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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

FEMINIST AND GAY MALE POLITICS:  
NEW ISSUES FOR POLITICAL COLLABORATION AND ACTIVISM

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN WOMEN'S STUDIES AND GENDER STUDIES

BY  
ADAM J. HII  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS  
MAY 2016

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power	ACT UP
American Association of University Women	AAUW
Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome	AIDS
Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network	GLSEN
Gay Straight Alliance Network	GSA Network
Human Immunodeficiency Virus	HIV
Human Rights Campaign	HRC
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer	LGBTQ
Marriage Equality USA	MEUSA
National Black Justice Coalition	NBJC
National Council of Negro Women	NCNW
National Organization for Women	NOW
Sexual Information and Education Council of the US	SIECUS
Women Employed	WE
Women's Environment & Development Organization	WEDO
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom	WILPF

## ABSTRACT

This project looks at political collaboration between people who self-identify as gay men and those who self-identify as feminists. These two groups have been political aligned on numerous issues since the 1970s. The goal of this project is to see on which issues that political collaboration will continue moving forward. This research draws extensively on oral interviews conducted with gay men and feminists, as well as the current work of national advocacy organizations to see where political interest is high, and where networks already exist to foster future advocacy efforts. By focusing on these areas, this project predicts which issues will likely generate a large political coalition, and which ones will be faced with obstacles to political unity.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The feminist movement and gay men in the United States have had common causes for many years. Both movements struggle against biased, heteronormative patriarchal structures that value heterosexual white men above all others. While gay men might benefit from patriarchal privilege since outwardly they fit the dominant characteristics of male and white, they still have much to gain from uniting with feminists. Like feminists, gay men are limited by gender roles and expressions foisted upon them by the dominant culture. These may manifest in different ways, feminists suffering from notions that women should be primarily home and family oriented and gay men being ostracized for not engaging in expected heterosexual relationships, but these limitations all stem from the dominant understanding and imposition of gender roles. While often times gender and sexual orientation are viewed separately, the reason that non-heterosexual orientations are deemed outside the normative structure is due to the larger society's view on what types of relationships are appropriate based upon a person's gender. This common cause of breaking down traditional gender barriers and equalizing the playing field for those outside these limited gender norms has created cause for unity between these political movements for many years. Personally, this unity has influenced my own disciplinary focus of political science paired with feminist methodologies.



Today the political activities of groups fighting for equality, such as gay men and feminists, are more urgent than ever. The United States has been moving towards longer and longer campaign seasons every election, and that allows both for more time for political lobbying, but also less time for the elected officials to actually pass legislation. Therefore, focused political activity is a necessary component in successfully passing or amending laws to provide equal rights and protections. Additionally, over the past several years, issues such as gay marriage equality and reproductive rights have often been used to divide the political parties as a way of securing votes for a politician's own party.

This focus by social conservatives on the nuclear family unit, with an emphasis on reproductive responsibility, has led to both feminists and gay men finding their rights being challenged. Despite Supreme Court rulings that have existed for over 40 years, many people do not view having access to abortion services as a right. Most often this comes from a moral code that dictates life begins at conception and that abortion is tantamount to murder. This view places an excessive burden of responsibility on women since men are unable to get pregnant and the pressure for men to use contraceptive technology is not nearly as high as the pressure on women to sacrifice their choice.

Same sex marriage is another issue that has recently been settled by the court but faces similar gender issues instead of being seen as a basic right for gay couples. The same Judeo-Christian moral code often used in anti-choice arguments is the same code applied to the issues of same sex marriage. Once again the argument comes from a position of sanctity, this time for the institution of marriage, as something reserved for heterosexual couples. And this one is all about procreation as well. Many people argue

that same sex unions are not able to be marriage since the purpose of marriage is to have children. Despite the fact that this institution is embedded in other facets of life in the United States, such as the tax code, medical benefits and next of kin status, the arguments against same sex marriage ignore these facets in favor of a religious viewpoint. The gender aspect comes into play since the expectation of who is acceptable for one person to marry is based solely on their gender in the view, men marry women. Same sex unions are an affront to the established gender order.

These are the arguments that feminists and gay men have to combat in order to protect the rights they currently have. While politicians continue to use these as wedge issues to motivate their political base and call the validity of these rights into question, said rights are at risk of being repealed. Decisive and coordinated political action can help cement these issues and prevent equality from being stripped away under the guise of preventing government overreach. And while there is the threat of losing what has already been gained, these issues will continue to persist in the political discourse.

Due to their history of working together on various issues it seems likely a political alliance between feminists and gay men will continue. However, what is not evident is on what issues this partnership will focus in the near future. As significant gains continue to be made on social issues affecting these groups, such as reproductive rights and same sex marriage discussed above, and losses occurring in others, the question of where they will expend their political capital remains up for debate. In addition to gauging on which issues it is likely feminists and gay men will work, it is also

important to ask: will there be any barriers that may hinder this political unity? And if so, how can they be overcome?

With all of this in mind this project poses the following four research questions:

RQ1: What political issues currently galvanize gay men and feminists to political action? RQ2: Are these issues currently being addressed at the national level by organizations that are advocating for these groups?

RQ3: What barriers exist that could prevent this political unity from being successful or even taking place?

RQ4: On which issues is political unity between gay men and feminists most likely to occur in the near future?

### **Literature Review**

In order to answer these research questions, the first thing that needs to occur is a discussion of how these two groups have worked together in the past, on which issues and what barriers to collaboration have already been identified. Thus it is only natural that the conversation about this history begins in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this era the gay rights movement emerged alongside the second-wave feminist movement. Additionally, many of the current theories on gender and sexuality had their inception during this rise in activism.

Before delving into the background of these movements it is important to talk about some terminology regarding the gay rights movement. Throughout the historical portion of this literature review I use the term gay rights movement since that is the terminology used at the time. Eventually this would grow into the larger umbrella

movement the gay rights movement is associated with today. Yet during its inception the focus was primarily on gay male rights, and thus I will be using that terminology here instead of the larger movement encompassing lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and queer individuals.

The focus on rights and acceptance for gay men started in 1969 as a result of the Stonewall Riots and grew to encompass a larger lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) movement. While all aspects of the LGBTQ community were instrumental in beginning the struggle for acceptance, the majority of the benefits went to gay men, often at the expense of ignoring other parts of the community. This applies in particular to transgender individuals, bisexuals, and, to a lesser degree, lesbians. However, since each individual piece of the LGBTQ movement has had its own relationship with feminism, instead of skimming the surface of the larger movement's relationship to feminism, this study will focus in depth on the specific relationship between feminists and gay men.

I chose this focus due to my own positionality as a gay man and a feminist. As a male in feminist circles, I have gotten a greater appreciation for how much I benefit from patriarchy. Yet, as a gay male, I have seen that while I benefit from patriarchal culture, I have discovered some common concerns shared with the feminist cause. In particular, I have realized that pressure I received growing up to fit a heterosexual norm in behavior and actions, even after I publicly identified as gay, was tied distinctly to my sex. Being a male meant that I was supposed to like women, and even if I did not I was supposed to act the same as normative heterosexual males by liking sports, not speaking with a lisp,

and other similar behaviors. There was a set of standards and behaviors dictated by my sex and gender.

I have noticed this same trend for women in conversations throughout my academic career as a feminist. The societal expectations of women are also determined by their sex and gender. In this case women are expected to be more passive in regards to men, take primary responsibility for raising children, and be caregivers. Once again, these standards are influenced by the larger societal views on what is appropriate for a person based on their sex and gender. This is what caused me to focus on this unity between gay men and feminists. Both groups are fighting against the oppressive system of patriarchy, albeit sometimes on different facets of the issue. Thus with my backgrounds as a gay man and feminist, I wanted to see on which issues these two groups will come together on in the future for their political advocacy based on past issues of political collaboration, as well as gauging areas of current interest by gay men and feminists.

One of the first areas of collaboration between these groups is seen in the establishment of the gay rights movement. Its focus on sexual liberation in part draws from Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* (Adam 83). Sexual liberation was the culminating theme of this work. For Beauvoir a liberated female meant one who was able to break free of the restrictions society placed upon her due to her sex. In particular, she noted how femininity was the primary tool used by patriarchy to oppress women. "Precisely because the concept of femininity is artificially shaped by custom and fashion, it is imposed upon each woman from without" (Beauvoir 682). In addition to being imposed upon women by culture, Beauvoir notes that, "The individual is still not free to

do as she pleases in shaping the concept of femininity” (Beauvoir 682). And this oppressive system leads to a state of war (Beauvoir 717). “All oppression creates a state of war. And this is no exception. The existent who is regarded as inessential cannot fail to demand the re-establishment of her sovereignty” (Beauvoir 717).

For the burgeoning gay rights movement, Beauvoir and other feminists like her were inspiration for crafting their own message. Many groups, such as the Gay Liberation Front, drew on the work of noted feminists such as Beauvoir in the crafting of their political platforms (Adam 83). These organizations, inspired by feminism, set about creating a bridge between their movement and the women’s rights movement. First and foremost they adopted the ideals of rebelling against a system of oppression placed upon a person by society due to one’s sex. The gay rights movement heavily borrowed on the language of Beauvoir and the second-wave feminist movement noting how norms applied to heterosexual white men where the standard to which all people were held. Beauvoir noted that for women this oppression was felt economically and in their unequal power relationships with men. The gay rights group found their own struggle similar in that their sexual liberation was being denied due to patriarchal notions of heteronormativity (Adam 84). Thus they saw how the general themes advocated by feminists could be applied to their own struggle for equality (Adam 86). Additionally, in an effort to create a partnership with the feminist movement, during the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations, the groups present built “supporting women’s liberation” into their official platform (Adam 86).

Another way in which feminism inspired the LGBTQ movement is in how the success of first wave feminism influenced the direction of the gay rights movement. Having seen early feminists succeed in “gaining access to bastions of male power,” gay rights advocates began to focus on inserting themselves into the spheres of heteronormative power that had oppressed them as women were similarly oppressed by male power (Nichols 69). Gay rights activists saw how changes in women’s rights were fueled by women getting more political power through organizations such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) and getting officials with feminist identifications in office.

This inspiration was prevalent through the election of Harvey Milk. Milk was the first openly gay person elected to office in California. In 1977 he won a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. As an openly gay man in public office, he authored and passed a city-wide gay rights ordinance. His example showed the gay rights activists that gaining political power, such as feminists had done with their fight for the right to vote, directly led to positive changes for the movement. In this way the gay rights movement used the example feminists had set to help build and advance their own agenda.

As for feminists, they were divided on whether to embrace gay rights movements. For example, NOW, and its founder Betty Friedan, famously accused lesbians within women’s liberation groups of being a “lavender menace” in 1969 (Adam 97). Over the next year NOW purged suspected and confirmed lesbians from its membership, through actions such as removing the New York chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis from their sponsorship list (Adam 97). In 1971 the organization reversed course and added freedom

to express one's sexual orientation to the list of rights they were fighting for against heteronormative patriarchy (Adam 97).

Part of this change in positions was influenced by other feminists and their response to Friedan's characterizations of lesbians. Lesbian feminists, in response to Friedan, decided to portray the power of lesbianism in challenging patriarchy and empowering women. Charlotte Bunch, in her publication "Lesbians in Revolt," is a prime example. In this piece Bunch explains how lesbianism is the ultimate rejection of male definitions imposed by society and thus a cause for female empowerment. "To be a Lesbian is to love oneself, woman, in a culture that denigrates and despises women. Lesbianism puts women first while society declares the male supreme" (Bunch 8). Bunch elaborated further by stating that lesbianism would benefit feminism as a central tenet in abolishing patriarchy instead of the distraction that Friedan had characterized lesbianism as. "Lesbianism...politically conscious and organized...is central to destroying our sexist, racist, capitalist, imperialist system" (Bunch 9). Portraying lesbianism as a partner issue with feminism, and not antagonistic as Friedan was positing, created a means for feminists to embrace lesbians instead of standing in opposition.

Another key factor in this change of stance was due to the focus on "sex roles" that heteronormative patriarchal society was advocating in the 1970s and 1980s (Jeffreys 11). Both the domestic lifestyle women were encouraged to maintain and the heterosexual relationship norms that were expected of gay men boiled down to this idea that dominant society had particular roles for individuals based on their sex (Jeffreys 11). These sex role expectations stemmed from the same idea of women at home and men



working, but due to the nature of gay men and feminist struggles both groups placed a larger focus on distinct aspects of this oppression. For women, the issue of employment became the main rallying cry while gay men focused sexual expression and orientation, once both groups began to focus on the concept of sex roles through this lens it became easier for unity to occur between them since they had a common foe (Jeffreys 11). The realization that heteronormative sex roles were affecting both gay men and feminists, albeit in different ways, gave the two groups a common element to work towards correcting. These heteronormative sex roles were in fact enforcing a set of expectations based on a person's gender, as Jeffreys illustrates. While these norms were based on a person's biological sex, the norms themselves were actually directed at the socially-constructed notions of gender.

Other feminists, such as the Combahee River Collective, are often credited with helping to expand this view of male domination, or patriarchy, beyond just relationships between men and women. In their piece, "A Black Feminist Statement," from 1977 they laid a framework for how all oppression, instead of a black versus white or man versus woman narrative, stems from the intersections of multiple identities. "We often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual" (Combahee River Collective 213). This description focus primarily on the junction between race and sex in regards to how patriarchy does not just affect sex. Yet further on in their work they describe how this can apply to any oppressed group, including sexual orientation. "We

realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy” (Combahee River Collective 213).

A decade later, Eve Sedgwick in her book *Epistemology of the Closet* also discusses this link between feminist and LGBTQ issues. While she sees the feminist movement as having a larger focus on gender and the LGBTQ movement as being more focused on sexuality, she notes that in many places these two causes intersect such as performance of gender roles. Sedgwick notes there are “many intersections where a distinctively feminists (i.e., gender-centered) and a distinctively antihomophobic (i.e., sexuality-centered) have seemed to diverge” (Sedgwick 15). In her book she admits she tends to favor the antihomophobic viewpoint for her analysis when this divergence occurs (Sedgwick 16). Yet her statement encapsulates the nature of the feminist and LGBTQ movements. While both movements focus on patriarchal oppression overall, they tend to highlight distinct areas such as workplace equality and equal pay for feminists, or sexual desire and expression for gay men.

Once these intersections were established, both groups have been making strides in recent years to combat the looming specter of heteronormative sex roles. In 2009 feminists scored a political victory with the passage of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. This law made it easier for women to ensure they were receiving equal pay to male counterparts by lengthening the statute of limitations for cases to be brought to court. Meanwhile gay men have recently seen success in the push for same-sex marriage. With the recent Supreme Court decision marriage in the United States, and all the related

benefits such as medical next of kin decisions and tax benefits, expanded from being reserved for heterosexuals to homosexual couples as well. While this did expand a typically patriarchal institution, it did so in such a way that challenges notions of heterosexist patriarchy by eliminating barriers between heterosexual and homosexual couples.

These are just two examples of the political work these groups have done. And neither issue was carried to victory without support from allies. While feminists led the charge on the 2009 act, they do so with a coalition of supporters and allies, including many gay men, and numerous feminists stood behind the LGBTQ movement during the fight for same-sex marriage. For proof of this one needs look no further than the National Organization for Marriage (NOW) having LGBTQ equality as part of their platform since 1971 as already mentioned, or numerous LGBTQ that have workplace discrimination, which can include equal pay legislation, as part of their platform.

Considering these political collaborations began as early as 1970 and have continued through legislation passed within the past year, it seems clear that the partnership between these two groups will continue. While they may focus on differing issues at times, the underlying cause of oppression for both groups is still gender norms imposed by a heteronormative patriarchal society. Thus, uniting to oppose that system, even if in different ways, will make their resistance to it more effective.

However, while these groups have unified on many issues in the past, such as the two listed above, there have been some barriers to this political collaboration throughout the years. These barriers to collaboration have been detailed in their various forms by

several authors. One such hindrance is detailed by Robert Jensen in his article “Homecoming: The Relevance of Radical Feminism for Gay Men.” In this article, Jensen argues that gay men could use radical feminist ideals to more sharply critique the sex industry and pornography. Since these areas represent the domination present in patriarchy, these critiques are incredibly important for the gay male community to consider (Jensen 77). According to Jensen the gay male pornography industry imposes heteronormative standards on homosexual relationships, both in looks and attitude (Jensen 78). The gay male pornography industry has rigid expectations on how men are supposed to look and how they are supposed to act. These expectations are then used to decide which of the two men will play the more submissive role, typically the male displaying more traditionally feminine characteristics, and the dominate role, the one who is more traditionally masculine (Jensen 79). In this way gay men are taught by pornography to validate their own personal relationships in a traditional heteronormative lens (Jensen 79). He argues that only by rejecting pornography and critiquing the industry can gay men find “new ways to validate gay sexuality” (Jensen 79).

Some feminists, such as Catharine MacKinnon, have noted that heteronormative pornography reinforces patriarchy since it promotes a culture of violence and dehumanization. “Pornography constructs what a woman is in terms of what men want sexually, such that acts of rape, battery, sexual harassment, prostitution, and sexual abuse of children become acts of sexual equality” (MacKinnon 301). Since women are typically in the submissive role in pornography, barring some sub-genres, these acts of violence are almost always directed against women. And as Jensen has pointed out, gay male

pornography often adopts these same traditional hierarchal structures in applying dominate roles to the more masculine participant and the submissive roles to the more stereotypically feminine actor. MacKinnon goes even further in explaining how these traditional hierarchies are enforced and promoted by pornography. “What pornography does goes beyond its content. It eroticizes hierarchy, it sexualizes inequality” (MacKinnon 301). This explains part of Jensen’s call for partnering with feminists like MacKinnon on challenging heteronormative pornography. Considering gay men are already in an inferior position to heterosexual men, reinforcing this inequality through pornography perpetuates this hierarchy.

Yet Jensen explains that despite the patriarchal nature of heteronormative gay male porn, there is a limiting factor in working with feminists on this issue. “I have found very few gay men who are interested in this as a *political project*” (Jensen 79, emphasis his). Jensen set out to propose new ideas for future collaboration and show how feminists and gay men can utilizing ideas from each other to grow their movements; however, in the particular case of combatting the heteronormative pornography industry, he discovered that a lack of passion on the part of gay men for this project makes it one space that will not foster collaboration. This is one of the potential barriers to political collaboration between feminists and gay men. While in many ways their political platforms are aligned, there are certain issues where the interest and activism may be lacking by one side such as this issue of pornography.

Another author explains what might be the biggest barrier to gay men wanting to work with feminists: gay men benefit from male privilege (Jacobs 167). While gay men

are oppressed in terms of family structure, they do enjoy the typical male perks such as getting paid more for their work than women, having greater political representation along gender lines, and greater access to positions of power, especially since being gay is a relatively invisible minority indicator (Jacobs 169). Jacobs illustrates that in many areas gay men may feel they might lose privileges they currently enjoy if they align with the feminist movement. This could also hinder political collaboration if gay men feel they are losing more than gaining by aligning with feminist causes, or vice versa.

For some feminists, one of the areas where male privilege becomes a limiting factor is the realm of academia. Women's Studies spaces have often drawn a gay male population, to the point that any man associated with Women's Studies is often assumed to be gay (Murphy 179). Yet while gay men are oppressed in similar ways to women, feminists are aware of the privileges that gay men have that they do not. And this can lead to feminists wanting some distance from gay men (Murphy 180). Since women have so few spaces in society where they are in a position of power, some feminists do not want to give up the Women's Studies space to too many gay males and risk shifting the balance of power back to men (Murphy 180). Thus gay men, instead of joining in on the critique of heteronormative patriarchy offered by feminist spaces, are often silent for fear of taking away that platform from the women they wish to support (Murphy 181). And while gay men do not feel the domination of heteronormative patriarchy in the same way women do, they still are hindered by it in other ways. Thus while many gay men find a home in Women's Studies programs, threading this balance of not taking over the space

from women instead of adding to their voices can be a barrier to political collaboration if feminists and gay men are unable to find this balance (Murphy 182).

Scott Morgensen expresses similar concerns he felt as a man in academic Women's Studies spaces. "When I presented myself as a potential learner in this space, I was asked as the only man to be a quiet observer" (Morgensen 176). Morgensen said that his time in Women's Studies caused him to feel, "called to distance myself from my identity as a man" (Morgensen 176). Ultimately Morgensen left Women's Studies more educated, but unsure of how to reconcile his personal life with "ongoing engagement with feminism" (Morgensen 176).

Other authors have even gone as far as saying that gay men and feminists should put more distance between themselves since their areas of interest do not always align. Ian Halley, in the article "Queer Theory by Men," argues that feminism limits the ability of anyone who studies queer theory to adequately analyze sexuality (Halley 8). Halley calls for not only gay men but for queer theory as a whole to take a step back from that partnership. Halley argues that since feminist thought is concerned with male-female power relations, there is space for "meaningful projects about sexuality" without feminist involvement. (Halley 9). Since gay identity politics "often do not primarily concern themselves" with male-female power disparity they can instead focus on other issues without involving feminists (Halley 9).

While Murphy, Morgensen, and Halley make a case for why gay male politics and feminism should not be continuously linked, they never say that the two groups should cease all collaboration. Instead they are arguing that each group must ensure that

in any collaboration there is space for everyone's voice to be heard instead of one group dominating the conversation. Additionally, certain issues lend themselves to collaboration more than others, and that is the goal of this project, to discover what those issues are.

### **Methodology**

My selected methodology for this project focuses primarily on oral interviews. This focus lends itself to more analytical methods which are rooted in political science with a feminist lens. I am conducting 30 interviews, with 15 people who are self-identified gay men and 15 who are self-identified feminists. This number was chosen so as to be manageable for one person to conduct all of the interviews, while still trying to recruit as many different people as possible. No other limiting factors besides self-identification and being over 18 have been taken into account in selecting applicants. I am limiting the sample to people over age 18 since that is the legal voting age and, thus, when a person's political activity is commonly recognized and legitimated. Participant demographics include men and women, people who identify with 4 distinct political parties or as independents, have an age range of 22 to 66, and identify with 4 different racial groups. Additionally, participants are from across the United States, but with the majority being clustered in the Midwestern states. For the sake of confidentiality, all participants quoted in the study will be given pseudonyms.

I chose this kind of qualitative approach since I feel it provides more insight into the underlying reasons behind a person's political stance than a quantitative survey would. I believe this deeper insight into the rationale behind political stances is more



illuminating than just raw data since it provides a feeling of how much energy each individual will put into their political activism on a particular issue. While surveys can have people say they care about 20 different issues, using interviews allows each person to self-identify their causes and shows what they think is most important, and thus most likely at the forefront of their attention.

Qualitative approaches are often utilized in feminist research to achieve this goal of giving the research subject a stronger voice. Typically the research subjects of feminist research have not had much, if any, opportunity to make their voices heard on a particular topic. Qualitative feminist research often allows access for “voices that have been traditionally silenced” (Hesse-Biber 215). In describing her own research on housework, Marjorie DeVault explains how this process can be challenging, but also an opportunity for growth for the researcher and the interviewee. “As we talked, this woman was trying to formulate the principles that guide her activities. It is difficult because she doesn’t have appropriate words. She knows what she means, but expressing it is new” (DeVault 234). This is one of the boons of this type of research, and why I have chosen to pursue it in my own project. Providing a platform for those who may not typically have a space for speaking about these issues provides a unique insight not available by asking narrow questions on a survey.

Additionally, research questions in a feminist methodology are “marked by an openness to the fluidity and flux of the research question” to allow the participant the greatest opportunity to express herself (Hesse-Biber 212). With this in mind, only 10 questions were asked of each participant. The questions were designed to be as open-

ended as possible while still focusing on politics. The questions that were asked to all the participants are detailed in Appendix 1.

Also of note is that the interviewees were not aware of the scope of this study when they began the interviews. As will be explained more fully in Chapter Four, the interviewees thought they were talking either about their politics as feminists, or gay men, but not in comparison to the other group. This was designed to see if each group would identify the other as potential political partners. All the participants were debriefed on this deception and the reason for it at the end of the interview.

In addition to conducting the oral interviews, a second phase of the project will examine a total of 30 organizations including 15 organizations that advocate on behalf of feminists and 15 organizations that advocate on behalf of LGBTQ populations. This number was selected once again to incorporate a wide range of organizations that focus on different areas, such as employment, reproductive rights, marriage equality, and racial injustice among others. Yet it also provides a window into where these organizations overlap in their goals to illustrate the issues receiving the most attention currently on the national level.

In the end, I compare the results of the oral interviews with data from the national organizations to see which issues are receiving the most attention, on both the personal and organizational level, by feminists and gay men. Finally, pulling on the interviews yet again, as well as some of the background data on historic collaborations and problems between these two groups, I analyze see which factors might limit their unification.

This study does have a few limitations that I want to acknowledge here. Including these limitations shows where additional research studies can build upon this one. First of all, while the sample size is adequate for gauging a variety of people while still providing depth to the results, a larger sample size, possibly requiring the help of additional researchers, would be a good way to expand on this project in the future.

Secondly, my position as both a gay man and a feminist may have influenced the responses of some participants if they knew too much about my background and reasoning for conducting these interviews. And for this project that is a possibility with a couple of the participants. Two of the people who volunteered for the study were acquaintances of mine from several years ago. While I had not really spoken with any of them in approximately five years, I was connected with them through mutual friends. Thus they did know of my identification as a gay male and self-identified feminist. These two participants were part of the self-identified feminist interview pool. During these two interviews I noticed one particular phrase come up that DeVault found in her research on housework. Several of her participants repeated used the words “you know” to talk about shared views and experiences instead of going into them in greater detail than they would with a researcher outside their community (DeVault 235). During my own interviews I did attempt to press the interviewees to expand on their answers when I heard the phrase you know. However, a researcher who is removed from these groups may get different responses than I will throughout this project on these particular questions. Yet my positionality was a strength in terms of getting people to open up about more sensitive topics.

Kath Weston explains this precarious positionality of the researcher in her article “Fieldwork in Lesbian and Gay Communities.” She explains how, in her experience interviewing lesbians and gay men in California, her identification as a lesbian both aided and complicated her research. “Many participants mentioned that they would not have talked to me had I been straight” (Weston 202). In this case, her identity as a lesbian allowed her to tap into a participant pool that would not be available to a heterosexual researcher conducting the same study. However, Weston also noted that her interviewees would often gloss over or completely ignore certain topics based on a shared common frame of reference in the community. “People devoted relatively little time to addressing antigay stereotypes” (Weston 202). Instead her subjects spent most of their time discussion topics “controversial among gay men and lesbians themselves” such as drag queens and butch/fem distinctions (Weston 202). The downside to her positionality within the community she was studying was that she had to consciously work harder to get subjects to open up about topics they would have discussed with a heterosexual researcher readily, but assumed to be understood by her as a fellow lesbian.

This challenge has occurred for this research project as well. In some cases, I needed to press interviewees to explain the reasons behind the issues they support politically since they assumed a shared understanding based on my sexual orientation and feminist identification. While I have strived to ensure the interviewees explained their positions fully, I am certain that had they been interviewed by a person who did not share this common identity with them the results would be slightly different. In some cases this has benefitted the study by allowing the subjects to be comfortable in explaining their

views since it was a safe environment for them. However, if this type of study is conducted by someone outside of the field the results may include answers this study did not find since they may have been assumed or implied by the commonality of researcher and subject.

Additionally, I would once again like to point out the distinctions between gay men and the larger LGBTQ movement. While the feminist movement and LGBTQ movement have a history of working together, this study focuses on gay men specifically in order to allow for an in depth analysis of this segment of the LGBTQ coalition, instead of scratching the surface of the broader movement. Yet the larger movement is recognized in regards to the national advocacy organizations working on issues of importance to gay men. Since most organizations try to be all encompassing of the LGBTQ movement, there was insufficient data available by trying to exclude organizations working on issues for the broader LGBTQ community. Thus the national organizations have a broader focus than the gay men interviewed since they represent a more diverse population. Considering the fact that gay men are part of the larger LGBTQ coalition, this will not likely deter gay men from working with these organizations, but it is something to keep in mind while analyzing this research.

Finally, since I took volunteers for this study, my participants were skewed to be more politically active than the population as a whole. At the very least, they are more apt to discuss political issues than other segments of the population since they willingly answered my call for participants. However, since this is a study about likely political activity, such an emphasis is appropriate and expected.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FEMINIST POLITICAL CONCERNS

When thinking about the word feminist, many images come to mind. Some of those are historically based images such as the idea of burning bras in the 1970s or suffragettes chaining themselves to the fences of the White House in the early 1900s for the right to vote. Other images are disparaging and draw negative connotations, such as the term “Feminazi” used by some pundits and talk show hosts. Most notable of these is Rush Limbaugh, who popularized the term that he claims a friend of his created (Limbaugh 1993). And still others may think of the recent social media campaign “I Stand with Planned Parenthood” when thinking about the feminist movement and feminist political concerns.

Yet do these media and historically driven images accurately capture those issues where feminists themselves invest their political capital? Are some issues that feminists are passionate about being overlooked by the media and national advocacy organizations? Or are they attributing issues to the feminist cause about which most feminists are apathetic? These problems, among others led to the start of these oral interviews with self-identified feminists. In order to paint an accurate image as possible, I solicited 15 self-identified feminists to participate in the open ended interviews designed to highlight their political concerns and to help identify strategies and partners for tackling those issues.

### Political Issues of Importance for Feminists

When approaching these interviews, one of the main goals was, to the greatest extent possible, not to have the researcher guide the conversation. Therefore, before talking about specific political leanings, their views on partnerships and areas of collaboration, the interviews all began by asking each participant what they would define as the most important political causes to them. Starting the conversation in this manner, even before bringing up feminism, helps gain a sense of each subject and what political issues interest them without applying any filters or lenses. The table below illustrates the results of that question.

Table 1. Political Issues of Focus for Feminists

Issue Area	Number of Respondents Mentioning Issue
Reproductive Rights/Abortion Access	9
Economic Equality/Equal Pay	8
Immigration	5
Health care Access	5
LGBTQ Equality	4
Sex Education	4
Racial Equality	3
Education Access	3
Violence Against Women	3
Gender Based Product Marketing	2
Campaign Finance Reform	2
Access to Social Services	2

Environment/Global Warming	2
National Debt	1
Income Inequality	1

The media often portrays access to legal and safe abortion and equal pay as central feminist issues. And based on the data gathered from the interviewees, this is a correct assumption. These two issues were far and away the highest ranking for a majority of the people interviewed.

Yet, it is quickly clear that the feminist movement encompasses so many more issues than just those two. 15 unique issues were brought up by the people interviewed. (See Table 1.) And, out of those, all but two were repeated by at least one other person. For many of these issues another aspect of the individual's intersectional identity was cited as the reason for them prioritizing that particular issue. One such example is global education access. One of the interviewees, Michele, worked in her twenties teaching outside of the United States for a year. Despite several years passing since this experience, she still holds it as one of her highest causes. "I am excited to see the feminist movement be more inclusive than it was during the 70s, but I think we need an even bigger push for global education. There are so many women's voices that are not being heard and must be brought to the table" (Michele).

While these intersectional pieces of identity did allow for the discussion and focus on many issues, the dominance of traditionally feminist issues throughout the interviews implies that many of the respondents feel a commonality with the feminist movement at



large on these issues. Thus, how much weight did their feminist identity carry in regards to determining which political causes to track and champion?

In order to answer that question each participant was next asked to rank the importance of feminism on their political leanings on a 10 point scale with 10 at the highest. The lowest answer for this question was a 6. Over half of all the participants ranked it as a 7 or 8, and averaged across all 15 answers the average was just above 8 out of 10. Nancy, a feminist in her early 30s, discussed why she felt a feminist identity was so important in shaping political views. “In my opinion, feminism is about equal opportunity to all. And because of that you can’t detach it from any political issue. Race, sexual orientation, income inequality and so on all impact us being equal. And as feminists it is our duty to work to disrupt any system that keeps people down” (Nancy).

With that sentiment in mind, I wanted to see if the respondents had the same view of feminism as a whole that they did about their own political beliefs. How well did they think they fit into the current political leanings of the larger feminist community? As a means of gauging this, I asked each one to list what they thought were the most important political issues to the feminist community based on their personal interactions with other feminists and what they see in the media.

Table 2. Feminist Views on Political Issues of Importance to the Feminist Community

Issue Area	Number of Respondents Mentioning Issue
Reproductive Rights/Abortion Access	8
Economic Equality/Equal Pay	7
Racial Equality	5

Health care Access	4
LGBTQ Equality	4
Political Representation	3
Sex Education	2

Comparing these two questions, it is evident a majority of people who identify as feminists find common cause with the larger feminist movement. Both reproductive rights and equal pay top the lists of individuals' personal issues of importance as well as what they perceive the larger feminist community to be concerned with. Going down the list, topics have stayed roughly in the same place with racial equality surpassing LGBTQ rights in the perceived list of political concerns for the feminist community. And, in general, the issues that were only listed by one or two people in the personal issues list did not get mentioned in response to this part of the interview. Considering the low number of people who acknowledged these issues, this is hardly surprising.

Yet, there are two distinct changes to this list from Table One that deserve some discussion. First of all is the obvious addition of the category of political representation. Three of the participants discussed the perception that a major goal of the feminist movement is to elect female politicians. "I see a lot of organizations like EMILY's List talk about how we need more female representation, so I would say that is a big concern of the feminist community" (Jennifer). However, she did not list it in her own personal list of issues, so I asked her to explain why that was. "Well, I can see why it is important. The thought is that women will help other women. And while I don't disagree with that, I think it is more important to get politicians that have feminist ideals elected, whether they

are a man or woman. Because there are plenty of women who are not feminists”

(Jennifer). This sentiment was echoed by the others who listed political representation as a concern for the larger feminist community. Some of the individuals felt that this focus of electing women and just feminists in general would hurt the feminist movement since it could be seen as exclusionary; hence they did not rank it as one of their own priorities. Another interviewee referred to the idea as shortsighted saying it was “missing the forest for the trees” (Kendra).

The other issue area to make note of is immigration. This ranked fairly high on the list of issues people personally are passionate about, but it is missing from this question. Though one third of all the participants cited it is a vital issue, none of them see it as a priority for the feminist movement. In this case, the history of the feminist movement was often used to explain this discrepancy. “I mean, you always see and hear how it was mostly all about white women back in the 70s. And I think the feminist movement is growing out of that. You see a lot more about women of color, but only in the US. I just don’t personally see many people talking about women in other countries in feminist circles. I have a couple friends who do, but I have not seen enough to say it is a concern of the movement” (Raquel). This explanation also explains why access to education on the global scale is missing from the list of concerns for the larger feminist community. While certainly some strides have been made in making feminism more inclusive, considering racial equality is the third highest perceived issue for feminism, this has not bled over into the issue of immigration.

The question remains, are these depictions of the feminist movement rooted in reality? Are these truly the issues that are being advocated for by advocacy organizations? For example, are issues of immigration being ignored by these organizations despite the high level of interest from self-identified feminists?

### **Analyzing the Work of National Feminist Advocacy Groups**

In order to answer these questions, the work of 15 national feminist advocacy organizations was analyzed. Such groups include the National Organization of Women (NOW), Planned Parenthood (PP), and the Feminist Majority Foundation. A full list of organizations used in this analysis can be found in Appendix 2. Every one of these organizations has a section of its website devoted to current topics it is working on. The findings on these sites have been compiled below to see which issues are most common among them and how many organizations are currently engaging on each issue. It is important to note that organizations do shift their focus frequently based upon current happenings in the media and political spheres. Thus, this table reflects the current areas of advocacy by these organizations as of January 2015.

Table 3. Current Advocacy Efforts of National Feminist Organizations

<b>Issue Area</b>	<b>Number of Organizations Prioritizing Issue</b>
Economic Equality/Equal Pay	6
Reproductive Rights/Abortion Access	5
Violence Against Women	5
Education Access (in United States)	5
Health care Access	4

Racial Equality	4
LGBTQ Equality	3
Paid Parental Leave	3
Political Representation	3
Anti-war	3
Education Access (Global)	2
Immigration	1
Climate Change	1
Sex Education	1

The list of what national advocacy organizations are working on is incredibly expansive. Based purely on the number of issues alone it is clear that the feminist organizations have a larger range of advocacy issues than what feminists themselves think is happening in the movement. However, the interviewees did identify the most common issues in which advocacy groups are engaged. Hence these feminists are aware of what is happening in the feminist movement based on visibility. Yes, there are more issues in this list of organizational priorities, but some of those only have one or two organizations lobbying on their behalf. In regards to the majority of issues that have several organizations working on their behalf, the interview respondents were on target with their perceptions of what issues feminism currently advocates.

One issue that has widespread action from feminist organizations that was not recognized by the participants is violence against women. A few placed it on their personal lists, but not on what they saw organizations and the larger community doing.

One explanation for this discrepancy comes from what is currently dominating the media in terms of violence: the issue of police violence against African Americans. “I just don’t see much about rape culture and violence towards women. Right now everyone is concerned, as they should be, with discrimination and brutality against African Americans. I just think that issue is dominating currently over violence against women” (Victoria). There are some events, such as One Billion Rising and Take Back the Night, that provide ways for people to engage politically on this issues alongside the organizations advocating on issues of gender based violence. Yet while institutional violence against African Americans continues to dominate the media narrative, there is less attention paid to these events. Thus while there are many people passionate about violence against women, and organizations engaged on this issue, it is currently overshadowed. Yet if people advocating on gender based violence can bring this issue to the forefront for others, the organizations and framework are already in place to make this a hot topic for advocacy.

Education access faces a nearly identical situation, with several organizations working on it, a smaller number of people interested, and no perception of the larger feminist movement working on the issue. And this is only for education access in the US; global education access is in a worse position due to the smaller number of supporters and organizations. Thus it is challenged with similar issues of underrepresentation that affects the issue of violence against women. Yet while gender based violence has events such as those already mentioned that bring more awareness to the issue, there are not

large marches for equity in education. The awareness on this issue is thus undoubtedly even lower and presents another challenge to mobilizing people on this issue.

LGBTQ rights and racial equality, while having a slightly lower number of organizations working on them than violence against women and education, are actually in a better place to overcome these barriers and become a breakout issue. The advantage these issues have is the perception that the feminist movement is working on these issues. Yet the importance of these issues for feminists themselves is not as expansive as other issues, such as health care access, workplace equality, and reproductive rights. Hence the largest barrier these issues will face is simply getting people energized about them and identifying with them in order to spur them to action.

It is a very different case when concerning reproductive rights and equal pay. Those two issues are poised to be the ones that continue to garner the largest amount of support and political action by feminists. They are also some of the most oft debated and controversial rights with people still protesting and trying to defund Planned Parenthood and women still advocating for laws guaranteeing equal pay, such as the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. This leads to a vested personal interest for these issues in the feminist community. Also, there is the perceived, and accurate, idea that these issues are important to nearly all feminists. And with so many organizations currently working on behalf of these issues, there is the framework in place to engage people on these issues. With this framework and the interest of the feminist community behind these issues, sustained political activity on these issues is more likely to occur than on other issues.

Finally, the other issues mentioned by interviewees and advocacy organizations do not seem to be likely candidates for visible political activism. While there will be a few individuals and organizations working on these goals, seeing a large movement around the issues such as sex education is unlikely. There simply are not enough organizations actively advocating for these issues, and, in addition to that, not many feminists place them high on their list of priorities. Thus the likelihood of seeing a concerted, feminist push on these issues is minimal.



## CHAPTER THREE

### GAY MALE POLITICAL CONCERNS

LGBTQ rights, and gay male rights in particular, have made tremendous leaps in the last decade. Since 2004, with the legalization of same-sex marriage in Massachusetts, a dramatic cultural and legal shift has occurred in regards to LGBTQ persons. 11 years after that decision, the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage throughout the country. Additionally, the discriminatory military policy of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was also repealed in 2010. Considering the high concentration of men in the US military and the general cultural acceptance of gay men, especially when compared to transgender individuals, it is clear gay men have been the ones who have benefited most by these recent policy changes. Additionally, gay men and lesbians as a whole benefit more from marriage equality than bisexual, transgender and queer individuals.

With gay men and the advocacy organizations that represent them spending much of their time and energy on these seemingly resolved issues over the past decade, the question is where will that dedication go? With two major policy points passed in favor of gay men, what issues will draw their attention next? What issues do gay men and national LGBTQ organizations think are the most important to push on at this point? Or are they planning to double down on securing same-sex marriage due to the political rhetoric of some state and county officials trying to block the right guaranteed by the Supreme Court, or the fear of a socially conservative president and Congress reversing some of these victories? These questions set the stage for my oral interviews with self-

identified gay men. In order to accurately gauge the political interests of gay men, I solicited the participation of 15 self-identified gay men in open ended interviews designed to highlight their political concerns and to help identify strategies and partners for tackling those issues.

### **Political Issues of Importance for Gay Men**

As stated earlier in the methodology description, all interviews in this section were conducted with individuals over the age of 18 who self-identified as gay men. Keeping with the pattern from the feminist interviews, each conversation began by having each person describe what political issues were important to them. Once again, no limit on the number of issues was given, and “political” was not defined in the interest of keeping the questions open-ended. The results are detailed below.

Table 4. Political Issues of Focus for Gay Men

<b>Issue area</b>	<b>Number of times mentioned</b>
Legal discrimination protections	10
Workplace discrimination	10
Same-sex marriage	10
Income Inequality	7
Health care	4
Access to public services	4
Racial discrimination	3
Comprehensive sex education	3
Environment	3

HIV/AIDS	3
Budget	2
Transgender rights	2
Abortion	2
Taxes	1
Sustainable/local business	1
Constitutional division of powers	1

The first thing that is abundantly clear from this question is that there is a large variety of issues cared about by self-identified gay men, and, in many cases, other intersectional pieces of identity come into play. The issue of the environment is one example. “With the current drought in California, water usage and the environment are extremely important to me” (Kevin). In this case, geographic location played a significant factor in this issue being personally important, yet it also explains why only 3 of the respondents identified the environment as one of their important political issues. Those who are not in an area currently feeling the strong negative effects of environmental change were less likely to list it as a major concern.

The other clear point from this question was that, despite the variety of answers, there were overwhelming trends. 66% of respondents felt same-sex marriage, legal discrimination protections, and workplace discrimination were pressing concerns. Brandon, a human resources manager, explains, “I have personally seen people victimized by the employment policies that oppress gay men” (Brandon). Brandon points

out that issues affecting the gay community directly carry a lot of importance in the community. And while different intersectional identities brought other issues to light, the majority of respondents still shared commonalities on issues that focused on legal protections based on sexuality. Thus it can be inferred that for most gay men this piece of their identity carries significant weight in determining which issues they focus on politically.

Yet did the respondents agree with this assessment? That was the next question the interview tackled. And the answer was a resounding yes. Each participant was asked to rank the importance of their gay identity in their political leanings on a 10 point scale, with 10 at the highest. All but one ranked this at a 5 or higher. The average of all answers was a seven, and the most repeated answers were seven and eight. Matthew explains why gay men place heavy emphasis on their identity in politics: “Gay men are an oppressed group and are more sensitive to issues of oppression. They cannot separate their identity from any issue” (Matthew).

Next I wished to see where these men felt their politics fit into the gay community. In order to do this, I asked each one to list what they thought were the most important political issues to the gay community based on their personal experiences and what they see in the media. (See Table 5.)

Table 5. Gay Male Views on Political Issues of Importance to the Gay Male Community

<b>Issue area</b>	<b>Number of times mentioned</b>
Legal discrimination protection	8
Same-sex marriage	8
HIV/AIDS	7
Employment equality	7
Health Care access	4
Environment	2
Violence/hate crimes	2
Sex education	1
Adoption	1
Gay neighborhood upkeep	1
Resource access	1

From this table, it is clear that the majority of gay men do have some sense of political camaraderie with the larger gay community. The same three issues that topped question one also top the list here. A notable difference, however, is the larger number of people who raised HIV/AIDS as an issue. Despite only three people putting it on their personal lists, nearly 50% have the perception that this is an important issue to the larger gay male community. Additionally, the participants collectively viewed gay males, as a whole, more homogeneously than their own selves. Whereas there were 15 unique political issues raised in the first question, here the number drops to 11. It is clear that some of the diversity different gay men bring is perceived to be lost in the larger group.

However, do these assumptions about what issues concern the larger gay male community align with what national advocacy organizations are currently working on? Are some issues of concern being ignored by these groups, and are there other causes they are working on that these interview participants failed to identify?

### **Analyzing the Work of National LGBTQ Advocacy Groups**

In order to answer these questions, the work of 15 national advocacy organizations that work on LGBTQ rights was analyzed. Such groups include the HRC, GLAAD, and Out & Equal. A full list of LGBTQ organizations used in this analysis can be found in Appendix 2. Every one of these organizations has a section of its website devoted to current topics it is working on. The findings on these sites have been compiled below to see which issues are most common among them and how many issues in total the organizations are currently engaging. It is important to note that organizations do shift their focus frequently based upon current happenings in the media and political spheres. This table reflects the current areas of advocacy by these organizations as of January 2015.

Table 6. Current Advocacy Efforts of National LGBTQ Organizations

<b>Issue area</b>	<b>Number of Organizations issue as a priority</b>
Anti-Bullying	7
Inclusive Sports	5
Marriage Equality	5
Workplace Discrimination	5
Transgender Issues	4

HIV/AIDS	3
Racial Equality	3
Immigration	2
Acceptance in Faith Communities	2
Political Representation	2
Health care Access	1
Sexual Education	1
Reproductive Rights	1
Adoption	1
Anti-Violence Activism	1

From this list it is clear that the gay men interviewed as part of this study do have their finger on the pulse of what issues are currently drawing the attention of national advocacy organizations. Both the first list of their own personal views as well as what they think the larger gay male community concerns itself with align closely with what advocacy organizations are currently doing. Nearly every issue the men themselves reported caring about is reflected by the national organizations, with a few additional issues such as political representation included as well.

Bullying and inclusive sports are also very notable for being highest on this list, but excluded from the discussion of political issues during the interviews. It appears that while many organizations feel these topics are important, gay men themselves do not see these as political issues. Many more organizations are working on bullying and making sports more inclusive compared to the number of interviewees who listed these as a

priority. It is likely that, given the age of the men people interviewed, they are not currently thinking about these issues as regularly since they are no longer in an environment where these topics come up often. They are more focused on issues that personally affect them, such as employment discrimination and marriage.

Same-sex marriage does not ranking as high on this list of organizations compared to the answers given by interviewees. This may be the US Supreme Court decision that legalized same-sex marriage nationwide in 2015. While many respondents pointed out they did not want to lose the progress that was made on that front, and a few organizations have listed that as well, it is plausible that many advocacy organizations have shifted their focus off of that fight considering the recent legal victory. This victory gave these organizations the opportunity to allocate their resources to issues that are currently in legal gray areas instead of settled law.

Finally, combining all of this data gives an idea of which issues will likely draw the continued political attention of gay men. It seems likely that issues surrounding employment discrimination and protecting same-sex marriage gains are on top of that list. With both of those issues there is a high level of passion by gay men themselves, a perception by gay men that the community cares about those issues, and data that suggests the current work of national advocacy organizations back these issues and provide a framework in which people can lobby on behalf of them. Being able to quickly and easily engage people on those issues, since the organizational structures are already in place, will allow these organizations to thrive due to the already existent passion for these issues.



Other advocacy areas have some of these three components in place, and thus a path can be laid out for those issues to rise in prominence as well, but they will have a slightly more challenging path. And due to that alone, it is likely that employment discrimination and same-sex marriage will be large energizing forces for the gay male community because of this ease. However, educational issues such as bullying and sporting could rise in awareness among the gay male community with so many organizations working on those issues.

Issues of racial equality and transgender equality have some support both from gay men and advocacy organizations as well. Yet these issues do not often come to the forefront of people's thoughts, whether about their own politics or the perceived greater community issues. When these issues did arise in the interviews there were often by people who identify with, or had family who identify with a racial minority group or other part of the LGBTQ community besides gay men. And while there are a few organizations working on these issues, particularly around transgender rights, unless these issues become more visible, the likelihood of getting actively engaged volunteers and activists on them is much lower than it is with more prominent issues. Major pushes in the media, traditional and social, would be needed even just to raise the profile on these issues and to help people who identify as white, cisgender gay men personally connect to the challenges faced by their fellow community members. In particular gay men and racial minorities are often both targets of violence due to their identities. This could be one way to brand the issue to build a larger coalition.

HIV/AIDS is an interesting issue to analyze. Only a few organizations are currently advocating on this issue, and the emergence of new drugs such as PrEP, may stimulate the conversation due to new attention, or stagnate it if people consider the issue resolved due to this drugs. It is still too early in the media campaign on those drugs to see what effect, if any, it will have on the conversation. However, despite the lack of personal interest by gay men and the relatively few organizations working on the issue, it is still viewed as a major concern for the larger community. One reason for this association is the historical significance of HIV/AIDS for the gay male community. This perception that the gay male community as a whole is actively engaged on HIV/AIDS could be a hindrance or a boon, depending on how this is interpreted. It could lead to more activity on the issue if it is pointed out that this is an issue affecting numerous members of the gay male community specifically and the LGBTQ community more broadly. However, it could also be viewed as having enough people caring about it already, so that advocates can turn their focus to issues that are not receiving as much attention. Either way, with the perception in the community that HIV/AIDS is an important issue, political action could potentially be galvanized around it, yet it faces several hurdles to this occurring.

The other issues mentioned, both by the interviewees and the advocacy organizations, do not seem likely to generate a large coalition for activism. First of all, there is little interest among the members of the community, both perceived and actual interest. Secondly, with only one or two organizations at most working on these issues there is not much of a structure in place for those who would be marginally interested to easily get involved, and this barrier could deter them from action. Unless some major

shift, such as increased media attention on an issue, dramatically alters the conversation and brings new issues to the forefront, it is unlikely that the next major political pushes will fall outside the areas already discussed above.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO POLITICAL COLLABORATION

Several pending legislative issues, such as the ERA and state level bans on employment discrimination would benefit greatly from a political coalition of feminists and gay men. Yet there are numerous reasons why a political cause may not find success in the legislative arena. Lacking a strong coalition to counter those opposed to an issue is one of these explanations, especially when facing off against a concerted effort on the opposite side of an issue. Thus, before moving into analyzing areas of likely political collaboration between feminists and gay men, it is important to identify these potential barriers to political collaboration.

Some of these barriers have been discussed by other authors and studies described in the literature review in Chapter One. Thus, in this section, I plan to focus on what my interviews with self-identified feminists and gay men revealed as other problems facing their political unity. One such issue is that while feminist is an inherently political identity, the same is not true for gay men. Besides this factor three trends emerged from the interviews. First, in some cases, political issue areas simply do not have the same level of interest by both groups. Second, when I asked gay men and feminists what they saw as political priorities for each other, their perceptions were often inaccurate. On many issues the perception of one group by the other was accurate, but some issues were diminished or overinflated in their importance. And finally, it became evident that, in

many cases gay men and feminists, even when their issue areas do align, simply forget to engage with each other as political partners.

### **When Areas of Interest Do Not Align**

First and foremost, one of the largest barriers to political collaboration is the fact that sometimes there is just not widespread support for political issues. Without support building a large coalition will be difficult since there will not be an incentive to mobilize people on an issue. This has already been seen in Chapters Two and Three with each group's personal list of issues. There were some issues on each list that only had one or two people interested in them, and, unsurprisingly, the advocacy organizations are not currently tackling them as high ranking projects. Some of these issues include reworking the tax code and campaign finance reform. While there are plenty of passionate people working on these issues in other areas, and organizations behind them, there simply is not much interest in these topics as feminist or gay male political priorities. Thus it is easy to dismiss these issues as the next likely nexus of political collaboration between these groups since it will be difficult to galvanize people on issues not currently on their political radar.

Beyond these obvious issues there are several other causes on the list of priorities for gay men and feminists that can also be ruled out as likely candidates for high profile political collaboration. There are several issue areas where there is support for the issue by one group, but not by the other. Two of these issues are both health-care related: abortion and HIV/AIDS. While the issue of health care access in general is fairly popular among both gay men and feminists, looking at the interviews and the advocacy

organizations, it is clear that many gay men and feminists think about HIV/AIDS and abortion access as distinct issues, separate from general health care access.

First is the issue of abortion. The feminists interviewed identified access to abortion as their highest personal political priority. Additionally, the majority felt it was the issue of highest concern for the feminist movement as a whole. And, finally, abortion is the second most popular issue for political activism by the national advocacy organizations studied. Clearly for the feminist political base abortion access is a major rallying cry. Yet for gay men this is not the case. Only two gay men saw abortion as an important issue to them. For the gay community as a whole no one interviewed had the perception that abortion rights were a priority. And, based on the advocacy organizations, this perception is accurate, with only one organization having reproductive rights in their platform. Thus with the issue of abortion the problem facing political collaboration is that the activism and interest on the issue is decidedly one-sided.

There is a way support for the issue could expand. The right to access abortion challenges the patriarchal notion that that reproduction is the end goal of sexuality and heterosexuality in particular. Homosexuality challenges this idea that reproduction is the point of sexuality as well. Thus if the issue of abortion is framed differently it could see an increase in activity on the part of gay men. Instead of treating abortion as a personal issue, if the narrative also focused on the challenge to heteronormative patriarchy, it could be a way build a larger coalition on the issue.

HIV/AIDS faces similar challenges as a political issue. HIV/AIDS also has nearly all of its interest coming from the gay male community and not the feminist community

based upon these interviews. None of the feminists interviewed, nor the organizations studied, included this item specifically as part of their political concerns. Additionally, not nearly as many gay males or organizations listed HIV/AIDS as a high priority compared to feminists. Thus not only does HIV/AIDS have lopsided support, but it is diminished in comparison to abortion access. HIV/AIDS is often seen as a more historical crisis in the gay male community. Most people think of the HIV epidemic as something that occurred in the 1980s and early 1990s. Hence why there is not much personal interest on the part of gay men in regards to the issue. HIV/AIDS will need to be personalized and brought forward as an issue of today and not just the past in order to increase the activity and awareness on the issue.

As was seen earlier with the gay male interviews, HIV/AIDS is often seen as an issue of concern for the larger gay male community. Thus, it could be argued that this issue may be lumped under the category of LGBTQ Equality for some people since HIV/AIDS often seems tied to the gay male community. And both HIV/AIDS and abortion access do technically count as health care issues. Yet, considering that many people and organizations have felt the need to state these issues separately, it is fair to say that while others may include them as part of an overarching health care or LGBTQ goal, the focus on these specific issues is diminished by combining it with other areas. However, if instead of talking about this issues separately from health care access, if these are included in that overall discussion it could be a way to garner broad support for the issues.

The issue of political representation faces some similar challenges. However, where this issue has an advantage is that both LGBTQ advocacy groups and feminist advocacy groups recognize it as one of their areas of importance. Yet the problem is that the topic is not as important to the members of the communities as it is to the advocacy organizations. Political representation failed to register as an important issue for gay males personally nor their perceptions on the community as a whole. Meanwhile, feminists did not place it on their personal list of political concerns. However, twenty percent did identify it as a prominent cause within the feminist community. With this issue the attention for it thus comes more from the feminist community than the gay male community, although both sides are working on it. Yet the bigger problem is that the personal goals of these community members do not align with the advocacy organizations currently, at least not enough to make the issue noteworthy for their most important political causes.

However there have been significant leaps in this regard, especially for feminists. The Supreme Court currently has more women than anytime throughout its history. The front runner of the Democratic Party is Hillary Clinton. And the leader of the Democratic Party in the House of Representatives is Nancy Pelosi. In many areas this push on identity politics has benefitted women. Yet based on the interviews I conducted, it seems that the majority of gay men and feminists are more concerned with issue based politics than identity based considering political representation was a low ranking issue.

Immigration is another issue where a disconnect exists between the advocacy organizations and the personally identified issues. On the feminist side many people



consider immigration to be a high priority. Yet the same does not hold true for the advocacy organizations. The opposite is true for gay men. Several organizations state immigration as one of their target areas, yet the issue barely registers on the personal radars of the gay men interviewed. This disconnect will make it difficult for this issue to become a likely area of political collaboration, since not enough people are galvanized by it on the gay male end. Yet, there is an opportunity for feminists to work with LGBTQ advocacy organizations on this issue since so few feminist organizations are currently focusing on this issue. Thus there might be some small scale collaboration, but it is still unlikely to garner a large, concerted movement.

Violence, whether in the form of hate crimes based on sexual orientation or violence against women/rape does have some support for political activism with each group. There are some feminists and gay men concerned with this issue as a top priority, along with a few organizations advocating on this issue as well. Yet the numbers are low. Only twenty percent of feminists and slightly less gay men identified the issue as an area of high importance. It is likely that these smaller populations will work together on this issue since there are already organizations in place for them to funnel their political energy. But once again, the numbers seem slightly too low for dismantling a violent culture to become the next big area of political unity.

The final two issues facing this barrier of unequal interest are education access and bullying. Many feminists and feminist advocacy groups listed access to education, both nationally and to a lesser extent globally, as a top priority. However, no self-identified gay males did the same. In terms of bullying this was reversed. Numerous

LGBTQ advocacy groups, and to a much lesser extent gay men themselves, identified this issue as one of urgent concern. Meanwhile none of the self-identified feminists listed bullying as a major political cause.

However, these two issues actually have a stronger chance than the other causes discussed here of rallying a large political coalition of feminists and gay men. Granted, they still face the same overarching challenge of generating a broad interest in both populations interviewed. Yet the path to overcoming this particular challenge is easier than with most other issues. If, instead of focusing solely on bullying, or accessing education, the broader focus becomes on education reform it is likely you could see gay male organizations and feminists coming together to tackle these issues, each to achieve their own goals. The hurdle still remaining would be that gay men themselves have not identified bullying or education reform, in general, as an issue of concern. This issue has more LGBTQ organizations working on it than any other issue, but the interest of most self-identified gay men simply is not there. Thus feminists may have an easy path to finding partner organizations to work with on education reform, but in terms of getting people to advocate for it, the battle is much tougher. And this is only one of the barriers to political collaboration between gay men and feminists.

### **Perceptions about Political Issues versus the Reality**

In an effort to gauge feminist and gay male political priorities, the interviewees were asked what they felt the larger community was concerned with in order to see if their personal priorities fit with how they perceived the larger group. This concept was followed up on later in the interviews when all participants were asked to describe which

issues they felt the other group prioritized. Feminists were asked to state what issues they saw as being important to gay men in particular and vice versa. For feminists and gay men to partner together effectively it is important that they understand the political priorities of one another so they can pick issues to collaborate on accordingly. First, Table 7 shows the results of feminists being asked what they saw as political priorities for gay men.

Table 7. Feminist Views on Issues of Concern for Gay Men

<b>Issue Area</b>	<b>Number of Individuals Mentioning Issue</b>
Same-Sex Marriage	8
Employment Discrimination	6
Breaking Down Stereotypes	4
Health care Access	4
HIV/AIDS	4
Political Representation	3
Racial Equality	3
Violence and Hate Crimes	2
Unsure	2

Overall, the assessment by feminists on what issues galvanize gay men is accurate. A few issues, such as transgender rights and the environment, were left off of this list, but, with only two or three gay men listing those as issues of concern, this is not a big oversight. Besides those few issues, the feminist views on what political issues gay men care about matches what the gay men interviewed responded.

On the issue of employment discrimination however, feminists saw the issue as a concern for gay men, but did not rank it as highly as gay men did. This issue had the largest disparity in answers between feminist perception and the number of gay men who identified the issue. Yet since the feminists tended to underestimate gay male support for this issue, this will not likely be a barrier to their political collaboration on this issue. If anything it would suggest that feminists would be expecting a certain level of support only to be surprised with more than they anticipated if the two groups worked on this issue.

There are two issues, however, where these perceptions did not align with the answers of the gay men, the first of which is the issue of political representation. This issue has been a relatively low ranking issue for feminist organizations and the perception of the feminist movement as a whole. Keeping with this trend the feminists interviewed identified political representation as an issue of importance for gay men, but kept it low on the list once again. However, none of the gay male participants listed this issue as a high priority. In this case the feminists interviewed tended to inflate support for prioritizing this issue among gay men when, in reality, there is not much interest in this as a political project.

The other issue in question faces the opposite problem. Legal discrimination protection was one of the largest political priorities for gay men. However, this issue was notably absent from the feminist perceptions on issues that concern gay men. Several of the gay men interviewed noted how housing can still be denied in many states due to a person's sexual orientation. While issues such as that exist, the need to fight for equal

protection is vital. Yet several of the feminist interviewees did not see this as a priority for gay men. “I mean I have seen so much about gay marriage the past few years, and now that that fight is done I don’t know what legal issues there are left to work on. So much energy was spent on that fight that I just am not sure where gay male activism is going from there except in regards to employment” (Corrine). Since many people in the gay male community consider this to be an issue of importance, feminists may be pleasantly surprised to find a strong partner on this issue. There will need to be a concerted effort on the part of gay men to reach out to feminists on this issue however in order to overcome this perceived apathy on this issue.

As was the case with the feminist subjects, the gay male interviewees were also asked what their perceptions are of feminist political priorities. Once again each participant was asked to list what they had seen in the media and their personal experiences, and the results are reflected below.

Table 8. Gay Male Views on Issues of Concern for Feminists

<b>Issue area</b>	<b>Number of times mentioned</b>
Equal pay	10
Equal economic opportunity (hiring/firing)	7
Violence against women	5
Political representation	5
Health care access	4
Abortion	4
Parental leave	3

Victim blaming/rape culture	3
Transgender Issues	1

From this list it appears the gay men interviewed have a fairly accurate view on what feminists themselves consider important political causes. On issues such as equal pay, health care access, and violence against women, the amount of gay men that identified these issues as feminist political causes nearly mirrored that of the feminists themselves. Yet there are a few discrepancies that are worth mentioning.

First is the issue of political representation. One-third of all the gay men interviewed felt this was a high priority for feminists. And they are right, at least in regards to feminist organizations. And the feminists themselves also felt this issue was one that concerned the feminist community. Yet none of the interviewed feminists identified it as one of their highest priorities. For this particular issue, all of the perceptions seem to align with what advocacy organizations are currently doing instead of the personal views of many feminists themselves.

Another issue to take note of is immigration. This was one of the top issues for feminists personally. However, none of the gay male participants felt that this cause was one that feminists were working on. Yet this disconnect only exists on the personal level. When it comes to the larger feminist community, the assessment of gay men that immigration is generally a non-issue is accurate. Only one feminist advocacy organization identifies this issue as a major goal. Additionally, the feminists interviewed agreed with the perception that gay men held about immigration, that it is not a priority to

the feminist community. All thirty participants, feminists and gay men, did not think that immigration was a major part of a feminist political platform. Thus while many feminists feel very strongly about immigration, this perception that the feminist community does not engage on this issue will be a significant barrier to any political collaboration on this issue. Considering the Second-Wave Feminist movement had a large focus on middle class white women to the detriment of other women, it is understandable why this gap between actual issues and perceptions exists.

Finally, there is one more issue that faces a significant disconnect between the perceptions of gay males and the realities of feminist concern, and this is reproductive rights. This issue is at the top of the list for feminists on a personal level and has a large number of advocacy organizations working on this issue. Yet less than a third of the gay male participants feel this issue is of concern for feminists. The reason for this disconnect, in part, comes from the fact that for many it seems the Supreme Court has settled this debate years ago with *Roe v. Wade*. “I mean abortion is legal. And while some blowhards are going to say we should get rid of it, I just don’t see that going away. So really I think feminists are focusing on employment stuff instead since it is still a problem” (Ted). Clearly the feminist respondents do not agree with this assessment of abortion access being settled and secure considering the high priority it receives from them. Since so many states have passed and try to pass new legislation to regulate abortion services, it is understandable why feminists feel the need to keep fighting for this right. And for gay men, to help understand this feeling they just need to look at the issue of same-sex marriage that many gay men think needs to be defended in case attacks

against this right are intensified. If this is done then this perception that reproductive rights are stable would be challenged and this barrier could be overcome.

### **The Issue of Invisibility**

Finally, there is one more major barrier that can impact political collaboration between feminists and gay men. Simply put, oftentimes gay men and feminists do not recognize each other as potential political partners. In the middle of the interviews, each participant was asked who they felt would be good partners for political activism. The respondents gave answers that ranged from political parties, to advocacy groups, and even demographics of people. First are the results from the feminist interviewees.

Table 9. Feminist Views on Political Partners

<b>Possible Political Partner</b>	<b>Number of Times Mentioned</b>
Moderate Democrats and Republicans	8
Marginalized minority groups	5
Non Profit Organizations	4
United Nations	4
Planned Parenthood	3
NOW	2
Political Action Committees	2
Media	1

As was noted in the methodology section, each interviewee was not aware at the time of the interview that this project was designed to predict political collaboration between gay men and feminists. The reason for this deception lies with this question. One



potential barrier to collaboration is the matter of outreach. If a group does not reach out to another group, it is no surprise when the two do not work together as often as they might due to areas of shared interest. Thus, here I wanted to see if feminists would identify gay men, or more broadly the LGBTQ community, when asked about whom they should partner with political and vice versa.

For the feminist interviewees, reaching out to more moderate voters was the only answer that even reached the threshold of 50% for the number of times mentioned. Many of the participants also focused on organizations when responding to this question, whether in the general sense or more specifically by naming advocacy groups such as NOW. For many feminists these groups have the advantage of already having structures in place for people to volunteer, support, and lobby for change so they make excellent partners. Additionally, they see these national and international organizations pushing agendas they feel feminists can align with. “I would definitely say the UN should be a focus for feminists. They have a lot of publicity going on their women’s initiatives like having Emma Watson as their new spokesperson. It definitely would be a good time to get on board and stand with them on those issues” (Lisa).

Yet, while a majority of participants identified people of particular political leanings or some form of advocacy organization, only 5 mentioned marginalized minority groups, such as LGBTQ and ethnic minorities. Each of the 5 people who did mention these groups answered by saying that feminists should work with any marginalized group pushing for equal rights; hence each of these marginalized groups were not separated out into their own separate category. Specifically African Americans, Latino Americans,

LGBTQ individuals and Asian Americans were identified as marginalized minority groups.

Yet this result of ultimately only one third of feminists identifying LGBTQ people and organizations as partners presents one of the most significant barriers to political collaboration between the feminists and gay men. Especially since feminists have a stronger history of working with lesbians it is likely that when feminists identify LGBTQ people as political partners their first thought might be lesbians specifically. Uniquely identifying gay men as political partners is more unlikely than lesbians or the LGBTQ community as a whole. However, do gay men have the same problem of not thinking of feminists as political partners? Below are the responses from the gay male participants about political partnerships.

Table 10. Gay Male Views on Political Partners

<b>Political partners</b>	<b>Number of times mentioned</b>
Feminists	6
HRC	5
Racial minorities	5
Open to all who are willing to help	3
Democrats	3
Independents	2
Church groups	2
Transgender community	2
Any candidate with a strong record supporting gay rights	1

Log Cabin Republicans	1
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The first point of interest is that no group even got 50% of participants to identify them as possible political partners. Even national groups that advocate for gay rights such as the HRC only had 33% however, that number could be higher if the three participants who said they were open to all groups had given specific examples of groups. Javier explains why some participants were less than willing to limit this list with particular examples. “There is such a diverse amount of people who are gay or know someone who is gay. I do not think anyone should be automatically cut out of the conversation since everyone could have a reason to be there” (Javier).

As for the partnership with feminists, there are some positive and negative outlooks here. Feminists or women’s groups were the most popular choice of potential political partners. However, despite being the most popular they were still only identified by fewer than 50% of interviewees. Just like with the feminist responses, in the majority of cases gay men do not think to include feminists in their list of potential political partners, thus compounding this issue of invisibility about this political partnership and making this a more difficult barrier to overcome for collaboration. Even if their issue areas were aligned 100 percent of the time, if the groups do not reach out to each other, political union will suffer.

The biggest bright spot for the future political alliances of gay men and feminists is that neither group identified the other as one to avoid partnering with. In addition to asking both groups who they felt would make ideal partners, every participant was also

asked to list those they felt would be ineffective political partners. The results for the feminist interviewees immediately followed by the gay men are below.

Table 11. Feminist Views on Groups to Avoid Political Partnerships

<b>Groups to avoid partnering with</b>	<b>Number of times mentioned</b>
Extreme right/left on political spectrum	6
None	4
National Rifle Association	3
Religious Institutions	3
Pro-life Supporters	2

Table 12. Gay Male Views on Groups to Avoid Political Partnerships

<b>Groups to avoid partnering with</b>	<b>Number of times mentioned</b>
Religious extremists	6
Republicans	5
None	4
Social conservatives	3
HRC	1
Catholic Church	1
Family Resource Council	1

While feminists and gay men may not always think of each other as political partners, the fact that they do not think to avoid each other is positive news for their political collaboration. Thus, even though there is the hurdle of invisibility for both feminists and gay men, it is not insurmountable since neither group wishes to actively

avoid each other. However, there still needs to be work done on getting feminists and gay men to actively engage each other.

While this data does not directly dismiss feminists or gay men from partnering with each other, there could be some small issues when other facets of identity come into play. For example, some gay men feel that partnering with groups with strong religious affiliations is “sleeping with the enemy” and thus should be avoided (Ted). And while a few feminists also included religious institutions in their list of groups to avoid, several of the feminist participants did identify as Christian and thus could potentially feel unwelcome by some parts of the gay male population.

This hesitancy to interact with religious individuals and institutions likely stems from the adversarial relationship feminists and gay men have had with religious institutions throughout the years. Most notably on issues of birth control, abortion and same-sex marriage, religion has often been used as the principal reason for denying this rights. Thus it would be very difficult to overcome the distrust of people with strong traditionally religious identifications and make it hard for a partnership to develop.

For feminists, the majority feel they should avoid political extremes since it “alienates the middle of the road people we really need” (Ellen). This could be a potential barrier to collaboration as well. A few of the gay male participants identified as extremely liberal in their politics, and thus could be turned off from working with some feminists who feel more outreach needs to be done to the middle of the spectrum as opposed to the extreme ends. Yet despite these potential intersectional identities creating barriers, there was no group identified as one to avoid that was mentioned by even 50%

of participants. Thus this potential barrier should be easily cleared. And while there are several potential barriers to political collaboration between feminists and gay men, there are positive signs that show these barriers can be overcome.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

All of the data presented thus far illustrates the positives and negatives to political collaboration between feminists and gay men. Historically, creating a stronger coalition has helped both groups build a larger support network for achieving their political goals, such as when NOW and the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations added LGBTQ rights and feminist activism to their respective platforms. Yet, at times, this collaboration has failed due to a lack of mutual interest on certain issues, such as the fight against pornography.

However, as the interviews with self-identified feminists and gay men have shown, there are currently several topics which have the ability to foster unity and become a driving force for joint political activism. For example, there is a mutual interest in expanding equal economic opportunity, health care access, and passing an equal rights amendment through Congress. The question remains, out of all these issues that seem likely for political collaboration, which ones have the best chance for creating a large political coalition? And how will/could the barriers to political collaboration identified in Chapter Four be overcome to achieve this collaboration?

### **Overcoming the Barriers to Political Collaboration**

Collective political activism by gay men and feminists is a goal that can be achieved, despite the barriers to this unity already discussed, and there are several factors that point in this direction. First, and possibly the strongest indicator of the likelihood of

collaboration between these groups, are their intersections in terms of identity. Most importantly, how many gay men identify as feminist? And how many feminists have ties to the LGBTQ community?

For the feminist interviewees, 14 out of 15 had some tie to the LGBTQ community. 3 of them stated they did not identify as heterosexual, 2 worked in organizations that had ties to the LGBTQ community, and 9 had family or close friends who are LGBTQ. Only 1 person said they had no ties with the LGBTQ community. And that individual with no ties to the LGBTQ community explained, “It is not because I dislike gay people or anything. I think they should have the same rights as everyone else. It is just that in my social circle I don’t know anyone who is” (Angela). Having so many feminists relate to the LGBTQ community in some way will clearly be a boon for any future political collaboration because they already a part of or feel invested in the community.

As for the gay male participants, of the 15 interviewees only 2 stated that they were not feminists. The rest either said a resounding yes (9) or that they liked the ideas but were uncomfortable with the term itself (4). Craig summed up why some gay men were uncomfortable with the term by explaining how the term feminist has been “co-opted by people who are too radical” (Craig). Thus while there may be some hesitancy in part of the community due to this perception of radicalism, the majority of gay men either are or agree with the ideas of feminists. Hence, considering the overlap between feminists and gay men, it should be possible to overcome the fact that oftentimes they forget about each other when it comes to political partnerships.



The other major positive indicator for political collaboration is that, on several issues, the political interests of gay men and feminists align. This is apparent from the responses already discussed in earlier chapters. Yet in addition to this alignment, it is important to see where the participants themselves thought political collaboration would be likely. All 30 participants were asked to identify which issues they felt would benefit most from a political alliance between gay men and feminists. Below are the responses of the feminist interviewees followed by the gay male participants.

Table 13. Feminist Views on Issues of Collaboration

<b>Area of Collaboration</b>	<b>Number of Times Mentioned</b>
Employment discrimination	7
Legal discrimination protections/ERA	6
Any are open for collaboration	5
Health care	3
Political Representation	3
Breaking down stereotypes	1

Table 14. Gay Male Views on Issues of Collaboration

<b>Area of Collaboration</b>	<b>Number of Times Mentioned</b>
Legal discrimination protections/ERA	6
Employment discrimination	5
Equal pay	4
Health Care	3
Transgender equality	2

Access to social services	1
Environment	1
Political Representation	1
Any area open for collaboration	1

Employment discrimination continues to be near the top of the list for both groups with a total of 12 participants listing that issue specifically. Equal pay was separated out of the gay male list since some participants identified that issue uniquely from other employment issues. But if that number is included, the identification of workplace discrimination issues rises to 16 interviewees citing it as an area of collaboration. Also with 12 unique mentions is legal discrimination, an issue that was notably absent from the list of what gay men saw feminists caring about. Although it is an underpinning idea of several issues on that list, it is still surprising it did not appear on the gay male views of feminist political concerns. Yet since this issue is so overarching it could be the ideal issue for collaboration. “Given so many areas that these groups are discriminated against: pay, hiring, housing, and so on, it is time to finally get some legal protections on the books” (Philip).

Other issues that were regularly identified by both groups such as health care and the ERA continue to appear, albeit in smaller numbers. One other interesting point to note is that feminists were much more open to working on any issue than gay men were. Only one of the gay male participants said that any issue would benefit from political collaboration. Yet 5 of the 15 feminists said they would work on any issue with gay men.

Even though gay men were more specific, they did list more unique issues than their feminist counterparts. Either way, there are numerous issues that clearly are open for collaboration between feminists and gay men. And some of these issues have very high levels of support, especially if you add in those who are willing to work on any issue into those numbers.

Another positive sign for a political coalition between gay men and feminists is that there are very few areas where gay men and feminists think the other would not make good partners. When asked if there were any political issues where collaboration would not be useful, 24 participants said none. Another two said there may be some areas, but were unable to think of any at the time. And four people had an area where they thought it would not be useful, abortion. “When it comes to abortion, gay men just do not know. They cannot have kids so they cannot really understand the issue from a feminist perspective. So I think they would just slow down the process instead of help” (Zach). Feminists tended to agree with this characterization. “Gay men simply don’t have much of a stake in the abortion fight. So I would rather collaborate on issues with them where it would be more useful” (Tammy). Overall it shows that for nearly every issue area feminists and gay men are open to working with one another and feel it would be particularly useful in areas such as the ERA and employment discrimination protections.

### **Probable Areas of Future Political Collaboration**

There are numerous factors that have been explored that go into predicting political collaboration. Numerous authors have analyzed political coalitions and their use, typically around specific issues. Some examples of this include Edith Balbach and her

work analyzing issues involving the tobacco community, Assaf Razin discussing migration and Francisco Gutiérrez looking at violence reduction in Columbia. In all of these works the authors identified some important aspects that go into creating a successful coalition. First of all, there needs to be alignment on political issues at both the personal and community level. Second, a large number of advocacy organizations working on those political issues will make it easier to direct political activism. Finally, for groups to work successfully together there needs to be a perception that the groups would make ideal partners for tackling a political issue, along with a high level of passion for this partnership. Together these factors can overcome barriers that may interfere with political activism such as entrenched and established opposition to a position and lack of faith in the political system. The self-identified gay men and feminists included in this study have already stated several issues where a partnership could occur. In the interest of judging which of these issues would have the highest level of passion for political collaboration, at the end of the interviews each participant was asked to narrow that list to the top issue they would see benefitting from a political partnership. Below are the answers of the self-identified feminists followed by the gay men.

Table 15. Top Issue Feminists Would Focus on with Gay Men

<b>Top Issue to Focus on Next</b>	<b>Number of Times Mentioned</b>
Employment Discrimination	5
Non Discrimination Laws/ERA	3
Political Representation	3

Health Care	3
Social Security Reform	1

Table 16. Top Issue Gay Men Would Focus on with Feminists

<b>Top Issue to Focus on Next</b>	<b>Number of Times Mentioned</b>
Employment discrimination	4
Sexual assault/violence	3
Same-sex marriage	2
Adoption laws	2
Paid parental leave	1
Non Discrimination Laws/ERA	1
Health Care	1
Racial Equality	1

First and foremost, the feminist participants were more focused on identifying their top issue, with only 5 unique issues coming up. Meanwhile, the gay men listed 8 unique issues as their highest priority for political collaboration. Topping these lists, as with many other of my questions, is employment discrimination. This issue held a lot of attention throughout many interviews. The reason for this, according to one participant, is that “Many people, me included, have personally experienced [employment discrimination]. I think feminists and gay men are affected by this so it would be an easy issue to come together on” (Steven). While many agreed with Steven, others thought the best way to start was to pick an issue that would grow an even larger political coalition.

The issue of violence was talked about in this way to “include African-Americans and other racial minorities such as the Black Lives Matter movement” in a larger movement (Vernon).

With this final question indicating which issue the interviewees think are in the best position for political collaboration, the earlier questions illustrating how broad the base is for each particular issue, and the current focus, as of January 2016, of national advocacy groups, conclusions can be drawn on which issues it is most likely these two groups will coalesce. Yet before delving into which issues will foster collaboration, several issue areas can be ruled out immediately for not having broad support between feminists, gay men and advocacy groups. Issues such as racial equality, social security, public service access, and adoption laws were mentioned throughout various parts of the 30 interviews, but always in small numbers and either barely registering or absent from the final question gauging each person’s top area of interest for collaboration.

However, there are four issues that seem most likely to create a strong political coalition between feminists and gay men: political representation, the ERA, health care, and employment discrimination. Each of these issues has most if not all of the necessary components to forging a political collaboration between gay men and feminists, yet some have a better chance than others. Out of these four issues, political representation is the least likely issue to be the top cause of political unity.

Political representation was one of the issues that came up repeatedly during this study, particularly in regards to national advocacy organization projects. Yet while it is likely that some feminists will continue to work on this issue, the interest of the gay male

community is not there. Tackling political representation as a cause has worked in the past for LGBTQ group, as noted earlier in the example of Harvey Milk, but the current issues of concern for gay men do not include political representation. Thus the most likely partnership on this issue at this time is one on the organizational level between feminist and LGBTQ advocacy groups. The likelihood of getting a large support base of individuals, though, is too low on the gay male side to make this the most likely of the four issues to be the next major focus of joint political activism.

The ERA and health care are nearly equal in their probability of becoming the next major issue of political collaboration between feminists and gay men. Both issues have several advocacy organizations that listed them as political priorities. Several of the feminists and gay men interviewed listed them as a top priority for them personally as well as one of the issues they see as a priority for the feminist and gay male communities. And a few of the individuals even ranked these issues as their number one issue they would like to see political collaboration on. In fact, it is likely that some feminists and gay men will prioritize these two issues. Whereas the issue of political representation will likely draw more feminists than gay men to action, the ERA and health care seem like they would build a larger coalition. The only reason this issue is not the strongest likelihood for large scale political collaboration is because of employment issues.

Employment discrimination is clearly the issue with the greatest chance of building a large political base between feminists and gay men. This particular issue has several factors working for it to propel it to this high priority status. First of all, it is already on the radar for both demographics at the national level through national

advocacy organizations. It is also the highest priority for both gay men and feminists as repeatedly shown through the interviews conducted. And, for both gay men and feminists, this was the issue most often cited in terms of their top priority for political collaboration. While some of the other issues discussed, such as the ERA and health care, have these elements of passion, an energized base of support, and the focus of national advocacy organizations, none of them do so at the level of employment discrimination. Considering this continues to be a high profile issue, as evidenced by the relatively recent passage of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, the focus on issues of employment discrimination is only likely to grow. All in all, this issue is simply in the strongest position to create a broad and strong political alliance between gay men and feminists.

This issue is easily the least controversial issue for feminists and gay men to work on together due to this broad swath of support. Equal pay continues to be a concern for feminists. And gay men in many states still live with the fear of being fired due to their sexual orientation. Yet for building the coalition and getting both sides invested in employment discrimination the issue of parental leave may be the best idea for a starting point. With the passage of same-sex marriage it makes it easier for gay couples to adopt kids. And for women in the workplace having children is often seen as a career staller or ender due to the lack of paid parental leave. Thus I think this particular issue would be a good starting point to building a coalition on employment discrimination. Then once everyone is at the table it can be expanded to issues such as equal pay and firing based on sexual orientation since the base will be there.



As has been seen, feminists and gay men do have room to work together, a history of doing so, and a willingness to collaborate. There have been some hurdles on past collaborations, and will likely continue to be some more problems that arise as well. However, with the similarly aligned interests, both on the personal and national level, it is unlikely that any barrier would permanently stop feminists and gay men from collaborating to achieve their political goals.

APPENDIX A  
ORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are your most important political priorities?
2. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, what role does your identity as a (gay male or feminist) play in your political priorities?
3. What would you say are the top five political issues concerning (gay men or feminists) as a whole?
4. Which political groups, parties, or other demographics do you think (gay males or feminists) should partner with?
5. Are there any political groups, parties, or demographics that (gay men or feminists) should avoid partnering with?
6. Do you identify as a feminist? or Do you have any personal affiliation with the LGBTQ community, and if so what is that affiliation?
7. What do you perceive to be the five highest priority political causes for (feminists or gay men)?
8. Where, if anywhere, do you see room for collaboration between gay men and feminists?
9. On what issues, if any, do you think there is no room for collaboration between gay men and feminists?
10. If you had to pick the top political cause for feminists or gay men to work on which issue would it be and why?

APPENDIX B

NATIONAL ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS STUDIED

9to5

AAUW

ACT UP

Athlete Ally

Campus Pride

DignityUSA

EMILY's List

Feminist Majority Foundation

Feminists for Life

Get Equal

GLAAD

GLSEN

GSA Network

HRC

INCITE! Women of Color against violence

MEUSA

MS JD

National Council of Negro Women

National LGBTQ Task Force

National Partnership for Women and Families

NBJC

NOW

Out & Equal

Planned Parenthood Action Fund

Pride at Work

Radical Women

SIECUS

WE

WEDO

WILPF

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