

**Charles Phelps Taft Research Center
at the University of Cincinnati
Center Fellowship Grant Application**

Each section (I-IV) should be placed at the start of a new page. All required materials must be included in a single document, uploaded to the electronic submissions system, no later than 5PM on the published day of the deadline. Intradepartmental review and two external letters of support are required for this program. Applicants should submit their application with enough time to receive all letters of support prior to the close of the deadline. Taft does not accept an obligation to review applications that have not received the required letters of support by the close of the deadline.

I. General Information

- a. Name: Ashley Currier
- b. M#: 04946733
- c. Department: Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies
- d. Position: Associate Professor
- e. Project title: The Politicization of Homosexuality in Malawi
- f. Potential external funding that might arise from this project: I plan to parlay the success from this project into an American Council of Learned Societies fellowship application to support work on my third book project.
- g. Intended results of a funded research, e.g., concrete plans for publication or conference presentations: This project will yield a book manuscript, "The Politicization of Homosexuality in Malawi." I will submit the book manuscript to university presses for consideration for publication; possible presses include University of Minnesota Press, University of Illinois Press, Indiana University Press, and Ohio University Press. These presses have published books on African sexual politics since 2008.

II. Taft Grant History

Please list your grant history with Taft for the last 5 years, in reverse chronological order. Please list project title, the name, date, and amount of award, as well as development of the project subsequent to the grant, e.g. publication.

Project title: "Arrested Solidarity: Obstacles to Inter-Movement Support for LGBT Rights in Malawi"

Award name: Domestic Conference Travel Grant

Award letter date: April 25, 2014

Amount: \$274.90

Development: I presented this paper at the American Sociological Association annual meeting in San Francisco, California, on August 19, 2014. This paper is part of the third chapter of my current book manuscript, "The Politicization of Homosexuality in Malawi."

Project title: Bodies of Christ: Women, Sexual Pleasure, and (What Looks Like) Feminism in Evangelical Christianity

Award name: Competitive Lectures Grant

Award letter date: February 10, 2014

Amount: \$1,211

Development: This award funded Dr. Kelsy Burke's (St. Norbert's College) public lecture and visit to UC in September 2014.

Project title: "Sexual Politics and the Polarization of Civil Society in Malawi" and "The Specter of Foreign Interference: Obstacles to Cross-Movement Solidarity for Gay Rights in Malawi"

Award name: International Conference Travel Grant

Award letter date: January 24, 2014

Amount: \$2,700

Development: I will use the feedback I received on these papers at international conferences I attended in Switzerland and Germany to revise a chapter of my current book manuscript. I forged connections with African studies researchers based in Germany, and I hope to collaborate with them in the future on organizing conference panels at international African studies meetings.

Project title: "LGBT Thought and Culture"

Award name: Research Support—Collections Purchase

Award letter date: December 19, 2013

Amount: \$21,390

Development: This award enabled the library to acquire “LGBT Thought and Culture,” an online database collection published by Alexander Street Press. This collection contains historical materials of interest to faculty and students interested in LGBTQ studies. Faculty from German Studies, Romance Languages and Literatures, and WGSS supported this acquisition. This collection is now available for use.

Project title: “Transnational Dimensions of African LGBT Organizing”

Award name: Travel for Research Award

Award letter date: January 16, 2013

Amount: \$3,700

Development: I completed the first phase of fieldwork for this project in the summer of 2013. I also obtained a small grant (\$7,000) from the American Sociological Association’s Fund for the Advancement of the Discipline for this project. The next phase of this project will involve arranging for the transcription and translation of interviews I conducted in West Africa and analyzing these interview transcripts.

Project title: “Gendered Revolutions in Orthodox Judaism: It’s Not Just the Feminists”

Award name: Competitive Lecture Award

Award letter date: November 8, 2012

Amount: \$597.65

Development: Dr. Orit Avishai delivered a presentation based on her research with Israeli Orthodox Jewish women at the Charles Phelps Taft Research Center on March 7, 2013. Approximately 40 people attended her talk.

Project title: The Toxic Closet: Being Gay in the Bible Belt

Award name: Competitive Lecture Award

Award letter date: November 7, 2012

Amount: \$554.39

Development: Dr. Bernadette Barton delivered a presentation about her book, *Pray the Gay Away: The Extraordinary Lives of Bible Belt Gays*, on January 17, 2013.

Approximately 150 people attended the talk. Her book was a finalist for a 2013 Lambda Literary Award in the LGBT Studies category.

Project title: The Diffusion of Political Homophobia in Contemporary African Contexts

Award name: Domestic Conference Travel Grant

Award letter date: October 3, 2012

Amount: \$680.90

Development: The conference paper is part of a chapter of my current book manuscript, “The Politicization of Homosexuality in Malawi.”

III. Project Proposal

My proposed Taft Center Fellowship project, “The Politicization of Homosexuality in Malawi,” is the first book-length manuscript to trace the emergence and effects of political homophobia in an African nation. “Political homophobia” refers to political elites’ public denigration of homosexuality, gender diversity, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) organizing. This project continues my work on African gender and sexual diversity politics. Whereas my first monograph focused on comparing the trajectories of LGBT activist organizations in Namibia, a nation with anti-LGBT policies, and South Africa, a nation with pro-LGBT policies, my current project examines the sociopolitical environment governing the production of political homophobia in Malawi.

Two arguments guide this book project. First, I argue that political homophobia is a strategy of African statecraft. State leaders in Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe have used political homophobia to defend their country’s autonomy against foreign donors’ insistence that governments adhere to aid conditionalities,¹ against transnational activist coalitions requesting leaders to respect and enforce all human rights, including LGBT rights, and against critics who call for economic, legal, and political reform. Treating political homophobia as a strategy of statecraft challenges popular assumptions that homophobia is spreading unchecked like a virus throughout Africa, infecting politicians and Africans with homophobia. Second, I contend that political homophobia in Malawi ensnares not only gender and sexual minorities, but also different social movements, such as HIV/AIDS, human rights, LGBT, and women’s movements. LGBT Malawians attributed violence and harassment they experienced to rising levels of homophobia. Similarly, social movements that criticized state corruption also became targets of political homophobia. Malawian state, religious, and traditional leaders used political homophobia to besmirch social movements’ credibility, alleging, for instance, that activists were trying to legalize same-sex marriage and overthrow the government. Political homophobia divided social movements and fomented discord among activist organizations.

Project’s Significance

Queer African studies has gathered momentum in the last decade as scholars probe LGBT Africans’ lived experiences,² investigate African LGBT mobilization,³ and

¹ Aid conditionalities are requirements made by donor governments that aid recipient governments must implement certain policies or laws in exchange for continued development assistance.

² Rudolf Gaudio, *Allah Made Us: Sexual Outlaws in an Islamic African City* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009); Graeme Reid, *How to Be a Real Gay: Gay Identities in Small-Town South Africa* (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013); Amanda Lock Swarr, *Sex in Transition: Remaking Gender and Race in South Africa* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

³ Patrick Awondo, “The Politicisation of Sexuality and Rise of Homosexual Movements in Post-Colonial

deplore the political homophobia that has appeared in Cameroon, Gambia, Liberia, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.⁴ Taken together, these perspectives offer important insights into both the forms of resistance that gender and sexual minorities forge to disrupt heteronormativity, a term referring to the promotion of heterosexuality and disparagement of homosexuality, and to concerted efforts by political, religious, and traditional leaders to stifle gender and sexual diversity. Yet autonomous readings of these three approaches to queer African studies generate misleading and partial understandings of gender and sexual dissidence on the continent. This project is poised to correct misconceptions about the quotidian and political dynamics of African gender and sexual diversity.

A comprehensive study is necessary to counteract the effects of two dominant partial readings that currently dominate queer African studies. Triumphalist readings celebrate the defiance of African gender and sexual dissidence, overlooking how homophobia hurts gender and sexual minorities. In contrast, pessimistic readings of “African homophobia” portray African countries as inhospitable to gender and sexual minorities, a grossly inaccurate depiction. Only a comprehensive view of the experiences of African LGBT persons and activists will offer a thorough rendering of African gender and sexual minorities’ sociopolitical realities. “The Politicization of Homosexuality in Malawi” will provide a nuanced, complete understanding of the rise of political homophobia in this country and chart the consequences of political homophobia on LGBT persons and on different social movements in the country, correcting partial readings that populate queer African studies.

Sources and Materials

This project draws on diverse sources, including 130 interviews with Malawian activists and LGBT persons and hundreds of articles from Malawian newspapers that mention homosexuality or homophobia. In 2012, I interviewed 50 HIV/AIDS, human rights, LGBT, and women’s rights activists in Malawi about how the politicization of homosexuality affected their movement campaigns; I conducted all interviews in English.⁵ I returned to Malawi in 2014 and interviewed 80 LGBT persons about their

Cameroon,” *Review of African Political Economy* 37 (2005): 315-328; Ashley Currier, *Out in Africa: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Robert Lorway, *Namibia’s Rainbow Project: Gay Rights in an African Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

⁴ Ayo A. Coly, “Introduction to Homophobic Africa?,” *African Studies Review* 57 (2013): 21-30; Marc Epprecht, *Sexuality and Social Justice in Africa: Rethinking Homophobia and Forging Resistance* (New York: Zed, 2013); Vasu Reddy, “Perverts and Sodomites: Homophobia as Hate Speech in Africa,” *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 20 (2002): 163-175.

⁵ The Institutional Review Board approved both rounds of human subjects research I conducted in Malawi.

experiences with discrimination and violence; I conducted some interviews in English, and Malawian research assistants conducted the remaining interviews in Chichewa, a local language, and translated them into English. I have gathered hundreds of Malawian newspaper articles published since 2003 that mention homosexuality; these articles help me establish a timeline for the trajectory of political homophobia in Malawi.

Taft Center Contribution

Diverse interdisciplinary theoretical approaches from anthropology, gender, sexuality, and queer studies, history, international relations, and sociology inform this project. I would benefit from discussing this project with colleagues from different disciplines. Such conversations help me ascertain whether certain interpretations need refinement and explanation for readers unfamiliar with Malawi and queer African studies. I would gladly offer similar feedback to other fellows.

Project Organization and Schedule for Completion

The manuscript has seven chapters. The introductory chapter theorizes how the politicization of homosexuality unfolds in postcolonial African contexts. I employ two complementary conceptual approaches in this chapter: 1) the politicization of sexuality from above and 2) the sexualization of politics from below. First, I treat the “politicization of sexuality” as a constellation of social, cultural, and political processes generated by political elites “from above” that police sexual practices, identities, and communities. To supplement the “politicization of sexuality” perspective, I employ the “sexualization of politics” perspective, which shows how discourses of sexuality can overwhelm political deliberation. I use the sexualization of politics approach to identify moments when anxieties about same-sex sexual communities and practices spill over into political debate. The second chapter synthesizes historical research on the sociopolitical organization of sexuality and offers a history of how heteronormativity became enshrined in Malawi. The third chapter charts the concomitant rise of LGBT organizing and political homophobia in Malawi in the 2000s and how LGBT movement developments prompted corresponding anti-LGBT opposition in the country. In the fourth chapter, I use activist interviews to show how the politicization of homosexuality pitted social movements against one another and interrupted activist campaigns, documenting one of the negative effects of political homophobia. The fifth chapter enumerates and analyzes different ways that political homophobia harms African gender and sexual minorities, some of whom have endured rape and violence. Many LGBT Malawians I interviewed claimed that political homophobia authorized family members and community to unleash localized social homophobias against them. The sixth chapter profiles responses from gender and sexual minorities who claim that political homophobia does not hamper their lives; their perspectives present an

opportunity to understand how and why some queer Malawians reject labels of oppression to insulate themselves from the psychological turbulence generated by social and political homophobias. The concluding chapter chronicles contemporary antihomophobic mobilization in Malawi and compares LGBT rights developments in Malawi to those in other African nations.

In AY 2014-15, I will continue acquiring and analyzing Malawian newspaper articles and analyzing the interviews I conducted in Malawi in 2014. I have drafted four of seven chapters and written sections of the remaining three chapters. A Taft Center Fellowship for AY 2015-16 would enable me to complete the remaining three chapters and revise the entire manuscript. When I am close to completing the book manuscript, I will submit a book prospectus and sample chapters to university presses, such as University of Minnesota Press, which published my first book.

Ashley Currier
Curriculum Vitae

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Education

Ph.D.	Sociology (Ph.D. certificates in Women's Studies and Cultural Studies)
2007	University of Pittsburgh
M.A.	Sociology
2003	University of Pittsburgh
M.A.	English
2001	University of Pittsburgh
B.A. (<i>summa cum laude</i>)	English and Spanish
1998	University of Oklahoma

Academic Appointments

2014-present	Associate Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, University of Cincinnati; affiliated with Sociology (2013-present)
2012-2014	Assistant Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, University of Cincinnati
2007-2012	Assistant Professor of Sociology (50%) and Women's and Gender Studies (50%), Texas A&M University

Publications

Book

Currier, Ashley. 2012. *Out in Africa: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa*.
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

*Honorable Mention for 2013 ARNOVA Award for Outstanding Book in Nonprofit and
Voluntary Action Research

*Finalist for 2013 Lambda Literary Book Award—LGBT Studies category

Refereed Journal Articles and Book Chapters (Graduate student coauthor)

Currier, Ashley. "Transgender Invisibility in Namibia and South African LGBT Organizing."
Feminist Formations. In press.

Currier, Ashley and Rashida A. Manuel. "When Rape Goes Unnamed: Gay Malawian Men's
Responses to Unwanted and Nonconsensual Sex." *Australian Feminist Studies*. In press.

Currier, Ashley. 2014. "Arrested Solidarity: Obstacles to Intermovement Support for LGBT
Rights in Malawi." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 42(3-4): 142-159. In press.

Currier, Ashley and Joëlle M. Cruz. 2014. "Civil Society and Sexual Struggles in Africa." In *The
Handbook of Civil Society in Africa*, ed. Ebenezer Obadare, 337-360. New York:
Springer.

Currier, Ashley. 2012. "De la ventriloquie provisoire: l'inclusion de la catégorie transgenre dans
les mobilisations LGBT en Namibie et en Afrique du Sud." ("Temporary Ventriloquism:
Transgender Inclusion in Namibian and South African LGBT Organizing.") *Politique
Africaine* 126: 87-108.

Currier, Ashley. 2012. "The Aftermath of Decolonization: Gender and Sexual Dissidence in
Postindependence Namibia." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37(2): 441-

467. *Recipient of 2013 American Sociological Association Sex and Gender Distinguished Article Award
- Blee, Kathleen M. and Ashley Currier. 2011. "Ethics Beyond the IRB: An Introductory Essay." *Qualitative Sociology* 34(3): 401-413.
- Currier, Ashley. 2011. "Representing Gender and Sexual Dissidence in Southern Africa." *Qualitative Sociology* 34(3): 463-481.
- Currier, Ashley. 2011. "Decolonizing the Law: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa." *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society* 54: 17-44.
- Currier, Ashley. 2010. "Behind the Mask: Developing LGBTI Visibility in Africa." In *Development, Sexual Rights, and Global Governance*, ed. Amy Lind, 155-168. New York: Routledge.
- Currier, Ashley. 2010. "Political Homophobia in Postcolonial Namibia." *Gender & Society* 24(1): 110-129.
- Currier, Ashley. 2010. "The Strategy of Normalization in the South African LGBT Movement." *Mobilization: An International Journal* 15(1): 45-62.
- Currier, Ashley. 2009. "Deferral of Legal Tactics: A Global LGBT Social Movement Organization's Perspective." In *Queer Mobilizations: LGBT Activists Confront the Law*, ed. Scott Barclay, Mary Bernstein, and Anna-Maria Marshall, 21-37. New York: New York University Press.
- Blee, Kathleen M. and Ashley Currier. 2006. "How Local Social Movement Groups Handle a Presidential Election." *Qualitative Sociology* 29(3): 261-280.
- Blee, Kathleen M. and Ashley Currier. 2005. "Character-Building: The Dynamics of Emerging Social Movement Groups." *Mobilization: An International Journal* 10(1): 129-144.

Recent Grants and Fellowships

- 2013-14 American Association of University Women Postdoctoral Research Leave Fellowship
- 2013 Fund for the Advancement of the Discipline, American Sociological Association
- 2013 ACE Ohio Women's Network Professional Development Scholarship

Work in Progress (Graduate student coauthor)

- Currier, Ashley and Tara McKay. "In Pursuit of Social Justice through Public Health: Gender and Sexual Diversity Activism in Malawi." Book chapter to be submitted to "Transnational Queer Activism," ed. Jill Irvine and Janice Irvine. In draft.
- Currier, Ashley and Thérèse Migraine-George. "Queer Studies / African Studies: An Inevitable Merger?" Special issue of *GLQ* on "Area Impossible: The Geopolitics of Queer Studies." In draft.
- Currier, Ashley and Thérèse Migraine-George, eds. "Lesbians in Africa." *Journal of Lesbian Studies*. Anticipated completion: summer 2016.
- Currier, Ashley and Kathleen Ratajczak. "Gender Distortions: News Media Depictions of Male-Male Rape and Consensual Sex in Malawi." In draft.

Upcoming Invited Presentations

- 2014 "Colliding Interests: Organizing around Gender and Sexual Diversity in Africa," Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, October 21.
- 2014 "The Potential of Transnational Queer Studies for Sociology," "Gender and Globalization" symposium, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, October 17.
- 2014 "Indigenous Mobilization against LGBT Rights in Liberia," West African Research Association, Boston, Massachusetts, October 6.