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# Nation and History in the Mobilization of Collective Identity Among LGBT Czechs

## **Cover Page Footnote**

I'd like to thank my thesis advisor, Professor Colin Beck, for his patience and encouragement throughout this project. This research was conducted as part of my thesis in fulfillment of a BA in Sociology at Pomona College, and his generosity in both feedback and spirit was critical to its successful completion. I also would like to show sincere appreciation for my other professors at Pomona College and during my time abroad in Prague for preparing me with invaluable analytical and conceptual tools and reminding me of my positionality in relationship to the work of Czech academics and organizers. Lastly, this work would not have been possible without the generosity of those who shared their stories with a young researcher. Thank you to all the interview respondents who gave this research its life with their everyday experiences.

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# Nation and History in the Mobilization of Collective Identity Among LGBT Czechs

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**ABSTRACT**

Social movement theories are often built on Western and US-centric understandings of civic life and the values that underpin it. Studying participation in the LGBT movement in Prague, Czech Republic provides one context for complicating such underlying assumptions. Within theory on mobilization, collective identity is said to act as a conduit for developing personal investment through individuals' identities. Interviews with LGBT people in Prague, however, show that there is little sense of or desire for collective identity among these potential participants. Czech national history contextualizes respondents' distinct descriptions of the role of civic life and activism, value of private life, and contemporary situation for LGBT people in Prague. Drawing from these descriptions, and an analysis of the influence of values on movement participation in the Czech Republic and other CEE countries, I argue that nation and history complicate the application of collective identity for mobilization in Prague's LGBT movement.

**KEYWORDS**

collective identity, mobilization, social movements, Czech Republic, LGBT

In the social movement sub-field of sociology, participation is often understood through Western and US-centric understandings of the role of civic life and activism. While social movements and engagement with this form of the public sphere can be found across different cultural experiences, the predominate role of Western European and US based movements in this field has shaped the values that underline its theoretical contributions. Studying participation in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) movement in Prague, Czech Republic provides one context for destabilizing those underlying assumptions.

Within social movement theory on mobilization, collective identity is often discussed as a way people are mobilized into movement participation. Yet, developing a collective identity among LGBT Czechs, particularly in relationship to Prague's LGBT movement, is deterred by the role collective identity played in controlling and denying people's freedom in Czech national history, in particular the communist period from 1948 to 1989. What resonates more than a collective identity are the values of personal freedom and privacy that emerged in response to this history. These values have shaped how Czech LGBT people view their contemporary situation and the role activism should play in addressing their experiences as LGBT people.

Drawing from interviews with twenty LGBT people living in Prague, along with an analysis of movement participation and values in the Czech Republic and other Central-Eastern European (CEE) countries from the European Social Survey (ESS), I argue that nation and history interfere with the application of collective identity as a tool for mobilization in Prague's LGBT movement. A nation and its particular history shapes the values that underlie how people understand the role of identity, activism, and public life, which are all critical for the emergence of collective identity and thus impact social movement mobilization. This is mirrored in the Czech LGBT movement's struggle to mobilize participation, as expressed by respondents involved in LGBT organizations, and as evident in the ESS analysis of mobilization in the Czech Republic more generally.

The argument for this paper is presented in five sections, beginning with two theoretical sections, first in social movement mobilization theory and then in the history of LGBT people in the Czech Republic. These are followed by a section on Data and Methods, and then the analysis section. The latter takes up both the interviews with LGBT people living in Prague and the quantitative exploration of ESS data on the Czech Republic and other CEE countries. Lastly, a conclusion section ties the arguments presented throughout the paper together into a call for further study of identity-based movements in non-Western countries.

### **COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN SOCIAL MOVEMENT MOBILIZATION**

Within social movement theory on mobilization, this paper looks specifically at collective identity, which often comes up as a way potential participants are mobilized into participation. Collective identity is said to mobilize participants by acting as a conduit for developing personal investment in individuals' identities and leading to sustained movement participation. Mobilization processes are critical for a social movement to succeed on the whole, for as Munson (2008) states, "activists simply don't mobilize themselves" (p. 189). Without a strong set of participants working towards the cause, a social movement will be weakened in its ability to make an impact or even be

heard. In this section I briefly discuss some of the literature on collective identity in social movement mobilization in order to unpack its reliance on Western conceptions of civic participation and the boundary work of identity politics.

### ***Collective Identity's Uses in Mobilization***

In the mobilization literature, collective identity can either be pre-existing or created by the movement. Simon, Trötschel, and Dähne (2008) conceptualize these two roles as either a “push” to participate from membership in a pre-existing collective identity or a “pull” to participate in order to gain an attractive collective identity: “In the first case I already occupy a place or position in the social world which makes participation for me the natural thing to do. In the second case I am still on my way to that place” (p. 945). This “first case” is more documented and most relevant to our discussion of how the possession of a collective identity would influence mobilization. In this case, a collective identity serves as an already united group that can be mobilized by connecting membership to the collective identity or participation in a movement. This role is based on the idea that “one of the most powerful motivators of individual action is the desire to confirm through behavior a cherished identity” (Friedman & McAdam, 1992, p. 169).

The desire to claim a “social attachment and new sense of identity” provides the incentive that movements capitalize on to mobilize participation (Friedman & McAdam, 1992, p. 157). This works largely because of the process of “identity affirmation.” Simon et al.’s (2008) work describes the power of collective identity to mobilize people based on its relationship to “a sense of inner obligation to enact one’s collective identity” (p. 935-936). They connect this inner obligation to the process of identity affirmation, which is where participating or acting in agreement with a desired collective identity allows an individual to affirm their personal identity as a member of the collective (p. 936). Identity affirmation is motivated by the fact that identities in general are rarely stable or able to be permanently ‘attained,’ and thus require ongoing work on the part of the individual to affirm to themselves and others that they indeed possess a certain identity (p. 936).

### ***Boundary Work in Collective Identity***

Either way they use or deploy it, using collective identity for mobilization necessitates framing and boundary work in order to establish who is part of this identity and who is not (Haenfler, 2012). This turn follows Polletta and Jasper’s (2001) call for greater attention to the tools and formative materials by which collective identity is constructed, and begins to direct our attention towards the assumptions that underlie this tool for mobilization. Friedman and McAdam (1992) argue for the necessity of boundary work in building a collective identity, stating, “In order to reward participants by conferring this identity, it has to be possible simultaneously to exclude non-participants from adopting the identity” (p. 165). One example of how boundary work reified a collective identity in the context of a social movement is Taylor and Whittier’s (1992) study of the US lesbian feminist movement, where they found that while boundaries are “central” to forming collective identity in that they promote a sense of commonality and “frame interaction between members of the in-group and the out-group,” they depend on the incorporation of relevant cultural values in a specific context, even as these may

be external to what a movement seeks to create (p. 111).

Boundary work within collective identity always takes place in a specific cultural context. As Jasper (2008) argues, fixing the boundaries of a collective identity's membership relies on both member and nonmember perceptions of the group. In other words, collective identity has to locate itself in the existing "system of relations," it cannot attempt to "construct its identity independently of its recognition...by other social and political actors" (Melucci, 1995, p. 47-48). All identity is constructed through interactions with other people (Jasper, 2008, p. 88). This interaction between members and non-members therefore invests a collective identity with externally-constructed definitions. Whittier (2002) argues that this relationship shapes how a movement produces meaning as well, pointing to the influence of forces from both the internal (movement culture, discourse, individual identities) and external (hegemonic culture, oppositional discourse, emotion cultures and norms) (p. 293). Collective identities are in part dictated by the terms of the existing system, which is shaped by contemporary and historical power.

### ***Limitations of Using Collective Identity in Mobilization***

One limitation that emerges from the assumptions and implications of using collective identity as a tool for mobilization is the constraining dialogic nature of a marginalized group's collective identity and the dominant societal narratives. Minow (1980) calls this the "dilemma of difference" (p. 20). This dilemma is the challenge of trying to stop the exclusion of a group that was constructed out of difference "without employing and, in that sense, legitimating those very differences" (p. 47). Another other key limitation is provided by queer theory, which suggests that in movements that seek to destabilize fixed notions of identity, collective identity is difficult if not incompatible (Gamson, 1995). Owens et al. (2010) references Gamson's argument and connects it to a point that mirrors Minow's (1980) "dilemma of difference," stating that "boundary work regarding collective identities such as race, gender, and sexuality can sometimes vacillate between taking on the goal of deconstructing boundaries and taking on the goal of fixing the boundaries to mobilize on the basis of them" (p. 491).

Uses of collective identity must be contextualized in relationship to the role power has played in shaping marginalized identities in relationship to norms and values. Given these limitations, the costs of a collective identity might out-weigh the benefits it has for mobilizing, and therefore may not be a productive, valuable or appropriate tool for certain groups. Jasper and McGarry (2015) point to these limitations in their recent book, and come to a similar conclusion as this literature review:

Once seen as a great advantage to a group, allowing inspiration and mobilization of members for political action, identities are now viewed by many scholars as straitjackets that distort and repress more than they help individuals. (p. 2)

How can the limitations of this theory of collective identity then explain why organizing around a shared sense of community built on collective identity is specifically absent among LGBT Czechs people? If we begin with an understanding that the theory explained in this review emerges from predominately Western academics looking at

movements that take place within the United States or Western Europe, answering this question begins with comparing the Western academic theory of collective identity to a non-Western case study of movement mobilization.

### **HISTORY OF LGBT PEOPLE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

The LGBT movement in Prague is one example of a movement where deploying collective identity in order to mobilize LGBT people appears ineffective, if not inappropriate. This case study of LGBT people and the LGBT movement in Prague thus brings light to the way theoretical understandings of collective identity are dependent on distinct relationship to civic life and experiences with individual and group identities. Moreover, it offers a critique of collective identity as a tool for mobilization by demonstrating the way collective identity's necessary framing and boundary work relies on a Western conception of sexual identity that may be at odds with the national context a non-Western movement might contend with.

### ***Positionality in Studying Across Difference***

One of the central arguments of this paper is that understanding the experiences of Czech LGBT people requires an understanding of Czech history, specifically the history of LGBT people in the country. In pointing to the critical difference between the Eastern and Western studies of sexuality, Kulpa and Mizielińska (2011) state, “The history of Western queer theory, significantly Stonewall and the ‘identitarian politics’ that come from this watershed moment, have not shaped the experiences of LGBT people in the ‘East’ as it has the ‘West’” (p. 2). Hall (2009) also notes that while the majority of theory on sexual identities is extrapolated from “Western, largely urban, late modern populations,” people who fall outside that group often “do not embrace same-sex orientation or behavior as a primary of defining component of their social identity” and “do not form meaningful communities or political organizations above the level of sexual or friendship networks” (p. 55).

Studying LGBT people throughout history poses a difficult challenge within itself, and I therefore draw on the Czech academics who are writing on these topics while also drawing on queer theory to bring an appropriate methodology. This methodology recognizes and works within the temporal nature of identity categories, the relationship between Western homosexual discourse and global understandings of non-heterosexual acts, and the significance of positionality in studying across difference. To do this I draw from the work of Grewal and Kaplan (1994), who call for a transnational feminism based on comparison and connections rather than ahistorical relativism. They critique the idea of a transnational center and periphery that privileges the West as a hegemonic force and the other as a passive receptacle, arguing instead for a model of transnational cultural exchange that highlights a “multidirectional flow of culture” (p. 12, p. 8). Their feminist critique accounts for the complex processes of globalization that bring about “scattered hegemonies,” in other words the intersection of power, agential nature, and cultural flow between the local and global that “thoroughly infiltrates the other” (11).

Funk's (2006) personal reflections on her experiences as a white American feminist working with Czech women after the Velvet Revolution helps connect these queer theoretical ideas to this specificity of the Czech case study. She similarly points to the

need to address the power inequalities between the West and East that bore tension around feminism in the Czech Republic during this transition period. The problem of how to study across this power inequality and difference is an intrinsic part of my research, grounding me in a reflexive interpretation of Czech academics' own navigation of their relationship with Western LGBT discourse.

### ***Transition After the Velvet Revolution***

Given the limited documentation of LGBT life before the communist period, this history of LGBT Czechs begins with the transitional period immediately following the Velvet Revolution (for more information on LGBT life during communism, see Lisková, 2013, Procházka, 1997, and Sokolová, 2014). While this focus is in part a limitation of the available literature, this period of transition is especially relevant for the contemporary conditions of LGBT rights in the country. As Czech academic Sokolová (2004) states, "The contemporary history of sexuality in the Czech Republic is very much shaped by the confrontation and contestation of the ideas, institutions and economic conditions of the socialist past and the democratic present" (p. 263).

The Velvet Revolution was the period of transition out of communism, a result of massive student strikes and public demonstrations occurring when the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was already politically isolated following the fall of the Berlin Wall (David & Choi, 2005). It was also at this time that Czechoslovakia separated into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which came with a process of large-scale privatization, the adoption of capitalism, and integration into the EU. Stulhofer and Stanfort (2005) argue that because sexuality is linked to and influenced by religion, family, and societal institutions, as all these institutions were changed in the transitions, the dynamics of sexuality were changed as well (p. 45). One instance of this change is the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1961 (Procházka, 1997, p. 246). Through this decriminalization, state-mandated acceptance of LGBT people in the Czech Republic was pushed onto people as another importation of Western ideas rather than something originating from among Czech people. Sokolová (2004) unpacks this popular Czech feeling that homosexuality was not a "natural component" of Czech society and is a product of the transition into liberal democracy, "something 'alien' that does not concern them personally" (p. 260).

### ***Sexual Citizenship, Tolerance, and Civic Engagement in the Contemporary***

Touching on the Czech Republic's joining of the European Union (EU) in 2004 can help illuminate how the transition after communism was influenced by the West and the consequences of this influence on LGBT Czechs. Stychin's (2001) work explains the influence of the nation (through the concept of citizenship) on sexual identity and the subsequent formation and goals of LGBT movements. In 2010, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation that EU member states combat discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, a recommendation that was signed by the Czech Republic (Prokopík, 2014). Stychin (2001) questioned how engagement with such international legal and political discourses can potentially disrupt local discourse on sexuality.

*The Analysis of the Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Minority in the*

*Czech Republic* (2007) is a documentation of the conditions of LGBT life in the Czech Republic through primarily a legal perspective. One of the important takeaways from this data is the way LGBT community is described:

There are many homosexuals who have very strong social ties within their minority without desiring to present themselves to the majority as a member thereof or even take part in public life as such. [...] The majority of the Czech LGBT community falls into this very group, because public involvement of LGBT people is still not the norm in our lands. (p. 10)

This description offers important context for the argument of Guay (2011) and Prokopík (2014), who both offer pointed critiques of Czech tolerance of LGBT people as assessed by the 2013 and 2014 Pew Research Center polls on global acceptance and belief about morality of homosexuality. Guay's (2011) criticism rests on a comparison of the Czech Republic to Western countries: "There is a low level of organization among the gay and lesbian communities in the Czech Republic; the long-term work put into building a gay society similar to those flourishing in Western Europe, the United States, and Canada just isn't there" (p. 111). Prokopík's (2014) conference paper adds to this analysis with an assessment that LGBT Czechs legitimize this form of tolerance by not drawing attention to their problems. (See Fojtová and Sokolová (2014) for a historical perspective on this argument.)

Identity politics were coopted under state socialism, as well as abused by the Czech Republic's history of nationalist foreign occupiers (the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Nazi Germany, and the USSR) (McCajor, 2009, p. 53). After being forced to live under an ideology that many at one time believed would bring the Czech Republic prosperity and equality there lingers a sense of skepticism towards aligning oneself with any ideology (Guay, 2011, p. 110). This can even manifest as a "general resentment against politicizing one's identity," as Sokolová (2010) notes about Czech lesbian artists. Moreover, Flam (2001) asserts that Central European's "constructions of reality are largely immune to new social movements" (p. 171). She attributes this in part to less interest in identity politics that might bring a sense of collective identity, and suggests there is a tension between mobilizing around identity-based social movements and a desire to maintain currently held identities, tradition, and the status quo. Howard (2003) further discusses the weakness of civil society in CEE countries after communism, arguing that civic life is tense because of the extensive control of public identity during the communist period. Privacy and independence are valued and preferred. These authors make the crucial connections between the history of the Czech Republic, a contemporary aversion to civil engagement and community action, and the resulting stagnation in LGBT activism and rights.

### ***Historical and Theoretical Incompatibilities with Collective Identity***

What underlies this historical account is the difference between Western LGBT social movements' use of collective identity and the context in which LGBT Czechs face their current situation. Given this, should collective identity even be what Czech LGBT people are aspiring towards? Jasper and McGarry's (2015) argue that while collective

identity is “‘fictional’ because of the complex cultural meanings it unavoidably elides,” it is a “necessary fiction [...] because of the strategic advantages of identities” (p. 13). As seen in the previous section, within the social movement literature collective identity has been presented as key for mobilizing people in movements. Yet, these “complex cultural meanings” seem to still rest within an assumption of shared perception of civic life and the role of activism. Returning to queer theory, Joshua Gamson’s (1995) work critiques the necessity of collective identity. He argues that identity politics falter when they are deployed in movements that seek to destabilize identity, such as queer movements. He points to how fixed identities are products of power. Both of their work alongside the data presented in the next section encourage an imagination of what alternative forms of organizing, outside of relying on collective identity, might exist for the LGBT movement in Prague.

This section has presented an argument for the invaluableness of history in understanding contemporary Czech values regarding activism and civic life among LGBT people. While the majority of the authors cited in this section are Czech or from the CEE region, this history has been bookmarked by Western queer theorists, leading back to what started this section: the difficult reality of studying across difference from within a Western-dominated field. If nothing else, this is a testament to the reflexive and ongoing practice of de-centering assumptions and finding connections that must underlie this type of research. Looking back to the argument presented by Hall and Read (2006) and Sokolová (2014) presented in the introduction, one way to address this power differential is to work with the voices of Czech LGBT people themselves.

## **DATA AND METHODS**

Extended interviews with twenty LGBT people living in Prague, Czech Republic are the foundation of this research. From February to July 2015, I connected with and interviewed 20 respondents who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual and were living in Prague (all respondent names have been changed to protect anonymity). Although three of the interview respondents also identified as trans women, this did not provide a large enough sample to speak on the specific experiences of trans people in Prague distinct from the more general LGBT movement. Further work on this topic should seek to address the lack of work on Czech trans people.

The interview respondents were found through snowball sampling that began with connections made through my study abroad program, LGBT organizations, and the social media network of LGBT cafés. As LGBT people are an ‘invisible’ minority, it was necessary for people to self-identify, hence the choice of this sampling method. Given that I speak very minimal Czech and could not secure a translator with my funding, it was necessary to conduct the interviews in English. With one interviewee, the use of a mobile electronic translator was used. This certainly limited my sample, eliminating people who are less educated or older, as well as constraining the respondents’ descriptions.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics on Variables from Czech 2012 ESS Analysis, N=1375

	N (%)	Mean (S.D.)
Member Of Group Discriminated Against Based On Sexuality		
No	1372 (99.8%)	-
Yes	3 (.2%)	-
Activism Participation Index <sup>a</sup>	-	0.7 (1.1)
Total	1375 (100%)	-

Notes: a) Index created by computing 7 measures of activism participation measured in participation within the last 12 months. Participation in none of these ways is represented as 0, while participation in all is represented as 7.

Because the findings from the interviews are limited in their applicability to LGBT people living in Prague and their relationship to a specifically LGBT movement, previously collected data from the European Social Survey (ESS) is also analyzed. The ESS data tests whether the interview findings could be generalized to participation in non-LGBT movements, the non-LGBT population, and outside the specific context of Prague. Specifically, data on the Czech Republic from 2014 is used to compare movement participation and values held by these survey respondents. For the former, movement participation is measured through an activism participation index that sums respondents' participation in seven forms of activism as they reported over the last 12 months (see Table 1). These forms included boycotting certain products, contacting a government official, working in a political party or action group, working in another organization or association, wearing or displaying a campaign badge/sticker, signing a petition, or taking part in a lawful public demonstration. For the latter, the ESS includes a module for measuring human values, developed by Schwartz (1992). He designed this series of questions to measure 10 traits, of which three were chosen for their potential to reflect the values related to participation, as described by respondents in the interviews: conformity, traditionalism and universalism.

Since the ESS data does not accurately capture the percentage of respondents who are LGBT, with the only measure being 'belonging to a group discriminated based on sexuality' which makes up less than 1% of the sample, this data can be assumed to not capture LGBT people in particular (see Table 1). Comparing the findings from interviews with the 2014 ESS data on the Czech Republic thus allows for generalizing the argument outside the LGBT movement, LGBT people, and the city of Prague. Yet, in order to fully make the argument that the relationship between limited movement participation and the influence of values that are products of national history, comparison between the Czech Republic and other CEE countries is made. Other CEE countries were chosen

in order to compare countries that had similar recent national experiences to the Czech Republic, in other words were former members of the Soviet Bloc, but also had different histories prior. The countries chosen were thus Germany, Slovakia, and Hungary.

### **LGBT CZECH EXPERIENCES OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND ACTIVISM IN PRAGUE**

First drawing from the interviews conducted with LGBT people living in Prague, I argue that collective identity does not exist among LGBT Czechs. Then, incorporating the results from the ESS data, I delve into the conditional tolerance of the general Czech population towards LGBT people, how different LGBT Czechs perceive the contemporary situation in Prague, and the way these both are informed by perceptions of activism and the LGBT movement in particular. Following that, I argue both that the basis of these perceptions and relationships can be best understood through the valuation of private over public life, and that these values are products of Czech national history. Lastly, I turn to participation in activism within the Czech Republic at large, as well as within various other CEE countries (Germany, Hungary and Slovakia), to show how this relationship between national history and movement participation might extend beyond the LGBT movement in Prague.

#### ***Questioning the Existence of an LGBT Community***

When asked whether there was a LGBT community in Prague, the idea of community seemed elusive and inappropriate to many respondents. Although some did identify a form of LGBT community, none described what is understood as collective identity nor did they see it functioning as a mobilizing tool. This disinterest towards a community based around being LGBT was shared across respondents, regardless of participation in LGBT movement organizations. Respondents specifically did not recognize a LGBT community that revolved around a collective LGBT identity and often talked about community in conjunction with activism. This is why, even as the term community is used in the interview guide and thus in the conversations with respondents, I analyze their perception of community through the sociological concept of collective identity as it relates to movement participation.

David, a 24-year-old bisexual man, didn't think there was an LGBT community in Prague nor a reason to have one:

...to be honest I'm not even sure it's good to build some like strongly interconnected community around sexual orientation as a base. I'm not really convinced it's a good reason, it's like building a community of people with blue eyes. It's something biological. I mean it sounds a bit confused because I'm actually a member of a group that's trying to build something like this. Well, I'm trying to find friends who have something in common with me, that doesn't mean I have a general feeling of community with hundreds or thousands of gay people in this country.

He doesn't see sexual orientation as a meaningful basis for group identity, even as he himself is involved in a student-based LGBT organization. Lukáš, a 34-year-old gay man involved in the leadership of an LGBT organization, similarly thought that movements

should be based around issues rather than identities: “Yeah, so there are very different organizations, and I think by focusing on one or two things it is much easier that you cover the topic to more deep, to more depth, than if you are just uniting gay people just because they are gay.” Petra, a 27-year-old lesbian woman had a similar perspective, even as she was not involved in any LGBT organizations. She preferred to be in a group with people who had the same hobbies rather than the same sexual orientation.

Another reason respondents disliked the idea of a LGBT community was because of their perception of the political nature of such a group. Petra saw danger in being a part of any form of group identity:

I don't have a need to be in community and say I'm a part of LGBT community, let's do something together. And it's horrible because what I really don't like is to be part of some big group [...]. I just don't want to be a part of some group, where we share only one opinion but the rest is absolutely different.

The influence of Czech history is apparent here, as living under oppressive ideologies has encouraged a skepticism towards aligning oneself with any ideology and a general distancing from politicizing identity (Guay, 2011; Sokolová, 2010). For Štefan, a 29-year-old gay man originally from Slovakia, even the language of using LGBT “boxed” him in: “I don't like these boxes, I actually a little bit hate the shortcut LGBT. It just brings something with it that I don't consider myself to be part of.” This general sense of discomfort with being a member of a large politicized group of people is also reflected in how Pavel, a 40-year-old gay man, noted that there are not many communities in Prague in general. This is consistent with the lack of religious communities, given the large majority of atheist people in Prague, as well as the predominant uniformity of Czech ethnicity across the country.

### ***Conditional Tolerance and the General Population's Perception of LGBT People***

While most respondents did not view themselves as part of a collective identity, their understanding of the general Czech population's view of LGBT people is less heterogeneous. Petra noted that the general Czech view of LGBT people is often marked by public displays of promiscuity and assumptions about LGBT people leading abnormal lifestyles. Given this popular perception, she thought LGBT people needed more opportunities to be visible in non-sexual situations to help people see them as “normal”. On the other hand, as Pavel noted, LGBT activism on the whole is perceived by non-LGBT people as “calling for special treatment,” and as he noted, “nobody gets special treatment in the Czech Republic.” Special treatment isn't permissible because, as David explained, there is a “huge built in social sense of equality” that “gives this sense of uniformity and that everybody should be the same.” Therefore trying to seem more “normal” would be incompatible with participating in LGBT activism.

Nearly all respondents expressed that they experienced very little discrimination, in spite of these perceptions of LGBT people. In national surveys, Czechs report a high level of tolerance towards LGBT people (see the 2013 and 2014 polls conducted by Pew Research Center). Many respondents agreed that Czechs are tolerant, but they also distinguished tolerance from respect. As Martin, a 21-year-old gay man, said:

My attitude towards tolerance is that we tolerate smoking and alcohol drinking, we tolerate prostitution, we tolerate drug abuse, but homosexuality isn't bad, homosexuality don't cause problems. So the Czechs don't should to tolerate homosexuality, they should to respect homosexuality.

Jaroslav, a 39-year-old gay men, further discussed the dynamic between this purported tolerance and the reality of non-LGBT Czechs' attitudes:

Jaroslav: Because Czech society looks very tolerant, but it's not true. Because if somebody—because in every research most people tell, I don't care about gays and lesbians, I don't care, I support them, blah blah blah. But then if somebody has gay or lesbian neighbors, the situation changes a lot and they are very angry with this.

I refer to this phenomenon as conditional tolerance, where non-LGBT people tolerate LGBT people until it begins to affect their lives by being too visible or public.

Indifference is one source of this conditional tolerance among Czech people, as David explained that “most Czech people they have this attitude that they just don't care about what other people do in their personal life. Like Czech people tend to be very indifferent to other people, like there's very low community feeling generally.” He went on to say that Czechs are usually focused on their close family and friends and are “indifferent” to strangers. This indifference is thus directly connected to a sense of each person prioritizing their own issues and their friends over public issues, to the notable extent that they do not care what other people do. Lenka, 26-year-old lesbian woman, also understood conditional tolerance in relationship to this prioritization of the individual among Czechs when she said, “I think they ignore [LGBT people]. I think it's okay if it's not in my family, not in my school, not in my work.” She points out that non-LGBT people do not care what others do as long as it does not affect their personal circle. Pavel also discussed how this kind of conditional tolerance is in reaction to Czech history:

Czech tolerance is usually that you don't care, don't care about what your neighbor is doing, now that we live in a free society you don't need to spy on him, you don't need to say to the state police how many children they have, how many times they are using the shower—things like this were really recorded during communism, everything was recorded. [...] So now it means just live and let live. But in the same way, why to grant any special rights? Why to change anything? We can be free as it is.

### ***Different Perceptions of Contemporary Situation Among LGBT People***

Although many respondents described the general Czech population as being conditionally tolerant towards LGBT Czechs to some extent, their response to this situation differed. This included different perceptions on whether addressing LGBT people's unequal rights was necessary at all. When Zuzana described her experience working for one LGBT organization, Prague Pride, she noted the backlash the

organization had received from some LGBT people who are content with the current situation. Ondřej, a 21-year-old gay man, did not participate in the organizing around Prague Pride, but he did attend their annual Pride festival which he described as a “carnival.” However, he recognized that other LGBT Czechs had a different attitude towards the festival, as “something they don’t want to see.” Many other respondents noted that Prague Pride was a contentious event among LGBT people as well, mostly because of the way it contributed to the general population’s association between LGBT people and explicit public sexuality. Štefan was one of the respondents who didn’t see this kind of activism as a solution to LGBT people’s situation in the Czech Republic because to him it conflicted with LGBT people being perceived as ‘normal.’

Some LGBT people are satisfied by the kind of conditional tolerance that exists in Prague. Jakub, a 26-year-old gay man, did not have any interest in doing activist work because, as he said, “I think now it’s not necessary in Prague. [...] There are no needs to do this.” Violent discrimination against LGBT people is quite low in the Czech Republic, as is reported by both respondents and in the *Analysis of the Situation* (2007). Many LGBT people in the Czech Republic are able to live their lives as they wish, if they do not want to be married or have children. As Lenka observed, “Maybe they haven’t had need for equal rights because they are fine like they are. Maybe they don’t want a child or wedding or something.” Some respondents certainly felt like they were comfortable with their current lives, and thus did not see the need to do anything to change it.

### ***Engagement with Activism and Perceived Roles of an LGBT Movement***

Many of the respondents who felt uncomfortable with their current lives participated in an LGBT organization. Jaroslav, for example, was one of the respondents most explicitly unhappy with the differences between LGBT people’s rights and non-LGBT people’s rights. This dissatisfaction was channeled into leadership of a major LGBT organization in Prague. Yet, as elaborated in the beginning of this section, the majority of respondents who participated in LGBT organizations did so because of a problem they saw facing LGBT people, not because of a sense of collective identity. David best articulated this common perception that participating in activism had nothing to do with a sense of collective identity:

That doesn’t mean that with everyone that’s a part of the movement and if there’s like tens of thousands of people in that protest, that doesn’t mean that I feel like I’m a member of that community and personally connected to all of them, definitely not. Not because we have the same cause or because we’re all LGBT, no. Sorry but that’s just not enough, that doesn’t seem right.

David did not see a collective identity forming in the LGBT movement, neither in mobilizing people to join or something that manifested through one’s participation.

Because not all LGBT people perceive their situation in Prague as negative, many feel comfortable not taking action. This leads to a shortage of volunteers in LGBT organizations, as respondents who were leaders in such organizations noted. For example, when talking about his work at an LGBT organization, Lukáš explained that

the two big challenges he faced were finding money and the lack of “man-power.” Respondents’ accounts of low mobilization are also reflective of movement participation in the Czech Republic at large. Over 50% of Czech survey respondents in the ESS participated in no forms of activism within the last 12 months, 33% participated in at least one form, and none participated in all the forms listed in the index (see Table 1 for more on Activism Participation Index). Similarly, 45% of the 20 interview respondents were active participants in an LGBT organization, and 55% were not. Among the interview respondents, the difference in participation often came down to not only how comfortable people were with the current situation, but also different perceptions about the use of activism.

All respondents thought there were some issues that LGBT people faced, but they varied on the necessity of taking action on them. Some respondents who were not interested in activism thought that the LGBT situation would continue to move in a positive direction even if no action from activists is taken. Varya noted the EU’s influence in her reasoning for this: “But even without help it goes that direction you know, it’s part of the European Union, more and more countries legalized [gay marriage] right now.” Respondents who did not participate in activism, often said that it was not the right time, even if they recognized legal or social issues facing themselves or other Czech LGBT people. As Jakub stated, “I think that gay couples should have the right to adopt children, but I think the right time for this will come in five or ten years.”

Pavel saw these various forms of putting a hold on activism until it is “the right time” in a very negative way. In his estimation, some LGBT people want to wait on taking action because they do not want to provoke or disrupt or in other words take the risks of participating in activism, given that they can live with little discomfort in the current situation. He also perceived some LGBT people’s decision not to participate as coming from a skepticism towards activism in general:

Here, there’s again this mistrust and you really have to convince people that what you are doing is really going to help them or will really change something, it’s not going to make it only worse, that it has really—there is a point in doing it.

Activism is perceived as potentially making things worse because of the connection made between the ideology of activism and the heavy control of life Czechs have seen throughout their history. As Ondřej similarly said, “I think that’s the biggest trait of Czechs, is being skeptical, like I think every time something new comes, Czech people just see the bad things first.” Seeing the potential for “bad things first” is a logical way of thinking in a nation whose history that has often put it’s people in a position of deference to ideological power.

### **Valuation of Private Life Over Public Life**

The proceeding sub-sections have all touched on or alluded to this central argument, what I find to be the grounding motivation for these various dynamics around participation in LGBT activism: the normative prioritization of private life in Czech society. Respondents consistently discussed forthright or described in themselves the valuation of private lives (including close friends, family, and personal freedom) over

participation in public life (including politics, activism, and the freedoms of an abstract collective). They connected this value with conditional tolerance, participation in activism, and, most significantly, the influence of Czech history on contemporary life in Prague. Martin was one respondent who connected the conditional tolerance towards LGBT people with the prioritization of private lives:

[Non-LGBT people] don't fight against [LGBT rights], but don't support them. [...] I think that in Czech nature is looking after about myself only. The Czechs are relaxed people, they are glad to looking after about themselves but not other people. [...] The Czechs are interested in their own problems. The Czechs are interested in high taxes, low living conditions of them, but don't interested in problems of other people especially minorities.

He pointed to how non-LGBT Czechs' conditional tolerance of LGBT Czechs is in part due to the prioritization of the problems that affect their more personal lives. This leads them to both not care about LGBT Czechs and not support their issues. Šárka, a 35 year old lesbian woman, also made the connection between the valuation of private over public life and LGBT respondents' attitude and involvement in activism. She linked people's lack of public and civic engagement with their prioritization of their "inner circle," in other words their private lives. Jiří further speculated that Czech history influenced this valuation of private life:

Maybe it's because of the experience of communism which was very centered... For communism it was good collective or to do things collectively, and it was the point of it, the source of power of communism was the collectivity. And now people wanted in 90s to distance from it because they view it as bad or oppressive regime. So maybe more people want to live their lives in more individual way.

During the communist period, Czech citizens were forced to participate in public parades and demonstrations of support for the communist party. There was a lack of trust as strangers, neighbors, coworkers, even friends would rat one another out. After the Velvet Revolution, individual freedom and privacy became important on a national scale. I argue that this sentiment is still held by Czechs as a value in which private life is priority over public life.

Czech history has informed the shape of Prague's contemporary LGBT movement participation. Respondents connected the prioritization of private life over public, the shape of conditional tolerance, and the incompatibility of collective identity seen throughout their interviews. Historical experiences on the national level informed the values regarding civic life, and in turn private life. These values then help to shape other values, such as those held about tolerating minority groups, the role of activism, and desire for group identity. Ultimately, all of these values inform the decision of whether to participate in movement activism or not.

### ***Participation in Czech Society at Large***

Respondents' firsthand accounts of the dynamics surrounding participation in

LGBT activism present an interconnected web of values and national history. Yet by the nature of these interviews, this data is limited to activism around LGBT issues as specifically experienced by LGBT people in Prague. As seen in the theoretical section, LGBT identity and movement have had a particular history that is distinct from other identity movements, let alone movements not organized around identity. Moreover, the experiences of these particular Czech LGBT people might differ from those who do not live in Prague. To see to what extent these findings are indeed specific to LGBT people in Prague, data collected throughout the Czech Republic via the ESS is used as a comparison to the interview findings.

Table 2 shows models for the three values used in the ESS's human values measures that I identified as similar to the values referenced in the interview findings. These three values are conformity, traditionalism, and universalism, and were chosen to reflect potential values instilled by Czech national history. Conformity mirrors the attractiveness of normalcy referenced positively and negatively by various respondents in a negative relationship with movement participation. Traditionalism mirrors the acceptance of the current situation (both legal and social) discussed positively and negatively by various respondents in a negative relationship with participation. Universalism mirrors the dissatisfaction with conditional tolerance and different rights for LGBT people discussed by some respondents in a positive relationship with participation. In the data, I would thus expect to see conformity and traditionalism as having a negative relationship with movement participation, and universalism having a positive one.

The first model run in Table 2 establishes that the demographic variables used as controls account for some differences in participation among Czechs. Working from a Western knowledge of social movements, it was expected that higher education, being male, and higher household income would positively impact movement participation, as is shown in the first Control model. Looking next at the influence of each of the three values on movement participation among Czechs, those who held universalist values were significantly more likely to participate in movement activities, whereas traditionalism and conformity had no affect in their individual models. In the All model, these affects hold, and universalism is the only value that has an affect on movement participation, in a positive direction.

**Table 2.** Results of Linear Regression of Activism Participation Index in the Czech Republic <sup>a</sup>, N= 1375

	Controls	Conformity	Traditionalism	Universalism	All
Conformity	—	-.059	—	—	-.069
Traditionalism	—	—	.007	—	.004
Universalism	—	—	—	.151*	.158**
Gender <sup>b</sup>	-.405***	-.256***	-.265***	-.289***	-.281***
Age	.002	.003	.002	.001	.002

Household income	.034*	.033*	.035*	.037**	.036*
Education <sup>c</sup>	.095***	.094***	.095***	.095***	.094***
R-square	.061	.063	.061	.066	.068
F statistic	20.851 ***	17.106 ***	16.674 ***	18.093 ***	13.328 ***

\*                      \*\*                      \*\*\*  
p < .05              p < .01              p < .001

Notes: a) From 2012 ESS data.  
b) Where female is 2 and male is 1.  
c) Measured in total years of education

In the context of Czech national history and its contemporary moment, the finding that universalism encourages movement participation is not surprising. This mirrors what was found in the interviews, that respondents who were dissatisfied with conditional tolerance and different rights for LGBT people were more likely to participate than those who did not. Movement participants holding universalist beliefs also could potentially be explained by a valuation of more than one's inner-circle, or in other words valuing public life more than private life. This could further back-up the finding from the interviews that a lack of mobilization through collective identity was due to the more generally held valuation of private life over public life.

What requires more explanation is why there was no relationship between valuing conformity or traditionalism and participating in movements. One possible reason conformity has no affect on movement participation is the general belief in egalitarianism held by Czechs, as described by respondents. If belief in equality isn't controversial, than movement participation might not be seen as non-conforming and in fact within the realm of norms. If devaluing traditionalism had a significant impact on participation, it would have suggested that movement participation is a product of reactionary behavior. But the significance of valuing universalism suggests that movement participation is, in part, a product of altruism. Given the interview respondents' perception that Czech people value private life over public life, the desire to help those outside their private sphere might be less common and in turn, lead to less participation. While the specific values brought up in the context of the LGBT movement were not mirrored in the larger Czech sample, values are still shown to influence movement participation.

### ***Comparison to Other CEE Countries***

In arguing that history has shaped contemporary Czech participation in movements, much of what I discuss in terms of national history is about the Czech communist regime from 1948 to 1989. Yet, it is clear from differences across the CEE region that national histories cannot be boiled down to past membership in the Soviet Bloc. As Varya noted, the contemporary movement conditions within various former Soviet bloc countries vary

greatly. To see the degree to which the trends in Table 2 are symptomatic of post-communist transition, the Czech case can be compared to countries in the CEE region that have similarly transitioned from a communist system in the last 50 years. Hungary, Slovakia, and Germany serve as the comparisons in Table 3, which repeats the ‘All’ model from Table 2 for each country. The influence of valuing conformity, traditionalism and universalism on participation is notably different across these four countries. While universalism was the only value of significance for Czech participation, in Hungary both universalism and conformity had significant influence, in Slovakia only conformity was significant, and in Germany all three values were significant.

While East Germany was run by a communist state, after its fall the Eastern faction was reintegrated into West Germany, which had no such communist history and is regarded as more a part of Western than Eastern Europe. Thus, all three values being significant in Germany confirms the expectation that the assumptions drawn from social movement mobilization theory is particular to Western European countries and their historical influences. Looking then to the countries with more similar relationships to the Soviet Union, the findings on Hungary are similar to the Czech Republic, while Slovakia tells a rather different story. This might be due to both the Czech Republic and Hungary recognizing same-sex partnerships on a national level, whereas Slovakia does not (Prokopík, 2014). However, this should not be seen as an equation of the situation for LGBT people in the Czech Republic and Hungary, given that the role of the right wing media and its hateful speech plays a much larger role in the latter. These groups in Hungary are fueled by a “nationalist, anti-Western discourse,” calling LGBT movement supporters “national corrupting” and the cause of “moral decay” (Rissovannij, 2001, p. 158).

The Catholic Church also plays a large role in both Hungary and Slovakia, whereas the vast majority of Czechs identify as atheist or with no religious affiliation. Lucie remarked on the effect of religion in these countries after communism: “[In the Czech Republic] there isn’t so much influence of the Catholic Church. When you compare with Slovakia or Poland, they are way more religious, and it shows.” In combination with the findings on Slovakia, this suggests that the degree to which conformity is relevant for movement participation reflects the degree that participating in activism is seen as intrinsically working against a country’s cultural norms.

Overall, the findings in Table 3 support the argument made via the interview findings that there is a relationship between particular national histories and the values held in those countries because the latter influences movement participation. Although all four of the countries experienced a communist regime in the last 50 years, they each had different responses to this period in their history, which gave rise to different values that have impacted movement participation in the countries differently. This shows that the specific connections found in the interviews between history and contemporary values are not only about the influence of the recent communist regime but also about something unique to the Czech nation in how it responded to that period.

**Table 3.** Results of Linear Regression of Activism Participation Index in CEE Countries<sup>a</sup>

	Czech Republic	Germany	Hungary	Slovakia
Conformity	-.069	-.135***	-.112***	-.178***
Traditionalism	.004	-.061*	.021	.049
Universalism	.158**	.273***	.098**	-.005
Gender <sup>b</sup>	-.281***	-.133**	-.081*	-.052
Age	.002	.00006730	.001	.003
Household income	.036*	.071***	.008	-.013
Education <sup>c</sup>	.094***	.078***	.029***	.056***
N	1375	2540	1401	1236
R-square	.068	.177	.061	.044
F statistic	13.328***	47.625***	12.822***	7.939***

\* p < .05      \*\* p < .01      \*\*\* p < .001

Notes: a) From 2012 ESS data.  
 b) Where female is 2 and male is 1.  
 c) Measured in total years of education

## CONCLUSIONS

Understanding LGBT people's experiences regarding LGBT activism in Prague requires historical contextualization and, in turn, a re-thinking of the Westernized social movement theory. Although collective identity appears frequently in discussions of mobilization, its application as a potential movement strategy must be checked against a movement's national and historical context. From interviews with twenty LGBT people living in Prague, it is evident that there are normative values, informed by national history, that determine whether people participate in a social movement. The link between these values and national history is noteworthy in the way it disrupts the logic of collective identity as a mobilizing tool. A sense of collective identity was not present among any respondents, regardless if they participated or not in activism, because the idea of a collective identity conflicted with the values held to a greater or lesser extent by each respondent. The most relevant of these values was prioritizing private life over public life, which is deeply influenced by national history and its accompanying understanding of personal freedom and equality.

Overall, the findings from both the interviews and ESS data analysis support the

argument that nationally held values impact how people come to participate in activism and the tools that will be most available to them for mobilizing others. The interview data speaks to the way applying a Western model of collective identity for mobilization is limited because of the role national values take in shaping attitudes towards participation. The quantitative data backs up this connection between values and participation and further builds on how the relationship between the two differs across nations with different historical and contemporary realities.

Ultimately, this is thus not an argument about the intangible idea of post-communism, but rather about the distinct positionality of national history that influences how those nation's people come to engage with changing their world. As Hall and Read (2006) offer, "whether we retain the term 'post-socialism' or not, the broader challenge is to understand the increasingly diverse incorporation of the socialist past into present social actualities and experiences" (p. 12). The central work of this research is to elaborate on these incorporations in the Czech Republic as it has affected the mobilization of LGBT activism. And if collective identity does not work as a tool for mobilization among LGBT Czechs, what should LGBT organizations in Prague look to in trying to address the lack of mobilization?

Many respondents argued that if the situation of LGBT people in Prague was to change, the general heterosexual population would need to be exposed to more LGBT people so that they might come to understand them as "normal." Martin, a 21 year old gay man said, said being visible was important because "I want to people know that we are normal people. Normal people who study and pay taxes, somebody have children and living among them." While much of the LGBT movement in Prague today revolves around legal recognition and the rights that go with it, perhaps greater attention and effort towards breaking down an essential construction of LGBT identity would be valuable. This move could take inspiration from the Czech lesbian activists working on issues of parental rights, who are already modeling activism beyond essentialism and assimilation, towards the deployment of an "intersectional critique of normative sexuality and gender" (Fojtová, 2011, p. 357). Mobilization is fundamentally a matter of working with the expressed needs, values, and identities of a movement's potential participants, and many LGBT organizations in Prague are already trying to accommodate these complex intersections of values, identity, and history. It is my hope that this research will offer new jumping-off points for these organizations in Prague to further develop such mobilization strategies that work outside the limitations of a collective LGBT identity.

For future work on this topic, there is much left unexplored regarding the influence of gender on LGBT experience and movement participation. Because of the gendered hierarchies that proliferate among LGBT people as well, there are few accounts of the intersection between gender and LGBT identity in the Czech Republic. Several women respondents spoke of this in their interviews, such as Šárka, who noted, "There might be less equality in female to male than in gay. [...] some how the sexism seems more present than homophobia." The feminist movement in the Czech Republic has experienced much greater resistance than the LGBT movement, and lesbian women have had unique difficulty creating spaces for themselves (for work on Czech feminism see Saxonberg 2001, Pachmanová 2010, Kapusta-Pofahl 2002; for work on Czech lesbian women in activism see Sokolová 2010, Fojtová 2011).

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