
LGBTQ Politics in Media and Culture

Thomas J. Billard, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, University of Southern California

and Larry Gross, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, University of Southern California

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Summary

As the primary vector by which society tells itself about itself, popular media transmit ideas of what behavior is acceptable and whose identities are legitimate, thereby perpetuating and, at times, transforming the social order. Thus, media have been key targets of LGBT advocacy and activism and important contributors to the political standing of LGBT people. Of course, media are not a monolith, and different types of media inform different parts of society. Community media were an important infrastructure through which gays and lesbians and, separately, transgender people formed shared identities and developed collective political consciousness. Political media, such as newspapers, news websites, and network and cable television news broadcasts, inform elites and the mass public alike, making them an important influence on public opinion and political behavior. Entertainment media, such as television and film, cultivate our culture's shared values and ideas, which infuse into the public's political beliefs and attitudes.

Generally speaking, the literature on LGBTQ politics and the media is biased toward news and public affairs media over fictional and entertainment media, though both are important influences on LGBTQ citizens' political engagement, as well as on citizens' public opinion toward LGBTQ rights and their subsequent political behaviors. In the case of the former, media—particularly LG(BT) community media—have played an important role in facilitating the formation of a shared social and then political identity, as well as fueling the formation of, first, separate gay and lesbian and transgender movements and then a unified LGBTQ movement. Moreover, digital media have enabled new modes of political organizing and exercising sociopolitical influence, making LGBTQ activism more diverse, more intersectional, more pluralistic, and more participatory. In the case of the latter, (news) media representations of LGBTQ individuals initially portrayed them in disparaging and disrespectful ways. Over time, representations in both news and entertainment media have come to portray them in ways that legitimate their identities and their political claims. These representations, in turn, have had profound impacts on public opinion toward LGBTQ rights and citizens' LGBTQ-relevant voting behavior. Yet, the literature on these representations and their effects overwhelmingly focuses on gays and lesbians at the expense of bisexual and transgender people, and this work is done primarily in U.S. and Anglophone contexts, limiting our understanding of the relationships between LGBTQ politics and the media globally.

Keywords: agenda-setting, cultivation, electoral candidates, framing, legitimacy, media effects, media representation, public opinion, social movements, LGBT politics

Media and the Making of Political Reality

The three key institutions of society that govern what behavior is acceptable and whose identities are legitimate are (in approximate order of their historical establishment) religion, the state, and medicine. For gays, lesbians, and bisexual people in the United States, the last half century has seen dramatic transformations as homosexual behavior was decriminalized by the state and depathologized by medicine, and as an increasing (but still small) number of religious groups have shed the idea that homosexual behavior is sinful (Gross, 2001). What's more, gays, lesbians, and bisexual people have been increasingly assimilated into the mainstream of contemporary American society (Seidman, 2013). For transgender people, however, these transformations have yet to (fully) take place; transgender people continue to face barriers to legal recognition of their identities by the state. Even where legal recognition is accessible, it is nearly always contingent upon the approval of medical and psychiatric "experts" (e.g., Ashley, 2019). As for religion, transgender identities are widely condemned as violations of God's will.

As the primary vector by which society tells itself about itself, popular media transmit these ideas of what behavior is acceptable and whose identities are legitimate, thereby perpetuating and, at times, transforming the social order. For instance, news coverage of transgender individuals' rights to access public accommodations convey politicians' and medical experts' opinions of the legitimacy of transgender peoples' claims to gendered spaces, as well as transmits citizens' religiously held beliefs about the "rightness" of transgender identification (Billard, 2016; Capuzza, 2014). Thus, media have been key targets of LGBT advocacy and activism and important contributors to the political standing of LGBT people (Doyle, 2016; Gross, 2001; Montgomery, 1981). Of course, media are not a monolith, and different types of media inform different parts of society. Community media were an important infrastructure through which gays and lesbians and, separately, transgender people formed shared identities and developed collective political consciousness. Political media, such as newspapers, news websites, and network and cable television news broadcasts, inform elites and the mass public alike (Entman, 2003; Entman & Usher, 2018), making them an important influence on public opinion and political behavior (Boomgaarden & Schmitt-Beck, 2019; Zaller, 1992). Entertainment media, such as television and film, cultivate our culture's shared values and ideas (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, and Shanahan, 2002), which infuse into the public's political beliefs and attitudes (e.g., Morgan & Shanahan, 2017).

The following sections consider these various media and the roles they play in LGBTQ politics, though with an admitted bias (reflective of the literature) toward news and public affairs media over fictional and entertainment media. First, we discuss the role media play(ed) in the formation of the LGBTQ movements. Next, we review research on mass media representations of LGBTQ politics before explaining the effects these representations have on pro-LGBTQ public opinion. Third, we attend to the particularities of the bisexual and transgender communities, which have been generally excluded from research on LGBTQ media and politics and, where included, critically collapsed into the category of "LGBTQ" without

considering how they differ from gay and lesbian communities. Finally, before proposing important avenues for future research, we consider international perspectives on LGBTQ politics and media.

Media and the Making of the LGBTQ Movement

Media—particularly LG (and, often separately, B and T) community media—have played an important role in facilitating the formation of a shared social and then political identity, as well as fueling the formation of, first, separate gay and lesbian and transgender movements, and then a unified LGBTQ movement. For gays and lesbians, early homophile organizations like the Mattachine Society, ONE, Inc., and the Daughters of Bilitis began publishing community magazines like the *Mattachine Review*, *ONE*, and *The Ladder* around the mid-1950s. These magazines connected urban gay and lesbian communities across the country into an imagined national community and helped establish a shared political orientation that enabled the formation of a “homophile movement” (D’Emilio, 1998; Gross, 2001). Around the same time, medical understandings of transsexuality advanced considerably and popular sexological magazines like *Sexology* that conveyed this vital information became important sources of identity formation for would-be transsexuals (Meyerowitz, 1998). Meanwhile, *Transvestia*, first launched as a mimeographed newsletter, connected geographically isolated heterosexual male transvestites and laid the groundwork for an eventual circuit of social conferences that built a national transvestite community (Beemyn, 2014; Hill, 2007).

In the era following Stonewall, the 1969 rebellion commonly (though inaccurately) credited with launching the LGBTQ rights movement in the United States, the gay and lesbian press expanded considerably. Particularly as the Gay Liberation Front, the Gay Activist Alliance, and other post-Stonewall groups were launched in cities across the country, local gay communities created new media outlets to share news and debate political priorities (Streitmatter, 1993, 1995). These became key resources in the organization of the gay and lesbian movement and helped sustain prolonged national organizing in the lead-up to the formation of national organizations like the National Gay Task Force (now the National LGBTQ Task Force) and the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) (Gross, 2001). Beyond founding gay media organizations, these activist groups also targeted mass media institutions seeking changes in how gays and lesbians were represented. As noted by Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) in their articulation of multi-institutional politics, social movements seek political change by targeting the governmental and administrative institutions of the state as well as the cultural institutions that hold social power—media being chief among them. This was certainly true of the gay and lesbian social movement, which accurately viewed media as a vector of cultural influence that could propagate both social acceptance and political change (Bernstein, 2016). Early organizations like the Gay Activist Alliance picketed and “zapped” mass media outlets that misrepresented or disparaged gays and lesbians alongside their other political protest activities, and in 1985 the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (now simply GLAAD) was founded with the sole mission of addressing issues of media representation (Gross, 2001). The mass media further served to define the nascent gay and lesbian movement *as a* movement, giving social prominence and political weight to their challenges to institutional authorities (Bernstein, 2016).

While the emerging gay and lesbian movement succeeded in achieving significant cultural and political change, both through media and through other levers of social influence, transgender people and, to a much lesser extent, bisexuals were excluded from the scope of change the movement sought (Beemyn, 2014; Billard, 2020; Murib, 2015; Vitulli, 2010). Accordingly, transgender people began to launch their own publications like *Tapestry* and *Chrysalis Quarterly* in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the pages of these magazines transgender activists developed a new language of self-identification and, following the influential 1992 pamphlet *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come* by Leslie Feinberg, a coherent set of political demands (Billard, 2020; Stryker, 2008, 2017). By the early 2000s, these activists had succeeded in mobilizing the political energy that fueled these publications into a set of nonprofit advocacy organizations, including the Gender Political Advocacy Coalition, the National Center for Transgender Equality, the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition, and the Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund. The newly established transgender movement, largely under the stewardship of the National Center for Transgender Equality, then used the infrastructure of the gay and lesbian press to pressure the trans-exclusive gay and lesbian movement into incorporating transgender concerns into their advocacy in the mid-2000s, “hybridizing” the gay and lesbian and transgender movements into the contemporary LGBTQ movement (Billard, 2020; Vitulli, 2010).

With the advent and rise of digital technology, the significance of media to LGBTQ activism has increased manifold. Digital media, including personal websites, online forums, blogs, and, eventually, social media enabled gays and lesbians to realize and develop their identities at younger ages than prior generations (Gross, 2007; Pullen & Cooper, 2010). For transgender people, the Internet was, until recently, often the only means of discovering one’s identity. Moreover, given that trans people are more often geographically isolated relative to gays and lesbians, who often concentrate in urban environments, digital media provide the primary means through which transgender people socialize with one another (Billard, 2020; Oakley, 2018; Shapiro, 2004). These digital networks have, in turn, quickened the emergence of “transgender” as a minority identity category (Billard, 2020; Fink & Miller, 2014; Oakley, 2018; Shapiro, 2004). Beyond identity formation and community-building, digital media have enabled new modes of political organizing and exercising sociopolitical influence, making LGBTQ activism more diverse, more intersectional, more pluralistic, and more participatory (e.g., Brown, Ray, Summers, & Fraistat, 2017; Fischer, 2016; Soriano, 2014; Williams, 2017).

Media Representations of LGBTQ Politics

Media play a key legitimating role for minorities in American politics. That is, it is via media asserting the legitimacy of minority groups’ social and political claims that political elites and the public alike come to view their issues (and, oftentimes, their very identities) as worthy of attention (e.g., Billard, 2016). At a base level, media’s inattention to minority groups constitutes “symbolic annihilation” (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) and serves to keep those on the margins of political hierarchies marginalized by simply ignoring them (Billard, 2016). As such, media coverage shifts minority communities out of invisibility and brings them into the domain of “legitimate controversy” (Hallin, 1986), where they are at least discussed, even if often in disparaging ways. From this initial place of disparaging and disrespectful coverage, minority groups are increasingly legitimated as holding valid identities and making valid

claims, where journalists must discuss them “objectively” and entertainment media must present them sympathetically. This is a process seen across the board in coverage of LGBTQ people.

Indeed, early news coverage of gays and lesbians and, separately, transgender people was delegitimizing—ridiculing them at best and portraying them as dangerous at worst (Billard, 2016; Pearce, 1973). From there, coverage evolved such that the identities and issues of LGBTQ people became subjects of contentious debate but in falsely “even-handed” ways that equated the validity of LGBTQ civil rights claims with the opinions of those who would see LGBTQ people denied those rights (Adams, 2013; Moscowitz, 2013). This was evident in the framing of gay and lesbian rights issues within news stories. Framing refers to the application of interpretive schemas for organizing the social world onto complex social issues in their representation in media and, in the context of politics especially, defining the nature of social problems (Entman, 1993). Framing answers the basic question of what is this issue *really* about? For gay and lesbian rights issues, the competing frames offered by media were *value frames*, which positioned gay and lesbian rights as fundamentally being about competing social values. In his study of framing of gay and lesbian rights in the United States, for example, Brewer (2003) found two competing value frames: equality and traditional morality (see also Hull, 2006; Smith, 2007; Tadlock, Gordon, & Popp, 2007). These two frames then broke down further as each frame was mobilized both in support of and in opposition to gay and lesbian rights, producing four total frames: (a) gay and lesbian rights as a violation of traditional morality, (b) gay and lesbian rights as compatible with traditional morality, (c) gay and lesbian rights as an issue of equality, and (d) gay and lesbian rights as unequal demands for “special rights” (Brewer, 2003). Numerous studies have found similar frames applied to media discussion of gay and lesbian rights issues, though the specific frames advanced often differ within the *master frames* of “traditional morality” and “equality” (e.g., Adams, 2013; Hull, 2006; Pan, Meng, & Zhou, 2010; Rodriguez & Blumell, 2014; Smith, 2007; Tadlock et al., 2007; cf. McFarland, 2011).

While studies have consistently identified value framing in coverage of gay and lesbian rights issues, these findings have been inconsistently replicated in studies of transgender rights framing (Graber, 2018; Tadlock, 2014). Tadlock (2014), for instance, found that morality framing was scarcely found in newspaper coverage of transgender rights issues, but rather frames of safety, education, and equality predominated. In his analysis of coverage of the 2015 Houston Equal Rights Ordinance in Texas, Graber (2018) similarly found frames of equality and safety (in the form of the “bathroom bogeyman” frame, which claimed transgender women pose a danger to the safety of women and children), though he also identified religious freedom frames that mirrored earlier morality framing over gay and lesbian rights issues. That said, these religious freedom frames were likely specific to the Houston case, since the main opponents of the Equal Rights Ordinance who brought about the referendum that made it national news were Houston clergy, and other research on transgender news coverage has failed to find religious framing (Billard, 2016, 2019c; Capuzza, 2016; Li, 2018; Schilt & Westbrook, 2015). Rather, framing transgender people—particularly transgender women—as threats to safety has predominated as the opposition frame to transgender rights (Billard, 2019b; Graber, 2018; Schilt & Westbrook, 2015) and is, in many ways, unique to transgender rights coverage relative to gay and lesbian rights coverage.

The academic literature on representations of LGBTQ rights in news media has overwhelmingly focused on the issues of marriage equality for gays and lesbians and access to public accommodations (especially restrooms) for transgender people (with no particular focus on issues facing bisexual people, to the extent they differ from gay and lesbian issues). In some respects, this is reflective of the content of news coverage and the issues subject to heightened public scrutiny. Marriage equality, for instance, was the most salient civil rights issue of the 2004 election and dominated coverage of gay and lesbian civil rights for much of the 2000s up until the 2015 Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex marriage in the United States (e.g., Hester & Gibson, 2007). Yet, while transgender access to public restrooms has certainly been a controversial political subject due to legislative battles in, among other places, North Carolina, Texas, and Massachusetts, and has, consequently, been the subject of high levels of media attention (e.g., Graber, 2018; Schilt & Westbrook, 2015), content analyses have found that other issues actually predominate coverage (e.g., Billard, 2019c; Li, 2018). For example, Billard (2019c) found that among the 10 most-visited legacy press and digital-native news websites, discrimination was by far the most covered transgender rights issue—not restroom access. Thus, the foci of academic research and the public agenda are not always aligned.

The admittedly small literature on the media agenda for LGBTQ political issues offers some indication of the dynamics by which these issues emerge on the public agenda. In the context of marriage equality, for example, Hester and Gibson (2007) found key differences in the agenda-setting effects of local versus national media such that local political events (in this case, a proposed amendment to the Georgia State Constitution banning same-sex marriage) produced different patterns of coverage in local media compared to national media and local media in other locales. In the transgender context, Li (2018) found that Caitlyn Jenner’s 2015 interview with Diane Sawyer, in which she came out publicly as a transgender woman, produced changes in subsequent transgender coverage, which increased attention to issues facing nonbinary transgender people; attended more to how the intersections of race, class, sexuality, and gender identity influence the issues transgender people face; and took more care to differentiate transgender issues from the issues facing gays, lesbians, and bisexual people (see also Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2017). Attending specifically to how the digital news environment affects coverage of transgender issues, Billard (2019c) found that while digital-native news entities published significantly more coverage of transgender issues than legacy press online news sources, changes in the amount of digital-native coverage caused subsequent changes in the amount of legacy press coverage. At the level of specific issues, however, there was reciprocal agenda-setting. That is, while digital-native attention to anti-transgender violence and transgender children and education drove increases in legacy press attention to those issues, legacy press attention to nonbinary identities drove increases in digital-native attention to the issues. On the basis of this evidence, Billard (2019c) concluded that the introduction of digital-native outlets offers transgender issues and identities an indirect inroads to “the sphere of legitimacy” by pressuring legacy press entities to, at a broad level, increase their attention to transgender rights concerns.

Media's Effects on Pro-LGBTQ Public Opinion

That media have effects on the public's social attitudes and political opinions is a well-established fact. In the context of LGBTQ political issues, ample research has demonstrated the effects—both positive and negative—of media exposure on public opinion toward LGBTQ rights issues (e.g., Becker & Todd, 2018; Lee & Hicks, 2011; Riggie, Ellis, & Crawford, 1996). Explanations of how and why these effects occur, and how strong they are, generally draw on any of three theoretical domains, namely, cultivation theory, parasocial contact/mediated interpersonal contact theory, and framing theory. Studies drawing on the former two theoretical domains generally address social attitudes toward LGBTQ people and only consider opinions on LGBTQ policy as a secondary outcome or as an indicator of homo/transphobia (e.g., Calzo & Ward, 2009; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005, 2006). Studies drawing on the latter generally consider how competing media frames affect public opinion on LGBTQ policy differently (e.g., Brewer, 2002, 2003; Price, Nir, & Cappella, 2005).

As already discussed, studies of gay and lesbian rights framing revealed a predominance of value framing, with a particular focus on traditional morality and equality frames (Brewer, 2003; Hull, 2006; Smith, 2007; Tadlock et al., 2007). Further studies investigated the effects of these competing frames on public opinion on gay and lesbian rights in an effort to establish whether media's adoption of these frames was politically consequential (e.g., Brewer, 2002, 2003; Price et al., 2005). Consistent with framing theory, these studies found significant effects of framing on public opinion such that those exposed to equality frames were more likely to support gay and lesbian rights (specifically, marriage equality) while those exposed to traditional morality frames were more likely to oppose rights, at least at a surface level (Brewer, 2002, 2003; Price et al., 2005). However, further analysis revealed that the effectiveness of framing is largely contingent upon the partisan leaning of the respondent exposed to the frame (Price et al., 2005) and that while framing influenced the language with which participants discussed gay and lesbian rights issues, that language was often mobilized in ways that both supported and opposed the frame (Brewer, 2002). Moreover, Brewer (2003) suggested that the effects of moral traditionalism and egalitarianism on public opinion toward gay and lesbian rights depend upon whether media provide undisputed frames or competing frames. Considering the journalistic tendency to present "both sides" of political issues, encountering undisputed frames outside experimental contexts would be unlikely. And indeed, Becker and Scheufele (2009) found in a nationally representative survey that political ideology and religiosity influenced public opinion on gay and lesbian rights over and above the effects of media. In the transgender context, Bode and Hildebrandt (2018) drew on framing theory to hypothesize that describing transgender people as either "transgender," "transsexual," "trans," or "people born as men living as women or vice versa" would affect support for pro-transgender policy. Counter to their expectations, however, this linguistic framing was minimally effective on policy opinion.

Cultivation theory has offered another theoretical explanation for the relationship between media and public opinion on LGBTQ rights.¹ Put simply, cultivation theory posits that, over time, media consumers come to view the "real world" as being like the mediated world, adopting factual, attitudinal, and ideological perceptions that align with those dominant in the media's message system (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner et al., 2002). As such, media "cultivates" a particular worldview in audiences. Central to cultivation theory are two

concepts: mainstreaming and resonance. Mainstreaming refers to the process by which media audiences from disparate groups converge in their outlook over time because they consume media that cultivates shared perceptions (Gerbner et al., 2002). Resonance, in contrast, refers to the process by which the effects of cultivation on an individual are amplified because of the similarities between the mediated world and their personal environment (Gerbner et al., 2002). As Gross (2001) has argued, cultivation is a primary means by which cultural (and political) attitudes toward gays and lesbians have formed and evolved in the United States. In a survey study testing this cultivation effect, Calzo and Ward (2009) found evidence of mainstreaming in the attitudes of American college students such that greater media consumption was associated with more acceptance of homosexuality among those most predisposed to homophobic views, while greater media consumption was associated with less acceptance among those most predisposed to accepting views. While Calzo and Ward (2009) did not directly assess respondents' opinions on gay and lesbian rights issues, research makes clear the direct relationship between social attitudes about gays and lesbians and support for gay and lesbian rights (e.g., Wood & Bartkowski, 2004), suggesting an attendant mainstreaming of policy opinion.

Perhaps the most common theoretical explanation for the relationship between media and public opinion on LGBTQ rights is parasocial contact theory (Schiappa et al., 2005, 2006; see Bond & Compton, 2015; Garretson, 2015a, 2015b; Gillig, Rosenthal, Murphy, & Folb, 2018), which is variably referred to as mediated intergroup contact theory (e.g., Ortiz & Harwood, 2007). Summarized briefly, parasocial contact theory adapts Allport's (1954) interpersonal contact theory to mediated arenas, arguing that exposure to media figures from social outgroups reduces prejudice against those groups in the same manner as interpersonal contact would (Schiappa et al., 2005, 2006). Thus, especially for outgroups that individuals are unlikely to encounter in daily life, media serve as a primary means of prejudice reduction and opinion (trans)formation. While Schiappa et al. (2005, 2006) and others who have tested their theory in the context of LGBTQ people (e.g., Billard, 2019a; Hoffarth & Hodson, 2018; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007) only assessed the relationship between media contact and prejudice, other work has directly investigated the effects of media contact on public opinion on gay and lesbian (Bond & Compton, 2015; Garretson, 2015a, 2015b) and transgender (Gillig et al., 2018) rights. Consistent with the parasocial contact hypothesis, each study found that mediated interpersonal contact with LGBTQ media figures increases support for pro-LGBTQ policy.

As an additional point of synthesis between the interpersonal contact theory of Allport (1954) and parasocial contact theory, Garretson (2018) showed that increases in media attention to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s fueled a large scale "coming out" among gays and lesbians. This coming out, in turn, shifted public attitudes toward gays and lesbians as heterosexuals came into contact with individuals whom they knew to be gay and of whom they had generally positive perceptions (e.g., Overby & Barth, 2002). Thus, media can be said to have indirect effects on public attitudes and political opinions via social interaction, as well as direct effects due to media exposure.

Importantly, both cultivation theory and parasocial contact theory emphasize the political effects of *entertainment* media, as well as news media. This speaks to the importance of cultural change via media to political change, as transformations in cultural attitudes toward sexuality and gender identity both directly cause and mutually reinforce changes in public

opinion on LGBTQ rights issues. Indeed, Flores, Haider-Markel, Miller, Tadlock, and Taylor (2018) have shown in the context of transgender rights that reducing anti-transgender prejudice was a reliable and direct mechanism by which to increase support for pro-transgender policy.

Beyond public opinion on pro-LGBTQ policy, some research has investigated the role of media in evaluations of LGBTQ political candidates and officeholders. As of 2019, 25 members of the U.S. Congress have either come out or been outed as gay, lesbian, or bisexual; none has identified as transgender. At the state and local level, countless LGB(T)Q politicians have run for or held office, and their identities have circulated in media either as public information or as gossip and rumor (Gross, 1993; Moritz, 1992). A number of these candidates and officeholders, particularly those who held office in the 1990s and prior, were outed against their will, either in obituaries after their deaths or amid public scandals. In fact, a number were outed by gay activists who wanted to expose the hypocrisy of their homophobic policy positions (Gross, 1993). Still others ran for office while openly “out” (Haider-Markel, 2010). While considerable research has investigated whether voters would be willing to vote for hypothetical candidates who were gay and lesbian (Golebiowska, 2001; Golebiowska & Thomsen, 1999; Haider-Markel et al., 2017; Herrick & Thomas, 1999) and transgender (Haider-Markel et al., 2017; Jones & Brewer, 2019; Jones, Brewer, Young, Lambe, & Hoffman, 2018)—unsurprisingly finding that voters were significantly less likely to vote for them—little has directly investigated the role of media in forming these evaluations. In one unpublished study, Tadlock and Gordon (2003) presented respondents with a fictional news report of heterosexual, gay, or lesbian candidates, finding that the gay and lesbian candidates did not receive less support than heterosexual candidates and that, in certain situations, they were even preferred over heterosexual candidates with the same qualities. Alternatively, in their study of support for transgender candidates, Jones and Brewer (2019) presented respondents with a fictional news report of a transgender candidate represented simply either as a “businesswoman” or as a “transgender woman,” finding that respondents expressed significantly less likelihood of voting for her when she was identified as transgender. Thus, our knowledge of the role of media in public evaluations of LGBTQ candidates and officeholders remains limited.

The B and the T

Historically, bisexual and transgender people have been excluded both from the LGBTQ movement and from academic research on LGBTQ politics. While bisexual people are, to a certain extent, covered by gay and lesbian advocacy to outlaw discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and other similar policies, transgender people are not. What’s more, LG(B) activists have often purposefully sought the exclusion of transgender people from laws intended to protect sexual minorities by opposing the addition of “gender identity and expression” to legislation (e.g., Beemyn, 2014; Billard, 2020; Murib, 2015; Vitulli, 2010). Academic research has largely replicated this exclusion, offering little attention to the political needs of bisexual and transgender people and the role media plays in bisexual and transgender politics (cf. Billard, 2016, 2019c; Bode & Hildebrandt, 2018; Graber, 2018; Hackl, Boyer, & Galupo, 2013). Where academic research includes bisexuality and transgender identity—as it increasingly has—it often does so either by appending “BT” to the “LG”

acronym without giving them any substantive consideration (Chan, 2017; Gross, 2005) or by reapplying research findings from studies of gay and lesbian identity to bisexual and transgender ones.

While this latter tendency is less concerning for research on bisexuality, investigating transgender issues and identities through the lens of sexuality is particularly troublesome. Outside the realm of politics, Keegan (2020) offers a powerful critique of the subsumption of “transgender” into gender studies and/or sexuality studies, both of which underserve the empirical and theoretical specificity of transgender life. When transgender studies are subsumed into gender studies, he argues, trans identity is discussed vis-à-vis the category of woman and in the terms of male-female hierarchies of domination that transness complicate. When transgender studies are subsumed into sexuality studies, trans identity is discussed in relation to alterity and anti-normativity, which makes transness a political statement rather than a material existence and erases the precise desire for gender “normalcy” many trans people experience (Cavalcante, 2018). Within the study of politics and media, by extension, the subsumption of transgender politics into LG(B) politics ignores the myriad ways in which the political standing of transgender people differs from that of gays and lesbians and how mediated representation of transgender politics are driven by different cultural forces (e.g., Billard, 2016, 2019b). This subsumption has, consequently, resulted in a dearth of empirical and theoretical development in the study of (bisexual and) transgender media and politics.

International Perspectives

As with much academic research, the study of media and LGBTQ politics has overwhelmingly focused on the United States and, to a lesser extent, other Anglophone countries (e.g., Bode & Hildebrandt, 2018; Gupta, 2019; Smith, 2007). Research outside these contexts is limited, especially for LGB populations (Paternotte, 2018), though research on media and transgender politics is somewhat more developed (Åkerlund, 2019; Billard, 2016, 2019c; Billard & Nesfield, in press; Bode & Hildebrandt, 2018; Gupta, 2019; Zhang, 2014). Furthermore, where research outside of these contexts has been published, it often applies findings from U.S./Anglophone contexts directly to other national and cultural contexts (e.g., Ayoub & Garretson, 2017; Winkler, in press).

Generally speaking, research on media representation in international contexts has found that LGBTQ individuals are represented negatively (e.g., Adamczyk, 2017; Awondo, Geschiere, & Reid, 2012; Billard & Nesfield, in press; Zhang, 2014). However, within each national context, the manner of media representations and political consequences of such representations differs (Adamczyk, 2017; Billard & Nesfield, in press) in important ways. Moreover, they are often only poorly legible through the Euroamerican lenses applied to them (Awondo et al., 2012; Billard & Nesfield, in press). As Awondo et al. (2012) discuss in the African context, the narrative and stock cultural images of LGBTQ individuals differ across nations in ways that meaningfully influence the tenor of political debate. Additionally, different national contexts have differing forms and extents of media censorship, which result in differing types and amounts of LGBTQ representation in political media (Winkler, in press; Zhang, 2014).

Studies of media’s effects on public opinion, in contrast, have produced findings more consistent with those of U.S.-based research. That is, studies have found that media exposure increases support for pro-LGBTQ policy across a variety of national contexts (Ayoub &

Garretson, 2017; Winkler, in press). Ayoub and Garretson (2017), for example, found strong evidence of a relationship between media exposure and pro-LGBTQ public opinion such that the pervasiveness of mass media in a nation and a nation's degree of press freedom were positively associated with improved support for LGBTQ rights. Winkler (in press) offers more mixed evidence in the African context, finding that radio and television produce either no or negative effects on support for LGBTQ rights, while newspaper and social media produce positive effects. What these and other studies (Billard & Nesfield, in press) make clear is the need in studying global LGBTQ politics to look beyond those media that dominate U.S.-based studies (i.e., newspapers and television) and investigate media that may be of either more widespread use or more contextual relevance, such as radio, social media, and so on.

Avenues for Further Research

We conclude with a brief discussion of further avenues for academic research in LGBTQ politics and the media. This discussion is by no means exhaustive but, rather, focuses on a small number of glaring omissions from the research record. First, as LGBTQ candidates and officeholders become a more common feature of political life, particularly in so-called Western democracies, but also worldwide (e.g., Casey, 2020; Casey & Reynolds, 2015; Haider-Markel, 2010), researchers must endeavor to understand how media represent these politicians and the role that media plays in public support for them.

Second, future research must pay greater attention to non-American, non-Anglophone, and non-European contexts. Too little is known about the political standings of LGBTQ individuals globally and cross-nationally, media is generally absent as a consideration from work that does look internationally, and too much of this work is conducted by researchers in European and American universities, which fuels the tendency to apply theories developed in Euroamerican contexts directly to the situations of other nations.

Finally, there is also a need for attention to the emergence of new and intersecting identities. The LGBTQ acronym, especially in the United States, is ever-expanding. Studies of media and politics must adapt to these changes, incorporating new identity perspectives into their empirical and theoretical work. Studies must also pay greater attention to the intersection of multiple identities, both in terms of how LGBTQ identity intersects with other identities, such as race, economic status, nationality, and so on, and in terms of how different LGBTQ identities intersect with one another, as in the case of transgender people who identify their sexualities as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer. We must consider how to account for the compounding influences these identities have on how media represent them, how the public thinks about them, and how media affects those opinions.

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Notes

1. Importantly, whereas research on framing parasocial contact effects has largely utilized experimental designs, cultivation theory cannot be tested experimentally because of its macrosocial, long-term focus (Gerbner et al., 2002). As such, it is much more difficult to isolate cultivation as a precisely *causal* mechanism in the formation of social attitudes and political opinions.

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