

LESBIAN AND GAY STUDENT MOBILIZATION AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY,

1976-1985

A Thesis

by

ANDREW D. VASERFIRER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

May 2011

Major Subject: Sociology

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Approved by:

Co-Chairs of Committee,	Ashley Currier
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ABSTRACT

Lesbian and Gay Student Mobilization at Texas A&M University, 1976-1985.

(May 2011)

Andrew D. Vaserfirer, B.S.; B.A.; B.A., Iowa State University

Co-Chairs of Advisory Committee: Dr. Ashley Currier
Dr. Sarah Gatson

Drawing on newspaper, movement correspondence, and interview data, I examine the tactical selection and (in)visibility of a lesbian and gay student group, Gay Student Services (GSS), in a hostile university campus in Texas from the mid-1970s through the 1980s. GSS was formed to create a safe space for sexual minorities at Texas A&M University (TAMU) and asked university officials to recognize the group officially after physical threats of violence became real. After long delays, when TAMU administrators declined GSS's request, GSS filed a lawsuit against TAMU with the goal of achieving formal recognition.

In the first chapter, I offer a brief history of GSS and introduce my thesis structure. In the second chapter, I show how early access to legal aid bolstered GSS members' understanding of their rights and encouraged their use of legal tactics. A sense of legal entitlement also encouraged GSS to pursue legal tactics in the face of administrative antagonism. The hostile campus environment also motivated GSS to utilize legal tactics instead of engaging in more traditional forms of contention, such as protest, to pursue their goal of gaining official status on campus.

In the third chapter, I examine how GSS utilized visibility and invisibility to effectively navigate the hostile university environment. By controlling their (in)visibility GSS members were able to shield the organization from scrutiny and protect members' safety. Over time, as the campus environment became relatively more tolerant, GSS took more public action. As GSS made itself more visible, so was its support. Despite growing support and the positive outlook of the court case, GSS members knew they had to carefully construct the appearance of an "ideal" student organization. This led GSS members to carefully regulate their public actions. Such regulation extended beyond GSS receiving official recognition from the university to prevent further controversy from surrounding the organization. Finally, I end my thesis with a reflective conclusion of my experiences researching GSS.

DEDICATION

My thesis is dedicated to my partner, Jill, whose support and encouragement inspire me and my work.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1976, a group of lesbian and gay students formed Gay Student Services (GSS) at Texas A&M University (TAMU) as a service organization for lesbians and gay men at TAMU. GSS planned to offer a variety of services, including a hotline that offered medical, psychological, and religious counseling, a roommate-matching service to help members find safe living spaces, and educational talks to encourage safety in the lesbian and gay community. Initially, GSS wanted minimal official interaction with the university, but were forced to seek recognition when three members of TAMU's armed forces training program, the Corps of Cadets, threatened GSS members who were posting flyers on campus. Official recognition as a student organization would have provided GSS members protection from harassment because GSS would have all the necessary permissions to exist on campus. After delaying their response to the GSS application for eight months, GSS members threatened to file a lawsuit against TAMU. This prompted university officials to deny GSS's request on the basis that the group's goals were antithetical to TAMU traditions (Pinello 2003, p. 59).

GSS members decided they had no choice but to challenge university officials' decision despite the university's climate of antigay hostility. Seeing no other option, GSS members initiated a lawsuit that lasted from 1977 to 1985. The university did not make the legal process easy for GSS. University officials stalled as much as possible,

This thesis follows the style of *American Journal of Sociology*.

just as they did with the initial request. Eventually in 1984, the 5th Circuit Appellate Court reached a decision in favor of GSS. TAMU appealed the decision to the Supreme Court, which declined to hear the case. The 5th Circuit's decision stood and allowed lesbian and gay students to organize on campus in 1985. This constituted an important development in lesbian and student mobilization in the United States.

My masters' thesis research focuses on two elements related to the GSS: their strategic choice to use legal tactics and their (in)visibility. First, how did TAMU's gender and sexual policies and history affect GSS's mobilization? GSS members were forced to take action against the university if they wanted TAMU to recognize GSS as a student group. What about the university's environment encouraged them to utilize legal tactics rather than more direct, visible forms of protest such as sit-ins or marches against university administration? Were there factors beyond the university's environment that affected their tactical choices? Second, given the campus' hostility to GSS's existence, GSS members controlled the visibility of members and of the organization. Fearing retribution from the administration, student body, and local community for filing a lawsuit against TAMU, GSS sought to protect the members and organization from scrutiny before, during, and after the lawsuit. GSS supporters also had to work carefully to avoid negative public perceptions.

To answer these questions I utilized several kinds of data, including archival research, a qualitative analysis of approximately 600 newspaper articles and 173 internal GSS documents, and fourteen qualitative interviews with GSS members and supporters. To understand the campus's environment and the hostility directed towards lesbians and gay men, I consulted Cushing Library's GSS collection and local and campus newspaper

coverage of the lawsuit, internal GSS correspondence, and court documents.

Additionally, past GSS members and advisors granted me access to their private archives on the GSS. I used mixed qualitative methods to balance activists' lack of recollection about GSS's actions and bias in news coverage or internal GSS correspondence.

I organized my thesis as two separate, stand-alone articles with an introductory section and brief conclusion. The first article, Chapter II, focuses on my first research question, the question of tactical choice, while the second article, Chapter III, addresses GSS members' (in)visibility management.

CHAPTER II

TACTICAL CHOICE

In 1976, six lesbian and gay students formed the Gay Student Services (GSS) and sought recognition for the group from Texas A&M University (TAMU). University officials denied their request on the ground that the GSS's goals were antithetical to TAMU traditions (Pinello 2003, p. 59). Amid a climate of antigay hostility, GSS members decided to challenge the university officials' decision. GSS members initiated a lawsuit, *Gay Student Services v. Texas A&M University*, that lasted from 1977 to 1985. Eventually, the 5th Circuit Appellate Court reached a decision in favor of the GSS in 1984; TAMU appealed the decision to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court refused to hear the case, thereby upholding the 5th Circuit's decision that TAMU had to recognize the lesbian and gay student group. This decision allowed lesbians and gay men to organize campus advocacy groups across the United States.

This article focuses on GSS's choice to use legal tactics over other forms of contention in a campus context of antigay vitriol. In 1963, TAMU began its metamorphosis from an all-male, all white, land grant military school into one that admitted civilians and women. Feminist scholarship has demonstrated how militarized, all-male environments propagate homophobia, which can function as the content and product of militarized masculinities (Kimmel 2000). Editorials in *The Battalion*, the TAMU student newspaper, and threats to the GSS telephone helpline suggested violence as the best way to deal with the GSS. For example, antigay opponents stated that they

would “beat the hell outa [sic] the GSSO and all of its kooky-queers”¹ (Hickman 1982), contributing to the homophobic atmosphere on campus. In fact, the campus administration was so resistant to the idea of lesbians’ and gays’ existence that in the early 1970s, the university president addressed the incoming class of students by saying, “welcome to Texas A&M the school where there is no drugs, no sex, and no homosexuals” (Whitley 1977c). Intent on preserving the school’s heritage, the administration blocked efforts to change the school’s masculine and heterosexualized “traditions.” The administration’s feelings about maintaining the school’s “traditions” were so strong that in 1976 the university’s administration denied GSS’ request for student group status without reading the application (*Gay Student Services v. Texas A&M University* 1979, p. 4).

In situations involving institutional repression, social movement organizations (SMO) may choose tactics that directly challenge an institution. Cast as disruptive, these tactics include protesting or lobbying decision makers (McAdam [1982] 1999; Tarrow 1998). Scholars do not necessarily consider legal tactics to constitute direct or disruptive challenges (Burstein 1991). In this article, I adopt a different stance. I recognize that legal tactics may be disruptive in hostile contexts in which conventional modes of collective action, such as street protest or petitioning officials to change policies, are untenable. Drawing inspiration from Armstrong and Bernstein’s (2008) multi-institutional politics (MIP) model, I argue that GSS’s choice to pursue legal tactics challenged university officials’ authority. GSS members’ tactical choice required that they establish ties with legal experts. While litigation lasted for several years, GSS

1 “Beat the hell outta,” often-abbreviated BTHO, is the TAMU student rallying cry most often used at sporting events in an effort to intimidate the opponent.

members initiated an educational campaign related to the case. My work herein advances social movement theory by examining how sociopolitical contexts affect how activists decide which tactics are viable.

Understanding Tactical Selection

Social movement scholars recognize the importance of a SMO's tactics (Burstein 1991; McAdam [1982] 1999; Tarrow 1998), but SMO tactical selection is largely undertheorized (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004). Tactical selection is dependent on the tactics available to a group in its tactical repertoire (Tarrow 1998). Tactical repertoires are “the distinctive constellations of tactics and strategies developed over time and used by protest groups to act collectively in order to make claims on individuals and groups” (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004, p. 265). These repertoires are not limited to visible actions such as marches or strikes, but can also encompass discourse and identity creation, such as rights framing (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004). Over time, SMOs try out other possible tactics, such as when the Civil Rights movement experimented with sit-ins and jail-ins in the early 1960s (McAdam [1982] 1999; Tarrow 1998). Changes to the tactical repertoire are slow to occur because these changes result from interaction between the SMO and its target (Tarrow 1998). Tactical repertoires can change through tactical diffusion, the process through which SMOs exchange tactics (Meyer and Whittier 1994; Tarrow 1998; Whittier 2004). Tactical diffusion commonly occurs between different SMOs. The Civil Rights movement, in the 1960s, successfully utilized rights framing within the courtroom. After seeing the success of this tactic, lesbian and gay activists also started to utilize their own form of rights framing to mount legal campaigns (Bernstein 2002).

Different strands of social movement theory approach tactical selection in distinct ways. Political process and resource mobilization theorists focus on how SMOs exploit political opportunities and material resources (McAdam [1982] 1999; Tarrow 1998). Both models are vested in an elite model of society wherein working-class individuals slowly gain political power or resources until they are able to mobilize effectively to create or halt change (McAdam [1982] 1999). Both approaches conceptualize tactical selection as contingent on the opportunity of power and resources (McCammon 2003; Tarrow 1998). SMO actors utilize tactical choices instrumentally, choosing the tactic they think will be most successful (Meyer 2004). For instance in 1975, a U.S. nuclear equipment supplier hired a research firm to analyze attitudes on nuclear power so it could more effectively focus its pro-nuclear power movement on those likely to resist the proliferation of nuclear power (Zald and Useem 1987). Additionally, political process and resource mobilization theories analyze SMOs that target political institutions, not cultural SMOs (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). These approaches do not regard cultural actions, such as public spectacles and consciousness-raising, as part of a conventional tactical repertoire.

Using political process theory, McCammon (2003) found that the availability of resources and diversity of views within an SMO encouraged shifts in tactics within the U.S. women's suffrage movement. If SMOs have access to the necessary resources and maintain an open, varied discourse on tactics, they are more likely to change their tactics. As more culturally-centered theories have become more popular, understandings of SMO tactical selection have shifted. Meyer (2004) found that organizational identity determined what tactics peace movement organizations in Israel, Northern Ireland, and

South Africa selected. Meyer's findings have direct implications for tactical selection because “organizational identities...drive the goals that SMOs pursue, the mix of tactics they emphasize, the degree to which they change their tactics over time, and...how contentious they are willing to be” (2004, p. 183). Polletta (2005) offers another culturally-centered model of tactical selection. SMO adherents attribute symbolism to a particular tactic and associate that tactic with other social groups. These symbolic associations can alter a SMO's understanding of tactical effectiveness or usefulness because of its relationship with a group that the SMO perceived positively or negatively (Polletta 2005).

Theories more sensitive to cultural SMOs are more likely to recognize that a SMO's impetus for tactical selection is based on the group's ideology than on structural factors such as political opportunity or resource availability (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Taylor and Van Dyke 2004; Meyer 2004). Rather than distinguishing neatly between cultural and political SMOs, the MIP model focuses on how SMOs behave in particular contexts (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). The MIP perspective understands that power is diffusely dispersed throughout society, rather than centralized in one structure. Therefore, a SMO's focus can reach beyond specific political institutions, targeting cultural attitudes as well (Bernstein 2002). SMOs may also target multiple institutions simultaneously, including cultural institutions and the law. Additionally, the MIP approach allows researchers to study SMO strategy intimately, as activists shift their focus over time, rather than requiring researchers to analyze only one specific aspect of a SMO, such as resources, framing, or opportunity (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). In this sense, the disruptive nature of contention is dependent on context because

“disruption need not threaten public order” (Tarrow 1998, p. 96). This permits the recognition of certain tactics, such as the law, as both culturally and politically disruptive. For example, a SMO's actors may knowingly choose a tactic that will not be maximally effective, but one that fits their political grievances and ideological orientation. The MIP approach does not deemphasize how important resources and political opportunity are for tactical selection; instead, it focuses on both the structural and cultural factors that affect tactical selection (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Jasper 2004).

Repression, especially state repression, can directly impact a SMO's tactical selection (Meyer 2004). In an overtly repressive context, groups may be unlikely to select certain tactics in order to avoid backlash, such as in apartheid South Africa when most SMOs avoided public protest due to sanctions from whites in power (McAdam 1986; Meyer 2004). In addition to the threats of physical violence directed toward a SMO's members and proponents, there is also potential for “soft repression” (Ferree 2005, p. 88). The state and social institutions may attempt to stifle organizing by silencing, ridiculing, and stigmatizing activists (Ferree 2005, p. 97). In the U.S., from the 1940s to the 1980s, police used anti-sodomy laws to harass and stigmatize lesbians and gay men as criminals (Bernstein 2002). An indirect, nonviolent form of repression, “channeling,” “affect[s] the forms of protest available, the timing of protests, and/or flows of resources to movements” (Earl 2003, p. 48). Drawn-out legal battles can constitute subtle repression if authorities use them as tools of discouragement (Earl 2003; Pinello 2003). Additionally, officials can use legal repression to control SMOs. To constrain Southern civil rights organizing in the 1960s, state officials used “frequent

questionable arrests, high bail, court proceedings, lack of due process, and injunctions without legal foundation” with greater success than violent tactics” (Barkan 1984, p. 562).

The Law and Social Movement Organizations

Social movement studies often emphasize non-legal means of mobilization (McAdam [1982] 1999; Tarrow 1998), but legal mobilization has emerged as an important subject for students of tactical repertoires (Almeida and Stearns 1998; Burstein 1991). Scholars tend to approach legal mobilization from two primary theoretical vantage points. First, the political process and resource mobilization approaches regard legal activism as requiring sufficient expertise and financial support to create and sustain a legal campaign (Andersen 2006; McAdam [1982] 1999; Tarrow 1998). These traditions tend to subordinate the choice to use legal tactics to larger processes of opportunity or resource availability (Burstein 1991; McAdam [1982] 1999). Second, theories of legal consciousness assert that activists decide to use legal tactics if they possess an adequate understanding of their legal entitlements or rights (Marshall and Barclay 2003; Merry 1990). Legal consciousness theorists have focused on “how and why conflict reaches the judicial system” (Marshall and Barclay 2003, p. 619). More recently, legal consciousness theorists have started to explore how legal understandings influence “goals, options and choices” (Marshall and Barclay 2003, p. 621). Although both approaches provide insight into SMO tactical selection, neither is sufficiently able explain to explain why activists choose or decline to use legal tactics.

Legal mobilization research also tends to subsume legal tactics within a larger strategy, making it unclear how legal action unfolds within a SMO. This is particularly evident when scholars consider the significance of judicial decisions. Some scholars acknowledge the importance of a specific legal decision's influence on a SMO, but they typically lump legal tactics or outcomes with other outcomes, rather than analyzing legal tactics or outcomes separately (e.g., Tarrow 1998; McAdam [1982] 1999). McAdam ([1982] 1999) assumes that past SMO success with protest tactics spurred activists to pursue legal tactics, due to increasing political capital, but he does not thoroughly analyze SMO participation and effects on these cases. This tendency results in scholars' myopia with respect to how SMO conceptualize, use, and rank legal tactics. Paul Burstein (1991) suggests that this uneven understanding of legal tactics in social movement studies is related to the "inside/outside" dichotomy. As scholars focus on groups that use "particular tactics," such as direct-action tactics, lobbying, or litigation, "those studying social movements virtually force themselves to abandon the field of inquiry when the groups they are interested in begin to have influence" (Burstein 1991, p. 1203). According to Burstein (1991, p. 1203), the "insider/outsider" dichotomy persists because often social movement researchers focus on SMO actions that do not utilize "proper channels," such as the judicial system or lobbying. Thus, once an SMO reaches "insider" status and obtains institutional power, scholars become less able to account for why the organization chose certain tactics. In other words, scholars have a tendency to examine the tactics of the powerless and ignore the tactics of the powerful, such as legal tactics. In this sense, the insider/outsider dichotomy is collapsing. Certain

SMOs' use of institutionalized means of collective action erases the idea of the outsider status (Werum and Winders 2001).

LGBT Organizing around the Law in the United States: 1950s-1980s

Many U.S. states, Texas included, had laws prohibiting same-sex sex until 2003 when the Supreme Court ruled sodomy laws unconstitutional. These laws defined same-sex sexuality as criminal, reducing it to a single sex act—anal sex between men (Cain 2000; Clendinen and Nagourney 1999). As long as same-sex sexuality remained criminalized in anti-sodomy statutes, lesbian and gay activists were unable to make significant legal gains and to convince Americans, lawmakers, and social institutions that they were normal, law-abiding citizens (Cain 2000). This status was especially detrimental to early lesbian and gay organizing because many lesbians and gays believed the pathologizing rhetoric that there was something wrong with them.

Lesbian and gay organizing in the 1950s primarily focused on self-help and assimilation rather than political challenge (Armstrong 2002; Bernstein 2002). Initially, lesbian and gay organizing was a risky endeavor, often undertaken in relative secrecy by homophile organizations. Homophile activism concentrated on social and cultural integration through mainstream political channels because discriminatory state policy targeted lesbians and gay men. Since activists feared negative sanctions from the state, homophile activists sometimes shied away from public action (Cain 1993; Jagose 1996). Lesbians and gay men also faced negative consequences in the workplace and were under the constant threat of losing their jobs due to their sexuality (Bernstein 2002).

In addition to using assimilation tactics, lesbian and gay activists “tried to persuade psychological and religious authorities (and themselves) that homosexuality [was] neither a sickness nor a sin” (Bernstein 2002, p. 541). Because the American Psychological Association categorized homosexuality as a disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* until 1973, medical professionals viewed it as curable (Cain 2000). The pathologization of homosexuality created a problematic legal situation for sexual minorities as the law regarded their sexuality as a curable disease, making them second-class citizens. From the 1940s through the early 1960s, homophile activists used a discourse of normalization to emphasize their similarities to heterosexuals, trying to minimize negative state and cultural sanctions (Bernstein 2002). Eventually, some started to identify themselves publicly as gay, lesbian, or homosexual, but potential negative sanctions made publicly disclosing one’s sexual-minority identity a dangerous decision (Jagose 1996).

By the mid 1960s, the expanding civil rights movement encouraged more lesbian and gay men to organize (Armstrong 2002; Bernstein 2002). As homophile organizations grew in membership, they began making demands on the state using political and legal tactics; they lobbied legislators for equal rights when possible and sued the state for the right to assemble openly (Bernstein 2002, 2003). These demands enhanced the homophile movement’s visibility, spurring the creation of religious countermovements that fought for increased sanctions against lesbian and gay persons (Fetner 2008; Mucciaroni 2008). Emulating budding civil rights movements, homophile activists used minority rights discourse to frame the legal tactics they used to obtain equal rights and protection for sexual minorities (Armstrong 2002).

In the late 1960s, the formation of gay liberation groups fractured lesbian and gay organizing. Gay liberationist groups outpaced homophile movements in terms of growth (Armstrong 2002). Vested in challenging cultural norms, gay liberationists preferred more visible tactics, such as public protests and marches, and moved away from legal tactics, while homophile organizations favored working within mainstream political channels (Bernstein 2002). For instance, gay liberation activists disrupted psychiatric conventions to protest the classification of homosexuality as a mental illness (Jagose 1996). For many gay liberationists, challenging cultural norms meant moving away from an essentialized or fixed sexuality toward a more fluid understanding of sexuality and gender (Bernstein 2002; Valocchi 1999). This led liberationists to try to ally themselves with women's and Black Power movements of the time, only to find that some of these groups refused to work with gay liberationists (Bernstein 2002; Clendinen and Nagourney 1999).

With the decline of the gay liberation movement in the early 1970s, single-issue gay lesbian and gay SMO began to form (Armstrong 2002; Bernstein 2002). These organizations deployed collective action frames, such as "fairness" and "equal rights," to further their goals (Bernstein 2002; Pedriana 2009). Since these organizations focused on single issues, such as repealing anti-sodomy laws, they lost potential allies who worked on more broadly framed civil rights causes (Bernstein 2002). Additionally, single-issue groups were less willing to compromise on their goals and tactics, leading to further splintering within SMOs (Bernstein 2002). In 1973, Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund emerged as the first organization dedicated to gay rights litigation. The organization had a troubled beginning. Lambda operated solely on a volunteer basis due

to a lack of funding. Lambda's members and leaders maintained a low profile for fear of negative sanctions and had trouble convincing lawyers to associate with a pro-gay organization because being "out" as a lesbian or gay man came with the risk of being disbarred (Andersen 2006).

In the 1980s, as lesbian and gay organizing became more organized and well-funded national organizations formed, activists met strong resistance from the religious, antigay countermovement (Fetner 2008). Lesbian and gay activists shifted their focus from lobbying legislators to litigation because legislators had become less receptive to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) needs than they had been in the past (Kane 2003). Lesbian and gay activists targeted judges, who often did not have to worry about reelection, because negative public opinion was less likely to influence judges and more likely to sway legislators (Clendinen and Nagourney 1999; Mucciaroni 2008). Organizations that pursued gay rights litigation, such as Lambda, led the campaign to repeal sodomy laws at the state and federal levels more aggressively than ever before by actively seeking cases to take to court (Andersen 2006; Pedriana 2009). The LGBT movement's legal success did not only depend on their mobilization; lawmakers in states such as Illinois repealed sodomy laws based on recommendations from the American Law Institute (Mucciaroni 2008).

LGBT Student Mobilization: The Case of GSS

Although there is much research documenting shifts in LGBT organizing in the U.S., there are few studies on lesbian and gay student organizing. Some studies include information on LGBT student organizing, pointing out that student-led SMOs across the

country followed trends that developed in the larger LGBT movement (Cain 2000). Lesbian and gay student groups in more liberal areas, such as New England and the West Coast, achieved university recognition with minimal contention, just as lawmakers in some states voluntarily repealed anti-sodomy laws, making decriminalization campaigns unnecessary (Cain 2000; Kane 2003). In contrast, universities in politically conservative areas refused to let lesbian and gay student organizations operate on campus, forcing students to take legal action (Bernstein 2002; Cain 2000). Taking legal action was difficult for some student groups because they rarely had access to the legal expertise or financial funding required to mount a legal campaign successfully (Andersen 2006). Despite local antigay opposition, lesbian and gay student groups in conservative areas obtained favorable outcomes when they sued universities for recognition. For instance, in 1972, in the district-level First Amendment court case *Wood v. Davison*, a lesbian and gay student group successfully sued to prevent the University of Georgia's from canceling a planned event (Cain 2000). Some judges also did not assume that a lesbian and gay SMO would necessarily promote same-sex sex, even though anti-sodomy laws remained in effect, and ruled in favor of lesbian and gay student organizations, as was the case in *Wood v. Davison* (Cain 2000).

Despite the legal decisions that forced universities to recognize and offer some amenities to lesbian and gay student organizations in the mid-1970s and 1980s, there were still disparities in how universities treated “out” gays and lesbian students, staff, and faculty. In many states, especially Southern ones, it was legal to discriminate against a person based on her/his sexuality (Bernstein 2002; Cain 2000). For instance, in Texas, anti-sodomy laws were still on the books, and enforced (ACLU n.d.). This political and

cultural landscape made it hard and potentially dangerous for individuals to be “out” because of the possibility for unemployment, harassment, or physical harm (Kane 2003).

The Formation of Gay Student Services

Several white lesbian and gay Texas A&M University students formed GSS in 1976 to provide a support group for lesbian and gay students on campus. Of specific importance to the GSS was campus culture and the Bryan/College Station community. It was difficult for lesbians and gay men to live in College Station because of the largely repressive environment exemplified by intolerance and misunderstanding. Groups like the Corps of Cadets, an armed forces training program with relatively large enrollment, were especially opposed to GSS and defended TAMU’s heteronormative traditions by threatening and harassing GSS members on campus. TAMU also has a history of tense race relations. Once African American students were allowed on campus in 1963, they repeatedly had to demand that university administrators hire more African American professors, enroll more African American students and offer Black history courses; many African American students viewed the university as a “racist institution” (Martin 2001). Additionally, some university traditions² were codified prior to the inclusion of people of color and women at TAMU and excluded these groups from participating fully in campus life (Nissimov 2002).

Just as African American students were outcasts in the student population at TAMU, so were lesbian and gay students. TAMU offered no formal protection to sexual

2 At TAMU, traditions are extremely important to student body cohesion. This manifests in multiple elaborate ceremonies during sports events and throughout the school year. Incoming students also attend including an orientation called “fish camp” that familiarizes them with the university’s traditions. See <http://aggietraditions.tamu.edu/> for more information on TAMU traditions and their importance.

minorities, making it risky for lesbians and gay men to be “out” on campus. Repressive environments like TAMU campus life in the late 1970s and early 1980s affect how activists perceive the tactics available to them. More traditional forms of contention like protest require a large participant base for success (McAdam [1982] 1999). High-risk activism, such as engaging in property destruction, can attenuate a SMO's ability to mobilize and recruit individuals (McAdam 1986; Tarrow 1998). These factors limit how a group with little to no previous activism experience, like the GSS, navigates the sociopolitical environment.

GSS members carefully planned their actions and strategies. They applied for university recognition when three Corps of Cadets members harassed and threatened them when they posted flyers on campus advertising their organization. GSS members decided it was prudent to apply for official recognition to ensure they would have protection if similar harassment occurred in the future. Eventually, due to the campus homophobia and officials' refusal to respond to their application for recognition, legal tactics gained intelligibility for GSS members as a viable tactic (Cain 2000; McAdam [1982] 1999).

Data and Methods

I used multiple qualitative methods to understand why GSS members chose to pursue legal tactics. First, I engaged in archival research to understand the historical and social context of GSS mobilization at TAMU. I consulted Cushing Library's private archives at TAMU and collected GSS newsletters and documents and articles from *The Battalion*, the TAMU student newspaper, related to the GSS, the *GSS vs. TAMU* lawsuit,

and gender and sexual politics on campus. Several past GSS members and faculty advisors shared their personal archives about GSS mobilization, which consisted of allies' correspondence, original court documents, audio recordings of a GSS member interviewing two other members, a local radio show about the GSS's demand for recognition, a series of threats left on the GSS telephone hotline, and video recordings of news coverage of GSS mobilization. In total, I gathered approximately 600 newspaper articles and editorials from *The Battalion*, *The Houston Chronicle*, and *Alternative News*, the local lesbian and gay student newspaper, and 173 GSS documents.

Social movement scholars acknowledge that newspaper data have limitations. In particular, newspaper data suffer from both selection and description bias. Selection bias refers to uneven news coverage of a SMO's actions as journalists and editors decide which events to cover (Earl et al. 2004; Ortiz et al. 2005). Description bias refers to imprecision in reporting about a protest event or an SMO (Earl et al. 2004; Ortiz et al. 2005). I also use opinion letters from the newspapers as data. This data has its own issues as their authors are not always representative of the general population and editors can alter the letter received so that it does not represent the original (Hull 2001). Geography also constrains newspaper reporting, which affects the subjects on which they report; this explains why I utilize local newspapers instead of national newspapers, which did not cover GSS's mobilization (Strawn 2008). Analysis of GSS documents and interviews with GSS members counteracted newspaper data's limitations.

Second, I interviewed GSS members and supporters. Recruiting GSS members for interviews was difficult since more than twenty-five years had passed since the GSS lawsuit. To locate potential interviewees, I first contacted TAMU faculty and staff for

assistance in locating GSS members. While looking through archival data, I also took note of names that appeared in relation to the GSS case. With these names in hand, I used Internet search engines like Google to look for original GSS members or those related to the lawsuit. These methods put me in contact with GSS members willing to be interviewed. Additionally, I used snowball sampling techniques, asking initial interviewees for the contact information of other potential interviewees. Snowball sampling was ideal for this study because GSS activists were few in number, and the nature of their activism made them the target of constant threats of violence and stigmatization, even resulting in the vandalism of their personal property.

I used archival research to formulate open-ended interview questions about how GSS operated, made tactical choices, and interacted with the university and the media. I interviewed fourteen people for this project whose ages ranged from 39 to 67. The interviews include GSS members, former and current TAMU faculty, and lawyers who worked on the case. Of the interviewees, eight identified as gay men, two as heterosexual men, two as women, one as a lesbian woman, and one as queer. Recruiting people of color for my study was difficult because GSS membership mirrored the university community, which was – and is – overwhelmingly white. Since most GSS members and supporters were white, most people in my interview sample are white. I do not identify GSS members specifically by their race or ethnicity in quotations or in the demographic description of interviewees because interviewees of color might be identifiable to others, which would violate the anonymity I guaranteed them. I conducted ten interviews in person at a location of the interviewee's choosing and the remaining four over the phone. I recorded all interviews with a digital voice recorder. Interviews

lasted between fifteen minutes and an hour; this variance in interview length stemmed from some interviewees' difficulty in remembering events. Many interviewees had trouble recalling the events accurately, if at all; in these instances, I used my archival research to fill in the gaps in memory. I assigned pseudonyms to interviewees to protect their identities. I transcribed the interviews and coded them based on themes that emerged from my transcription of the interviews and analysis of archival documents. Coding categories included visibility, GSS goals, GSS actions, external and internal dynamics, and external ties/audiences.

GSS Decision to Use Legal Tactics

Those involved with the GSS lawsuit stated that GSS had no other option but to use legal tactics and noted they did not seriously consider other alternatives. What caused this perception to arise? I identified three themes from my archival and interview data that explain why GSS members preferred legal tactics to other forms of contention. First, GSS had immediate access to legal counsel before they filed the lawsuit or had contact with university officials. Second, GSS members had a sense of legal entitlement that encouraged them to pursue the legal battle because they knew the law was on their side. Finally, GSS members knew their request for recognition would not be popular in a hostile environment, making legal tactics the only possible course of action.

Early Access to Legal Aid

GSS members initially thought there would be some problems with their request for university recognition as a student group. Through a member's acquaintance, GSS

members contacted a lawyer before contacting any university representative to ensure the group's safety. They knew the risks involved in seeking university recognition as a student group, due to antigay laws and the social treatment of lesbians and gay men in Texas (Private Archive Tape 3, 12-09-1984). Emily, a faculty member who was present during the lawsuit, stated that "it [homophobia] was just a free floating thing in the [campus] atmosphere...gay people were targeted all the time" (Interview, April 5, 2010). The lawyer had experience with a similar case at University of Texas in Austin, but that case was settled out of court. The lawyer counseled GSS members about the possible negative outcomes that could result from seeking university recognition and recommended ways members could protect themselves if the situation deteriorated. The lawyer advised members never to attend a meeting with university officials alone and always to document what happened during meetings, dating these notes and gaining signatures from GSS members in attendance (Private Archive Tape 3, 12-09-1984). When the case went to court, GSS lawyers used members' notes from meetings with university officials to prove inconsistencies in the university's story.

Through their interaction with lawyers, GSS members discovered how civil rights cases of the time were often financed. If the defendant—the university in the case of the GSS—were found in the wrong, the plaintiff's attorney could petition the court to have the defendant pay the plaintiff's legal fees. The GSS lawyers took advantage of civil rights funding law and took the case pro bono, so the GSS would bear minimal out-of-pocket expenses when various expenses would arise; in some situations, the lawyers worked to minimize activist groups' fees, even covering them when necessary, according to Jack, a lawyer involved with the case (Jack, Interview, April 24, 2010). The

lawyer and the GSS advisor, who “was very active in the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union]” used their connections to help GSS members garner a financial donation from the ACLU (Allen, Interview, March 28, 2010; Turner 1976).³

Second, GSS members believed that their demand for recognition was legally defensible. GSS members' strong sense of legal entitlement was based on a layperson's understanding of the law. They understood the law intuitively as a “cultural schema that people use to understand their everyday experiences,” but were not familiar with the technical details of creating a legal case or navigating the legal system (Marshall 2005, p. 88). Initial contact with legal counsel fortified this belief. Jack stated that GSS members relied on legal authority because they did not feel competent in their own understanding of the law (Interview, April 24, 2010; Marshall and Barclay 2003). Jack also noted that “it was basically the First Amendment...and we knew we had an excellent chance at prevailing” (Interview, April 24, 2010), despite a lack of direct precedence of gay and lesbian student groups suing universities for recognition. Jack stated that any lawyer, especially one who specialized in civil rights litigation, would have made this known to the group. The knowledge GSS members gained from legal professionals and a lawyer's willingness to work almost free of charge bolstered members' dedication to pursuing legal tactics.

Legal Entitlement

Campus hostility initially prompted GSS members to apply for university recognition. Amy, one of GSS's founders, recalled that GSS members “had gone out

³ I could not find the exact details of how the ACLU became involved with GSS.

postering [to raise awareness of Gayline, telephone hotline for sexual minorities]. . . and some Corps guys with their name tags taken off had held them [GSS members] at knife point and go around and take the posters down” (Interview, April 22, 2010). GSS members knew they needed official recognition to protect themselves from further danger. They did not necessarily have a clear understanding of the law before contacting legal counsel, but they knew that it was their right to be treated just like other student groups. GSS members viewed their group as no different from any other service organization on campus, designed to help those who needed it. They were within their right to request official status because GSS members saw themselves as students, and it was the university's job to protect them (Sanction or Lawsuit 1976). Amy stated, “We just had to convince them [the university] of our moral position.” She further clarified, “All we have to do is make it clear that this [the campus environment toward minorities] is wrong...I was raised a non-bigot, and I looked around me and thought this is just not sane, not reasonable, and it was more that conviction than anything else...and I knew the law was behind me” (Interview, April 22, 2010). In fact, David, one of GSS's faculty advisors said he “was very surprised when the university refused the GSS's request for recognition” because he believed the law was clearly on GSS's side (Interview, July 10, 2010). This led GSS members to conceptualize the law as protecting and helping them when the university would not (Merry 1990).

Despite the university's opposition, GSS continued with the campaign to obtain recognition because it “was the right thing to do,” according to Lisa, a GSS member (Interview, April 29, 2010). This sentiment not only helped hold the organization together, but also encouraged GSS members to continue the battle with the university

when they experienced hostility. Once GSS applied for recognition in April 1976, the organization had to wait eight months, while the university kept their application for recognition “under advisement,” an example of channeling tactics (Whitley 1977b). Campus culture prevented university officials from openly criticizing and rejecting GSS’s request. Behind closed doors, university officials told the group that they would deny the GSS’s application even before members filed any paperwork (Amy, Interview, April 22, 2010). John Koldus, the university official in charge of the application, “announced [in court] that, without reading the GSS application, he [had] made up his mind to deny campus recognition to GSS” (*Gay Student Services v. Texas A&M University* 1979, pp. 3-4). This delay indicated how university officials treated groups they did not like publicly. Rather than offering an official outright dismissal, TAMU officials hoped the group would fade away. Emily stated

Well, the way things work around here, it is always very polite. You know, people go and ask for things, and they ask for things and ask for things, and the university smiles and says, “Oh, yes yes yes, we understand, blah blah blah.” That’s the way it goes, but then the university doesn’t do anything (Interview, April 5, 2010).

Emily also suggested that even if the GSS had chosen other tactics over legal tactics, TAMU would have treated the GSS in what seemed like a polite manner, but then would have completely ignored the group’s requests. Officials’ “polite,” but neglectful treatment became fully evident in December 1976 when the university denied the GSS’s application for group recognition immediately after GSS members threatened the university with legal action after TAMU had failed to respond officially to their initial

request for recognition (Sanction or Lawsuit 1976). GSS members' dedication to legal tactics did not waver. One member stated in an interview with a reporter from the student newspaper that "unless something very unusual develops arises, they (the administration) don't have a chance" (A&M Gays Organize 1976). GSS members were certain their case would prevail in court where other methods seemed futile due to the university's previous treatment and actions.

Pursuing legal tactics created the conditions for GSS members to select other tactics. GSS members believed university officials denied the group's application because they held common misconceptions about lesbians and gay men. Because of the growing publicity surrounding the group, GSS members developed an educational campaign focused on lesbian and gay rights. In early interviews with the student newspaper, GSS members tried to educate others about alternative sexualities and negative stereotypes (Whitley 1977b). When talking about GSS's interaction with legal counsel, Thomas, a GSS member during the time of the lawsuit, stated, "We were there [on campus] educating. We didn't have much legal contact" (Interview, April 2, 2010). Once lawyers took over, GSS members had little to do with the case. GSS used a variety of opportunities to educate including "consciousness-raising events" (Amy, Interview, April 22, 2010), visiting classes at the behest of professors, "advise in whatever capacity" necessary for the "debate society...on the GSS [subject], should it be recognized or not" (Adam, Interview, April 15, 2010), and sponsor public discussions. Allen, another GSS faculty advisor, pointed out that before filing the lawsuit, GSS had recruited members "primarily through word of mouth" within the local lesbian and gay

community because “in College Station [the lesbian and gay community] was very small...everyone kind of knew each other” (Interview, March 18, 2010).

The educational campaign enabled GSS to recruit members more effectively. After filing the lawsuit, the GSS received press coverage that allowed the group to disseminate its message to a wider audience through “events...that would bring awareness to the group” and advertised services like “Gayline...and the roommate [finding] services” (Thomas, Interview April 2, 2010). These services helped create a safe space for lesbians and gay men. The increased publicity from the legal battle also encouraged The Texas Human Rights Foundation (THRF) to help GSS. THRF, a lesbian and gay SMO, viewed the lawsuit as an educational tool that brought lesbian and gay issues into mainstream media and discourse (News Conference 1983). THRF “provided most of the money for the suit” (Allen, Interview, March 18, 2010). At a “held a press conference,” THRF representatives asserted that through the “Gay Student Services legal battle against TAMU” and “public education, discrimination as displayed by TAMU against the gay students will become a thing of the past” (News Conference, pp. 1-2).

Hostile Environment

The hostile environment also affected GSS's choice to pursue legal tactics. GSS members faced antagonism in their interactions with the university's administration, many faculty, most students, and local residents in Bryan and College Station, the two cities that comprised TAMU's local community. Additionally, the local courts and legal system created obstacles for GSS. Each group's hostility manifested differently. At first, the lawsuit was centered in Texas's legal system, but through the appeal process, the

case moved up through the District Court for the Southern District of Texas and into the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, eventually making its way to the Supreme Court via a *writ of certiorari*,⁴ where the TAMU's request was denied.

Multiple interviewees mentioned that the university would have “crushed” the GSS if they had tried to use alternative forms of contention to express dissatisfaction with the university's denial (Amy, Interview, April 22, 2010; Emily, Interview, April 5, 2010; Steve, Interview, March 29, 2010). Public protest would have fomented organized opposition to GSS. In the archival tapes, an interviewee pointed out that “A&M did not like its student organizations to be affiliated in any way politically.... Unless, of course, you were Republican, religious, or if you were the right politics, you could affiliate to your heart's content; if you were the wrong politics, hey no no, so they had rules about political affiliation” (Private Archive Tape 3, 12-09-1984). Thus, if the GSS had used non-institutionalized forms of contention, such as sit-ins, protests or marches, it would have hurt the group's cause. Because the GSS used legal tactics, the university could not act as forcefully and push the GSS out of existence; the decision was no longer in officials' hands.

Legal/Political Environment

The GSS's case attracted statewide media attention. Three days after GSS filed their suit, Texas state lawmakers introduced Senate Bill 800, legislation that would have prevented the formation of “homosexual clubs” at TAMU and other state-funded colleges and universities in Texas (Parks 1977). The legislation was introduced by

⁴ A writ of certiorari is the appellate process through which the Supreme Court of the United States selects the cases it wishes to hear.

Representative Walter H. Mengden Jr. of Houston, whose assistant went on the record as stating Mengden “doesn't like queers!” when asked why he sponsored the bill (Whitley 1977a). This legislation would have stalled the formal recognition of lesbian or gay organizations on Texas university campuses. To gain recognition, organizations would first have had to challenge this law in court, if it had been passed. The proposed bill indicated that GSS's enemies included not only TAMU administration, but also some Texas state legislators.

The state's judicial branch did not view lesbian and gay rights and activism favorably, as evidenced by their rulings in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the 1981 case, *Childers v. Dallas Police Department*, Childers contested the Dallas Police Department's refusal to hire him because he was openly gay; the federal district court stated “there [were]...legitimate doubts about a homosexual's ability to gain the trust and respect of the personnel with whom he works” (ACLU n.d.). According to multiple interviewees, there was also significant public and political pressure on federal district Judge Ross N. Sterling who presided over the GSS case in Houston because of a pro-lesbian and gay rights decision he had issued stating that a gay man's First Amendment rights were violated when his superiors attempted to change his work hours so that he could not speak to the county commissioner about lesbian and gay rights (ACLU n.d.). With the “pro-gay” decision in *Van Ooteghem v. Gray* under his belt, the judge ruled against the GSS out of fear of retribution for being “pro-gay,” but wrote a weak defense of the decision so it was easily overturned in a higher court, according to Amy. Jack explained that GSS “had an uphill battle against him [Sterling]...we knew going...which side he was going to come down on” because of his deep ties with TAMU because his

grandfather was a founding member a special group, The Ross Volunteers, within the Corps of Cadets, the oldest group on campus and the official honor guard of the university (Interview, April 24, 2010).

Campus Environment

Antigay hostility also trickled down from the university's regents and administration to the students who emulated university leaders' attitudes toward the GSS. Students and some groups intimidated and harassed GSS members without fear of reprisal. From their first meeting with the administration, GSS members realized they were not wanted on campus. But they faced a double bind. They could not receive protection from harassment and threats without obtaining recognition of GSS as a student organization. This required GSS members to reveal publicly that they belonged to the group as stated in existing university regulation, which would also certify they were lesbian or gay. According to Amy, three GSS members had to identify themselves publicly as GSS to file an application for official recognition of their organization; this identification revealed that these students were lesbian and gay. According to one archival tape with a GSS founder, the university administrator who formulated this policy thought "he could scare us; he thought that our position was that we were so ashamed of ourselves that we would crawl under a rock and that we would never dare go for recognition" (Private Archive Tape 3, 12-09-1984).

GSS also faced the university's stalling tactics in handling the group's application and lawsuit. TAMU tried to draw out the lawsuit by appealing court decisions that were not in their favor. Many interviewees thought the administration

intentionally dragged out the lawsuit in an effort to drive GSS into the ground. GSS members were keenly aware of the university's goal and thought “it would be terrible to win that [legal] battle, and nobody would be here to do it [continue the GSS's legacy]” (Thomas, Interview, April 2, 2010). Adam, a former GSS president, said one of the group's goals was to “survive” (Adam, Interview, April 15, 2010; Earl 2003). One example of the university working to hinder GSS’s survival occurred when the Texas Attorney General, who was in charge of representing the university, released a statement saying there would be no appeal of the Fifth Circuit Court's August 1984 ruling in favor of GSS. The State of Texas was no longer willing to fund a losing battle and withdrew its financial support (Puckett 1984). The TAMU Board of Regents and alumni association assembled the funds for an appeal to the Supreme Court after TAMU indicated in an initial press release that the university would allow the decision to stand uncontested, which mirrored the State's decision to let the verdict stand (Fluegel 1984).

Although formal communication between GSS and the university was cordial, the campus environment did not accept those who disrupted the school’s heteronormative traditions. GSS members often experienced intimidation, threats, and harassment, which were implicitly endorsed by university officials. GSS members endured “pushing, shoving, and being beaten up,” according to Steve, a GSS member (Interview, March 29, 2010). The university condoned actions taken by students against GSS members and supporters because there were no consequences for discriminating against the lesbian and gay community. Both Thomas and Adam recalled the “group called Maranatha [Christian Fellowship]” put out a “flyer [that] ...compared homosexuals to depraved sexual acts and bestiality and other things like that” (Interview,

April 2, 2010; Interview, April 15, 2010). Although GSS won recognition as a student group, these problems continued because the university refused to add official protection for LGBT students and faculty in the university's rules. Additionally, harassment directed against GSS members and lesbian and gay individuals did not stop once the group technically had university protection. GSS members were also confronted with constant harassment and death threats well into the 1990s from Corps members who called Gayline. In these messages, callers often yelled "faggot," laughed, and issued threats like "I'm going to kick all your little pussy whipping asses, you butt fuckers"; without fear of reprisal, callers sometimes revealed their names, ranks, and room numbers in their messages (Voicemail Tape 1990). In one case in 1991, a story in *The Battalion* documented how a university building was vandalized with the statement "KILL FAGS" in chalk on National Coming Out Day. The university never bothered to clean it up; instead, more than 48 hours later, a private party cleaned up the statement (Hobbs 1991).

Conclusion

SMOs have to make important choices about how they will mobilize and which tactics they will use. These choices are dependent on the sociopolitical environment. GSS members, current and past faculty members, and the group's lawyers maintained that group members had no choice but to select legal tactics as their primary means of contention. First, GSS members believed that their position was right, and their contact with legal counsel encouraged this understanding. Second, the campus and state political environment was so hostile that the group had no choice, but to remove any decision-

making power from their possible control. These factors generated a situation in which the GSS members saw no other option but to proceed with a lawsuit.

This case study suggests that several elements predispose SMO to adopting legal tactics. First, while SMO adherents might strongly believe in their legal entitlement to equal treatment, access to legal expertise is vital to a SMO's legal success. A SMO has to find a lawyer willing to pursue their claim and procure the funding to pay legal counsel. Small groups targeting large organizations can face limitations when using the court system because of available resources. Large organizations typically have access to well-trained legal counsel and to hire large legal teams, allowing for the implementation of costly, time-intensive tactics to overwhelm the smaller organization. If an organization is able to overcome these challenges, then the legal system can be a useful tool for correcting local grievances SMO action cannot overturn by using “outsider” tactics. Second, contact with legal counsel early in a SMO's formation can affect SMO development by allowing activists to preview possible legal and institutional outcomes. Legal counsel can show SMO adherents how their grievances are not just institutional or cultural issues, but are also legal matters. Contact with legal counsel thus shapes how activists view and select tactics and can influence whether activists choose to use legal tactics.

Third, when the environment is hostile to certain social groups or forms of mobilization, SMOs may be unable to pursue “traditional” forms of activism. Then, legal alternatives can become more attractive. Legal tactics allow a SMO to temporarily remove their case from a negative environment and plead it in front of an impartial arbitrator. Involving the legal system takes the decision out of the institution's grasp and

obligates the target institution to follow the court's orders. The ruling may not only affect SMO outcomes, but it may also have cascading effects that shape the other SMOs' tactical possibilities

Social movement scholarship can benefit from focusing on the issue of why groups choose to use legal tactics. What combinations of access to legal counsel and funding allow SMOs to pursue legal tactics? Is belief in the legal system enough? How hostile must an environment be before legal tactics become an only choice? Under what circumstances do legal tactics become impracticable? It is clear, in the case of GSS, that a hostile environment mixed with GSS members' legal consciousness and external funding allowed the SMO to pursue a lawsuit against the university. Culturally focused theoretical frameworks, such as MIP, offer new insight into SMOs' tactical selection.

CHAPTER III

(IN)VISIBILITY

In 1976, when students at Texas A&M University (TAMU) formed Gay Student Services (GSS), the organization and its members anonymity for their personal safety because the campus atmosphere was hostile towards lesbians and gay men. This inhospitable environment prompted GSS leaders to discuss their organizational status with TAMU administration; to qualify for campus protection, campus administrators would have had to certify GSS as a TAMU student group. GSS members wanted to maintain as much anonymity as possible and only requested partial status so they could post flyers on campus with administrative approval and expect protection if necessary, but would not use any other university resources. TAMU administrators were not amenable to this request, stating partial status was not an option for any student organization, and required GSS to apply for full recognition. In order to become an official student group, three GSS members were required to reveal their identities as part of the application process; such a revelation would have confirmed that these members were lesbian or gay, public disclosure members did not want to risk in a homophobic environment. GSS members viewed this requirement as an effort to bully the group. Refusing to let the administration intimidate them, GSS members applied for recognition as a student organization. The university's administration stalled for approximately eight months and finally denied GSS' application when members threatened legal action. GSS sued for their right to organize as a campus group, which brought publicity to their case and a largely invisible sexual-minority population at TAMU.

This chapter focuses on the controlled and uncontrolled aspects of GSS's visibility and invisibility during their conflict with the university. Because TAMU was an overtly hostile environment towards lesbians and gay men, GSS required varying levels of (in)visibility so the organization and its members could safely navigate their time at the university. Early in GSS's existence while the organization was relatively unknown on campus, a member of the Corps of Cadets, TAMU's armed-forces training program, threatened a group of GSS members at knifepoint, while they were posting flyers on campus. This experience solidified the potential threat of hostility at the university. After GSS filed the lawsuit, antigay opponents suggested violence in *The Battalion*, the student newspaper, as a way to silence lesbian and gay student activists. At one event *The Battalion* covered in 1977, antigay opponents hung a sign from a dormitory window that read "AGGIES ARE NOT QUEERS. BEAT THE HELL OUT OF THE G.S.S.O.!"⁵ (Reis 1977, emphasis in original). As GSS became more visible, by filing a lawsuit spurring increased public hostility, how did GSS members carefully control their (in)visibility so that members could safely navigate their lives as students at TAMU while fighting for their rights as lesbians and gay men?

(In)Visibility in Social Movement Organizations

Visibility manifests as a "fluctuating quality that movement organizations carefully cultivate over time," allowing for the understanding of SMO visibility as "dynamic, multi-directional, multiscalar and engaged with multiple audiences... [shifting] with changes in the external sociopolitical environment and internal

5 "Beat the hell outta" is the TAMU student rallying cry often used at sporting events to intimidate the opposing team.

movement-organizational culture” (Currier n.d., p. 37). Social movement theorists have long regarded social movement organization (SMO) visibility positively, while viewing invisibility negatively (Currier n.d.). This understanding of visibility is rooted in the idea that “authorities will not react to – and will often not even know about – protests that are not reported in the media” (Koopmans 2004, p. 368). In other words, without visibility, a social movement cannot realize activists’ goals because activists will not have the ability to influence different actors and targets. As SMOs interact with different target audiences, the SMO may become visible in different ways as necessary to protect members or achieve its goals (Currier n.d., 2010; Stoecker 1995).

In contrast, scholarship views invisibility as a sign of unsuccessful or declining SMO activity (Taylor 1989). Conceptualizing visibility and invisibility dichotomously results in a loss of nuance regarding SMO activity, such as when an SMO actively seeks a certain kind of invisibility (Currier n.d.). Despite social movement scholars’ common understandings of invisibility, many SMOs try to balance their visibility and invisibility. Early homophile activists, fearing negative sanctions from the state, avoided public action (Cain 1993; Jagose 1996). Visibility and invisibility are not dichotomous; instead, they exist on opposite sides of a continuum such that (in)visibility can manifest in multiple levels specific as required by an SMO and the sociopolitical field within which the SMO operates (Currier n.d.). How then do lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) SMOs utilize *both* visibility and invisibility strategically?

To understanding how SMOs control their (in)visibility in a particular sociopolitical environment, I turn to the multi-institutional politics (MIP) model of social movements (Armstrong and Bernstein’s 2008). The MIP approach conceptualizes SMOs

as targeting multiple cultural and political institutions to achieve their goals. As institutions differ, so does the ideal method of interacting with the institution. For example, an SMO might maintain differing levels of visibility with the media than with an antagonistic movement (Johnston 2005). An SMO involved in extra-legal activities may take great care to avoid direct contact with the government, to avoid legal repercussions, which has been the case with militias in the U.S.; however, some militias seek out sympathetic media coverage to spread their varying, often anti-government, messages (Johnston 2005). By recognizing that SMOs target multiple institutions using diverse methods, the MIP approach allows for the realization that SMOs may also require varying levels of visibility depending on the institution they target (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Van Dyke, Soule and Taylor 2004).

Constituent (In)Visibility and Safety

As SMOs accrue visibility, their constituents also usually become more visible. At a time of increasing visibility in high-risk movements, individual members may develop concerns about their increasing visibility and overall safety (Hanhardt 2008). The interplay between movement visibility and constituent safety can result in an SMO utilizing differing visibility strategies for its constituents relative to the larger movement. SMOs respond to constituent concerns about safety by developing tactics to protect their members, such as when a SMO uses strategies of normalization, the synchronization of “personal, organizational, and movement identities to consolidate collective identities,”⁶ to “articulate the boundaries” of their organizing in an attempt to prevent public scrutiny

⁶ Stoecker (1995, p. 114) refers to the synchronization of the multiple identities as “identity convergence.”

of the SMO and by extension protecting the safety of its members (Currier 2010, p. 50). For example, employing normalization tactics, in 1994, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) expelled the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) because of public outrage, castigating the organization as pedophiles (Currier 2010; Gamson 1997). By “emphasizing NAMBLA's social abnormality,” ILGA was able to normalize itself within public discourse, which protected ILGA and its members from growing public outrage (Currier 2010, p. 50).

Lesbian and gay SMOs in the United States actively created programs to protect members as their visibility increased. In the mid-1970s, patrollers with the Butterfly Brigade, a gay safe street patrol in California's Castro district that was an offshoot of a larger gay liberation organization, recorded tag information from cars in the area whose occupants yelled antigay epithets or were perceived as threats (Hanhardt 2008). Later, members used car license plate numbers to look up the owners and send them a letter about the recorded actions of the night to discourage further discrimination (Hanhardt 2008). Street patrols generated “publicity about [anti-gay] violence” so that lesbians and gay men could claim “geographic spaces...as gay territories” or safe spaces, spaces in which activists developed their collective identity and their organizational values without fear of retribution from the public (Evans and Boyte 1992; Hanhardt 2008, p. 74). Lesbians and gay men also faced sanctions at work, such as being fired or disbarred from professional organizations. This encouraged many activists to hide their affiliation with homophile organizations while homophile organizations were hesitant to publicize meetings because they wanted to avoid outing members (Bernstein 2002). When homophile activists were fired from their jobs, homophile organizations utilized public

tactics, such as lawsuits and picketing, to combat the discriminatory practices found within the law (Bernstein 2002). Homophile organizations and their members balanced the necessity for invisibility, to protect members, and visibility, to attract new members and encourage public discourse, forced lesbians and gay men to carefully navigate their environment.

LGBT Movement (In)Visibility in the United States: 1950s-1980s

Early lesbian and gay movement organizations utilized visibility and invisibility strategically to both protect members and achieve their goals. In the 1940s, early homophile SMOs remained invisible and avoided public action to avoid state sanction for members individually, but also for the group as a whole (Cain 1993; Jagose 1996). Homophile organizations' invisibility also manifested in their organizational structures, with groups loosely organized "cell groups that did not necessarily know one another"; this provided another layer of protection for organizations and their members (Jagose 1996, p. 24). Rather than participating in political rallies, marches, or other forms of public action, homophile organizations focused on "assimilation and quiescence" (Bernstein 2002, p. 541). Homophile movements utilized assimilation strategies due to sociopolitical hostility toward lesbians and gay men. Medical professionals and religious authorities considered homosexuality a sickness and sin (D'Emilio 1983). Hostility toward homosexuals as a group encouraged lawmakers to pass discriminatory legislation against lesbians and gay men (Cain 2000). Anti-sodomy laws reduced same-sex sexuality to an illegal act, and lawmakers and the police used sexual solicitation and loitering laws in concert with anti-sodomy laws to prevent the political and social

gatherings of lesbians and gay men (Bernstein 2002; Cain 2000; Clendinen and Nagourney 1999). Lawmakers intended such laws to limit lesbians and gay men from interacting with one another; homophile activists feared additional retribution from the police and lawmakers (Bernstein 2002). Homophile activists responded to social and political hostility by creating safe spaces; some formed support groups and focused on individual self-help and education, rather than on visible political activism (Bernstein 2002; Evans and Boyte 1992; White 2009).

Over time, as the sociopolitical environment became less hostile because of growing responsiveness in the polity, activists started to publicly identify themselves as lesbians and gay men. In their strategic deployment of identity, lesbian and gay activists recruited members and publicized their goals (Armstrong 2002; Bernstein 1997, 2002, 2005; Jagose 1996). Lesbian and gay activists borrowed tactics from and modified ideologies used by the civil rights movement (Bernstein 2002). Homophile activists also targeted legislators through lobbying and used legal tactics so they could assemble freely and openly in a safe manner (Bernstein 2002, 2003). As homophile organizations grew and became more visible, they spurred the creation of antigay countermovements (Fetner 2008; Mucciaroni 2008).

Unhappy with focusing on assimilation and normalization, gay liberationists formed separate organizations in the late 1960s (Armstrong 2002). Gay liberation organizations focused on breaking society's gender and sexuality norms by using visible tactics, such as sit-ins and marches; they hoped these tactics would result in a more fluid understanding of sexuality and gender by making these issues visible to the public, creating a new discourse about gender and sexuality (Bernstein 2002; Valocchi 1999).

Gay liberation activists also tried to ally themselves with women's and Black Power SMOs, but many groups refused to ally themselves with the gay liberation SMOs because of the potential for negative public reaction. This precipitated the demise of the gay liberation movement in the 1970s (Bernstein 2002; Clendinen and Nagourney 1999). Following this decline, single-issue lesbian and gay SMOs emerged and concentrated on publicly portraying a more acceptable “fixed identity” (Bernstein 2002, p. 552). Single-issue SMOs typically focused on abstract principles found within the larger civil rights movement, such as equality, instead of on identities themselves (Bernstein 2002).

The increasing publicity around the lesbian and gay movement resulted in the formalization of an antigay countermovement. In the late 1970s, to combat the antigay countermovement, lesbian and gay SMOs began to work together on a national scale on highly visible actions, such as the March on Washington (Bernstein 2002; Fetner 2008; Ghaziani 2008). Such visibility strategies helped certify lesbians and gay men as a growing political constituency, evidenced by politicians courting sexual minorities for their votes (Hertzog 1996). As politicians realized the importance of the LGBT vote, LGBT lobbying groups focused on national politics, which led to specialization, or “niche activism,” of LGBT rights groups (Bernstein 2002; Clendinen and Nagourney 1999; Levitsky 2007).

Data and Methods

I used several qualitative methods to understand how the GSS used visibility and invisibility as strategies. Initially, I utilized archival research to understand the sociopolitical context of GSS's actions at TAMU. I collected GSS documents and

correspondence and articles from the TAMU student newspaper, *The Battalion*, from Cushing Library at TAMU. Additionally, several GSS members and faculty advisors allowed me to consult their personal GSS archives. These personal archives consisted of correspondence with allies, court documents, video recordings of news coverage on GSS, and audio recordings of an interview with a GSS member, GSS members' participation in local talk radio shows, and threats left on the GSS telephone hotline. I gathered 173 GSS documents and approximately 600 newspaper articles and editorials from local and regional papers, such as *The Battalion*, *The Houston Chronicle*, and *Alternative News*, the local lesbian and gay student newspaper.

Using newspaper data has known limitations, such as description bias, or the inexactness in reporting on a SMO or protest event, and selection bias, the uneven news coverage of a SMO's actions (Earl et al. 2004; Ortiz et al. 2005). Opinion letters in newspapers also present their own limitations because their authors are not always representative of the general population, and editors can alter the letters received so that they do not represent the original (Hull 2001). Because geography constrains the stories on which newspapers report, I utilize local and regional newspapers, rather than national ones (Strawn 2008).

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, I interviewed GSS members and supporters and analyzed GSS documents to counteract the limitations associated with newspaper data. Locating potential interviewees was difficult because twenty-five years have passed since the GSS lawsuit. First, I contacted TAMU faculty and staff present during the legal battle for assistance locating GSS members. I also took note of names that appeared in archival materials and used Internet search engines, such

as Google, and the TAMU Association of Former Students to find original GSS members. I used snowball sampling techniques with the individuals I interviewed to find the contact information of other potential interviewees (Brown 2005).

My archival research was instrumental in developing open-ended interview questions that focused on how GSS operated, made tactical choices, and interacted with TAMU, the media, and the student body. I interviewed fourteen people, including GSS members, former and current TAMU faculty, and GSS lawyers. Interviewees' ages ranged from 39 to 67, and eight identified as gay men, two as heterosexual men, two as women, one as a lesbian woman, and one as queer. GSS membership mirrored the university's demographics; most TAMU students and GSS members and supporters were white, making it difficult to recruit people of color for interviews. Thus, most interviewees identified as white or Caucasian. I do not identify interviewees by their race or ethnicity because it could violate their confidentiality. I interviewed ten people in person at a location of the interviewee's choosing and conducted the remaining four over the phone, due geographic constraints preventing face-to-face interviews. Interviews took place between March and August 2010. I recorded all interviews, which lasted between fifteen minutes and an hour, with a digital voice recorder. Many interviewees could not recall the events accurately, if at all, resulting in the variance in interview length; in these instances, I used archival data to fill in interviewees' memory gaps. I assigned pseudonyms to all interviewees to protect their identities. After transcribing interviews, I coded them based on themes that emerged from my archival data and interview analysis. These categories included (in)visibility, GSS goals, GSS actions, external and internal dynamics, and external ties/audiences.

(In)Visibility and GSS

Early in its existence, GSS members focused on keeping the group invisible, primarily due to a fear of hostility. Despite this concern, GSS members and supporters gradually made themselves and the group more visible. How did (in)visibility affect GSS? Three themes arose from my archival and interview data that help explain the effects of (in)visibility on the GSS. First, there is a general trend toward visibility in the GSS's actions, but even with growing visibility, GSS carefully tried to control its visibility. Second, as GSS became more visible and vocal on campus, GSS sympathizers became more willing to show their support publicly. Third, GSS members knew TAMU administration and students were watching them closely. GSS members purposely altered their behavior to guard against the university's gaze.

Growing Visibility with Controlled Invisibility

Prior to the launch of GSS, discussion of lesbian and gay issues at TAMU was nonexistent, beyond denial of the existence of same-sex sexuality on campus (Whitley 1977c). Emily, a faculty member present during the lawsuit, said university officials denied rumors about “what was going on in the [Corps of Cadets] showers and stuff like [male-male sex]” (Interview, April 5, 2010). The university got “a very bad reputation, [so much so that] straight guys didn't want to come.” According to Emily, these rumors contributed to the decision for TAMU to admit women as students in 1963; officials hoped more heterosexual men would come to TAMU and join the Corps of Cadets (Interview, April 5, 2010). Instead of admitting some men students had sex with one

another and dealing with the problem directly, the administration chose to hide the problem and make an unpopular decision to admit women as students⁷ (Kavanagh 2001).

When GSS was first established in 1976, members advertised the group discreetly. They knew students and school officials would not respond well to a group or individuals openly defying heteronormativity, the set of cultural practices that maintain the assumption that there are only two genders and sexes and that only opposite sexual attraction be sexes acceptable, on campus (Schilt and Westbrook 2009). Aware of the potential for danger, members quietly posted inconspicuous flyers around campus. Flyers only displayed a lambda⁸ and stated GSS was a support group because GSS members “assumed [the right] people would know what it meant” (Amy, Interview, April 22, 2010). Instead, many people thought GSS was a religious group (Amy, Interview, April 22, 2010). Eventually, GSS members realized such obfuscation protected themselves and GSS from scrutiny and hostility, but did not allow the group to create a community or fulfill GSS’s service goals of helping lesbians and gay men on campus because they could not reach out to new members effectively. In this sense, invisibility protected GSS members, but hampered their abilities to accomplish their goals. GSS members knew a change was needed.

Members shifted their strategy and tried to balance their anonymity with outreach to new potential members, resulting in an increase in GSS’s visibility. Members launched a newsletter for the lesbian and gay community called *Alternative News and*

7 The decision to admit women was unpopular because it broke with one of TAMU’s oldest traditions, being an all-male institution.

8 “The symbol [lambda] was originally chosen by the Gay Activists Alliance [GAA] of New York in 1970...Because of its official adoption by the GAA, which sponsored public events for the gay community, the lambda soon became a quick way for the members of the gay community to identify each other. The reasoning was that the lambda would easily be mistaken for a college fraternity symbol and ignored by the majority of the population” (Riffenburg 2004).

Views. It was available to anyone who subscribed, but GSS members maintained pseudonyms for columnists and editors while keeping the subscriber list private. In the 1960s, *One Magazine*, a homophile publication, utilized a similar strategy encouraging columnists to employ pseudonyms for their own protection (White 2009). GSS members took similar care to maintain anonymity when they consented to newspaper interviews; they often asked journalists to interview them anonymously or to publish only part of their name. Initially, the three GSS members who filed the lawsuit against TAMU included only their first initial and last name because of the public nature of lawsuit documentation. GSS members also held group meetings in secrecy. Rather than publicly posting meeting times and locations, GSS members posted the Gayline⁹ phone number on flyers. “If you wanted to know [the time and location of a meeting], you would have to call the Gayline to find out” (Interview, Thomas, April 2, 2010). While there was no official vetting process for giving out meeting locations and times, members felt this extra step helped to prevent problems at meetings (Interview, Thomas, April 2, 2010).

These preventative measures allowed GSS members to feel safer on campus because they remained mostly anonymous, while the GSS as a whole became more visible. Emily noted that homophobic hostility “was just a free-floating thing in the [campus and local] atmosphere” (Interview, April 5, 2010). A generic lesbian and gay community was the abstract focus in editorials published in *The Battalion*, the university newspaper, and *The Eagle*, the local Bryan/College Station newspaper. While GSS worked anonymously, the free-floating hostility had no centralized, direct target, enabling GSS members to work without as much fear of retribution.

⁹ Gayline was GSS’s phone hotline. Gayline volunteers referred callers to medical, religious, and counseling professionals and disseminated information about GSS.

As time passed, the names of the three GSS members who filed the lawsuit against the university were released as part of the public record. Soon thereafter, some became the targets of direct hostility. According to Allen, a faculty advisor to GSS, one member whose name was released on the lawsuit was “kicked out of [the member's rented] home.” A GSS supporter responded to this pressure by offering friendly housing so the member could “sigh a big sigh of relief...because [the member] knew [the member] wouldn't get kicked out again” (Interview, March 19, 2010).¹⁰ Other visible GSS members received harassing phone calls at home and also lived in fear of violence on campus or at their homes. In one case of antigay hostility targeting an individual, a GSS member's parents “set fire to her room, in their own home,” upon finding out she was a lesbian (Interview, Amy, April 22, 2010). GSS worked to protect its members by acting as a community or “family” to insulate members from these varying forms of external hostility (Interview, Amy, April 22, 2010).

As the lawsuit progressed, more members made themselves and GSS visible in an effort to politicize their cause, while attempting to change the general perceptions about lesbians and gay men on campus and in the local community. Newer, younger members were “far braver than the rest of us [the founders]” because they were more political, and they were far more willing to be visible (Interview, Amy, April 22, 2010). The entry of new members energized GSS and altered the group's approach to visibility strategies. Borrowing tactics from feminist organizing, members held multiple “consciousness-raising” events on campus meant to encourage the local and university community to think about lesbian and gay rights (Interview, Allen, March 18, 2010;

¹⁰ The GSS member's gender was removed to preserve anonymity.

Interview, Amy, April 22, 2010; Taylor and Van Dyke 2004). Blue jeans day was one such event when GSS members encouraged lesbians, gay men and their supporters to wear blue jeans as a sign of unity. According to one GSS member interviewed by *The Battalion*, GSS chose blue jeans day as a consciousness-raising event because the National Gay Task Force sponsored and encouraged lesbian and gay student groups to adopt it. The event acted to “help pull the gay groups together.” There was also the “possibility that straights might wear blue jeans and thus be harassed...help[ing] them see the world from a gay's point of view” (Gay Supporters 1978). Blue jeans day “got a lot of non-gay students really upset” because other heterosexual students mistook them as GSS supporters or members (Interview, Allen, March 18, 2010). The knee-jerk reaction from students encouraged local clothing businesses that “loved” blue jeans days and even let “us [GSS] put posters in their window and they would immediately sell out of cords” (Interview, Amy, April 22, 2010). Even though blue jeans day brought publicity to GSS, it also provided members and supporters safety and protection from being “outed.” The ubiquity of blue jeans meant that no one could be positive if the person in blue jeans actually was a GSS supporter, GSS member, or someone who unwittingly wore jeans on the “wrong” day (Interview, Thomas, April 2, 2010).

GSS members occasionally participated in political rally days, an open forum run by students dedicated to discussing varying political viewpoints, but GSS carefully navigated the terrain because of members’ fear of student hostility. In response to members’ fears, GSS members carefully orchestrated their participation in these rallies. For example, in 1983, anticipating there would be backlash to their presence, GSS members asked an “out” transgender TAMU Corps of Cadets former student to come

and have a separate table at the rally in an effort to deflect hostility away from GSS. The alumna wore feminized aspects of the Corps of Cadets uniform and passed out a double-sided flyer designed to “attack...remaining stereotypes” about the LGBT community; on one side, the flyer depicted the “all-American” TAMU student while the other represented her after she “became the person who had been locked-up inside” (Which Former Student 1983). This strategy allowed GSS to successfully navigate the political rally day without “any negative reactions” toward GSS members. The transgender former student’s table attracted “a lot of boos and hisses as well as some laughter” (Interview, Jimmy, May 3, 2010). The transgender former student's flamboyant mockery of TAMU traditions resulted in the deflection of attention from individual GSS members sitting at their table during the rally (Interview, Jimmy, May 3, 2010).

GSS members and the local lesbian and gay community also tried to police the visibility of other members. Such policing occurred both during the lawsuit and after GSS won the lawsuit and received official recognition in 1985, at which point GSS publicly held meetings on campus. One *Alternative* article chastised two men for kissing at a GSS picnic; fearing “ugly action” from other park goers, the article encouraged members to be “discreet” in their displays of affection (Notes from Aunt Lola 1982, p. 3). GSS members continued to police members well into the 1990s. Some members wore T-shirts that stated their sexuality on campus or openly discussed their sexuality with other members in public places. In these situations, some GSS members would hush more visible members because they were “afraid to be seen on campus [or elsewhere]” with someone who was too vocal because of “internalized homophobia” and the fear of reprisal (Interview, Steve, March 29, 2010). GSS members used these

policing tactics to protect GSS from unwanted attention. By encouraging specific, less threatening forms of visibility GSS tried to normalize public perceptions of its members to increase their safety (Currier 2010).

Visibility of GSS Support

Just as GSS members controlled their visibility carefully, so did GSS supporters. The visibility of support for GSS depended on a variety of factors, but, for the most part, mirrored GSS's visibility. The primary exception to GSS support visibility mimicking GSS visibility was when the support came from someone who could not publicly support GSS because of the university's culture. Early in GSS's existence, some professors asked GSS members to come to their classes and discuss lesbian and gay rights, equality, and stereotypes. During these discussions, when appropriate, GSS members would also address the religious arguments against homosexuality because of their local cultural prevalence. Amy remembered that

inevitably there would always be one kid, frequently a Corps guy, who would come to the front of the room after the rest of the class had left...[He would indicate] that he was very uncomfortable, not because he was gay—these would be straight kids—[but]because his church and his parents would have taught him on the one hand to not judge a book by its cover...and yet, at the same time, they are teaching them to hate gay [people]...He would see that we weren't monsters and he would be very conflicted about this and he would come and talk to us (Interview, April 22, 2010).

Amy stated the GSS members felt “like they were getting somewhere” with students despite their quiet support, because of students’ growing openness and ability to think critically about the discrimination of people with non-normative sexualities. Students slowly became more open to learning about different sexualities rather than the hateful rhetoric they were familiar with (Interview, April 22, 2010).

During the mid-1980s, Adam, a past GSS president who had made himself one of the most visible members of the group, remembered incidents on campus when he would get stopped by people every once and a while, often members of the Corps of Cadets, to express support. And that would just happen at random. I would be going to class and all of a sudden a Corps of Cadet member would come up to me and say, “Thank you for doing that [fighting for the GSS].” At times, it would happen when I would be in some administrator’s office. They would close the door and say, “By the way, I support what you guys are doing,” and then they would open the door and now we are back to like they hadn't told me anything. That's really what I experienced more than anything [else negative] (Interview, April 15, 2010).

These kinds of experiences occurred with those who were least able to support GSS publicly. The university administration and the Corps of Cadets were overtly hostile toward lesbians and gays. Neither Corps members nor administrators could publicly support GSS without risking retribution from their peers and supervisors. In fact, Allen noted that “if Koldus [the administrator in charge of student affairs and the GSS application] had done the right thing” by granting GSS official status, he probably would have lost his job (Interview, March 18, 2010).

Over time, as GSS became more visible on campus, so did their support. In 1976, the Student Senate passed a resolution supporting the administration's refusal to recognize GSS. In contrast, in 1984, the Senate voted in support of GSS's official recognition as a student organization, even though most students opposed this action (Fluegel 1984; Student Government 1984; Wahrmond 1976a). Despite the new found support within the Student Senate, highly vocal GSS supporters faced scrutiny from the university officials. In 1985, a Student Senate member who was "an outspoken supporter of GSS" claimed to be the target of antigay discrimination, when the university attempted to prevent him from graduating due to unpaid parking tickets (Snell 1985). He sued the university, which forced TAMU to allow him to graduate (Snell 1985). Additionally, the debate club held a debate on the subject of GSS recognition that Adam attended as an advisor for the pro-GSS side. He recalled that the room the debate was in was

split...into the pro GSS recognition side and the anti-GSS recognition side. All of the audience members were invited to sit in the side of which they supported... When I showed up, the anti-recognition side was packed with people, and there was actually no room to sit...The walls were covered; there must have been about 280 people on that side. On the pro-GSS side; there were like 25 people... the final vote was 225 [against] to 75 [in favor]...We gained people on our side constantly (Interview, April 15, 2010).

Despite this shift in support over the course of the debate, *The Battalion* completely omitted this fact in a story about the debate. The article only stated the final numbers which seem to be a large defeat for the GSS, while ignoring the large shift in public

support for the unpopular group during the course of the debate (Interview Adam, April 15, 2010). The increasing willingness for the general public to openly support for GSS signaled a subsidence in hostility towards GSS because of the growing acceptance of the lesbian and gay community at TAMU.

General Effects of (In)visibility on GSS

After GSS won the lawsuit, GSS members knew that GSS had to be perceived as the ideal student organization so that there would be no official reasons to deny their application for recognition. GSS's initial application for recognition was denied on the grounds that “the organization's goals and stated purposes 'are not consistent with the philosophy and goals that have been developed for the creation and existence of' the university” (Wahrmund 1976b). This occurred despite GSS's stated goal of “serving the community...[GSS wanted] to operate as a referral service for professional counseling for gays [and lesbians]...[and wanted] to provide information concerning gay life through a speaker's bureau” (Turner 1976). The university took a vague stance on the denial of GSS's official recognition to prevent GSS members from fixing their application (The Battalion Editorial Board 1984; Interview, Amy, April 22, 2010). Because GSS members had no exact understanding of how they should or should not act to remain within the university's regulation for student groups, they were very careful.

The need to be perceived as the ideal student group turned GSS into a tightly knit community. Lisa, a GSS member, recalled that their legal battle and being in the spotlight “held the group together; it probably made it more cohesive” (Interview, April, 29, 2010). Adam also had a similar understanding, stating, “I think we were very careful

about just having everything on the up and up so that there would be no excuse to deny recognition on any other basis. So I think it [being visible] affected us in that way. It made us a better group” (Interview, April 15, 2010). Furthering the goal of being the ideal student group, GSS members carefully controlled the group’s public exposure and avoided all political causes.¹¹ GSS members separated the student group, GSS, from the Alternative, the local community group that consisted of many of the same members and also published the local lesbian and gay newspaper. When members instituted this division, it existed primarily as a division on paper, not in reality. Both groups maintained nearly identical membership lists because the local lesbian and gay community was “was very small...everyone kind of knew each other”; the only difference was that Alternative had non-student and student members while GSS could only have student members (Allen, Interview, March 18, 2010). The division protected members from undue scrutiny about their involvement with political causes, which TAMU generally did not allow (Interview, Amy, April 15, 2010). GSS members separated GSS’s finances and events from those of the Alternative so that there would be no confusion over each group’s goals. GSS focused on service and education, while Alternative focused on social gatherings and political goals.

Even after GSS received recognition, members avoided controversy as much as possible. In 1987, shortly after receiving recognition, the group planned to show a “sexual[ly] explicit” film on “safe sex between gay and bisexual men” (Anderson 1987). Because they knew the film would cause controversy, although the film fulfilled the group's goals of service and education, GSS members chose to show the film off campus

¹¹ Members realized that the lawsuit itself was political, but they saw this as the university forcing their hand.

as a precautionary measure to prevent “unwanted attention,” according to one GSS representative interviewed for *The Battalion* (Anderson 1987).

GSS members were also careful about working with other student groups, even those that had supported GSS during the lawsuit. GSS distanced itself from Students Working Against Many Problems (SWAMP), a leftist organization. SWAMP had a history of promoting free speech, including the GSS's right to free speech, on campus, especially when it contrasted with popular views on campus (Roberts 1984). In 1984, SWAMP planned a protest on the Memorial Student Center (MSC) lawn.¹² According to Thomas, who could not remember the exact reason for the protest, many students believed SWAMP's protest at the MSC was a pro-GSS affair. The idea of people protesting on the MSC lawn was so upsetting to the student body that “enough people showed up to block their access. A human chain to block their access,” and the campus police threatened to arrest anyone who participated in the protest (Interview, April 2, 2010). While the GSS had a good history of working with SWAMP, they distanced themselves from this action because students and university officials viewed it so negatively (Behlen 1984).

Conclusion

This case study shows how controlled visibility and invisibility enabled GSS to navigate the sociopolitical environment at TAMU. Because GSS members and supporters realized how important their (in)visibility was members allowed the group to grow more publicly visible, while maintaining a certain level of invisibility to protect its

¹² One of the most important traditions at TAMU is that no one walks on the grass at the Memorial Student Center, which was built in honor of all TAMU former students who died in World War I and World War II.

members. As GSS became more visible, so did most of its supporters who were more willing to display their support or help the organization. Thus, visibility allowed GSS to recruit new members and encouraged mobilization of support of other groups and allies. In contrast, invisibility allowed GSS to move more freely in a hostile context, while minimizing public and administrative scrutiny through the creation of safe spaces. GSS members knew that people were watching them, and this affected how they acted; members knew they could lose their chances at recognition if one visible mistake was made.

Research on LGBT movements would benefit from further investigation into the full spectrum of movement visibility and invisibility. By focusing on how visibility and invisibility interact and are used by LGBT SMOs, scholars can further understand how and when being visible or invisible is a positive or negative attribute for the SMO. As shown in my study, these factors are dependent on sociopolitical variables, but the extent of this relationship is not well understood. For example, the nature of hostility can affect (in)visibility as seen with GSS's differing responses to free-floating and directed hostility. How do LGBT SMOs try to control their visibility and invisibility? How does public perception affect a social movement's (in)visibility? What effect does this have on a movement's supporters and allies and on recruitment?

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION – A REFLECTION

When I applied and was accepted into the Sociology graduate program at TAMU, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I planned to follow the path I had started in high school and focus on the sociology of deviance. Soon after I began taking classes at TAMU, my interest in deviance drifted, and I started to focus more on politics; eventually I became interested in gender and sexual politics and social movements. This led me to do my Master's thesis on the Gay Student Services lawsuit against Texas A&M University. The entire process was frustrating, worrisome, and ultimately rewarding.

Once I selected the topic for my thesis, I needed Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval so I could begin interviewing GSS members and others knowledgeable about the organization's actions during the 1970s and 1980s. IRB approval itself presented an issue. Initially, I submitted an expedited application, which was denied because I planned to study a “sensitive subject.” After resubmitting my application with minor changes three or four more times, and after as many months, I received IRB approval one day before I left for a trip for an interview and to study a private archive.

While awaiting IRB approval, I primarily focused on archival work at TAMU's Cushing Library. Archival research was a completely new experience, and I was not sure what to expect. Prior to going to the library, I emailed an archivist who I was told would pull the files I needed, all files relating to the GSS from its inception until the late 1980s. When I got to the archive, there was a small folder containing less than ten pages, which were copies of news articles all from the year 2000 or newer. My excitement quickly

turned into despair: how was I supposed to document a movement organization based on recent articles that only mention the GSS in passing? I knew Cushing had more data, but I needed to find it. After asking around, I eventually found someone who was familiar with what I was looking for. They brought me a cart containing three boxes of documents on the GSS. After sifting through these boxes and discussing the archive's materials with others, I heard rumors of more materials related to GSS. With more digging and asking around, I found even more information. Interviewees granted me access to their personal archives as well. The experience of unearthing documents in an archive, especially when those documents have not been properly catalogued, was interesting. Many documents archivists thought were lost or missing were found during the course of my research.

Interviewing GSS members and supporters proved to be the most memorable part of this project. For the most part, the interviews went well. As expected there were occasional difficulties, such as when I was unable to contact someone at the scheduled time for a phone interview or when an interviewee got lost on the way to the interview site. I worked hard to build rapport with interviewees. Interviewees and I would exchange emails and on occasion phone calls before the interview date itself and we would discuss GSS, TAMU and LGBT politics; we would also have these discussions prior to the interview itself, in person. Interviewees also asked me questions about my beliefs and about my interest in GSS. When asked about my interest in GSS, I explained that one of my Master's thesis committee chairs mentioned the movement to me, so I started to research GSS and its actions on campus to discover that it was a lost, but

important, historical movement that I wanted to study further. Often, after I answered this question, we would move on to the interview.

During the rapport-building process, some interviewees made assumptions that I identified as gay, which I did not anticipate prior to starting my interviews. These assumptions helped the rapport-building process. However, because I identify as a heterosexual man, I felt like I was lying by omission when I did not correct interviewees' misconceptions about my sexual identity, but broaching the subject was not always easy due to the flow of the conversation. When interviewees asked me about my sexual identity, I always answered by saying I identified as a heterosexual man. I worked to build rapport with interviewees that would result in candid, honest answers, and I expected the same of myself in the interview's dynamic. Interviewees had differing responses to my self-identification; some did not seem to care, others were surprised, and a small minority seemed to feel betrayed. When the interviewees felt betrayed, there was a two-pronged effect. First, the rapport I had cultivated with interviewees dissipated because the interviewee no longer trusted me, so I had to work to reestablish a personal connection with them. Second, a few interviewees questioned my reasons for choosing to do a project on LGBT studies. In these cases, I did my best to explain my reasoning for choosing to study the GSS's mobilization and my personal commitment to ending discriminatory practices based on sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, class, or other demographic characteristics. After this explanation, the interviewees seemed comfortable continuing the interview.

These cases presented a problem because some lesbian and gay-identified interviewees perceived me as an outsider (Merriam 2009). In some circumstances, I

never disclosed my sexual identity to interviewees, which could make them feel that I had betrayed them if they learn about my sexual identity in the future. This issue was on my mind often, and I had to try to come to terms with whether I should disclose my sexual identity to all interviewees and whether this disclosure would endanger my ability to complete the interview and gather data. These experiences have affected my future interests. I am still very interested in researching social movements, but am hesitant to focus on another LGBT movement because of the ethical issues my sexual identity poses.

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