

“Little Girls Unwilling to Do What’s Best for Them”: Resurrecting Patriarchy in an LGBT Christian Church

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Abstract

This paper examines how a group of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Christians resurrected patriarchal patterns of gender inequality in their local church. On the basis of more than 450 hours of fieldwork, we analyze how a group of lesbian and gay members collaborated with a new pastor to transform an egalitarian, inclusive, and democratic organization into one characterized by the elevation of men and the subordination of women via restricting leadership to men, instituting a gendered division of labor, and discrediting women dissidents. In so doing, the pastor and his supporters, regardless of their intentions, collaboratively reproduced patriarchal practices that facilitated the subordination of women. We conclude by suggesting that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between gains for LGBT organizations and gains for women, and we outline implications for understanding how retrenchment from egalitarian practice can undo gender-equality gains.

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When the first author began conducting fieldwork in a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Christian church, he encountered an egalitarian and leaderless group that prided itself on its collaborative ethos. Church members, regardless of gender, planned worship services, delivered sermons, maintained church property, handled business and administrative decisions, actively affirmed both gender-conforming and gender-dissonant self-presentations, and, in general, promoted gender, sexual, race, class, and religious inclusivity (Sumerau 2012a; Sumerau and Schrock 2011). Although these endeavors generated significant increases in membership and financial resources, the members determined that an ordained pastor was necessary for reaching their full spiritual and organizational potential, and so they initiated denominational processes and ultimately selected a gay male pastor raised and trained in the Southern Baptist tradition. Upon arriving, he initiated a series of events that dramatically transformed the gender dynamics to ones more patriarchal than egalitarian, leading to women's loss of powerful positions, steep declines in female membership, and a "resurrection" of patriarchy.

In order to make sense of these transformations, we draw on two sets of literature. We first examine the interrelationship between LGBT groups and gender-equality groups and ask whether equality gains on the dimension of sexuality necessarily further the goal of equality between women and men. We then turn to research and theory about gender and organizations, and ask how people transform egalitarian organizations into gendered ones: What key gender dimensions of the organization must be rearranged, what are the processes people use to transform organizational gender dynamics, and what are the consequences for the reproduction of gender inequality? We answer these questions with data from an ethnographic study of one LGBT Christian congregation. It is not our intention to generalize our findings to the larger population of LGBT Christian churches, but rather to elaborate organizational strategies to be aware of when displaced groups seek to regain lost standing and to point to the possibility that the advancement of LGBT rights and women's rights are not necessarily coterminous.

LGBT-Affirming Churches and the Goal of Equality

The feminist battle for women's rights is being waged on many fronts, one of which is the institution of religion. Movements to end violence against

women, advance women's reproductive rights, and decrease workplace-based gender discrimination, to name just a few, have done much to erode patriarchy—"the law of the father" (Therborn 2004, 8, 73) wherein men hold power and women largely do not. Patriarchy has also declined in the institution of religion, although, as Bush (2010, 308) noted, it is nevertheless pervasive, as symbols and doctrines of the major U.S. denominations still symbolize supreme deities as exclusively male, attribute blame for humans' fall to women, and importantly, tend to reserve for men the authority to interpret religious discourse and symbols. Nevertheless, the advent of LGBT-affirming churches, which are based on principles of equality for all (Wilcox 2003), may be a lever for positive gender change.

Three recent trends have given prominence to LGBT-affirming religious institutions as potential sources of positive social change. The first is that major secular activist groups, such as the Human Rights Campaign and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, are creating coalitions with faith-based groups for purposes of "mobilizing religious discourse in an attempt to reclaim the language of faith and moral values" from the right wing, which is not only anti-LGBT, but also anti-gender equality (McQueeney 2009, 153; see also Fetner 2008). The second is the rise of the Metropolitan Community Churches, an LGBT-affirming denomination comprising more than three hundred congregations, that provides the right to worship in a church that respects same-sex sexual relationships as "natural, normal, and potentially moral" (Kane 2013; Wilcox 2003) in a society where most congregations at best ignore it and at worst vilify it. Finally, some mainstream liberal Protestant denominations in recent years have begun to open their doors and, at times, recruit LGBT congregants (McQueeney 2009; Moon 2004).

Yet, while turning to religious organizations may be a wise tactical decision for furthering LGBT rights, it may be less than optimal for furthering women's rights. Richardson (2005) noted that lesbians are often subsumed under a universal notion of "sexual citizen" or "queer citizen" or "lesbian and gay citizen," where their concerns as women are obscured, and Phelan (1993, xi) similarly pointed to the danger stemming from "the 1990s paradigm of 'lesbian and gay' [which] too often heralds a return to male-dominated politics" (see also Collins 2005; Duggan 2004; Warner 1999). At the empirical level, Ward (2004) demonstrated that LGBT organizations' response to political and ideological currents can inadvertently marginalize lesbians (see also Crawley and Broad 2004).

The potential for such intergroup tension similarly appears in scholarship demonstrating processes of "homonormativity," wherein lesbian and gay people seek social legitimacy by conforming to patriarchal patterns of white, middle-class respectability (see, e.g., Duggan 2002; Seidman 2001; Warner

1999).¹ While these assimilation practices allow some (especially white, male, and middle class) sexual minorities to claim privileges traditionally reserved for heterosexual people, they ultimately rely upon and reproduce gender inequalities (Bryant 2008); the marginalization of other sexualities (Bernstein 2002); and the promotion of privacy, domesticity, and consumption (Duggan 2004). Rather than paving the way for radical changes in the gender, racial, class, and sexual structures of society, homonormative practices instead produce some “respectably queer” (Ward 2008) sexual minorities at the expense of the continued oppression of “others” (see also Berkowitz 2011; Bernstein and Taylor 2013). Thus, care must be taken to not assume that gains on one front are gains on the other.

Are LGBT-affirming churches a place of equality for women and men worshippers, a venue where women members can expect to be treated on an equal footing with men? While early research into LGBT religious culture celebrated the emergence of more sexually inclusive churches (see, e.g., Comstock 1996; Shallenberger 1998; Wilcox 2003) and exceptional cases reveal congregants could fashion such spaces (Sumerau and Schrock 2011), other analyses have revealed that sexually inclusive churches sometimes also reproduce societal patterns of racial, classed, and gender inequality (McQueeney 2009). Further, Wilcox (2009) found that many of the LBT women she interviewed left both traditional and LGBT religious organizations in response to perceived sexism in these settings.²

A similar dynamic has been documented in non-LGBT religious settings. Although some churches may foster gender equality (Lee 2004), findings from large-scale studies of mainstream (not LGBT-affirming) religion show that some denominations and churches bar women’s participation in leadership to symbolize their traditionalism (Chaves 1997) and that women face increasing barriers in every step up the organizational leadership ladder (Adams 2007). Such practices are not monotonic: religious subcultures may simultaneously challenge some forms of inequality while reproducing others (see, e.g., Wilkins 2008). In sum, the question of whether or not LGBT churches tend to resist or reproduce existing hierarchical gender relations remains an open one, and our data and analyses based on a case study seek to provide some answers by outlining some ways religious sexual minorities may reproduce gender inequality by fashioning a gendered organization.

Gendered Organizations

To say that an organization is gendered means that “advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female,

masculine and feminine” (Acker 1990, 146). Rejecting the notion that organizations are gender-neutral, scholars point to how they instead are constituted by what people do and the meanings they invoke that can have the consequence of reproducing gender inequality or patriarchy (see, e.g., Schrock and Padavic 2007; Britton 2000; Dellinger and Williams 2002; Ely and Meyerson 2000; Martin 1997). Key processes include restricting opportunities to wield authority to men (Reskin and Ross 1992; Smith and Elliott 2002), instituting a gender-based division of labor that reserves devalued tasks for women (Fletcher 2001; Lorber 1994; Padavic and Reskin 2002), and holding members accountable to uphold these practices through systems of social control (Ridgeway 2011; Schilt 2010; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Regarding the practice of restricting leadership to men, sociologists describe processes of “social closure,” by which a powerful group preserves its privilege by restricting access to valued positions (Weber [1922] 1978; see also Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey 2012; Weeden 2002), and gender scholars have shown how manhood can be a credential necessary for claiming leadership (Collinson and Hearn 1996; Kenny and Bell 2011). In the religious realm, Bush (2010, 308) has pointed to how reserving for men the authority to interpret doctrine is a key element of patriarchy. The supremacy of fatherly guidance, male headship, and divinely inspired religious leadership are elements research indicates have been endorsed by leaders and members of ex-gay Christian groups (Robinson and Spivey 2007), Promise Keepers (Heath 2003), and other LGBT-affirming organizations (Sumerau 2012b; McQueeney 2009). Robinson and Spivey (2007), for example, showed how leaders of the ex-gay movement mobilized religious and psychological discourses to depict men as naturally suited for organizational leadership. Taken together, these studies suggest that organizing and defining leadership structures as male is an important element sustaining patriarchy.

Creating a division of labor based on gender is another mechanism that can elevate men at the expense of women. A pattern of segregation that assigns certain tasks to men and others to women and devalues the latter is age-old (Acker 2006; Padavic 1991; Johnson 2005). In a comparative study of music stores, for example, Sargent (2009) found that men workers often downplayed women coworkers’ musical abilities and depicted themselves but not women as inherently qualified to handle the highly valued sales and managerial tasks. At a major accounting firm, women were assigned clients in the nonprofit, healthcare, and retail sectors rather than in the higher-status mergers-and-acquisitions area (Sturm 2001). These studies suggest that establishing and maintaining gendered organizations may require dividing labor along traditionally gendered lines (see also Acker 2006; Padavic and Reskin 2002; Ward 2004).

Finally, the notion that organizations hold members accountable for conforming to the local gendered culture is well accepted among gender scholars (Ridgeway 2009, 2011; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Schilt 2010; Trautner 2005). In a case decided by the Supreme Court, for example, a male oilrig worker who had failed to enact appropriate local norms about masculinity was subjected to humiliating treatment from coworkers, and in another Supreme Court case, the court affirmed a casino's right to fire a long-term female bartender who refused to wear makeup (Ely and Padavic 2007). Thus, some organizations enforce traditional gender norms, a key practice in maintaining inequality between women and men (see also West and Zimmerman 1987).

Importantly, organizational practices that typically maintain gender inequality are not immutable (Ely and Meyerson 2000, 2010). In her review of gendered organizational theories, for example, Britton (2000) argued that gendered organizations rely upon the local reproduction of patriarchal depictions of masculinity and femininity and may be de-gendered via the promotion at the local level of egalitarian policies and practices. Ely and Meyerson (2010) found that organizationally sponsored safety initiatives on offshore drilling platforms inadvertently nullified patriarchal definitions of masculinity by releasing men from societal and organizational imperatives to behave in a "manly" way. These studies reveal the malleability of gendered organizations. Gendered practices that disadvantage women are not set in stone, and organizations can respond positively to equality initiatives.

Studies of religious organizational change also have demonstrated some ways organizations may foster more equitable gender relations. In a study of an African American Baptist church, Lee (2004) showed how a new leader transformed a gendered organization into a bastion for the promotion and elevation of women pastors and lay leaders, and Wallace (1993) showed how elevating women to leadership positions in Catholic churches facilitated more equitable gendered and religious practices. Although these studies did not explicitly focus on organizational constructions of gender, their findings suggest that leadership change might facilitate positive changes in the gender dynamics in a given religious context.

Leadership change may have the opposite effect, however, by facilitating the retrenchment of patriarchal patterns within local organizations (see Bush [2010] for a review). In the LGBT Christian church at the heart of this study, this is exactly what happened following the acquisition of a new pastor. In what follows, we outline the processes whereby the pastor and church members collaborated to transform an egalitarian religious organization into one characterized by the elevation of men at the expense of women. Further, we show how they accomplished this by reproducing patriarchal patterns of male

leadership, sex-segregated labor, and the marginalization of women's voices and concerns (see also Johnson [2005] on elements of patriarchal organization). Our emphasis here is thus neither on how existing organizational patterns can shape gendered responses to religious experience (see, e.g., Mellow [2002] for this type of analysis) nor on how local ideological work by community leaders may influence sexual and religious politics (see, e.g., Ellingson et al. [2001] for this form of analysis). Rather, our focus is on how organizational members, drawing on religiously infused cultural beliefs about gender, can work together to erode an egalitarian foundation and construct in its place a patriarchal one.

Setting and Method

This research is based on participant observation and interviews the first author conducted with members of a Christian congregation affiliated with the Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC), a denomination comprised of more than three hundred congregations that promotes "the recognition of the inherent value of each individual regardless of sexual orientation, race, class, gender, gender identification, age, or abilities" (MCC 2013). A handful of LGBT Christians started the local congregation with a Bible study group meeting in 1993, and over the next fifteen years, the membership and mission expanded into a regular church that eventually purchased its own sanctuary and held weekly worship services that attracted about hundred people each week at its height.

Because this article is based on the participant observation of the first author, we hereinafter use the first-person voice to describe his experiences. The church's board of directors (it had no pastor at the time) granted my request to study the church, and I gathered data from several sources. Over the course of 36 months (which spanned the periods before and after the new pastor's arrival), I observed and participated in worship services (190), board meetings (30), Bible studies (45), choir practices (10), outreach efforts (5), and social events (105). I also conducted informal interviews with members before and after these activities, but most interview data come from twenty lengthy (three to four hours) in-depth interviews with church members who held formal or informal positions of power in the church. The interview guide covered religious and social background and involvement in the church and asked about family history, political activities, relationships, experience with religion and at the church before and after the arrival of the pastor, and feelings about the church. I tape-recorded meetings and took notes whenever conditions allowed, and I tape-recorded and transcribed all the in-depth interviews. Newsletters, newspaper articles and advertisements, list server

messages, e-mails, hymnals, pamphlets, and publications from the congregation and the denomination rounded out the data collection.

Church members came from a variety of family backgrounds, but during the time of the study, most (74 percent when the new pastor arrived and 49 percent one year after the pastor's arrival) were in middle-class or upper-middle class occupations (e.g., teachers, nurses, and lawyers). Their ages ranged from eighteen to seventy-two, with most in their thirties and forties prior to the arrival of the pastor and in their forties and fifties one year later. The church's racial composition varied between 5 and 13 percent African American and 5 and 2 percent Hispanic before and after the arrival of the pastor. The gender composition of the church went from 67 percent female when the pastor arrived to one-third a year later. While the pre- and post-meeting informal interviews were conducted with 104 people (members and visitors) holding a variety of sexual orientations (heterosexual, LGBT, asexual, and Queer), the in-depth interviews were with eight white and two African American lesbian women and ten white gay men (including the new pastor). Except where noted, the women quoted below all identified as lesbians and the men identified as gay.

Church members appeared to be open to my attendance and questions, and I felt treated as an insider rather than an outsider. At meetings, people spoke openly in a way that indicated they were not censoring themselves because of my presence, and in interviews, many spoke of very personal issues. Because of my accent, my status as a southerner was obvious, as were my race, sex, and age (white, male, at the time in my late twenties). I answered truthfully any questions about my personal life and my religious beliefs, and such discussions did not appear to create tension or lead interviewees to moderate their comments. In fact, perhaps because of my longstanding participant observation (three years), church members generally embraced me, as many put it, as "a member of the family."

The analysis developed in an inductive fashion. Following the arrival of the new pastor, organizational practices began to change, and membership rates of lesbians and of straight, bisexual, and transgender members of both sexes plummeted. Members began asking for pastoral approval before making decisions, invoked judgment day and salvation more frequently, engaged in less task-sharing and more gender-based task assigning, questioned loyalty, and held private meetings. Thus, drawing on principles of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), I added a set of codes about organizational changes and how members described the changes. An examination of the literature on LGBT religious organizations and on gendered organizations (along with discussions with coauthors about patterns emerging in the data) alerted me to the possibility that the transformations were part of a process of organizational change.

Building on this recognition, my coauthors and I generated labels to describe the changes within the church, compared these to concepts in the theoretical and empirical literature, and then refined our labels in a back-and-forth process involving the data, theoretical concepts, and previous research. To do so, we compared each initial code to the processes described in existing religion, gender, and sexualities literatures and refined our terms and examples in relation to the insights gleaned from them. By comparing and contrasting our analytic categories to those of previous studies, we came to see our case as an example of the process whereby an egalitarian organization is transformed into a patriarchal one. From there, we generated more refined labels and marshaled our data (see Charmaz 2006) to demonstrate how this process played out in our setting.

Results

Our results begin with a description of the situation that led to the installation of a new pastor and the precipitous declines in egalitarianism and female membership that ensued. We then detail the three mechanisms that brought about this result: social closure around masculine leadership, the institution of a gendered division of labor, and vilifying and rendering ineffectual any women dissenters.

For the first fifteen years of its existence, the church was an organization characterized by egalitarianism, inclusivity, and democratic decision making and conflict resolution, principles that were codified in its originating documents as part of an ethos of creating a “safe space” for LGBT parishioners. A woman interviewed during this era explained: “We try to have everyone involved and get everyone’s opinion. We feel like it’s important to have a safe space where everyone is treated equally and is included in God’s love.”

Organizationally, the group was leaderless for much of this period, occasionally drawing on the services of part-time preachers and for one seven-year period a full-time, gay, male pastor who managed the church in a “hands-off” fashion that left members responsible for running day-to-day operations. With the purchase of a sanctuary building, however, members felt that the group had outgrown the label of “Bible-study” and sought to become a “church” and that a key factor distinguishing churches is the presence of pastors who lead the way (see also Carroll 2006).

Another motivating factor was a concern that other local religious and LGBT organizations failed to take their church seriously because of the lack of a pastor (see Carroll [2006] on similar concerns in traditional churches). According to one male church member,

It's like other churches don't claim us, and other gay groups think we're crazy. I think the problem is that we don't have a visible leader, and that's the reason we need a pastor. We need someone out there showing these other groups that we're for real.

Both rationales echo research suggesting that sexual minorities sometimes adopt homonormative practices in hopes of gaining sociocultural legitimacy and respectability from mainstream society (see Johnson 2002). Although seeking pastoral leadership allowed some members to feel they were part of a "real church," the assimilation to dominant religious norms also created an opportunity for the reestablishment of patriarchal authority.

After democratic deliberation, members unanimously voted to proceed with a pastoral search, a process governed by the denomination. Perhaps reflecting Christian tendencies to promote male headship (Adams 2007), the denomination sent only male candidates (a fact that none of the members commented on or appeared to care about), and after rejecting the first two (one because his requested salary was more than the church could afford, and the other because his personality was deemed to be a poor fit for the church), the members approved a candidate raised and trained in the Southern Baptist tradition.

The Southern Baptist Convention has been one of the more vocal opponents to LGBT rights and recognition and has promoted the submission of women to men as a divinely inspired requirement for salvation (see Kaylor 2010). While the pastor did not subscribe to Southern Baptist proscriptions against homosexuality, his vision for the church, which he explained in an interview during his first week, echoed traditional Southern Baptist interpretations of authority predicated on male gender:

It's time to get things going in the right direction, and that requires strong leadership based on Biblical principles. It's like a family: I will be a father for these children as they take the next step in their spiritual journey. They've gotten by with a communal mindset, but now it's important that we do things the right way for God.

Thus, like many evangelical leaders (see Robinson and Spivey 2007), the new pastor promoted a version of Christianity predicated upon patriarchal notions of male headship and strong pastoral authority (see also Bush 2010; Johnson 2005; Kaylor 2010).

About half the members embraced this new vision and the other half sought to retain the previous ethos. Marti's initial assessment represents the attitude of the first group: "I always just wanted a place where I could be both gay and Christian, but I need to know that's okay. While I love these people

Table 1. Shepherd Church Demographics.

Category	Characteristics	Population at Pastor's Arrival	Population One Year Later
Women	Lesbian	59 (60%)	15 (33%)
	Transsexual	3 (3%)	0 (0%)
	Heterosexual	4 (4%)	0 (0%)
	Total	66 (67%)	15 (33%)
Men	Gay	25 (26%)	30 (67%)
	Transsexual	3 (3%)	0 (0%)
	Bisexual	2 (2%)	0 (0%)
	Heterosexual	2 (2%)	0 (0%)
	Total	32 (33%)	30 (67%)
Total	Total	98 (100%)	45 (100%)

[fellow worshippers], they don't have the training to tell me that. I think the pastor's ideas about getting back to being more traditional will be good for us." Patricia's initial assessment is representative of the latter group: "We have all felt what it was like to be judged, and we don't need that here, too. I don't need anyone but God telling me how to be a woman, a Christian, or anything else for that matter." By seeking official leadership, they acquired a pastor whose arrival generated an internal conflict. Whereas the resolution of these conflicts could have affirmed a more equitable conception of gender (see Lee 2004; Wallace 1993), that was not the case here.

Tension over the changes the new pastor wrought had a dramatic effect on the demographic composition of the congregation. As Table 1 shows, three-quarters of all women left, while the gay male population increased by 20 percent. The pastor's arrival thus initiated a series of events that transformed an LGBT Christian organization in which women outnumbered men two-to-one into an almost-exclusively gay organization where men outnumbered women by the same margin, echoing Wilcox's (2009) assertion that LGBT religious organizations tend to become male dominated in leadership, culture, and demographics over time. Like Wilcox, whose interviewees cited sexist treatment as impelling them to leave, our analysis suggests that both the organizational gender norms promoted by religious leaders and the perceived benefits—such as respectability and legitimacy—that LGBT religious people may gain from assimilating to dominant gender and sexual norms may drive out women (although not necessarily intentionally), leading to a male-dominated demographic makeup.

Alongside the change in gender demographics, the pastor's arrival also triggered changes in the church's race and class demographics. Whereas the

church's white, Hispanic, middle-class, and upper-class representation dropped after the pastor's arrival, the black and lower class populations remained steady. Considering that African Americans are both the most religious subgroup in the contemporary United States and are generally more religiously conservative than other racial groups (see Pitt 2010), it is possible that the pastor's invocation of traditional gender norms resonated more with the black population. It is also possible that his emphasis on sin, sacrifice, and submission to authority spoke to the religious preferences of lower-class members while alienating middle- and upper-class members (see Bush 2010). In either case, the mass migration of members initiated by the pastor's arrival did not apply to African-American or lower-class members.

The two main reasons members offered for defecting were that they objected to the pastor's heavy-handed assertion of his dominance or that they objected to his sin-centered sermons, or both. Regarding the former, Jenny explained her decision to quit by noting how:

It wasn't [originally] about people coming together to do what they're told by another Baptist man on a power trip.

Damien, a bisexual man who also quit, had a similar analysis:

The pastor is out to ruin us. We used to work together. We laughed, cried, and clapped as one, but now it's all about how we, not him, need to give all we can, serve all we can, and just trust that for some reason he knows better than those of us who have been here.

Some of the congregants who left pointed to off-putting sermons. According to one transgender member:

We used to celebrate our differences and our love for others. But now, we're sinners and we've done so-called bad things. It's kind of depressing.

Brian, a gay man, concurred: "I just feel like we left other churches to avoid hearing how bad and different they thought we were. Now, here we are, doing the same damn thing to each other. I just don't get it." Similar to other LGBT Christians who defected from traditional religious groups (see Wilcox 2003) and to LBT women who left LGBT religious groups (Wilcox 2009), these members quit to escape moral judgment. Many defectors created a new Bible study group and others returned to traditional denominations. The following sections describe the three mechanisms that together resulted in a church transformed along patriarchal lines. Taken together, these practices resulted in a church much more traditional than when it had begun.

Social Closure around Masculine Leadership

This section shows the mechanisms by which the pastor and his supporters collaboratively reproduced patriarchal associations between religious leadership and male bodies (see Kleinman 1984) and, more generally, how they resurrected cultural notions of male supremacy by emphasizing the rightness of masculine leadership. John, a gay man who had been a member for many years, described the authority structure before the pastor's arrival: "We don't really have a leader here. It's like a communal effort where we all focus on the desires of our Creator. Basically, we just work together to run the place as best we can." The new pastor introduced a different approach, as he explained in an interview during his first week:

It's important for us to recognize that real Christian leadership is . . . about projecting the proper image and living up to the designs of our Father. People need to be able to see and feel like we are doing things the right way.

Echoing the homonormative discourse invoked by some lesbian and gay activists seeking to present a more "comfortable" LGBT image in same-sex marriage debates (Bernstein and Taylor 2013), the pastor emphasized the importance of appearing normal, proper, and respectable. One element of the "proper image" of "real Christian leadership" was the introduction of traditional Christian props, including staves, ornamental goblets and other ritual instruments, decorative sashes, and priestly collars. According to fieldnotes from the pastor's first service,

Sitting at the piano in her jeans and T-shirt, Jenny plays a soft melody. The minister stands at the back of the sanctuary. He is wearing a long, white, ceremonial robe with flowing tassels and a purple sash across his chest. In his right hand, he holds a big, thick King James Bible. As Jenny begins a new hymn, he walks slowly to the front. As he passes, some members softly say "Amen," and all of them look up at him from their seats. On reaching the front, the pastor raises his hands like a conductor to signal members to stand. Facing the T-shirt-and-jeans-clad members, he adjusts his sash and points to Jenny to begin playing the hymn. A lesbian member leans over to me and whispers, "I'm still getting used to all this fancy stuff, but it really seems like we're back in a real church doesn't it?" Turning back to the front, she smiles up at the pastor, and we all rise and begin singing.

In this moment and others like it, members affirmed the pastor's self-presentation as an authority figure and collaborated in it by standing on command and defining the "fancy stuff" he wore as evidence of being "in a real church." Drawing upon associations between clerical authority and male bodies

decorated with symbols of morality (see Lee 2004; Kleinman 1984), the pastor used symbolic props to signify his God-given ability to lead, a power play to which many members acceded and which is reminiscent of Seidman's (2001) finding of similar performances that sought to "normalize" gay male leadership. As Maria corroborated after an evening service: "It's been interesting having someone who looks like they know what they're doing, like he does: you know, a real leader. We started coming when it was just us regular folks, but it feels more like a real church now."

Under the new leadership, the church—which had previously incorporated women as leaders—came to define pastoral authority solely in terms of male leadership. According to Marnie: "I just never liked someone like me standing up there. It feels wrong. I grew up in more traditional churches, where men taught us how to do things properly." Violet concurred: "There is something about a pastor where you get the image of a man pounding on a Bible. I think we needed that power, and now we have it." For the members who supported the pastor, the image of an authoritative "man pounding on a Bible" and teaching "how to do things properly" affirmed their perception of how a real church—the cornerstone of which is a male leader—should operate.

Another example arose in the pastor's use of "Father" to refer to God and the deletion of instructions in the weekly program that suggested members choose their own word for the "creator" in prayers. The new invocation of language about fatherhood, both divine and earthly, marked a dramatic switch from pre-pastor days, when the deity was referred to as "Creator" or "God," and no mention was made of the Creator's children. As a male congregant approvingly noted, "It's like having a father the same way Jesus did. Now we have someone who can guide our spiritual growth." The fatherhood metaphor trickled down, and as one male interviewee noted, assigning a gender label to God and having a male leader made them feel like "part of a family, and the pastor is the head of the family." Similar to sexual minority friends-and-family support groups (Fields 2001) and other LGBT-affirming churches (McQueeney 2009), the pastor and members generated these feelings of "reassurance" and "family" by reproducing patriarchal notions of male headship (see also Duggan 2004).

The language of fatherhood also underscored the benefits of male guidance for congregants, described as children. As the following sermon excerpt shows, the pastor accomplished this goal by defining leadership in terms of masculine experience:

I know ya'll come from different traditions, but that's okay because the healing I've done to become a proud gay man, a better Christian man, a committed

father to my own daughter, and an ordained MCC pastor have taught me how to help others, children of God like yourselves, to heal and grow in their own lives and faith.

Manly statuses, such as “proud gay man” and “committed father,” undergirded the pastor’s authority claims and purportedly granted him special skills for leading the church’s “children.”

Many members participated in the new system because of their desire to depend on male guidance. As Carla said following an evening Bible Study:

In many ways its just like growing up again, this being gay and Christian experience. We need the guidance and strength that our fathers gave us when we were little boys and girls, and there is no shame in that. We just have to be faithful and trust in the guidance of the pastor the same way we trusted our fathers to lead us then.

The interview data do not allow us to unravel the motivation behind such a sentiment, and many interpretations are possible, including that the conflicts accompanying the arrival of the pastor created angst and a longing for the security of a father and the desire to acquire stability by being “faithful” to his leadership (see also Wolkomir 2006). Alternatively, members may have interpreted the presence of a male leader as a sign of their normalcy as a church, and thus offering them a claim to socially-respectable selves (see also Warner 1999).

Instituting a Gendered Division of Labor

Sex segregation—a division of labor in which women and men perform different tasks—is a key source of gender inequality (Martin 2001; Padavic and Reskin 2002), and this section describes how the church came to subscribe to an ideology of natural differences that expressed itself in a sexual division of labor that reserved the most prestigious tasks for men. By this new system, the pastor and his allies reproduced in the microcosm of the church the subordination of women to men in the larger social world (see also West and Zimmerman 1987).

Prior to the arrival of the pastor, women and men took turns leading worship services and Bible studies; delivering sermons, holy communion, musical offerings, and scripture readings; and organizing outreach efforts to the larger community. Women and men had also equally shared the “dirty” tasks of cleaning, property maintenance, and cooking for and cleaning up after fellowship events. At the organizational level, equal numbers of women and men staffed the board of directors and the smaller working committees, meetings

were open to all members, and every policy decision required open debate and a majority decision. This section addresses change in these sets of practices.

Within weeks of his arrival, the pastor began reassigning tasks based on sex. As he explained in an interview:

We know that different people are naturally suited for specific types of work. So, as a pastor, part of my job is to figure out where people fit best and manage the church accordingly.

To this end, he divided labor by assigning key leadership positions to himself and other men. Specifically, he took over the leadership of worship services and Bible studies, the delivery of sermons and communion, the selection of musical offerings, and the role of representing the church in public venues. He assigned to men the vast majority of scripture readings, the leadership of all working group committees, the organization of musical offerings, the majority of musical solos, the purchase and operation of technological equipment, the management of financial resources, and the responsibility for fundraising.

Women were assigned three types of labor: clerical, domestic, and emotional. As the pastor explained over lunch about six months after his arrival:

It has been a struggle at times. I think the hardest part is finding where people fit best. Take the girls, for example. They just seem to be better at the clerical stuff and the detail stuff than I ever could be, and I think that's a gift from God—having girls who can handle the everyday stuff is a way to ease the heavy load of a busy pastor.

What this “gift of God” meant for women were the following responsibilities: counting the offering after worship services, printing and disseminating pamphlets and other documents, organizing fellowship breakfasts, dinners, and holiday events, delivering announcements during worship services, note-taking during meetings, photo-taking at church events, and arranging seating for special events. He also generally drafted women to domestic labor tasks such as setting up and wiping down the communion table, providing most of the food for fellowship and fundraising events, and removing trash from the church grounds. Women also gained sole responsibility for emotional labor, including serving as official greeters before worship services, visiting the sick, and attending ceremonial functions for victims of sexual violence and discrimination. As the pastor explained in an interview:

I sometimes marvel at the way women approach service. It is like God made them to take care of others, and I think the women we have here are doing such a great job. It just feels good to have people really fitting in where their true talents are.

In sum, the pastor resurrected patriarchal patterns of gender segregation by limiting women to secretarial, service, and emotional tasks.

The pastor found support for the new division of labor among the many followers (about 40 percent of the original congregation) who agreed that these new assignments simply conformed to natural ability differences between the sexes. According to one man,

Look at those ladies just handling it, man! They just seem built for this kind of work! Setting up the communion table, putting out the hymnals and such. We used to all pitch in, but it just feels more natural with a pastor preaching and giving us communion and those ladies handling the other stuff. Man, it's great! It just feels right.

Such statements indicate that a traditional division of labor somehow evoked what it means to be in a real church: "It just seems so much more like a real church with the ladies handling the greeting and cleaning stuff," said one man.³ Some women, too, echoed these sentiments: "It just seems like things are finally getting normal around here, with each of us doing what we do best."

Not everyone was on-board, however. The new division of labor was contested by a group of about 20 percent of the original congregation, who argued that these changes were "evidence that the church had lost its way and become an old boys club." As one transgender man said:

I feel like the church is losing its soul. How did we go from a place for everyone to a place where the pastor and our most conservative group of guys run the show?

Echoing this sentiment, Patricia, a member who later left the church, told the first author: "Just so you know, I don't know how long I'll be around here. It seems like all I'm apparently good for anymore is greeting people at the door, and that just isn't enough." Similarly to how some lesbian and gay activists felt disillusioned when their movement sought to become more mainstream (Fetner 2008), these members felt the new division of labor in their church left them, as a lesbian member noted, "feeling, once again, like outsiders." While the pastor and his supporters gained emotional benefits from adopting normative gender arrangements, members like Patricia were left with a choice between suffering in silence or leaving the church they had once called home. These examples reveal the double-edged sword of assimilation, wherein the benefits for sexual minorities willing to conform ultimately rely upon the continued or newly established oppression of others (see also Duggan 2004; Ward 2008).

Discrediting Women Dissidents

About six months after the pastor's arrival, members began leaving the church, and questions about changes in the church became regular occurrences, garnering very different reactions depending on the gender of the questioner. When a man sought to take over the job of selecting and arranging music for a worship service without clearing it with the pastor, for example, the pastor was sympathetic, although unmoved:

It's only natural. Tyler made a power play. He wanted more control over the music, and while I understand his motive, he needed to know how things are going to go.

While this quotation shows that the era of democratic decision making clearly had ended for everyone in the church, the reaction to women's complaints was very different and quite harsh. In this section, we describe how the pastor and his male and female supporters rendered women dissidents ineffective in three ways: dismissing their concerns, treating them paternalistically, and labeling them as immature, crazy, or morally suspect.

Dismissing women's concerns. Regarding the first point, the pastor explained his rationale for dismissing women's concerns: "They don't understand that what we're doing is best for all. What we're doing is what God wants. Maybe one day they'll see. Until then, they'll keep complaining about the evil man in charge." The pastor found support for this technique of simply dismissing women's concerns and asserting that his way was God-approved, as the following fieldnote excerpt shows:

Sally raises her hand during the meeting and after the pastor nods, she says, "I don't feel like its good to make all these changes. We were doing fine. Everyone was involved. And I miss the way Jenny ran the night services. It seems like we're turning into one of the churches we all tried to get away from, and I think that's a problem. It just seems like . . ." At this point, the pastor interrupts: "Well, I understand your concern, but it's *you* who must realize that we are learning how to do things *right* as a church." Nodding, Tommy adds, "Instead of attacking what we're doing, maybe you should try to see what you could learn from the pastor, like the rest of us are doing. That way, we can build a better church, which is what we all said we wanted." As Sally begins to reply, the pastor calls on a man's raised hand, and the topic shifts to financial issues.

Similar to some men in editorial offices (Dellinger 2004; Dellinger and Williams 2002), the pastor and his allies managed conflict by dismissing,

rather than discussing, the concerns raised by women. They thereby resurrected a patriarchal practice in the organization by defining women's voices and their concerns as unworthy of serious attention (see also Johnson 2005).

Patronizing women. A second tactic is hinted at in Tommy's instruction to Sally to "learn" and in the pastor's claim that women didn't "understand": complaining women needed to be patronized and taught what was in their best interests. This tactic typically entailed defining women's concerns as evidence that they had yet to properly mature. In explaining some women's objections to his selection of music, for example, the pastor noted:

It's like having children, really. They're not ready to do what Daddy wants, and so they have a tantrum. But the problem is they don't understand. They haven't grown up enough to understand the importance of the work we're doing here.

This patronizing orientation filtered down. According to Micah, one of the pastor's strongest supporters, "They're just a bunch of little girls unwilling to do what's best for them. That's all it is. They don't like that a man with more experience and training is telling them what to do." According to Carla, "These girls are just spoiled. They just don't have a clue how to react like rational adults." And according to Whitney, "Maybe they just haven't matured enough to be proper ladies." In all these examples, the complaints are deemed frivolous and the complainers immature. As the following illustration from fieldnotes reveals, this patronizing tactic can be effective:

At an evening Bible study, Andie asks, "So since the pastor isn't here tonight, can we discuss whether or not we should be making all these changes?" Carla responds, smiling, "Now Andie, don't go letting your confusion create issues. If you don't understand the changes, you should talk to the pastor about them." Tim leans over the table and says, "That's exactly right. You don't want to launch some silly attack that could hurt the church, Andie." Looking shaken, Andie wipes her brow and responds softly, "Well, no. I just sometimes wonder what we're doing." Carla again smiles and says, "Don't worry, honey. It will all make sense in time."

In this instance, the group defused possible insurrection by mischaracterizing disagreement as "confusion," and indeed, this exchange silenced Andie and left her looking confused.

Demonizing women. In some instances, however, stronger tactics were brought to bear. The third way that the pastor and his supporters discounted women dissidents was by demonizing them. This tactic involved labeling

women who spoke out as morally suspect, typically on the grounds that they were crazy. When a group of lesbians questioned why the pastor alone determined all the musical performances, for example, he explained in an interview:

I don't know what is wrong with those women. Maybe it's a sign of mental illness or something—that desire to be in power. I wish there was something I could do. It's so sad to see them lose their way with the Lord and turn their backs on God's lessons.

While his explanation has overtones of paternalistic sympathy, it nonetheless labeled dissenters as mentally ill. The sympathetic overlay was noticeably lacking in the denunciations from his supporters. According to Whitney, dissenting women are “just looking for a fight” perhaps because “they're working out some daddy issues.”

Perhaps a worse label than crazy—especially within the context of religious and LGBT experience (see also Wolkomir 2001)—is morally corrupt. In a comment denoting just how far this church had come from its ideological beginnings, Myrna announced after a contentious board meeting: “It's the same old lesbian drama. It's the same old crap that happens whenever you get a bunch of crazy lesbians together.” After a Bible study, Rhonda noted,

It is this kind of stuff that gives lesbians a bad name. What kind of Christians just run out on you? We have a pastor and things are getting going. Do they do their part? No, of course not. They just hightail it, like a bunch of little nitwit schoolgirls.

The misogyny inherent in making an association between women speaking up and “mental illness” and “daddy issues,” and in characterizing women as “crazy lesbians” and “nitwit schoolgirls” is reminiscent of the reaction to lesbians in the traditional churches many of these women had fled (see also Wilcox 2009). Whether by dismissing, patronizing, or vilifying them, the pastor and his allies marginalized women who refused to conform to the patriarchal imperatives of feminine submission and masculine authority (see also Bryant 2008; Johnson 2005).

Conclusion

The church members at the heart of this study believed other religious and LGBT organizations did not take them seriously and worried about the legitimacy of both their church and their spiritual beliefs. Seeking to resolve this

dilemma, they acquired an ordained pastor. While this acquisition could have bolstered their egalitarian, inclusive, and democratic organization (see Lee 2004; Wallace 1993), instead, the new pastor collaborated with supporters to reintroduce patriarchal patterns of gender inequality in the church. Their collective efforts resulted in a church in which women were vastly underrepresented and gay men overrepresented, where leadership roles were forbidden women and traditionally female tasks assigned them, and where women protesters were depicted as immature or insane.

These efforts reproduced patriarchal notions and patterns that facilitate the ongoing subordination of women. By dividing labor along gender lines, for example, they reproduced patriarchal patterns of gender segregation that scholars note have been used to justify male privilege in arenas as varied as fraternities (Stompler and Martin 1994), prisons (Britton 2003), religious organizations (Adams 2007), political organizations (Robinson and Spivey 2007), therapeutic settings (Fields 2001), and occupations (Acker 2006). The depiction of women unwilling to submit to pastoral authority as being natural sources of conflict, morally suspect, and emotionally underdeveloped similarly reproduced patriarchal themes justifying the denial of equal rights to women throughout history (see, e.g., Martin 2001; Ridgeway 2011). Our findings thus suggest that at least part of the answer to the question of why women are underrepresented in LGBT religious organizations (see Wilcox 2009) may lie in the processes through which LGBT religious organizations come to challenge or merely reflect patriarchal arrangements between women and men.

These findings also address the issue of the interrelationship between LGBT organizations and gender equality by showing that LGBT Christians may draw on cultural notions of gender and religion to resurrect patriarchal patterns of gender inequality in local organizations. Specifically, the pastor and his supporters drew upon traditional Christian notions of pastoral authority, male headship, and feminine submission to fashion a more traditional church, shift men into positions of power and control, and dismiss the complaints and concerns of women. Similar to secular organizations created and sustained by gay men, such as gay fraternities (Yeung, Stompler, and Wharton 2006), this church constructed an organization characterized by the elevation of men and the reproduction of patterns of gender inequality. Thus, while researchers have often treated LGBT religious organizations as purely oppositional spaces (see Wilcox 2003) and outlined some ways LGBT secular groups fight for visibility within heavily Christian communities (see Bruce 2013), our analysis suggests that in some cases these organizations may challenge sexual and religious inequalities while nonetheless reproducing the oppression of LBT women (see also Sumerau 2012b; McQueeney 2009).

These findings also support previous research investigating the dangers of homonormativity (see, e.g., Bryant 2008; Duggan 2004; Ward 2008) by demonstrating some ways LGBT religious organizations may reproduce homonormative processes in both beneficial and detrimental ways. Regarding benefits, the pastor and his supporters created a more traditional and normative Christian organization, an act that generated positive emotions for many congregants and granted a sense of religious legitimacy that relieved the anxiety many had expressed. Regarding detriments, the new practices created an environment that was hostile to lesbians, to bisexual women and men, and to transgender people and drastically reduced overall membership. Assimilating ultimately transformed the church into the type of environment worshippers had once sought refuge from and limited their ability to provide a space for others seeking a safe haven from heterosexist and patriarchal norms. Our analysis thus suggests that researchers should critically examine the role, as well as the benefits and consequences, of homonormativity in the ongoing rise of LGBT religious organizations and in LGBT activist partnerships with religious groups.

To accomplish this critical examination, researchers will need to consider the reasons some women and transgender people conform to patriarchal religious norms (see Kandiyoti 1988). Women are typically overrepresented in traditional and mainstream (heterosexual) religious traditions (see Bush 2010), where they often devise myriad strategies for complying with, opposing, and/or bargaining with patriarchal teachings and authority structures (see Avishai 2008). Our analysis similarly reveals many examples of women conforming to and promoting patriarchal standards while other women vehemently reject these same standards. It is possible that the women conforming to patriarchal religious structures do so—much like many sexual minorities—to gain a sense of legitimacy, respectability, and normalcy that religious participation can provide (see also Avishai 2008). While it is beyond the scope of this study to fully explore this question, our analysis suggests that critical attention should be paid to how women—LBT or otherwise—interpret and respond to patriarchal religious structures in their daily lives (see Bush 2010).

These findings also extend previous treatments of gendered organizations by drawing our attention to how people can transform organizational gender dynamics. Most organizations operate on the basis of inertia, where existing systems tend to remain in place, and it is important to add to the social science database any attempts at change in either direction. Unlike the positive outcome—de-gendering—that Ely and Meyerson (2010) found in their study of organizational transformation, we found the opposite process: re-gendering. Because there are so few gender-egalitarian

organizations, we know little about the key processes involved in converting a gender-egalitarian organization into its opposite (but see Kleinman 1996). Knowledge about how that is accomplished is important in order to subvert future attempts.

Such an understanding requires critically examining how people in organizations interpret and deploy patriarchal beliefs and practices as well as the factors that lead some women and men to construct and sustain localized systems of meaning that reproduce the elevation of men and the subordination of women. As our analysis of an LGBT Christian church reveals, the transformation of an egalitarian organization into a gendered one relies upon both the collective acceptance of patriarchal privileges and the collaboration of organizational leaders and members to enact patterns of action that benefit men at the expense of women (see also Ridgeway 2011). Unraveling and comparing the variations in these processes, and more generally, the multitude of ways groups of people construct and sustain the organizational oppression of women may deepen our understanding of the reproduction of gender inequality as well as possibilities for a more equitable social world.

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Notes

1. For an elaboration of interactional processes and practices that reproduce homonormativity as well as an explanation of the distinctions between homo- and heteronormative social structures, see Rosenfeld 2009.
2. Evidence from nonreligious settings also indicates that men marginalized because of their sexual identities do not necessarily advocate feminist principles (Chen 1999) and may seek to compensate for their marginal status by maintaining dominance over women (see, e.g., Asencio 2011; Author 2012b; Yeung, Stompler, and Wharton 2006).

3. Although no one specifically mentioned the change in language from the pre-pastor use of “women” to the use of “girls” and “ladies,” we note that the latter labels tended to appear in comments celebrating the division of labor that cast women in service roles and men in religious ones, including delivering communion and leading services.

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