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**Book Review of *Gay on God's Campus: Mobilizing for LGBT  
Equality at Christian Colleges and Universities*, by Jonathan S.  
Coley**

Dawne Moon

Marquette University, dawne.moon@marquette.edu

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## ***Book Review of *Gay on God's Campus: Mobilizing for LGBT Equality at Christian Colleges and Universities*, by Jonathan S. Coley***

Dawne Moon  
Marquette University

Jonathan Coley's *Gay on God's Campus* sits squarely in the sociological study of social movements but explores what we learn about social movements when we consider religious ones in religious climates. The book examines LGBT student groups at Christian colleges and universities in the United States, and how they address institutional policies and cultures. Addressing the three questions of why people participate in social movements, what makes them commit to them, and how participation affects participants, Coley uses quantitative data about the institutions in question and interviews with 65 students who had been involved with LGBT student groups at four carefully selected Christian colleges: Catholic University of America, Loyola

University Chicago, Goshen College, and Belmont University to test prevailing social movements theories about mobilization and commitment. The book is clear and concise, taking on many of the assumptions of social movements scholarship, arguing that the study of social movements must include those that don't work through disruptive techniques and recruit participants solely with "activist" identities. The study shows how and where those who lack politicized identities can work together to change institutional policies and cultures.

Coley's main argument is that participants are motivated by one of three main salient identity categories: those who see themselves primarily as political activists (who may or may not be LGBT or particularly religious), those who see themselves as primarily religious with a "value-based identity" (who may or may not be LGBT and/or identify as activists), and those who see themselves as primarily LGBT, for whom activism and religion are beside the point. These three different salient identities correspond to preferences for different kinds of organizing. Activists prefer often-disruptive direct action tactics, religious actors prefer education and reconciliation, and those who engage in LGBT campus activism primarily because of their LGBT identities prefer what Coley calls "solidarity" groups, though it might be more accurate to refer to them as "community" groups as their task is to build supportive communities. Finally, he finds that those who fit into these categories as students go on to pursue equality and justice in three different ways: through involvement in formal activist groups, through humanistic careers that stress education and inclusivity, or through intentional relationship work. By listening carefully to his respondents, he shows how people can move among those categories at different points in their own lives.

Coley carefully tests hypotheses generated by social movements scholarship, creating his own large datasets to test these hypotheses statistically, and using his face-to-face interviews to capture the meanings and logics that participants in LGBT organizations at Christian colleges and universities share with him about their approach to creating change. His interviews and data analysis help him to unpack categories like "attitudinal affinity" and "biographical availability," complicating the narratives that he says social movements scholarship has started to reify. He does an excellent job of showing how participants' different approaches make sense from their perspectives—sociologists of religion may be most interested in the accounts of those "value-based" actors who come to this work primarily through their identities as Christians—and the stories his respondents share give the study a richness that makes the book illuminating and thought-provoking. By revealing the diversity of motivations and tactics LGBT religious activists bring to the tasks of institutional and cultural change, Coley encourages us to cultivate a broad understanding of social movement goals and tactics. Overall, Coley presents us with a lucid and rigorous study that extends social movement scholarship to focus on numerous kinds of change people can work for and the numerous methods they can use to get there.

The book's empirical focus especially speaks to the interests of sociologists of religion and our students, by challenging the still too common notion that religious communities and LGBT communities are distinct and necessarily in conflict with each other. Particularly in Chapter 4, Coley focuses on LGBT activism on Christian campuses, examining the kinds of work for change that can take place specifically in hostile climates while moving the conversation far beyond the typical "culture wars" framework. He shows how LGBT Christians—impossible hybrids in the "Christians vs. gays" mindset—with some help from institutional leaders, can change the prevailing definition of "Christian," from mandating discrimination to loving and accepting everyone.

Ultimately, he suggests that his typology could shed light on other situations, that people whose most salient identities focus on activism, values, or in-group support and commonality may inspire multiple kinds of work for social change in many contexts. This is a careful, concise study that will be of interest to scholars and students interested in the many venues where people work for social change.