Gay Liberation Movement Success

Introduction

Still today, at least 40 countries worldwide have laws that criminalize same-sex relationships (Marks, 2006). This may be surprising for many people in the western world, although the situation could be the same if important gay rights movements like the Gay Liberation Movement (GLM) in the U.S.A would not have happened. The Stonewall Riots of June 28th 1969 are often named as the starting point of the GLM, while the end can be set at the beginning of the AIDS epidemic in the early 1980s (Baldwin, 2014). The main characteristic of this movement was the usage of more radical and militant tactics to reach its goals (Hall, 2010). It is worth studying because it was one of the major LGBT rights movements, whose apparent success was not yet investigated by an historical rather than sociological point of view. However, the success of the GLM is relative, as social movements' successes are difficult to define and the methods are often confusing (Amenta & Young, 1999).

To facilitate the definition of a social movement's success and consequently its impact on history, the Common Goods Criterion (CGC) is employed by many scholars (Amenta & Young). It is made up of four main parts: Joint supply, non-excludability, indivisibility of benefits, and impossibility of appropriation (Hart & Cowhey, 1977). The first to parts are the most relevant for the investigation of the GLM and are also further distinguished by scholars in this field. According to Samuelson, a good has joint supply if "each individual's consumption of such a good leads to no subtraction from any other individual's consumption of the good" (1954, p. 387). Frohlich, Oppenheimer, and Young define the non-excludability criterion by stating that a good must be "possible for individuals to receive […] even if they do not contribute toward its supply" (1971, p. 13). The benefits of a good are indivisible if no individual benefits more than another person, while it is impossible to appropriate the good if no one owns it (Hart & Cowhey). Knowing this, the success of the GLM can be determined by investigating the question: How successful was the Gay Liberation Movement in the U.S.A. according to the Common Goods Criterion?

In order to understand how the CGC can be applied to the GLM, it is helpful to see how the 'goods' are defined. In this case, they are the achievements of the movement and how those accomplishments were reached. The changes in the perception of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual (LGBT) people in society were achieved by the protests and campaigns, not by the laws that finally were made. That is why it is treated as part of the common good in this essay. Also, this essay investigates the goods according to the four criterions by determining to what extent they are fulfilled. It gives the conclusion that the GLM was successful in giving basic rights to the gay community, but not much more, because the CGC's four main points are not fulfilled to an extent to call it entirely successful.

Joint Supply

The members of activist groups of the GLM saw many positive results of their work, like new laws and policies, which fulfill a significant part of the joint supply criterion. For example, if an ordinance against discrimination based on sexuality applies to a gay man, it logically does not

take away the right of a lesbian woman that the law also applies to her. When looking further into the achievements of gay activist groups in the GLM, it is clear that the named example makes sense. Changes in law were the most apparent in showing the success of the movements, exemplar for this is the overruling of sodomy laws in 20 states until 1977 (Rosky, 2017). This gave the LGBT community back the basic human right of equality, in this case in their expression of sexuality, which they often lacked (Mertus, 2007). Gay rights ordinances, like the one passed in San Francisco in 1978 (Turk, 2013), intended to establish these missing rights. By 1978, over 40 municipalities in the U.S.A. had similar laws and policies (Rosky). Seen as the greatest success was the removal of homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's list of mental disorders in 1973 (Bernstein, 2002). Despite the laws and rights established for gay people, the discrimination faced by society prevailed. To resolve this issue, California, more than any other state, implemented anti-discrimination policies (Bernstein, 2003), for example to protect employees in the University of California or in state agencies. Additionally, San Francisco had a clause in its city code against sexual discrimination in employment (Turk). On a national level, the Civil Service Reform Act, signed by President Carter in 1978, forbid discrimination of homosexuals in most jobs in the federal civil service (Bernstein, 2002). None of the named laws and ordinances get less available to an individual if another person benefits from them. So, according to the results of the movement, the joint supply criterion is fulfilled. However, although the changes in laws and policies were available to all homosexual people, the way leading up to them was not.

When assessing the paths towards the gained rights using the joint supply criterion, it leads to the result that the protests and campaigns were not fully available for transsexual people. They were nearly completely left out of the movement (Mertus, 2007), despite being part of the LGBT community. Although some gay liberationist groups saw the discrimination against transsexuals as a form of gay oppression that needed to be stopped, their main goal was gay rights activism. Others were clearly against transsexuals and gender-transgressing people, as there were discussions if transsexual people should be included in anti-discrimination laws. Another example is the Society for Individual Rights (SIR), which focused on conveying the image of a white, middle-class, masculine gay man, so transsexuals as well as drag did not help in reaching their goals. SIR was the largest gay activist group in the early 70s, which makes the extent clearer to which gender-nonconforming people were alienated from the movement. Looking at drag, both gay men and lesbians limited the opportunities of drag queens to take part in the movement. It was a popular opinion that drag furthered the stereotypes about gay men and therefore harmed the goals of the movement. Lesbian feminists, on the other side, perceived drag as an insulting exaggeration of feminine stereotypes and another example of males trying to dominate even typical feminine gender roles. This repugnance of drag was the reason for lesbian feminists to throw Sylvia Rivera, a drag queen from the Stonewall Riots, from stage during a Gay Pride Rally in 1973 (Hillman, 2011). In this case, the fact that gays and lesbians take part in the movement, limits transsexuals' and gender-transgressing individuals' possibilities to be part of it. Similarly, it happened to people of color.

African American homosexuals experienced racism in activist groups, causing a decrease in joint supply. This was due to prevailing racism in gay rights organizations that they joined because of the homophobia in black pride groups. Trying to find a solution to the named dilemma, in 1978 homosexual people of color formed the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays. Amongst fighting for gay rights, this organization worked to decrease homophobia in black rights groups and racism among gay activists (Bernstein, 2002). In contrast to transsexuals, the rights won by the movement were available to homosexuals of color.

Nevertheless, the other part of the common good – how rights were gained – shows very little joint supply for both groups of people.

Non-excludability

Alliances with other radical activist groups and teamwork between lesbians and gay men could lead to laws that were rather exclusive. This is clearest when looking at workplace rights. Although the United States Court of Appeal had prohibited the dismissal of workers based on sexuality, companies were still reluctant to hire gay people (Turk, 2013). Homosexuality was not seen as a reason for discrimination by law because, in contrast to skin color or gender, it was considered a choice (Lewis, 1997). White gay men could therefore not sue a company that did not hire them because of their sexuality, while lesbian women and homosexuals of color could sue for discrimination of a minority. In places where there were no policies made against discrimination based on sexuality in the workplace, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protected employees from discrimination, including discrimination based on color or sex, but not sexuality. When challenged by gay activists, the Supreme Court reached the conclusion that masculine women were protected by Title VII, but feminine men were not. Most of this fighting for gay rights in the workplace took place in the early stages of the GLM, also even before it started (Turk). Similarly, before the late 70s, when the goals of gay activists shifted to solely gay rights (Hillman, 2011), there were alliances between gay liberationist organizations like the GLF and the Black Power Movement, the New Left or anti-Vietnam protests (Hall, 2010). Since at times the heterosexual identities of the other movements were not compatible with the gay liberationists, the alliances were fragile and decreased in the late 70s. However, as it was part of the liberationist ideology to find alliances with other radical groups and include them in their movement (Bernstein, 2002), they show non-excludability in this aspect of the GLM. Meanwhile, the teamwork of gay men, lesbians, and other organizations did not solely provoke non-exclusive laws. Consequently, there appear to be paradox results of the application of the non-excludability criterion on the GLM.

The ideological split between different gay rights groups proves further that non-excludability in the path towards change does not result in non-exclusive policies, and vice-versa. Many homophile groups who have existed prior to the GLM criticized the liberationist organizations' radical ways (Bernstein, 2002). According to Bernstein "older organizations […] continued to advocate educational tactics and newer organizations […] championed militancy. More established organizations wanted the continued support of sympathetic heterosexuals, while newer groups advocated separatism" (2002, p. 545). This resulted in a split between militant, radical organizations and groups that favored educational tactics. Older homophile organizations like the Mattachine Society, formed in 1950, declined with the start of the GLM because of their traditional, unradical strategies (Hillman, 2011). Those traditional groups favored the argument of employing gay men and lesbians because they were equal to everyone else and their sexuality was a private matter. Liberationist organizations, on the other hand, did not support this view, as they fought for acceptance in every aspect of society, also if they choose to show their sexuality at work (Turk, 2013). However, not only older groups clashed with the radical liberationist ideology, also other liberationist groups like the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA) were established by former members of the GLF in response to their militancy (Hall, 2010). The GLF wanted to abolish society's norms that limited people in their free expression, while the GAA is described by Mertus as their "competitor" (2007, p. 1051-1052). Instead of working together with other radical groups like the GLF's ally, the Black Panther Party, they

encouraged peaceful protests like “kiss-ins,” where numerous homosexual couples kissed in public places to promote visibility (Mertus, 2007). Despite this split between gay liberationist groups, they had similar goals and by fighting for them achieved positive changes in the country. Changes accomplished by one activist group, did not exclude the members of the other groups, but applied to all homosexuals. The same effect can be seen when analyzing the split between lesbian feminists and gay men.

The formation of independent lesbian-feminist organizations widened the gap between distinct gay rights groups, simultaneously showing that this gap does not negatively affect the acquisition of rights. Lesbian women were the target of both sexism and homophobia, so their goals differed from the gay men’s goals since the beginning of the GLM. Nevertheless, they were connected by the common identity of being homosexual, which allowed teamwork in the early stages of the movement. However, the prevailing sexism in gay rights groups sparked the formations of autonomous lesbian-feminist groups, like the Lesbian Rights Project in 1977. Those groups fought specifically for lesbian-feminist rights, not for feminism only nor rights for homosexuals. Examples of their work include helping women to keep custody of their children after coming-out, or shelters for victims of domestic violence or rape (Bernstein, 2002). While the mentioned actions took place in major cities, where most liberationist groups were situated, lesbians also distanced themselves from the GLM by developing their own anti-urban, rural culture (Herring, 2007). Lesbian-feminist groups released publications like Country Women, which was centered on rural lifestyle in contrast to the “‘cha cha’ gay publications such as the Los Angeles-based glossy Advocate,” like Herring calls it (2007, p. 341). The views presented in rural publications were often anti-middle-class and anti-urban, which gained the support of the working-class and homosexual people of color. These people felt excluded from other gay publications, which emphasized the white, gay, male culture of bigger cities (Herring). From this, it can be seen that non-excludability was barely achieved by the GLM, and if at all, then mostly only in the outcomes of the movement, not in the fight for them. Also, it shows that an inclusive, united force, like at the start of the movement, does not necessarily lead to non-exclusive laws, while a separated fight for rights can very much lead to rights that apply to everyone. Even though the movement is exclusive, the outcomes are not because they also apply to individuals that did not “contribute toward its supply” (Hart & Cowhey, 1977, p. 355).

Indivisibility of Benefits

A major reason why some members of the LGBT community benefited more from the GLM, was the implementation of different ordinances and policies in distinct cities and states (Bernstein, 2002). Based on solely the nation-wide changes in law, the indivisibility of benefits would be fulfilled, but this is not the case. According to Wald, Button, and Rienzo the major factors that determine whether gay rights are protected in a specific place are the population size, “the extent of political and organizational mobilization among the gay and lesbian community, [and] the political opportunity structure in the locality” (1996, p. 1152). As already mentioned, gay activist groups concentrated their work on large, urban cities (Herring, 2007). Therefore, living in a bigger city with a structured network of gay and lesbian activist groups increased the benefit an individual got from the GLM. Examples of these advantageous cities were Los Angeles and San Francisco, where the first gay and lesbian rights groups, Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis respectively, were formed. In addition to this history in gay rights activism, the liberationist organizations of the GLM accomplished several gay rights in those cities, like workplace rights at city level in San Francisco. The San Francisco police department started

employing gay men and lesbians as officers in the early 80s, which was very uncommon in other places at that time (Turk, 2013). A Los Angeles based housing program for LGBT people living on the streets, called Hudson House, contributed significantly to gay rights. Due to Hudson House and the Los Angeles Gay Community Services Center, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development changed their definition of ‘family’ to include same-sex relationships in 1977. Beforehand, public housing was reserved for families that were linked by marriage or blood-related, therefore discriminating gay and lesbian relationships (Baldwin, 2014). Considering these examples, it is clear that LGBT people living in urban areas like big Californian cities, benefitted more than those living in rural areas. Consequently, there exists no clear indivisibility of benefits.

Impossibility of Appropriation

It is nearly impossible to establish an ownership of gay rights or the GLM in general, nevertheless, there exists the possibility to use gay activism for own purposes, as it can be seen in Harvey Milk’s political campaigns. In 1977, Harvey Milk was elected supervisor in San Francisco and he was the first that did not hide his homosexuality. He is an example of a political figure that used his contribution to gay rights as means to push his campaign. The way he used them differed between his multiple intents to get voted into office (Foss, 1994). In the beginning he stressed the fact of being gay to align with marginalized groups in society and portray himself as a “humane alternative to the political machine” (Foss, 1994, p. 24). However, this did not get him elected. Only in his fourth attempt he succeeded, primarily because he appealed to a broader audience by presenting himself as a politician rather than a gay rights activist (Foss). The fact that distancing himself from the GLM brought the hoped-for results shows that appropriation of gay rights is to some extent possible, but not convenient. It is more beneficial for political LGBT figures to increase gay rights, rather than using them for other purposes (Reynolds, 2013). This way they can act as “advocates, educators, and physical embodiments of a community shut out of public life” (Reynolds, 2013, p. 269), instead of decreasing the fulfillment of the criterion of impossibility of appropriation.

Conclusion

When applying the CGC on the GLM, the not completely accomplished criterions show that progress in gay rights was made, but not to a degree of total success. Although the created laws entirely fulfill the joint supply criterion, the alienation of homosexuals of color and gender-transgressing people leads to a subtraction of their availability of the good. Similarly, the non-excludability criterion is fulfilled by the inclusive alliances of activist groups and all-including policies, but decreased by the break of gay activist groups in itself and with lesbians. Those policies had an indivisible benefit if they were applied nationally, but the fact that many were just implemented in cities or states, decreases the benefit. Contrastingly, the GLM has a strong impossibility of appropriation, that could just be altered by the seldom use of gay rights for individual purposes in political campaigns.

This demonstrates that, although the GLM was responsible for many of LGBT people’s basic rights, there is still room for further gains. This is important because it shows that the fight for LGBT rights has not yet reached an end. One just has to look at the people living in one of the 40 countries where being part of the LGBT community is still a crime to understand this.