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# Culture and Mobilization: Tactical Repertoires, Same-Sex Weddings, and the Impact on Gay Activism

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*Social movement scholars have long been skeptical of culture's impact on political change, perhaps for good reason, since little empirical research explicitly addresses this question. This article fills the void by examining the dynamics and the impact of the month-long 2004 same-sex wedding protest in San Francisco. We integrate insights of contentious politics approaches with social constructionist conceptions and identify three core features of cultural repertoires: contestation, intentionality, and collective identity. Our analyses, which draw on rich qualitative and quantitative data from interviews with participants and movement leaders and a random survey of participants, highlight these dimensions of cultural repertoires as well as the impact that the same-sex wedding protest had on subsequent activism. Same-sex weddings, as our multimethod analyses show, were an intentional episode of claim-making, with participants arriving with a history of activism in a variety of other social movements. Moreover, relative to the question of impact, the initial protest sparked other forms of political action that ignited a statewide campaign for marriage equality in California. Our results offer powerful evidence that culture can be consequential not only internally, with implications for participant solidarity and identity, but for political change and further action as well. We conclude by discussing the specifics of our case and the broader implications for social movement scholars.*

**I**n 2004, same-sex couples engaged in protests at marriage licensing counters across the United States in connection with the gay and lesbian movement's campaign to promote mar-

riage equality. Showing up at county clerks' offices, demanding marriage licenses, and holding weddings in public places, gay couples challenged long-standing heteronormativity

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inscribed in laws that deny marriage to same-sex couples. The largest protest occurred in San Francisco, historically a center of gay and lesbian movement activity (Armstrong 2002), where Mayor Gavin Newsom defied California's Defense of Marriage Act by ordering the county clerk to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. During the month-long "winter of love," 4,037 couples obtained licenses and married at City Hall, creating a public spectacle that drew widespread media attention. What were the origins of these protests and their significance? And, no less important, what were their implications for the marriage equality movement more generally? We address these questions in this article by drawing from and building on broader sociological understandings of contentious cultural performances, their attributes and relational dynamics, and their varied potential impacts.

Social movement researchers increasingly view social movements not as groups or organizations but as interactive performances or protest events in which collective actors make claims against elites, authorities, or some other group. This approach, which grew out of the work of Tilly (1978, 2004, 2008) and his collaborators (McAdam 1982; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 1998; Tilly and Tarrow 2007), has led to an interest in the performances and repertoires used by social movements to make collective claims (della Porta 2008; Jasper 2006; Tilly 2008; Walker, Martin, and McCarthy 2008). Tilly (2008) uses the metaphors of "performance" and "repertoire" to signal both the routine and limited forms of claim-making used by social movements in political contention and the tendency for claim-makers to innovate within limits set by the established repertoire and the cultural context.

While this formulation has been useful for understanding variations and changes in repertoires of contention, scholars working in the political process and contentious politics tradition have concentrated on a small range of claim-making performances, such as strikes, demonstrations, public meetings, petitions, and violence associated with the rise of social movements in the nineteenth century (Tarrow 1998; Tilly 2008). Over the past decade, scholars concerned with the role of culture and consciousness in social protest have documented an even wider range of repertoires used in modern polit-

ical contention (Bernstein 1997; Blee 2002; Earl and Kimport 2008; Gamson 1989; Jasper 1997; Mansbridge and Morris 2001; Pfaff and Yang 2001; Rupp and Taylor 2003; Staggenborg 2001; Staggenborg and Lang 2007). The core insight is that social movements often adapt, create, and use culture—ritual, music, street theatre, art, the Internet, and practices of everyday life—to make collective claims.

Cultural performances certainly inspire solidarity and oppositional consciousness (Kaminski and Taylor 2008; Morris 1984; Roscigno and Danaher 2004; Taylor, Rupp, and Gamson 2004). Little attention, however, has centered on developing models that discern both the *dynamics* and the *impact* of such performances. The same-sex marriage campaign—the focus of this article—provides an ideal case for addressing this gap in the literature. State-centered contentious politics and political process approaches frequently view the gay rights movement as a sub-cultural movement that embraces tactics that are expressive and internally oriented, rather than instrumental and externally oriented (Cohen 1985; Jenkins 1983; Kriesi et al. 1995; McAdam 1982; Tilly 1995). This distinction between expressive and instrumental action—or politics and culture—has, however, been overstated. To understand how social movements use cultural performances in political contention, it is necessary to look closely at the meaning and the relational dynamics of claim-making in particular contentious performances and to examine their potential mobilizing effects.

In this article, we use the 2004 San Francisco wedding protest to address two questions that are substantively meaningful but also theoretically important to general social movement scholarship. To what extent were the marriages used strategically and intentionally as a performance to make collective claims? And what effect did the month-long protest have on movement mobilization and subsequent actions directed at more conventional forms of political action? We begin with a theoretical discussion of tactics and repertoires, propose a model of cultural repertoires that bridges contentious politics approaches and social constructionist conceptions, and then offer brief background on the 2004 San Francisco same-sex marriage protest. Our multimethod qualitative and quantitative analysis, which includes semistructured interviews with participants and leaders and a random survey of

participants in the wedding protest, (1) documents the contentious nature of the marriages as a dynamic and multifaceted repertoire and (2) highlights the consequences of the month-long wedding protest for other forms of political action after participants' marriages were invalidated by the California Supreme Court.

### CONCEPTUALIZING TACTICAL REPERTOIRES

We begin by building on the insights of two theoretical traditions in social movements—contentious politics and social constructionist approaches—to understand the dynamics and consequences of cultural repertoires of contention. The contentious politics approach views social movements as a series of political campaigns that link claimants, their targets, and the public through contentious performances that cluster into repertoires (McAdam et al. 2001; Tilly 2004, 2008; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). Repertoires of contention, according to Tilly (2008), are the recurrent, predictable, and narrow “toolkit” of specific protest tactics used by collective actors to express their interests and make claims on authorities. Like its theatrical counterpoint, the term “repertoire” implies that the interactions between a movement and its antagonists are strategic performances or “established ways in which pairs of actors make and receive claims bearing on each others’ interests” (Tilly 1995:27).

Tilly (1986) initially introduced the repertoire concept to explain the rise in the nineteenth century of the social movement as a form of political contention directed at governments. The term repertoire is now used more broadly, however, to refer to “the culturally encoded ways in which people interact in contentious politics” or, put more simply, “the forms of claim making that people use in real-life situations” (McAdam et al. 2001:16; see della Porta 2008; Walker et al. 2008).

Contentious performances and repertoires are critical to the emergence and endurance of social movements because they are occasions for collective actors to demand recognition, signal numerical strength, and promote goals (Tilly 2008). Social movements, however, are more than contentious performances. Contentious political episodes influence subsequent campaigns and repertoires by creating social move-

ment communities, submerged networks, and collective identity among participants that become the basis for further mobilization (Staggenborg and Lecomte 2009). Protest performances do not, in other words, simply morph into repertoires. Rather, as Staggenborg and Lecomte argue (2009), the ability of people to come together to engage in collective action requires explanation.

The social constructionist tradition in social movements provides insight into how repertoires diffuse (Jasper 1997; Staggenborg and Lang 2007). Social constructionists conceptualize movements as organizations, submerged networks, and ideologically structured challenges to a variety of different institutional authorities (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Melucci 1989; Polletta 2002; Snow 2004; Staggenborg and Taylor 2005; Zald 2000). We propose an integrated formulation of tactical repertoires—a formulation that bridges these varying conceptions of social movements by linking tactical repertoires to social movement networks and communities.

Our conception combines Tilly’s attention to protest repertoires or claim-making routines with social constructionists’ concern with the structure, meaning, and social psychological dynamics of political contention. We identify three features of tactical repertoires (for elaboration of the model, see Rupp and Taylor 2003; Taylor et al. 2004; Taylor and Van Dyke 2004). First, tactical repertoires are not spontaneous episodes, but *intentional and strategic* forms of claim-making (Gamson 1992; Jasper 2006; Klandermans 1997; McCarthy and Zald 1977; McPhail 1991; Tilly 2008). How culture is brought to bear in episodes of political contention is critical. Collective actors frequently use cultural rituals and performances intentionally and strategically to contest authorities and to pursue instrumental as well as cultural goals (Bernstein 1997; Blee 2002; Morris 1984; Rupp and Taylor 2003).

Second, tactical repertoires involve *contestation* in which bodies, symbols, identities, practices, and discourses are framed and deployed to target changes in multiple institutional arenas, including cultural codes and practices (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Van Dyke, Soule, and Taylor 2004). The body of work on framing by Snow and colleagues (1986) suggests that movements mobilize, in part, by draw-

ing on identities, practices, beliefs, and symbols that are already meaningful in the dominant culture and placing them in another framework so that they are, as Goffman (1974:43–44) put it, “seen by the participants to be something quite else.” The same-sex wedding protest illustrates how cultural repertoires, in particular, exhibit this process of cultural borrowing—borrowing wherein rituals and practices typically used to create moral attachment to the social order are, instead, mobilized in the interest of protest (Alexander, Giesen, and Mast 2006; Durkheim 1915; Pfaff and Yang 2001).

Finally, tactical repertoires mobilize supporters through the construction of *collective identity*. To consider collective identity one of the defining features of a tactical repertoire is to acknowledge that contentious performances have both an external and an internal movement-building function (Bernstein 1997; Roscigno and Danaher 2004; Taylor and Van Dyke 2004; Taylor and Whittier 1992). Tactical repertoires serve both functions. They create solidarity, oppositional consciousness, and collective identity among participants, while also defining the relationship and boundaries between collective actors and their opponents (Klandermans and de Weerd 2000; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Rupp and Taylor 2003). Our analysis uses this model of tactical repertoires to demonstrate that the month-long same-sex wedding protest in San Francisco was a strategic collective action intended to challenge discriminatory marriage laws and practices.

To understand how cultural repertoires contribute to more conventional forms of political action, it is important to recognize that the dilemma for collective actors when strategizing about tactics is “whether to play to inside or outside audiences” (Jasper 2006:10). This is precisely why scholars often argue that cultural tactics detract from instrumental actions, as they privilege mobilization over tactics directed at external targets (Cohen 1985). However, the strategic choice is not mutually exclusive. Generally, movements that engage in expressive forms of action and identity deployment also aim to influence external targets (Bernstein 1997; Raeburn 2004; Staggenborg 2001; Whittier 1997). And tactical repertoires that target the state also create solidarity and collective identity (Jasper 1997; Klandermans, van Dertoot, and van Stekelenburg 2008; Melucci

1989). While scholars increasingly recognize that cultural repertoires matter, very few have considered whether and how they influence subsequent mobilization.

## CULTURAL PERFORMANCES, SPILLOVER, AND IMPACT

The body of literature on social movement spillover, which considers the effects of social movements on each other, allows us to understand how cultural performances and repertoires serve as a conduit for subsequent collective action directed at changing power structures and politics (McAdam 1995; Meyer and Whittier 1994; Whittier 2009). Prior research points to two spillover effects capable of creating new mobilizations and altering existing movements and campaigns: *spillover across movements* (McAdam 1988; Soule 2004; Taylor 1989; Whittier 1995, 1997) and *diffusion within movements*, or the spin-off of social movement tactics, frames, identities, and networks within the same campaign (Soule 1997, 2004).

Studies of movement-to-movement influence suggest that activism around one campaign affects participation in subsequent movements (McAdam 1988, 1989; Meyer and Whittier 1994; Soule 1997; Taylor 1989; Van Dyke 1998). McAdam (1988) describes how the civil rights movement spawned the student, antiwar, and women’s movements; Meyer and Whittier (1994) demonstrate that the women’s movement critically influenced the frames, tactics, and organizational forms of the peace movement; and Voss and Sherman (2000) provide evidence of how inter-movement exchanges of personnel revitalized labor unions.

Movements influence each other through tactical repertoires, collective identities, frames, and shared networks. Tactics from prior movements outline possibilities for activists in other movements (Soule 2004; Tilly 1995, 2008), and tactics deployed by one campaign spread to other locales and social movement organizations through network linkages and shared frames (Isaac and Christiansen 2002; Snow and Benford 1992; Soule 1997). And, of course, social movement communities in the larger social movement sector often supply the networks, master frames, and collective identities that allow new campaigns to emerge (McAdam 1988; Taylor 1989; Whittier 1995). Studies of

diffusion processes within social movements suggest that the collective identity and solidarity fostered by participating in a single protest event with high symbolic impact can create activist networks with a “readiness” to participate in subsequent political actions (McPhail 1991; Soule 1997).

In the case of the 2004 same-sex marriage protest in San Francisco, there is considerable evidence that the campaign was a spin-off of earlier movements. The body of writings on tactical repertoires and social movement spillover leads us to expect that, for most participants, the mass matrimony at City Hall was not a one-shot deal. Rather, the “winter of love” fostered heightened mobilization through the formation of collective identity and networks that generated future actions aimed at challenging authorities and discriminatory legal practices that support heteronormativity.

### **THE CASE OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE, THE GAY AND LESBIAN MOVEMENT, AND THE SAN FRANCISCO WEDDING PROTEST**

Throughout history, same-sex couples have embraced marriage rituals as a politics of “recognition, identity, inclusion, and social support” (Hull 2006:2), even in the absence of legal recognition. Disagreement over the desirability of marriage, however, kept it off the agenda of national lesbian and gay organizations until the mid-1990s (Andersen 2006). A vocal element of the movement opposed gay marriage, arguing that marriage constitutes “a normalizing process that assimilates queers to heteronormativity” (Green 2008:10) and provides a stamp of legitimacy to the hegemony of heterosexuality by excluding other relationships (Badgett 2009; D’Emilio 2007; Hull 2006).

Few lesbian and gay organizations thus engaged in activism around the issue of same-sex marriage until 1993, when it seemed as though same-sex couples in Hawaii might win the right to marry in *Baehr v. Lewin*. The state legislature, however, reversed Hawaii’s Supreme Court by amending the state constitution to define marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman (Andersen 2006).

Fetner (2008) credits the religious right’s opposition with catapulting same-sex marriage to the top of the lesbian and gay movement’s

agenda. Opponents of gay marriage launched a nationwide mobilization that resulted in passage of the 1996 federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), limiting the definition of marriage to a “legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife” and allowing states to deny recognition of same-sex marriages. California, along with 34 other states, jumped on the bandwagon and passed mini-DOMAs. National and local lesbian and gay organizations responded by orchestrating campaigns to win legal recognition for same-sex marriage in receptive states, using litigation as the primary tactic (Andersen 2006; Pinello 2006).

The first inkling that the lesbian and gay movement would embrace same-sex marriage occurred in 1987 at the third national March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. Couples, Inc., a Los Angeles-based organization fighting for recognition of lesbian and gay couples in a movement that had its origins in a critique of traditional marriage, organized a collective wedding protest to contest the discriminatory laws and practices embedded in marriage (Ghaziani 2008). Several thousand gay and lesbian couples took part, blocking off an entire street in front of the Internal Revenue Service building. Since this first marriage protest in 1987, same-sex weddings have been deployed as street theater in connection with local gay pride demonstrations around the United States.

The campaign for same-sex marriage languished until a window of opportunity for mass mobilization opened in 2003, when the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled it unconstitutional to deny same-sex couples the right to marry, making Massachusetts the first state to grant legal status to same-sex marriages. When then-President George W. Bush responded with a proposal for a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage, San Francisco’s Democratic mayor, Gavin Newsom, directed the assessor-recorder’s office to begin issuing marriage licenses to gays and lesbians. This set off a wave of marriage protests around the country. A county clerk in Sandoval County, New Mexico, issued 26 licenses, and gay nuptials were performed on the courthouse lawn before the state attorney general stopped the marriages. In New York, the mayor of New Paltz married 19 couples, and the mayor of Ithaca began accepting marriage license applications from

same-sex couples. In March 2004, a collective action comparable in scope to the San Francisco wedding protest emerged in Portland, Oregon, where 3,022 couples managed to marry before a circuit court judge ordered a halt to the marriages.

After same-sex couples began marrying legally in Massachusetts, and the marriages in San Francisco, Portland, and other locales were overturned by court action, the same-sex wedding protests receded, although isolated protests at marriage counters continued to emerge across the country. In August 2007, same-sex marriage was declared legal for less than four hours in Polk County, Iowa. Although only one couple managed to marry before the county judge declared a halt to the marriages, 27 same-sex couples filed applications for licenses. The largest instance of matrimony among lesbian and gay couples occurred in California during the summer of 2008, after the California Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional to exclude same-sex couples from marriage. Between June 17 and November 4, an estimated 18,000 couples married, until Proposition 8, passed by 52 percent of the voters, banned same-sex marriage in California. During the course of the "summer of love," it became evident that the religious right's campaign to ban same-sex marriage was gaining ground. As a result, the marriages took on an increasing political urgency. By the time the California Supreme Court upheld Proposition 8, denying same-sex couples the right to marry but allowing the existing marriages to stand, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, Maine, and, shortly afterward, New Hampshire had opened marriage to same-sex couples, making it clear that the battle had not ended.

Although California was at the forefront of legal recognition of rights for same-sex couples, public opinion in the state over same-sex marriage has been divided. In 2000, voters approved Proposition 22, a ballot measure supported by a coalition of conservative and religious-right groups, amending the Family Code to read, "Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid and recognized in California." Then in 2005, the California legislature granted domestic partners the state-conferred rights of marriage.

In San Francisco, the tactic of same-sex couples showing up at City Hall to demand mar-

riage licenses originated on February 12, 1998, when the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, a national organization of the lesbian and gay rights movement, sponsored "Freedom to Marry Day."<sup>1</sup> Gay rights groups held small actions in more than 40 cities that year. In San Francisco, Molly McKay and her partner Davina Kotulski went to the marriage counter at City Hall to request a marriage license. When they were denied, they decided to make it an annual protest. The spirited political contest over Proposition 22 led the two women to found Marriage Equality California (MECA), one of several fledgling grassroots organizations in California advocating for same-sex marriage. Through MECA, McKay and Kotulski ritualized the marriage-counter demonstration. Each year on Freedom to Marry Day, McKay donned a wedding dress and went to City Hall with a contingent of same-sex couples to render visible the discrimination that occurs at the marriage counter every day.

In addition to the annual marriage-counter protest, MECA coordinated rallies, marches, and other public actions to mobilize a broad base of support and educate the public about same-sex marriage. Across the country, National Freedom to Marry Day regularly featured groups of same-sex couples dressed in wedding gowns and tuxedos strolling down city streets. The Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund even published a "Strolling Wedding Party Guide" touting the efficacy of street theater for stimulating discussion of same-sex marriage.<sup>2</sup>

On February 12, 2004, demonstrators in San Francisco experienced a catalyzing moment. Same-sex couples went to City Hall to apply for marriage licenses, expecting to get turned down as usual. Instead, they received marriage licenses. The same-sex weddings, which began that day, were orchestrated by Mayor Gavin Newsom's staff, working with Kate Kendell of the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR), Tamara Lange of the northern

<sup>1</sup> Gay rights groups in 40 cities marked the day by demanding marriage licenses at city clerks' offices.

<sup>2</sup> Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund. "Strolling Wedding Party Guide: Street Theater for Your Community." Retrieved June 9, 2009 (<http://www.lambdalegal.org>).



**Photograph 1.** Hundreds of same-sex couples, waiting for marriage licenses, in a block-long line around San Francisco's city hall.

*Source:* Frederic Larson/San Francisco Chronicle/Corbis.

California chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and Geoff Kors of Equality California (EQCA). Kendell suggested that Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin—partners for 51 years and historic figures in the gay and lesbian movement—be the first couple married, and the ACLU invited four other couples, chosen for their suitability as plaintiffs in the lawsuit anticipated when the licenses were invalidated.

Social movement organizations coordinated the initial stages of the protest by selecting the first couples to apply for licenses. The couples who went to City Hall for the annual marriage-counter protest were among the first to marry. Media attention, however, allowed the wedding protest to gain momentum. Soon throngs of gay men and lesbians arrived to take their place in a queue of couples sharing food, blankets, chairs, and friendship while waiting outside City Hall to obtain marriage licenses, and media coverage flooded the nation with images of the couples waiting in line, then emerging from City Hall waving marriage licenses. In an Internet-launched

campaign of support known as “Flowers from the Heartland,” people donated money to purchase flowers for the couples married at City Hall. A handful of crusading Christians opposed to gay marriage marched alongside the long line of couples. Passersby honked in support, sometimes handing out wedding bouquets and cakes. So many couples showed up that the city began scheduling appointments a month in advance. When President Bush reacted by endorsing a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage, talk-show host Rosie O’Donnell flew to San Francisco to marry her longtime girlfriend, Kelli Carpenter-O’Donnell. By the time the California Supreme Court ordered San Francisco to cease issuing and recording marriage license, 4,037 same-sex couples had received marriage licenses and 3,095 managed to have their marriages officially recorded.

What can we learn about the dynamics and impact of contentious cultural performances by examining the 2004 same-sex wedding protest in San Francisco? While the media portrayed the weddings as personally motivated, a social





**Photograph 2.** Lesbian activists Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, the first couple married at San Francisco's city hall.

*Source:* Liz Mangelsdorf/San Francisco Chronicle/Corbis.

movement analysis suggests a different reading of the mass nuptials. In our analyses, we examine both the weddings as a tactical repertoire used by participants to dramatize their claims to the rights of marriage and how the San Francisco wedding protest affected subsequent mobilization on behalf of marriage equality. This two-pronged focus—on marriage as a tactical repertoire and its implications—addresses an important gap in the social movement literature surrounding the dynamics of cultural repertoires and how they may facilitate future mobilization.

## DATA AND MEASUREMENT

Most research on cultural repertoires is based on small and unsystematic samples (Gamson 1989; Rupp and Taylor 2003; Staggenborg 2001; Staggenborg and Lang 2007). Our analyses, in an effort to address some of these prior limitations, draw on survey data as well as semi-structured interviews and combine quantitative and qualitative analysis. Initially, we conducted a random survey of all participants in the San

Francisco weddings.<sup>3</sup> Although the individual is the unit of analysis, we sampled at the couple level, sending two surveys to a sample of 1,000 households in October 2006, approximately two-and-a-half years after the San Francisco protests. We received at least one questionnaire from 311 households (37 percent), and 525 individuals (31 percent) responded.<sup>4</sup>

The survey consisted mostly of closed-ended questions about respondents' demographic attributes, family structure, couples' legal sta-

<sup>3</sup> The data are part of a larger study of same-sex couples who married in 2004, including the 3,027 couples in Multnomah County, Oregon, and the 6,095 couples in Massachusetts.

<sup>4</sup> Sixteen percent of the packets were returned with no forwarding address. We attempted to increase the response rate, but follow-up with nonrespondents revealed many were suffering survey fatigue. The City of San Francisco made names of those who married available to the public for a nominal fee, and they were inundated with mail from researchers and businesses.

tus, political attitudes, and social movement participation prior to and after the protest. Our analysis draws from the survey data and the rich set of controls it affords, particularly for the quantitative analysis described below. We also draw at length from one open-ended question: "When San Francisco started issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples, why did you and your spouse decide to apply for a license?"

In-depth insight into the dynamics and the mobilization effects of participating in the protest—the two core foci of our analyses—necessitated not only systematic surveying of participants and measurement of potentially important controls, but also depth that only qualitative data could provide. We therefore conducted semistructured interviews with five key informant activists from marriage equality organizations, as well as interviews with 42 gay and lesbian individuals, representing 27 couples, who participated in the weddings. On average, each interview lasted about 90 minutes. We transcribed and coded the interview data using Microsoft OneNote.

Although the sample of participants we interviewed was not obtained randomly but through snowball sampling, the respondents come close to representing the characteristics of the individuals who married in San Francisco on nearly all dimensions. According to the City of San Francisco, more than half (57 percent) of the participants were women, a trend mirrored by the same-sex marriages taking place in other locations during 2004 (Teng 2004),<sup>5</sup> and half (55 percent) were between the ages of 36 and 50. Our survey data reveal that these couples had been together on average 12 years, although nearly one fourth of the couples had been in their relationship for 16 years or more. The great majority (88 percent) of survey respondents identified as white, while 4 percent identified as Hispanic/Latino, 4 percent as Asian American, and less than 2 percent as African American. Most had a college degree or higher and a household income of \$71,000 or higher.

<sup>5</sup> At 43 percent, men made up a greater proportion of couples who married in San Francisco than in Multnomah County, Oregon (29 percent) or Massachusetts (36 percent).

er. Although the protest drew same-sex couples from 46 states and eight foreign countries, the vast majority (91 percent) were from California (Teng 2004).

We use interview and open-ended survey data to analyze the first of our questions surrounding the dynamics of protest in general, and weddings as contentious performances in particular. We coded these data along the three analytic dimensions of the theory: contestation, intentionality, and collective identity. We then turn to the second of our questions, pertaining to impact, using the survey data along with qualitative data from the participant and key informant interviews. Here we ask whether participation in the weddings and the protest following the nullification of the marriages influenced individuals' subsequent involvement in the campaign for marriage equality. We expect that prior participation in a variety of related movements will have a generative effect on the marriage equality movement by spinning off a new challenge through relationships within the existing social movement sector and collective identities formed in prior campaigns (Isaac and Christiansen 2002; McAdam 1995; Whittier 2001).

#### *DEPENDENT VARIABLES: SUBSEQUENT ACTIVISM*

While the first portion of our analyses centers on the dynamics of contention relative to contestation, intentionality, and collective identity, and draws largely on the qualitative material, the second portion draws more evenly from both quantitative and qualitative data and focuses on impact and spillover. The first outcome is whether an individual protested after the California Supreme Court invalidated the marriages.<sup>6</sup> Reactions to the invalidation took a number of forms (see Table 1). We then consider the effects of prior activism and participation in marriage protests on whether an individual is a

<sup>6</sup> The survey sampled individuals who participated in the marriage protest. As a result, we are unable to run models predicting participation in the initial San Francisco weddings. A sample of nonparticipant gays and lesbians would be virtually impossible to obtain.

**Table 1.** Actions Taken in Response to Invalidation of Marriage Licenses

| Activity                                                                         | Percent |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| I have given money to an organization dedicated to fighting for marriage rights. | 74.9    |
| I have become more "out" about my marriage.                                      | 45.6    |
| I have given money to a political party or candidate.                            | 40.3    |
| I have participated in a demonstration or protest on behalf of marriage rights.  | 38.8    |
| I have written letters to public officials or other people of influence.         | 37.3    |
| I have joined an organization dedicated to fighting for marriage rights.         | 30.4    |
| I have spoken to or gone to see a public official or other people of influence.  | 14.8    |
| None of the above.                                                               | 10.6    |

Note: N = 474. Respondents could select multiple activities so percentages do not sum to 100.

current lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) or marriage rights activist.<sup>7</sup> Among our respondents, 58 percent are current activists. Table 2 reports descriptives for these outcomes, as well as the predictors and controls used in our modeling.

### EXPLANATORY VARIABLES

Given that our theoretical argument predicts that participation in protest inspires subsequent activism, our quantitative modeling includes a dichotomous indicator of *prior activism*, including antiwar, civil rights, environment, women's rights, labor, pro- or anti-abortion rights, community concerns, and education. Although these movements have different goals, they are related in their challenge to the status quo and in fostering the creation of solidarity and oppositional collective identity.

We also examine how participation in contention following the California Supreme Court's invalidation of the marriages influenced participants' subsequent activism. We include a dichotomous variable coded 1 if individuals protested the invalidation of their marriage. Consistent with our theoretical argument, we expect that individuals who engaged in collective forms of protest that brought them into contact with other activists, fostering the development of social network ties and collective identity, will be more likely to be current activists (Gamson 1992; McAdam 1986). We

include a series of dummy variables measuring distinct actions.

We include *intentionality* in our modeling to capture whether individuals participating in the weddings with an explicit and intentional political motivation differ from those who married solely for personal reasons. We expect participants who intended their marriage to make a political statement to be more likely to protest the dissolution of the marriage and to be current marriage activists.

Another survey question allows us to examine intentionality indirectly. We asked whether respondents felt that civil unions were an acceptable alternative to legal marriage and included a measure ranging from 1 to 4, with a mean of 2.5, where higher values indicate less support for civil unions as a compromise measure.<sup>8</sup> We expect that respondents less willing to accept civil unions as an alternative to marriage would be more likely to protest the invalidation of their marriage licenses and to report ongoing involvement in the marriage equality movement.

<sup>7</sup> We obtained comparable results when we restricted our analysis to individuals currently active in the marriage equality movement only.

<sup>8</sup> The question wording was as follows: "Some people seeking to find a 'middle ground' in the debate over marriage equality have argued that same-sex couples should be given all the legal rights and responsibilities associated with legal marriage, but that their relationship should be called by another name, such as civil unions or domestic partnerships. If the government were to create civil unions, identical to marriage in everything but name, would that be acceptable to you?" The four possible answers ranged from very unacceptable to very acceptable. We reversed the order of responses for the analysis, so that a higher value indicates less support.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics for Variables in the Analysis (N = 474)

| Activity                                                          | Mean (SD)      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Took Action to Protest Dissolution                                | .891 (.308)    |
| Current LGBT or Marriage Activist                                 | .582 (.494)    |
| Prior Activism                                                    | .757 (.429)    |
| Political Motivation for Marriage                                 | .812 (.391)    |
| Civil Unions Not Viewed as Acceptable Alternative (4-point scale) | 2.496 (1.117)  |
| Type of Action to Protest Dissolution                             |                |
| Demonstrated                                                      | .388 (.488)    |
| Joined an Organization                                            | .304 (.460)    |
| Became More Out about Relationship                                | .456 (.499)    |
| Gave Money to an Organization                                     | .749 (.434)    |
| Gave Money to a Politician                                        | .406 (.491)    |
| Met with a Public Official                                        | .148 (.355)    |
| Wrote Letters                                                     | .373 (.484)    |
| Controls                                                          |                |
| Experienced Problems                                              | .646 (.479)    |
| Liberal (7-point scale)                                           | 5.751 (.989)   |
| High Political Efficacy                                           | .437 (.496)    |
| Interest in Government and Public Affairs                         | .772 (.420)    |
| Female                                                            | .487 (.500)    |
| Race (white)                                                      | .882 (.323)    |
| Income (10 = \$74,000 to \$100,000)                               | 10.289 (1.465) |
| Children                                                          | .293 (.456)    |
| Employed Full-Time                                                | .709 (.455)    |
| Age                                                               | 47.200 (8.930) |

### CONTROLS

Based on prior work, we include a number of arguably important controls. Social movement scholars have found that grievances provide at least a partial explanation for protest participation (Jasper 1997; Klandermans et al. 2008; Olzak 1992). Here, we include an indicator of whether individuals feel they have been disadvantaged by not having the legal protections offered to traditional families. Research also consistently demonstrates that receiving information about a protest facilitates activism (Klandermans 1997; Klandermans and Oegema 1987; Schussman and Soule 2005). We include a measure of how informed an individual is about government affairs. The variable is measured dichotomously.

Research on political engagement suggests that individuals with a greater sense of personal efficacy are more likely to take action in pursuit of social change (Ennis and Schreuer 1987; Klandermans et al. 2008). Our measure captures a high feeling of personal efficacy based on two survey questions: "People like me don't have any say about what the government does" and "I feel that I could do as good a job in pub-

lic office as most people." We coded respondents 1 if they disagreed or disagreed strongly with the first statement and agreed or agreed strongly with the second. Our final attitudinal measure captures whether survey respondents consider themselves to be liberal (Schussman and Soule 2005), based on a 7-point scale ranging from extremely conservative (1) to extremely liberal (7).

Finally, research consistently finds that young people, those without full-time jobs, and people without children are more likely to participate in social movements (Klandermans and Oegema 1987; McAdam 1986, 1989; Schussman and Soule 2005). We thus include variables measuring age, full-time employment, and the presence of children, as well as race (1 = white), sex (1 = female), and income (in 11 categories).

### ANALYTIC STRATEGY AND RESULTS

Our analyses proceed in two steps, each of which employs the rich, multimethod character of these data. We begin by addressing our first empirical question. Drawing on the tactical repertoires formulation discussed earlier, we

analyze the weddings as contentious cultural performances. The survey data allow us to discern the intentions of a random sample of participants, and the qualitative interview data illuminate the meaning and dynamics of the weddings as a contentious performance.

The second component of the analyses addresses the impact of the wedding protest on subsequent political actions associated with the campaign for marriage equality. We begin with descriptive statistics regarding participation in protests after the same-sex weddings to establish spillover as a cause. To examine the impact of the same-sex wedding protest, we rely on logistic regression as the principal technique.<sup>9</sup> The first model (Table 3) estimates the likelihood of protest participation following the invalidation of the marriages. The next two models (Table 4) predict current activism in the marriage movement. Importantly, these analyses integrate qualitative data as well, allowing us to elaborate on the processes and mechanisms through which contentious cultural performance leads to further protest and more conventional forms of political action.

## SAME-SEX MARRIAGE AS TACTICAL REPERTOIRE

### CONTESTATION

Cultural rituals typically serve to affirm dominant relations of power. When used in the pursuit of change, however, cultural tactics imbue traditional symbols, identities, and practices with oppositional meaning and are often deployed in new ways that challenge and subvert the dominant order (Taylor et al. 2004). For most participants, the weddings were not meant to embrace the institution of marriage as traditionally defined. Rather, as sites of ritualized heterosexuality (Ingraham 2003), the weddings were an opportunity for same-sex couples to deploy identity publicly and strategically (Bernstein 1997) to gain visibility for their relationships, stake a claim to civil rights, contest discriminatory marriage laws, and challenge the institutionalization of heterosexuality.

<sup>9</sup> Diagnostics suggest no problems with multicollinearity, with all v.i.f.'s below 1.3.

The interview and open-ended survey data are remarkably consistent on these points. The overwhelming majority of participants considered their marriages acts of protest in which they were confronting the identity categories, values, and practices of heteronormative society (Jackson 2006) by enacting marriage outside the boundaries of state sanction. When asked "why did you and your spouse decide to apply for a license?" 81 percent of survey respondents characterized the weddings as politically motivated, describing their actions as "acts of civil disobedience," "a political statement," "a public statement," "a civil rights movement," and "a protest against discrimination." One woman admitted that she married entirely to make a "political statement." She said, "I was against the institution. I didn't want to be the same as straight people." Among interview respondents, 81 percent cited political motivations for their participation, including one man who said:

Certainly for most people, the idea of being married has no connection whatsoever with making a political statement, but for us, obviously, it's unavoidable, inescapable. It's civil disobedience.

Participants sought to challenge stereotypes of lesbians and gays. As one interviewee reported, "I saw what we were doing as a form of political protest because it was counter to all the hegemonic messages of society." Individuals who married also aimed to remake the meaning of an institution that ritualizes heterosexuality. One woman explained, "We wanted into that institution to transform it from the inside." One interviewee opposed marriage but wed so she could "participate in a movement that was trying to change society's attitudes about homosexuality, more than anything else, to say that you can't deny lesbians and gay men the rights that you grant to everyone else." Among couples who indicated they married for political reasons, many were also motivated by the desire to obtain access to the plethora of state and federal rights and responsibilities associated with marriage (Andersen 2006).

Although the majority of respondents gave political justifications for their marriages, a significant number also described the weddings as an opportunity to publicly profess their love and offered deeply personal and emotional reasons for getting married. About one third of both surveyed (36 percent) and interviewed (31 percent) respondents gave personal as well as

political motives for marrying. One survey respondent emphasized the emotional significance of making a public expression of commitment to her partner of many years: "At first it was a spontaneous decision to participate in part of history, but quickly it became something much more significant for us emotionally and politically." An interview respondent who described his marriage as "a political statement" also acknowledged that the government of the City and County of San Francisco lifted "us up from a place of second class citizenship to a place of equality. There we were, face to face, loving each other and committing to each other. It was very profound and moving." He went on to explain:

We both grew up believing in government, believing it meant something. I just remember when the official said, "By the authority of the state of California, I pronounce you spouses for life." And there was this electric chill, physically. And it was the sense of feeling for the first time that we're actually fully equal in the eyes of the law and the government, something we had never imagined.

The 19 percent of survey respondents and interviewees who did not provide political reasons for their marriages offered mostly personal motivations that parallel those used by conventional heterosexual couples to justify marriage (Swidler 2001). Nonetheless, these motivations dispute the hegemonic constitution of love as heterosexual (Johnson 2005:15). One interviewee argued, "People say two guys or two girls getting married is breaking the notion of marriage but, no, it's a question of love, a question of being together." No matter what individuals' motivations were for marrying, the spectacle created by thousands of same-sex couples lining up outside San Francisco's City Hall was itself a form of discursive politics that contested heterosexuality's monopoly on marriage, its associated emotions, and its attendant benefits.

### *INTENTIONALITY*

The interview data suggest that the decision to use public same-sex weddings as contentious performances was linked to activists' experiences with tactical repertoires from previous campaigns. According to one marriage equality activist, the San Francisco weddings were "our generation's Stonewall." Kate Kendell,

head of the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR), described her reaction when the mayor's office informed her that the city would begin issuing marriage licenses to gay couples: "Forget 'where you were when JFK was shot?' 'When did you find out about Gavin Newsom's decision to marry lesbian and gay couples?'" (Pinello 2006:76).

Molly McKay, the founder of Marriage Equality California, borrowed the idea of the marriage-counter protest from the lunch-counter sit-ins used by the civil rights movement:

We were very inspired by the grassroots organizers in Greensboro, North Carolina, the four college students that sat in at the lunch counters, and rendered visible segregation and the ugliness of white-only lunch counters. And we thought the only way to render visible the discrimination that crosses across the marriage counter every single day is to go and request a marriage license. We'll do it with dignity. We'll do it very peacefully.

McKay emphasized the modularity of the tactic: "The great thing about it, it is a moment of civil disobedience where anyone can participate because there's a marriage license counter in every town no matter how big or small." By making their annual request for marriage licenses in mid-February, the couples were taking advantage of Valentine's Day's cultural meaning as a holiday that celebrates love to call attention to the heartbreak experienced by same-sex couples denied access to marriage.

When City Hall began issuing marriage licenses, the couples assembled for the annual protest were among the first to marry. The survey and interview data provide clear evidence that for the majority of participants, the marriages represented a strategic action with both instrumental and cultural goals. Social movement actors anticipated that the weddings would be shut down quickly, and couples who married believed the courts would eventually invalidate the marriages. The explanation provided by one respondent, when asked why he and his partner got married, illustrates this point:

It was an historic moment that we wanted to be part of. We fully expected the courts to close it down, so we rushed over as soon as we could. We felt this was a way to participate in the activist efforts to bring marriage equality to all of us.

Participants saw the weddings, however, as more than a strategy to expand same-sex couples' access to marriage. The weddings were



**Photograph 3.** Solidarity forms among couples waiting outside San Francisco's city hall to marry on Valentine's Day.

*Source:* Kurt Rogers/San Francisco Chronicle/Corbis.

forms of action with a highly symbolic impact intended to win media attention, with the aim of increasing the social status and worth of lesbians and gay men as a group. This idea is seen in one man's explanation of why he and his partner participated in the weddings: "We wanted to share our love with the world and work to end homophobia." Such responses indicate that the majority of participants viewed the weddings as a strategy to bring about legal and social recognition of same-sex relationships. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that even in contexts where same-sex marriage is legal, many couples marry to make a political statement about the rights of gay men and lesbians to full equality (Badgett 2009).

### **COLLECTIVE IDENTITY**

Protest is one means by which challenging groups develop oppositional consciousness, solidarity, and collective identity. To consider collective identity as one of the defining features of a tactical repertoire acknowledges that protest tactics are not only directed to external targets, but they have an internal, movement-building function as well (Roscigno and Danaher 2001; Taylor and Van Dyke 2004; Taylor and Whittier 1992). The San Francisco wedding protest facilitated the creation of new forms of solidarity and community related to participants' adoption of an activist identity. Participants described their actions as part of a "civil rights movement."

One interview respondent explained, "I feel responsible to my elders who fought so hard, all those people who spoke out, who pushed the issue forward, we owe it to them and then for the future generations to come so that they don't have to fight this barrier." Moreover, the collective scene at City Hall affected participants' sense of themselves as part of a larger whole. One man explained: "It was just a thrill to be sitting there where everybody's gay and everybody's there with the same purpose. And I thought, hmm, this is what straight people experience every day of their life."

The wedding protest countered the negative experiences of living in a heteronormative society by bringing so many gay men and lesbians together. One woman remembered standing in line for hours having "this emotional sharing of stories and dreams with all these strangers," and another found the "group support when you're coming in or going out to get married really amazing." A third woman put it this way: "This was the opposite of a homophobic culture. This was: we're embracing and celebrating you and excited about you and interested in you because you're gay." Indicative of the solidarity fostered by the weddings, couples borrowed each others' rings and served as witnesses for each others' marriages. The joy and camaraderie experienced by couples waiting to get married was so intense that several couples volunteered to come back to City Hall and assist with the

marriages in order to remain connected to the oppositional community.

In summary, although weddings as ritual practices typically reinforce status hierarchies and symbolic codes, our data provide clear evidence that, for the overwhelming majority of the participants, the San Francisco same-sex weddings were not meant for that purpose. Rather, the weddings provided participants an opportunity to advance their claims for equal access to marriage. The individuals who married during the month-long protest considered their marriages acts of *contestation*. They used the public marriages strategically and *intentionally* to challenge discriminatory marriage laws that reinforce heteronormativity and to make demands for gay marriage rights, which also concern the right to love. Moreover, the marriage protest fostered a sense of solidarity and *collective identity* among participants that likely persisted long after the event's conclusion. The survey data demonstrate that these results hold true for a sizable segment of the couples, and the qualitative interviews provide depth and shed light on the deep emotional and symbolic character of the weddings. These findings demonstrate the utility of our theoretically-grounded conception of tactical repertoires, which attends to actors' intentions and to the deeply dynamic and relational aspects of political contention.

### THE IMPACT OF THE MARRIAGE PROTEST ON MOBILIZATION

The wedding protest functioned not only as a creative and strategic tactical repertoire, but it also resulted from and then contributed to participation in activism. As Figure 1 shows, license applicants had an extensive activist history in a variety of movements.

Prior participation in a range of related movements had a generative effect on the marriage equality movement by spinning off a new challenge through relationships within the existing social movement sector (Isaac and Christiansen 2002; McAdam 1995; Whittier 2001). In turn, participation in the same-sex wedding protest had significant effects on subsequent activism in the campaign for marriage equality. As Table 1 showed, an astoundingly high number of survey respondents (89 percent) engaged in some form of contentious political activity follow-

ing the California Supreme Court's invalidation of the marriage licenses. The median number of political acts performed by protest participants subsequent to the voiding of the marriages was three; giving money to a social movement organization was the most common action (75 percent). Nearly a third of respondents (31 percent) reported joining an organization dedicated to fighting for marriage rights.

These survey data are corroborated by our interviews with leaders of social movement organizations, who consider the San Francisco marriage protest the catalyst that led to rapid and large-scale mobilization of the marriage equality movement. One month after the marriage protest ended, the two major marriage rights organizations in San Francisco, EQCA and MECA, merged under the Equality California (EQCA) banner to combine grassroots tactics with legislative and legal action; EQCA's staff increased from 5 to 22.

Marriage participants also deployed confrontational actions in response to the court ruling. Nearly 40 percent of respondents participated in subsequent demonstrations. In 25 counties, marriage rights organizations mobilized campaigns using emotion-laden direct action tactics to win public sympathy. Same-sex couples, especially those with children, took to the streets, organizing demonstrations in parking lots, shopping malls, and other public places to express their reactions to the nullification of their marriages and to demand civil rights to protect their families.

Table 3 reports regression analyses predicting protest against the Supreme Court ruling. Coefficients reflect the log odds of respondents currently being marriage activists. We find that individuals who married as an intentional act of political protest were 86 percent more likely to participate in marriage dissolution protests. As Table 3 reveals, neither prior activism nor support for civil unions predict participation in the dissolution protest. In addition, two control variables are significant. Individuals who experienced problems related to the lack of legal protection were also more likely to engage in protest after their marriages were overturned. About 65 percent of respondents indicated they had encountered difficulty visiting a partner during a medical emergency, been declared ineligible for coverage on a partner's health insurance, or been denied parenting rights, childcare



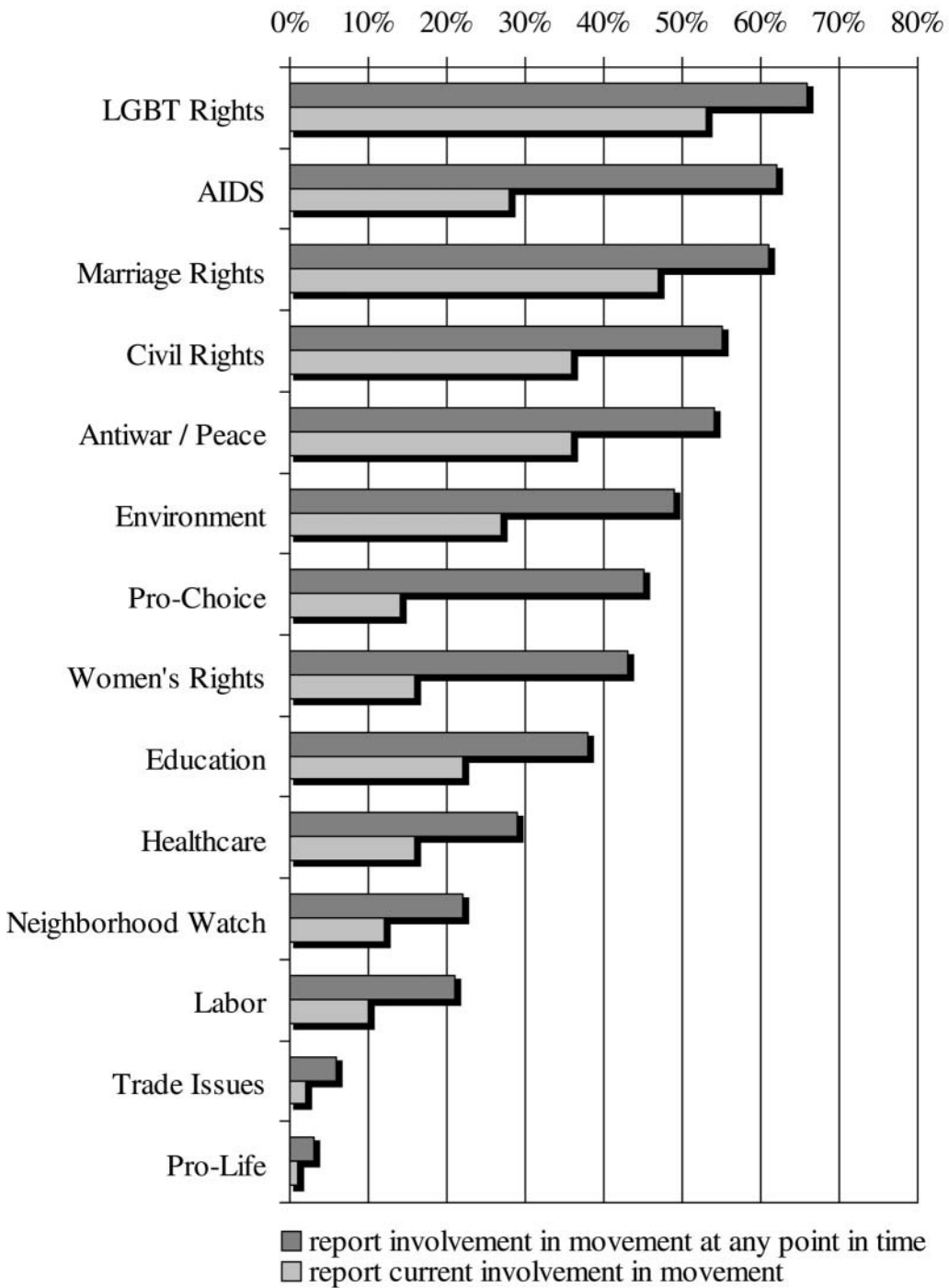


Figure 1. Participation in Prior Social Movements



**Photograph 4.** Marriage Equality California leads anti-Proposition 8 protest in San Francisco.  
 Source: AJ Alfieri-Crispin.

**Table 3.** Results of Logistic Regression Model Predicting Activism Response to Marriage License Invalidation

| Explanatory Variables                             |                 |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Prior Activism                                    | .422 (.347)     |
| Political Motivation for Marriage                 | .620* (.354)    |
| Civil Unions Not Viewed as Acceptable Alternative | .189 (.143)     |
| Controls                                          |                 |
| Experienced Problems                              | .763** (.319)   |
| Liberal                                           | .112 (.162)     |
| High Political Efficacy                           | .206 (.333)     |
| Interest in Government and Public Affairs         | .046 (.375)     |
| Female                                            | .256 (.341)     |
| Race (white)                                      | .301 (.441)     |
| Income                                            | .180* (.095)    |
| Children                                          | -.710* (.354)   |
| Employed Full-Time                                | -.679* (.405)   |
| Age                                               | .032* (.019)    |
| Intercept                                         | -3.257* (1.695) |
| -2 Log Likelihood                                 | 296.379         |

Note: N = 474. Log-odds; standard errors in parentheses.  
 \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (one-tailed test).

benefits, or inheritance rights. Although some scholars question grievance-based explanations of social movements, our findings are consistent with recent research that suggests grievances sometimes provide a partial explanation for protest participation (Klandermans et al. 2008; Olzak 1992).

Several of the significant control variables are also consistent with prior research on the role of biographical availability in predicting protest participation. Individuals without children and without full-time jobs, as well as older and higher income respondents, were more likely to protest. The association between viewing the marriages as political acts and participating in subsequent activism is thus quite robust, even accounting for these arguably standard controls derived from the social movement literature.

Table 4 reports the impact of wedding protest participation on future involvement in the marriage rights movement, with notable results. Recall from Table 2 that 58 percent of respondents, surveyed almost three years after the marriage protest, indicated that they were cur-

rently active in the LGBT or marriage rights movement. Variables for prior activism and marriage dissolution protest, reported in Table 4, Model 1, are positive and significant, lending important weight to the possibility of spillover effects. For ease of interpretation, we convert log odds to odds here. The odds of current marriage activism are over seven times higher for those who previously engaged in activism than for those who had not. Moreover, individuals who protested dissolution at an earlier point in time are more than five times as likely as those who did not to be current marriage activists, nearly three years later. These results show that the marriage rights protest was strongly influenced by participants' prior activism in earlier social movements, and protesting the dissolutions, in turn, inspired subsequent protest activity.

Consistent with our argument that participation in contentious action fosters the creation of collective identity and social networks that inspire further activism, respondents who participated in protest actions involving interaction with other activists are most likely to have con-

**Table 4.** Results of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Current Activism

|                                                   | Model 1         | Model 2         |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Prior Activism                                    | 2.011*** (.272) | 1.895*** (.295) |
| Political Motivation for Marriage                 | .167 (.276)     | .101 (.288)     |
| Civil Unions Not Viewed as Acceptable Alternative | .293** (.099)   | .179* (.106)    |
| Took Action to Protest Dissolution                | 1.656*** (.384) |                 |
| Type of Action to Protest Dissolution             |                 |                 |
| Demonstrated                                      |                 | .791*** (.259)  |
| Joined an Organization                            |                 | 1.058*** (.295) |
| Became More Out about Relationship                |                 | .383 (.249)     |
| Gave Money to an Organization                     |                 | .564* (.278)    |
| Gave Money to a Politician                        |                 | -.155 (.261)    |
| Met with a Public Official                        |                 | .799* (.423)    |
| Wrote Letters                                     |                 | .551* (.258)    |
| Controls                                          |                 |                 |
| Experienced Problems                              | .042 (.230)     | -.060 (.244)    |
| Liberal                                           | -.032 (.119)    | .001 (.128)     |
| High Political Efficacy                           | .602*** (.231)  | .432* (.249)    |
| Interest in Government and Public Affairs         | .675* (.263)    | .348 (.283)     |
| Female                                            | .089 (.232)     | .234 (.254)     |
| Race (white)                                      | .896** (.338)   | .984** (.365)   |
| Income                                            | -.178* (.081)   | -.121 (.087)    |
| Children                                          | -.022 (.255)    | .140 (.281)     |
| Employed Full-Time                                | .178 (.250)     | .232 (.266)     |
| Age                                               | -.010 (.013)    | -.007 (.014)    |
| Intercept                                         | -2.827* (1.387) | -2.973* (1.460) |
| -2 Log Likelihood                                 | 514.412         | 465.417         |

Note: N = 474. Log-odds; standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (one-tailed test).

tinued their activism. Two thirds of individuals who attended a demonstration after the invalidation of the marriages remained active in the marriage rights movement. Results of Model 2 suggest that individuals who joined an organization, participated in a demonstration, or met with a public official are most likely to be current marriage activists. The odds of being a current marriage activist are almost three times greater for respondents who joined an organization and 2.2 times greater for those who demonstrated or met with public officials. In short, individuals who participated in collective actions rather than individualized tactics, such as giving money to a political figure or becoming more “out” about their relationships, are more likely to be current activists.

Results from Model 2 are more complex with respect to the relationship between marrying for explicitly political motivations and current participation in the marriage equality movement. Having a political motivation for participating in the weddings does not entirely explain the difference between individuals currently active in the movement and those who are not. This factor does help predict participation in marriage dissolution protests, and it is clear that participating in marriage dissolution protests predicts current activism. Another indirect way of measuring the relationship between political intentions and current activism is through attitudes about civil unions as an alternative to marriage. The wedding protest participants who would accept civil unions or domestic partnerships may have been more interested in the benefits of marriage than in intentionally challenging the status quo. Results in Table 4, in fact, suggest that respondents who find civil unions an unacceptable alternative to marriage are more likely to be currently involved in marriage rights activism.

While the quantitative findings certainly demonstrate whether marriage protests had an impact on subsequent activism, the rich qualitative data and our analysis of it delineate how. One respondent explained the mobilizing effect of the “month of marriages” at City Hall:

I think we were actually in a bit of a lull at the time that the marriages happened. In a sense we were ripe to get reenergized. It wasn't like we hadn't been politically active before, but we were kind of recharging a bit. It was very opportune timing. We were ready to go.

It is significant that in no instance did interviewees report a lessening of their involvement in the movement after participating in the San Francisco wedding protests. Two thirds of individuals reported that the collective wedding protest had a significant impact on their subsequent activism.

Nearly half of the individuals who participated in the same-sex weddings reported that after their marriages were invalidated, they channeled their activism away from other causes, such as LGBT and women's rights activism, into the marriage equality movement to defend the legality of the San Francisco marriages in the face of anti-gay opposition. Citing both the court's invalidation of the marriages and the governor's veto of the gender-neutral marriage bill introduced the same day Mayor Newsom began the marriages, one respondent said:

It just really wasn't my hot button issue. And then it was. You wake up one morning and realize that Arnold Schwarzenegger decides whether you get married or not and you get a little pissed off.

Among protest participants, 20 percent reported that the weddings were the catalyst that initiated their participation in activism around marriage equality. One couple's actions illustrate the wide range of tactics used in the campaign for marriage equality in the months following the weddings. The couple wrote a declaration with the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Center for Lesbian Rights and were amicus parties to and plaintiffs in a lawsuit, traveled to Washington on the marriage equality caravan, and engaged in lobbying, public speaking, and media appearances. Many other couples reported that, when the same-sex weddings provoked such strong opposition from Republicans and the religious right, they understood the necessity of using identity deployment as a strategy to educate others about marriage equality:

We've been very public since the events at City Hall, and very involved in trying to build networks with all the different people, so it really has been a way where the personal and political really dovetail together.

The ensuing court cases offer additional evidence of the ways in which the San Francisco weddings served as a springboard for policy change. Following the decision to void the marriage licenses, several couples initiated legal



**Photograph 5.** Thousands protest in San Diego after the passage of Proposition 8.

*Source:* Grant Garrett.



**Photograph 6.** Thousands of Californians gathered on the steps of the state capital building in Sacramento to protest Proposition 8.

*Source:* Fritz Liess.

proceedings against the state, alleging that the ban on same-sex marriage constituted a violation of the state's equal protection clause. The City and County of San Francisco, too, filed legal proceedings against the State of California, and the social movement organizations that coordinated the same-sex weddings took part in the case. NCLR's legal director, who had worked with Mayor Newsom on the plan to issue licenses, was one of the attorneys who argued before the court. The California Supreme Court's ruling in March 2008 opened access to same-sex marriage until the passage of Proposition 8. That new defeat set off a wave of large demonstrations and movement mobilization, both statewide and nationally. Although our data do not allow us to assess the scope and duration of these events, it is highly likely that the campaign for same-sex marriage may result in the largest mass mobilization in the history of the lesbian and gay movement.

Our findings regarding the protest's impact highlight the connection between cultural contention and more conventional political tactics. The quantitative results provide strong evidence that individuals who had political motivations for participating in the San Francisco weddings were more likely to engage in conventional political protests such as public demonstrations, joining organizations, and lobbying policymakers in response to the dissolution of their marriages. Participation in dissolution protests, in turn, holds clear implications for current marriage activism. The qualitative data, which afford us greater depth and breadth, are particularly useful for understanding how participants channeled their activism into new forms of claim-making, as well as examining the wide range of tactics used in the campaign for marriage equality in the months following the dissolution of the marriages, including the initiation of legal proceedings against the state of California to overturn the Defense of Marriage Act.

## CONCLUSIONS

Social movement scholars have long debated the role of culture in producing social and political change. Yet researchers have largely ignored cultural tactics and repertoires, in part because political process theorists have a narrow conception of what constitutes a protest event

(Kriesi et al. 1995; Tarrow 1998; Tilly 2008) and in part because state-centered approaches hold that cultural tactics have no impact on policy change (Rucht 1988; Tilly 1995). This article confronts this debate more directly than previous studies by analyzing the attributes, dynamics, and impact of the 2004 same-sex wedding protest in San Francisco.

Drawing from a rich data set that integrates qualitative and quantitative analyses, we offer compelling evidence that cultural tactics do, indeed, matter in political contention. Our analyses demonstrate that the San Francisco weddings constituted a contentious public performance used by actors intentionally and strategically to make collective claims. We also find that the month-long wedding protest sparked other forms of political action and mobilization on behalf of marriage rights, igniting a statewide campaign for marriage equality in California. Together, these findings offer powerful evidence for moving beyond the rigid distinction between culture and politics that characterizes mainstream theorizing in social movements in order to consider the influence of cultural repertoires in political contention.

Our three-dimensional model of cultural repertoires has broad utility above and beyond our particular case in point and, we hope, offers other scholars a theoretical blueprint that more fully incorporates cultural repertoires into the study of social movements. This model combines the insights of contentious politics approaches (that define social movements as a series of public campaigns involving contentious performances or repertoires enacted between claimants and their targets) with social constructionist conceptions (that view movements as communities that create submerged networks and collective identity). We identify three features of cultural repertoires—contestation, intentionality, and collective identity—all of which interact and vary. This formulation adds a qualitative component to protest event research, which has been concerned mainly with documenting the diffusion of and variations in a relatively limited set of repertoires of contention. As our analyses reveal, the tactical repertoires model allows us to look inside cultural performances to discern their meaning and to examine the relational dynamics involved in political contention. The collective identity dimension of tactical repertoires captures both

the internal movement-building function of cultural repertoires and the external targets of contentious performances, providing insight into how social movement tactics diffuse within and between movements.

Participation in one movement, even simply one high profile demonstration, clearly can affect subsequent protest participation through the generation of networks, solidarity, and collective identity (Meyer and Whittier 1994). The couples who took part in the weddings in San Francisco had links to a variety of social movements, including the civil rights, AIDS, lesbian and gay, women's, and pro-choice movements. Movement-to-movement spillover helps explain marriage equality activists' initial adoption of marriage-counter protests as a strategy to make visible the civil rights denied to same-sex couples by virtue of the state's prohibition on same-sex marriage. These activists borrowed the repertoire from the direct action tactics pioneered by the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, adapting it to the political street theater used by the AIDS and women's movements in the 1980s and 1990s.

Our results also provide evidence pertaining to other unresolved questions about the role of culture in political contention. These data challenge the position of scholars who argue that expressive tactics that foster collective identity are not also directed at influencing external targets (Kriesi et al. 1995). The qualitative analysis provides clear evidence that couples intentionally participated in the wedding protest not only to make identity claims, but also to communicate their numerical strength and disruptive potential and to challenge the state. Scholars of social movements have, at times, faulted the gay and lesbian movement for its preference for tactics that rely on culture, performance, and identity deployment, arguing that these methods detract from the movement's broader political agenda (D'Emilio 2007; Gamson 1995). As our findings show, wedding protests used the trappings of the traditional white wedding—bridal gowns, tuxedos, bouquets, and wedding cakes—to dramatize and challenge the heteronormativity of traditional marriage. Such cultural performance was effective in mobilizing more traditional forms of political action.

One of our goals has been to demonstrate that the eruption of mass matrimony among lesbian

and gay couples in 2004, when 13,000 same-sex couples received licenses to marry in San Francisco, Oregon, Massachusetts, and other locations around the country, was a tactical innovation that increased the pace of mobilization around the issue of gay marriage. During the month-long protest in San Francisco, images of gay and lesbian couples standing in line for marriage licenses, then marrying in civic buildings and other public locations, appeared on the evening news, front pages of newspapers, and covers of weekly news magazines, challenging the hegemonic interpretation of marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman. Politics is as much a discursive struggle as it is a contest over resources (Alexander et al. 2006). As our findings show, cultural repertoires not only play an important role in the internal life of social movements, but cultural symbols, rituals, and practices can be used to convey powerful political messages to the multiple targets of social movements and to mobilize actors to engage in other forms of political contention.

Although the lesbian and gay movement historically has been more likely than other social movements to deploy cultural performances and repertoires to assert identity claims and to promote particular goals, the use of cultural performances in political contention is not limited to this particular movement. Social movements on both the left and the right typically use a variety of cultural forms of political expression, including music, art, literature, and theater. Our findings raise questions about how contentious cultural performances in less public venues might be connected to larger campaigns. Prior research suggests, for example, that same-sex couples who elect to engage in public or private ceremonies to express their commitment frequently offer political reasons for their marriages (Badgett 2009; Lewin 1998). Similarly, Rupp and Taylor (2003) argue that drag performances in gay commercial establishments are tactical repertoires that have a long history in the gay and lesbian movement as forms of claim-making that create collective identity and contest heteronormative structures, identities, and practices. One of our central interests in this study is to extend the concept of tactical repertoires to embrace these understudied cultural forms of political expression. To understand how movements remain vital, how they connect

to previous and future campaigns, and what types of impact they have, it is fundamental that scholars recognize the significant impact of cultural performances and repertoires in political contention.

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