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As the construction of the “political lesbian” suggests, the impact of lesbian separatism on understandings of feminism and woman’s liberation were important, specifically for the ways that it contributed to narrow understandings of the “woman” to comprise feminist politics. In her ethnography of lesbian separatist communities in San Francisco, anthropologist Deborah Goleman Wolf describes the ways that lesbian separatists viewed themselves in relation to the women’s movement and feminism:

As lesbians began to separate from both gay men and heterosexual women a rather curious phenomenon took place. Many heterosexual feminists began to define lesbians as “the vanguard of the movement” – the purest form of feminism – since lesbians did not cohabit with the enemy and already had to be self-sufficient and self-defining women.<sup>123</sup>

Sentiments such as these were famously echoed by lesbian feminist activist Ti-Grace Atkinson, who proclaimed that while, “feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice.” Thus it was from the space of these separatist communities that lesbian-feminists were able to advance a counter-narrative of feminism that located the redefined

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<sup>122</sup> Wolf, *Lesbian Community*, 66.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.



and organize around issues specific to a very particular definition of woman, or one could be active in anti-racist struggles alongside male activists. This within group marginalization of women of color from the women's movement thus enabled the construction of a very particular lesbian and feminist identified individual. As the following exploration of writings circulated by Black and Third World feminists demonstrates, by organizing women of color *out* of the women's movement in these ways, the construction of political lesbians put forth during this time resulted in the projection of a normative lesbian and feminist group member: one who was white, usually androgynous, and committed to separatism.

For many Black and Third World feminists, the adherence to biology as the basis for political action implicitly constructed feminist identity as white by explicitly excluding women of color. The Combahee River Collective Statement circulated by Black feminists in 1977 underscores the specific “woman” and “lesbian” constructed by the rigid adherence to biology advocated for by lesbian separatists:

As Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic. We must also question whether Lesbian separatism is an adequate and progressive political analysis and strategy, even for those who practice it, since it so completely denies any but the sexual sources of women's oppression, negating the facts of class and race.<sup>125</sup>

As these authors indicate, the rhetorical elevation of “woman” by lesbian separatists, i.e., motivating politics from “the sexual sources of women's oppression,” denied the ways that race and class exert significant influences on the political lives of women, particularly Black women. Indicating the erasure of Black women resulting from the

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<sup>125</sup> The Combahee River Collective, “The Combahee River Collective Statement of 1977,” *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), 277.

discourse of separatism and biological femaleness as a precondition for politics foreshadowed the eventual introduction of intersectionality by Black feminist theorists and activists.<sup>126</sup> Therefore, in addition to advocating for a feminist politics that is anti-sexist, the Combahee River Collective explains that feminism must be adamantly anti-racist and concerned with issues of class:

Although we are feminists and Lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism.<sup>127</sup>

Feminist and lesbian politics, in other words, should look to be organized in relation to multiple (intersecting) oppressions rather than solely in opposition to man, as some lesbian separatists and radical feminists might have it. Furthermore, by directly citing “white women” as the separatists making these demands, the Combahee River Collective statement implicates white women as productive of these exclusions and shows the ways in which within group marginalization and exclusions can be used to shape particular understandings of group boundaries and identity. In this case, the Combahee River Collective outlines the conditions in which feminist identity (and politics) is collapsed into woman, specifically white women, through the marginalization of women of color from separatist politics and the women’s movement.

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<sup>126</sup> Most scholars credit Kimberle Crenshaw with the late 1980s/early 1990s introduction of intersectionality in academia; however, there has been a recent interest in identifying what political scientist Ange-Marie Hancock terms “intersectional-like thinking” in women of color activism that predates the introduction of intersectionality as an theoretical and analytic concept in the academy, see Ange-Marie Hancock, *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>127</sup> “Combahee River Collective,” 275.

Black and Third World activists outside of the Combahee River Collective echoed these frustrations and confirmed that separatism and the construction of the normative lesbian feminist was predicated on the marginalization of women of color from the women's movement in representation. Mitsuye Yamada, an Asian Pacific activist writing during this time, cites the predominance of separatism as the reason that many Asian Pacific women are not leaders in the women's movement, choosing instead to focus their political energies in Asian Pacific politics. Yamada explains:

This doesn't mean that we have placed our loyalties on the side of ethnicity over womanhood. The two are not at war with each other; we shouldn't have to sign a "loyalty oath" favoring one over the other. However women of color are often made to feel that we must make a choice between the two.<sup>128</sup>

Echoing the Combahee River Collective's assertion that feminist identities are shaped at the intersections with race and class, Yamada continued by explaining that, "I have thought of myself as a feminist first, but my ethnicity cannot be separated from my feminism."<sup>129</sup> It is for these reasons, Yamada explains, that she is marginalized within separatist politics and the women's movement. Furthermore, Yamada's sense of being made to articulate a "loyalty oath" demonstrates the ways in which the construction of a narrow identity group also exerts a regulatory influence on identification. One can be *either* a feminist *or* an Asian Pacific activist, according the dominant rhetoric of separatism in the women's movement, but one cannot be both and must choose between the two. This choice, and the consequent marginalization of women of color from separatism and the women's movement, contributed to the construction of feminists as implicitly white and concerned primarily with issues impacting white women.

<sup>128</sup> Mitsuye Yamada, "Asian Pacific Women and Feminism," in *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds. Cherríe L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002), 76.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.



that they are made to feel as though the refusal to engage in typical separatist activities, such as carpentry or androgynous dress, disqualifies them from membership in the lesbian community. The reader is meant to understand that the boundaries of the women's movement and lesbian identity are enforced in ways that generate normative expressions of lesbian and feminist identity. In this case, these identities are understood as androgynous, engaged in separatist activities, and – through the persistent refusal to allow people with multiple identities to participate or feel comfortable in the women's movement -- as implicitly white, biologically female, and androgynous.

### *Excluding Transgender Women*

The ways in which race, class, and notions about biology conditioned the boundaries of “woman” are further illustrated in some of the activism taken up by lesbian and radical feminists during this period. To address the growing divides between liberal feminism and lesbian feminism, which tended towards separatism, self-identified lesbian feminist Robin Morgan famously delivered a keynote address at the West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference held on the UCLA campus in 1973. Her speech, titled “Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions?” attempted to heal some of the rifts of the “lesbian-feminist split” by emphasizing unity in the face of the challenges that the two movements shared, and demonstrate the role of backlash in the construction of group identities, particularly as Morgan and others attempted to motivate the formation of a countermovement to advance feminist demands.

Chief among the similarities across lesbian and feminist political groups, Morgan argued, was the threat of patriarchy as it was embodied in men – straight and gay. In a marked departure from similar arguments made by the Radicalesbians, Morgan argued

that most insidious was the persistence of “male transvestites” in feminist and lesbian organizations, some of whom were also attending the conference.<sup>133</sup> After comparing the presence of a transsexual woman<sup>134</sup> at the conference to the equivalent of rape, Morgan speculates: “*We know what’s at work when whites wear blackface; the same thing that is at work when men wear drag.*”<sup>135</sup> The comparison to blackface is striking. Morgan’s analogy to compare the use of blackface in minstrel shows to daily lives of transsexual women is deployed in order to locate transsexual women indisputably in the category of offensive practices for anybody who takes the goals of civil rights seriously. Since feminism, for Morgan, is occupied with the goals of social justice, the analogy to blackface serves as a way of drawing boundaries between the “us” of feminists, and the “them” of transsexuals. Most significantly, Morgan’s questionable use of a blackface analogy poses both feminist and transsexual identities as closed off to race.<sup>136</sup>

Morgan's narrow construction of feminists and lesbians as white and biologically female reached its crescendo when she asserted that: “where The Man is concerned, we must not be separate fingers but one fist.”<sup>137</sup> Locating the definition of woman in immutable biological traits such as two X chromosomes sought to further hermetically seal off lesbian feminist and feminist identities by posing it in opposition to a knowable other: man. Thus, to repair the lesbian-feminist rift forged in backlash, the identity of women-identified woman should not be split by men, but instead stitched together by

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<sup>133</sup> Robin Morgan, “Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions?” in *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Random House, 1977), 180-1.

<sup>134</sup> Transsexual is used here because it was the predominant term used during this time; I address the shifts in language from transsexual in the 1970s to transgender in the 1980s and 1990s in chapter four.

<sup>135</sup> Morgan, “Lesbianism,” 180 (emphasis in original).

<sup>136</sup> For an examination of the historical uses of Blackface to mark the boundaries of various groups and American national identity, see Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>137</sup> Morgan, “Lesbianism,” 180.

biological (i.e., female) sameness. In other words, the united fist advocated by Morgan to confront “The Man” stages feminist activism as a two-person match, with all those who do not conform to the gendered norms of white, lesbian women relegated to positions on the margins, including many self-identified lesbians. Among them were butch-identified lesbians (and often their femme-identified partners), who were accused of aping heterosexual norms as a symptom of their false consciousness.<sup>138</sup> Transsexual-identified lesbian women were also targeted for exclusions and were often subject to vitriol.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, the combined emphasis on biological essentialism and the persistent use of analogies to civil rights struggles and Black experiences to legitimize the goals of lesbian separatists effectively made coalitions with Black feminists impossible. These theoretical and conceptual moves, in total, constructed radical feminist and lesbian feminist political identity as implicitly white and explicitly as biologically female, and embodying femininity that was neither too butch or too femme.

Robin Morgan was not alone in promulgating this narrow construction of lesbian identity during this period. She was joined by self-identified radical feminists from across many fields, including academia, the arts, and activism.<sup>140</sup> Much like Morgan, these

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<sup>138</sup> There is a broad range of scholarship on butch and femme lesbians and relationships during this period. See Abbot and Love, *Sappho Was a Right On Woman*; Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993); Amber Hollibaugh and Cherrie Moraga, “What We’re Rollin’ Around in Bed with: Sexual Silences in Feminism” *Heresies* 12 (1981); Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 167-87; Joan Nestle, “Butch-Femme Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950’s” *Heresies* 12 (1981), 21-4; Gayle Rubin, “Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries” in *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*, ed. Joan Nestle (Boston: Alyson, 1992), 466-82.

<sup>139</sup> Henry Rubin, *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment Among Transsexual Men* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2003), Chapter 2; Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, Chapter 5.

<sup>140</sup> For other examples of the seminal figures in radical feminism, see Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaphysics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978); Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: MacGibbon and Kee Ltd, 1970); Janice Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the*

radical feminist figures invested considerable resources in establishing the theoretical foundation for lesbian separatism defined in explicitly biological ways. As the analysis in this chapter shows, however, this vision for lesbian separatism and lesbian identity that they advanced was defined along gendered and racialized lines that excluded transgender women and men, people of color, and butch and femme identified lesbians.

The exclusion of lesbian women from organizations dominated by gay men, and the marginalization of Black and transgender people from the lesbian political and social organizations formed in response, illustrates to what effect identities are constructed in politics. In the case of lesbian identity, political actors working on behalf of groups like the Radicalesbians – and radical feminists more generally – responded to backlash by attempting to seal lesbian identity off from those on the margins. Political actors like Robin Morgan and other radical feminists sought to position lesbians and radical feminists above scrutiny or stigmatization. They achieved this by policing the boundaries of lesbian identity to represent the most visible members as gender normative, which they defined as biologically female. Explicitly casting transgender women out of lesbian feminist circles and implicitly organizing women of color out of separatism and the women’s movement thus served the purpose of shoring up the boundaries of a particular lesbian identity, one that was gender normative, biologically female, and also white. This argument is illustrated most forcefully by the fact that butches, femmes, transgender men, and people of color were also implicitly excluded from the representations of lesbians put

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*She-Male* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1979); Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind: And Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

forth during this time period. These within-group marginalizations, in other words, were constitutive of what came to be known of lesbian identity in politics.

The next section explores one of the responses to this exclusionary radical feminist rhetoric and the construction of lesbian political identity and introduces the political solutions put forth by feminist and lesbian activists to contradict separatism: coalitions and solidarity.

### *Against Lesbian Separatism*

At the West Coast Music Festival in 1982, civil rights activist Bernice Johnson Reagon addressed the prevailing climate of lesbian separatism in feminist spaces. Using a metaphor of a closed room to connote separatist politics, Reagon begins her argument for reconceptualizing lesbian and feminist identity by indicating the ways that lesbian separatism forecloses considerations of race and class:

There is no chance that you can survive by staying *inside* the barred room.... In fact, in that little barred room where you check everybody at the door, you act out community. You pretend that room is your world. Of course the problem with the experiment is that there ain't nobody in there but folk like you, which by implication means you wouldn't know what to do if you were running it with all of the other people who are out there in the world.<sup>141</sup>

For Reagon, the trouble with separatist politics is that while its practice helps to nurture identification within the group, or “community,” that nurturing relies upon the exclusion of an other, most often articulated through difference, captured in the metaphor of the “barred room.” As Reagon points out: “ain’t nobody in there but folk like you”. Although the lesbian separatist ethos (particularly as it was expressed by the Radicalesbians)

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<sup>141</sup> Bernice Johnson Reagon, “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century” in *Home Girls*, 361.

emphasized opposition to sexist society as its principle political interest, as Reagon suggests in the conclusion of this quote, the elevation of “woman” neglects to attend to various dimensions of marginalization when she speculates that “you wouldn’t know what to do if you were running it with all the other people who are out there in the world.” Separatism, in other words, contributes to ignorance of politics outside of one’s own narrowly-defined interests.

The political solution that Reagon suggested in 1980 highlighted the importance of engaging in coalitions with various groups to target a common enemy and expand the narrowly-defined interests articulated by radical and lesbian feminists. In contrast to the “barred room,” however, coalitions are inherently difficult and uncomfortable:

You have to give it all. It is not going to feed you; you have to feed it. And it's a monster. It never gets enough. It always wants more. So you better be sure you your home some place for you to go to so that you will not become a martyr to the coalition. Coalition can kill people; however, it is not by nature fatal.<sup>142</sup>

For Reagon, coalitional advocacy is something akin to mutually assured destruction – a “monster” that has the potential to kill. However, the political efficacy lies in these tensions, “That's why we have coalitions. Cause I ain't gonna let you live unless you let me live.”<sup>143</sup> Rather than exclusion, coalitions are a step in the direction of fostering inclusion – however tenuous – because coalitions help to keep politics and activism accountable by promoting conversations across groups that comprise an alliance. Thus, although coalitions can be spaces of difficulty because they maintain the boundaries between groups, coalitions also provide the opportunity for one can learn about “all the other people who are out there in the world.”

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 365.

Reagon was not alone in arguing against separatism. Other activists and academics articulated political solutions to contradict the predominance of separatism in lesbian and feminist organizing. At a 1979 New York University Institute for the Humanities conference, Audre Lorde – a feminist and civil rights activist and author – delivered a speech that touched on many of the themes put forth by Reagon. Instead of advocating for coalitions, however, Lorde focused her energy on indicating the ways that lesbian feminist separatism relied on many of the false binaries and categories that mobilize patriarchal and colonial dominance. Using the metaphor of the “masters tools” to argue that sex and race categories were tools of patriarchal oppression, Lorde put forth the argument that the only effective political solution would be to harness differences as sources of strength, explaining that:

Advocating for mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformation. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. For difference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic.<sup>144</sup>

Differences for Lorde – as they are for Reagon – are a source of creative potential from which to advance a political agenda, rather than features of identity that ought to be minimized and absorbed for the superficial unity put forth by a separatist politics and lesbian feminist identity organized around sex. However, unlike Reagon, who introduced coalitions as the political solution to separatism, Lorde instead relies on what can best be characterized as solidarity politics. Lorde outlined the following political vision for honoring and mobilizing difference:

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<sup>144</sup> Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds. Cherrie L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002), 107.



lesbian feminist identity in opposition to people who are transgender, specifically transgender women.

More broadly, this chapter and the one before it demonstrate that construction of the gay and lesbian identity groups as mutually exclusive – with gay identity cohering around same-sex desire and lesbian identity unified by biological sameness – was a product of efforts by political actors and suggests that those wanting to make coalitions (or pursue solidarity politics) to unite these two groups would have their work cut out for them. And yet, the following chapter shows how the construction of both gay and lesbian identity as gender normative and white provided the grounds for these groups to unify. The evolving shared emphasis on gender normativity and whiteness, in other words, became the glue that held gay men and lesbians together the politically trying circumstances of the 1980s.

As I will continue to argue, however, the elevation of white, middle-class, and gender normative gay and lesbian subjects entailed within group marginalization that negatively impacted the most precarious members of these groups, particularly people of color, women, transgender people, and people who were poor, all of whom would be disproportionately impacted by the coming crisis of HIV/AIDS.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Unity, Diversity, and Righteous Indignation in the Context of AIDS

### *Introduction*

On October 12, 1987, *The New York Times* featured an article about the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, which had taken place the previous day and had gathered approximately 200,000 people on the National Mall in Washington, DC. In addition to describing the weather conditions (it was slightly foggy) and the National Park Service's troubled efforts to count the participants (estimates ranged from 50,000 in the morning to 200,000 by late afternoon), the story cited interviews with many of the participants, including 82-year old self-identified lesbian and grandmother, Buffy Dunker, who explained the motivation of the marchers in attendance:

"We are here today to show America and the world that the gay movement is larger, stronger and more diverse than ever...We are sending a message to our leaders here in Washington that gays are a united force that will have to be reckoned with. And we will be persistent and unrelenting in our pressure."<sup>146</sup>

Highlighting unity, diversity, and the righteous indignation of the "gay movement," Dunker conveyed the dominant orientation of lesbian and gay politics in the mid-1980s. In the context of the Reagan administration's flagrant disregard for the AIDS epidemic and the thousands of deaths that occurred because of that negligence, increased political opposition from evangelical Christians, the ascendancy of the conservative Right in US politics, and the Supreme Court's 1986 ruling in *Bowers v Hardwick* that denied gay men the right to privacy and called into question the very legitimacy of gay identity, those who took part in the 1987 March on Washington were not interested in simply announcing their presence in national politics. As Dunker's comments to *The New York*

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<sup>146</sup> Lena Williams, "200,000 March in Washington to Seek Gay Rights and Money for AIDS," *The New York Times*, October 12, 1987.

*Times* captures so well, the thousands of men and women who took part in the March on Washington were angry and scared, and they were passionate about mobilizing politically to effect change in national politics, united by the theme: “For love and for life: we’re not going back.”<sup>147</sup>

Focusing on the period between 1980 and 1991, this chapter continues the argument that within-group marginalization shapes the boundaries, meanings, and interests associated with group identities, specifically analyzing the political mobilizations advanced under the aegis of “gay and lesbian politics” that took place in the years after the 1987 March on Washington. Whereas the previous two chapters concluded that many disparate identity-based groups evolved out of the Gay Liberation period, this chapter shows how political actors sought to cultivate unity across many disparate groups during the 1980s in order to project an image of critical mass and issue agenda cohesion that is necessary and rewarded in national politics. This projection of unity was achieved by political actors through the continued elevation of sexuality as the defining characteristic of gay and lesbian identities, once again to the implicit and explicit exclusion of race, gender identity, class, and ability as overlapping identifications. What came to be known as gay identity, in other words, continued to be constructed by political actors as associated with white, gender normative, and middle-class gay men, with the effect of marginalizing all other gay and lesbian identified members.

This chapter advances these arguments – that within-group marginalization shapes meanings associated with group identities – in four parts. The first gives a brief

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<sup>147</sup> On the many lesbian and gay marches on Washington, see Amin Ghaziani, *The Dividends of Dissent: How Conflict and Culture Work in Lesbian and Gay Marches on Washington* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); for the political context of the 1980s, see Elizabeth Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identity*; Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*.

overview of political and social developments that took place from the conclusion of chapter two in 1973 and the 1987 March on Washington. The second section introduces the Hate Crimes Statistics Act Coalition that took shape beginning in 1985. In keeping with the main arguments of this dissertation, this section details how conflicts over the meanings to be associated with gay men and lesbians were shaped during the debates that took place in conjunction with the bill's introduction and eventual passage in 1990. Section three turns to the War Conference convened in 1988 to show how another political process – backlash – exerted a significant influence on the unity cultivated across lesbian and gay political organizations. Finally, in section four, the ways that gay and lesbian identities and political interests were represented at two sites – the HSAC and The War Conference – is examined, showing how political actors shifted representations of gay and lesbian political identities and interests according to different audiences. Examining these varying representations together reveals how marginalization of certain lesbian and gay-identified members – specifically different racial groups – helped to project unity in efforts to effect political change, with the consequence of excluding some members from effective representation and political gains. As the following shows, this unity was used by political actors as a key building block in the construction of gay political identity.

#### *1973 – 1987: The Institutionalization of the Movement*

The period between the transformations to Gay Liberation organizations (e.g., GLF) that began in the early 1970s and the formation of organizations devoted to mobilizing politically around HIV/AIDS like ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) in the mid-1980s also saw the introduction of a national gay and lesbian political

organizations and interest groups that identified expanding civil rights for gay men and lesbians as their central goal.<sup>148</sup> These organizations included the NGTF (National Gay Task Force), Lambda Legal, the American Civil Liberties Union Sexual Privacy Project, and the National Organization for Women Sexuality and Lesbianism Task Force, all of which were formed in 1973.<sup>149</sup> During the same year, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) held a meeting where members voted to officially declassify homosexuality as a mental illness, an outcome that NGTF claimed was a product of their relentless lobbying and activism.<sup>150</sup> The success of the APA mobilization, as well as the election of the first openly gay man, Harvey Milk, in 1977, and the increasing visibility for gay men and lesbians was taken by many at these political organizations as indicative of possibilities for future political gains.

It was against this backdrop of these successes that opponents began to mobilize politically. In 1977, Anita Bryant launched a campaign in Dade County, Florida, to repeal the local gay rights ordinance. Known as “Save Our Children,” the campaign was ultimately successful in overturning the gay rights ordinance and served as a model for similar legislation that was introduced in the following years. For example, in 1978, a California state legislator, John Briggs, introduced Proposition 6, a referendum that sought to ban gay men and lesbians from working in public schools. It was ultimately defeated by voters, and historians cite the successful mobilization by various lesbian and

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<sup>148</sup> Christina Hanhardt, “Laurel and Harvey: Screening Militant Gay Liberalism and Lesbian Feminist Radicalism Circa 1980,” *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 23, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>149</sup> Stein, *Rethinking*, 114.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

gay political organizations and interest groups as helping to motivate further expansion of civil rights-oriented model for lesbian and gay politics.<sup>151</sup>

At the same time that these battles over civil rights for gays and lesbians were taking place across the United States, political actors began to plan the 1979 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.<sup>152</sup> Organized by leaders from the NGTF, the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), and various political leaders from California, the 1979 National March was anticipated as an opportunity to show the best face of a united lesbian and gay political movement to the nation.<sup>153</sup> Organizers attempted to accomplish this goal by prominently featuring an organizational structure designed to achieve inclusion, which required each participating organization to send one female and male representative to the planning meetings. While this helped to convey unity across the sexes, particularly in the context of lesbian separatism contra male-centered political agendas described in the previous chapters, there were many other groups that were conspicuously excluded from the 1979 March planning. These exclusions primarily impacted participation for gay and lesbian people of color and groups that represented transgender people. These groups mobilized in response, and the Transpeople Caucus, for example, asserted that the term “gay transpeople” should be used on all National March materials. Their efforts eventually failed because, as sociologist Amin Ghaziani explains,

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<sup>151</sup> Christina Hanhardt’s exploration of this period in California shows that while the campaign to defeat Proposition 6 succeeded, thanks in large part to the grassroots political tactics of lesbian and gay organizers claiming an interest in expanding civil rights, Proposition 7 – also introduced by Briggs and seeking to establish the death penalty in California for first- and second-degree murder – was passed by an overwhelming majority. While Proposition 6 attracted the support of those affiliated with a civil rights model for lesbian and gay politics, radical lesbian-identified feminists and political organizations working on behalf of people of color in California mobilized opposition to Proposition 7 and Proposition 6. Hanhardt uses this cleavage among lesbian and gay activists to illustrate the growing dominance of the civil rights model over radical politics, see Hanhardt, “Laurel and Harvey,” 23.

<sup>152</sup> Ghaziani, *The Dividends of Dissent*, 54.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

“Activists had their hands too full with gender parity and racial inclusion to deal with this particular issue.”<sup>154</sup> The latter issue of racial inclusion also seemed to vex organizers of the National March, who eventually concluded that the concomitant staging of the Third World Gay and Lesbian Conference would suffice for addressing racial diversity.

In sum, the six years between 1973 and the 1979 National March on Washington was very active for gay and lesbian-identified activists and political leaders. As the rifts at the National March show, the unity of the new national movement that they sought to convey in the face of rising opposition, however, was still incomplete.

These efforts to bring together a united national movement to join gay men and lesbians in political action continued in the early 1980s, particularly in response to the growing fears over the rapid spread of AIDS among gay men. This new cooperation between gay men and lesbians was motivated by two factors. Lillian Faderman describes the first, which were internal shifts that were taking place among lesbian-identified activists in the early 1980s. Whereas a relatively large and active segment of lesbian-identified women pursued politics of lesbian separatism during the 1970s, as described in the previous chapter, many lesbian-identified activists rightly saw AIDS and the negligence of the Reagan administration during the 1980s as a threat of significant magnitude. In response, Faderman explains, lesbian-identified women became “less doctrinaire” about how to be a lesbian and began to pursue ways to work together across differences, including working with gay men.<sup>155</sup> The second factor to motivate unity was also premised on the need to mobilize in response to AIDS. Historian Marc Stein explains that the absence of centralized health care in the United States required the

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>155</sup> Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 280.

creation of networks to provide care and education. Many of these AIDS-related social organizations were established and staffed with volunteer hours donated by gay men and lesbians, working side by side to deliver services and care.<sup>156</sup> The addition of “L” to the title of the NGTF – to make it the NGLTF – in 1985, and the quota of one male and one female co-executive director for the organization, symbolically captured the extent to which these bonds across lesbian and gay men had been forged at the site of interest group advocacy and health service provision during this period.<sup>157</sup>

Once again, however, the work to establish a more cohesive lesbian and gay movement was not entirely effective at also addressing the needs of those lesbian and gay-identified people whose identities were shaped by race, gender, class, nation, and ability. Cathy Cohen’s in-depth study of the political response to AIDS provides insight into the many ways that Black men who did not necessarily identify as gay were marginalized in these efforts to politically address AIDS, detailing in one example among many how educational materials produced by AIDS service providers tended to portray the concerns of white, gay men instead of providing information to the specific communities of Black men who had sex with men.<sup>158</sup> And while it was widely noted at the beginning of the AIDS epidemic that the disease impacted gay men and trans-identified people almost equally, the next chapter on transgender political identity shows how the efforts to address the unique needs of trans-identified people who were newly

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<sup>156</sup> Stein, *Rethinking*, 147

<sup>157</sup> John D’Emilio, “Organizational Tales: Interpreting the NGLTF Story” *Creating Change: Sexuality, Public Policy, and Civil Rights* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 477.

<sup>158</sup> Cohen, *Boundaries of Blackness*, 96 – 99.

diagnosed with AIDS were largely symbolic inclusions, with the bulk of resources being devoted predominantly to white, gender normative gay men.<sup>159</sup>

In addition to the social and political response to AIDS, important political developments affecting lesbians and gay men were also taking place in the U.S. court system. During the mid-1980s, while AIDS service organizations were developing a coordinated public health response and activist groups like ACT-UP were beginning to mobilize politically, a case challenging Georgia's anti-sodomy statute was winding its way to the Supreme Court. The case pertained to Michael Hardwick, a man who was charged with violating Georgia's anti-sodomy statute after a police officer entered his bedroom without a warrant. The ACLU immediately identified this incident as an opportunity to advance a test case that would challenge anti-sodomy statutes across the states, which criminalized sex between men.<sup>160</sup> The case, *Bowers v Hardwick*, was heard by the Supreme Court in 1986, and the lawyers representing Hardwick was argued that the Constitutional right to privacy was violated by anti-sodomy statutes that prohibited acts between consenting adults in their homes. In the end, the Supreme Court's five-four decision upheld Georgia's anti-sodomy statute, which sent shock waves through gay and lesbian interest groups like the NGLTF and Lambda Legal.<sup>161</sup> In addition to denying a right to privacy and thus the Constitutional rights of gay men and lesbians, the Court's decision was interpreted by political actors at these organizations as calling into question the very existence of gay and lesbian – i.e., “homosexual,” in the Court's parlance – identities.

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<sup>159</sup> Stein, *Rethinking*, 150; Stryker, *Transgender History*, 113.

<sup>160</sup> Joyce Murdoch and Deb Price, *Courting Justice: Gay Men and Lesbians v. The Supreme Court* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001), 277.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

The events that took place between 1973 and 1986 outlined above serve as background to the following sections, in which the dynamics of coalition brokering between lesbian and gay interest groups and political organizations between 1987 and 1991 are explored with particular attention to how efforts to construct lesbians and gay men as a unified group and political identity category resulted in the continued elevation of sexuality over other facets of identity. The next sections examine The Hate Crimes Statistics Act Coalition (HCSAC) and the efforts to have a federal Hate Crimes Statistics Act (HCSA) include lesbian and gay-identified people for the first time in federal legislation.

*Conflict: The Hate Crimes Statistic Act*

The founding documents for the NGTF (National Gay Task Force) list a number of objectives for this first explicitly gay-oriented interest group, including, “Working toward obtaining legal protections and ending oppressive restrictions, whether public or private, upon human beings based on affectional/sexual preference or orientation.”<sup>162</sup> To meet these goals, the NGTF hired Kevin Berrill in 1981 to coordinate a new anti-violence program that would help the organization to meet the goal of establishing legal protections. By 1982, Berrill’s successes included a number of related anti-violence programs, including a toll-free line for people to report crime against them that were motivated by bias.

Berrill was also active in courting attention from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which had introduced model hate crimes legislation to Members of Congress. The 1981 ADL hate crimes legislation identified three objectives: curtailing institutional vandalism, penalty enhancements for crimes that were motivated by hate, and law

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<sup>162</sup> 7301, Box 1, Folder 2 “1976 NGTF Founding Documents,” 1.

enforcement training for officers responding to crimes.<sup>163</sup> The ADL hate crimes model legislation, however, did not include protections for lesbians or gay men, and Berrill and the NGTF worked to have sexual orientation considered by political actors at the ADL for future versions of the HCSA. As Christina Hanhardt explains, the goal for the NGTF was not to work with the ADL to develop ways to use the law as a tool against violence, but rather to have lesbian, gay, and bisexual sexual orientations recognized as valid in the eyes of the law.<sup>164</sup> In other words, the NGTF was motivated by the possibility of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities finally being recognized in a law at the federal level. For these leaders, the political goal then became demonstrating that gay men and lesbians were, in fact, a minority group that faced regular discrimination. Berrill and other NGTF leaders pursued this goal by projecting lesbian and gay people as a large, marginalized, and unified group of people in need of legal protection.

The objective of having lesbian, gay, and bisexual people featured in federal legislation as a legible minority group entailed conflicts among the NGTF membership over the goals to be prioritized by the organization as well as the meanings associated with the gay and lesbian identities. For example, one document circulated to the NGTF's large membership, titled "Responding to Anti-Gay Violence Through Legislation," explained why the NGTF leadership should prioritize the HCSA over a Gay Rights Bill, which had been introduced in the House by Bella Azbug and Ed Koch in 1974 and proposed adding sex, sexual orientation, and marital status to the 1964 Civil Rights

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<sup>163</sup> Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 163-4.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

Act.<sup>165</sup> In it, Berrill urges members to see the need for legislation to protect gay men and lesbians from hate crimes by connecting it to the current climate of AIDS and AIDS activism:

As gay and lesbian communities have become more visible, we have become more vulnerable to those who hate us and want to harm us. This problem is likely to grow as fear and hatred associated with the AIDS epidemic grows. Retreating back into the closet is not a healthy (or necessarily safe) alternative.<sup>166</sup>

As chapter two illustrates, discourse on “coming out of the closet” was used by political actors to represent political agency, and the act of coming out was projected by leaders in interest groups and social organizations as in itself a rite associated with political action. Here, Berrill extends this logic by arguing that the very act of coming out has provoked violence by making gay men and lesbians more visible, and that this visibility is only more dangerous in the current context of AIDS. However, lesbians and gay men cannot return to the closet for safety. According to Berrill and the NGTF, lesbians and gay men must be public and active political agents by seeking to have the HCSA passed and mobilizing to have their lesbian and gay identities recognized in federal legislation. These calls to political action played a significant role in shaping what would be considered sayable and knowable about gay identity in politics.

For example, reiterating lesbians and gay men as the most likely victims of anti-gay violence in conjunction with efforts to have them included in the HCSA effectively framed lesbian and gay identities as united in relation to the threat of violence and presupposed a vested political interest in combatting it as a unified group: “gay and

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<sup>165</sup> Paisley Currah, “Expecting Bodies: The Pregnant Man and Transgender Exclusion from the Employment Non-Discrimination Act,” *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3&4 (Fall/Winter 2008).

<sup>166</sup> 7301, Box 54, Folder 16 “Responding to Anti-Gay Violence Through Legislation: by Kevin Berrill” (nd), 1.

lesbian communities.”<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, grounding the political needs of this newly united group demonstrates how backlash creates the conditions for narrow identity construction. More specifically, Berrill’s emphasis on AIDS as it impacts the gay community suggests that gay men, in particular, are the population most negatively impacted by the disease. While this claimed some ownership for the political response that likely helped to produce positive political changes and the provision of health services, the appropriation of AIDS to help define the political priorities for gay and lesbian people effectively erased other populations impacted by the disease, particularly people of color, intravenous drug users, and transgender people. The marginalization of these people with AIDS from the discourse on hate crimes, many of whom were also gay, helped to define the boundaries of gay identity as gay men who are white, politically active, gender normative and *not* as intravenous drug users and/or transgender people.

Although many lesbians and gay men who were the recipients of this specific communication from the NGTF might not have been survivors of hate crimes themselves, Berrill goes on to explain why the NGTF prioritizes the HCSA:

We believe that crimes of bias are particularly heinous because they are directed not only at the individual, but the entire community s/he represents. They are intended to violate and isolate all members of the targeted group and to discourage their visibility.<sup>168</sup>

Here, Berrill argued on behalf of the NGTF that while one might not have the experience of being directly targeted for violence as a lesbian or gay man, the acts perpetrated against some in the community require a unified response. By implication, then, the justification for elevating the HCSA as an important goal for the NGTF also asserts a link

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<sup>167</sup> For a discussion of coming out and anti-violence legislation, see Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, 168.

<sup>168</sup> 7301, Box 54, Folder 16 “Responding to Anti-Gay Violence Through Legislation: by Kevin Berrill” (nd), 2.

between individuals and the community, drawing the boundaries of it to render gay and lesbian-identified individuals – i.e., “all members of a targeted group” – unified and one in the same in political action. Associating these newly-drawn boundaries to contain lesbians and gay men together as potential victims of violence once again relied on preserving opportunities for people to come out and become politically active, specifically when Berrill explains that violent acts are, “intended to violate and isolate all members of the targeted group and to discourage their visibility.” Here, visibility and isolation are trade-offs negotiated by those coming out: risking visibility by coming out contains the potential of joining a rich and vibrant lesbian and gay community; whereas not coming out entails isolation and self-deprivation. In this way, the discourse of the HCSA as an important political goal reified the evolving construction of lesbians and gay men – i.e., gay identity – as necessarily *political* and public identifications as well as a unified political identity category.

In addition to projecting internal cohesion and asserting shared political interests, the discourse in relation to the HCSA also sought to frame the boundaries of gay and lesbian identities as a minority group that would be legible to politicians and journalists. Projecting gay men and lesbians as a minority group took place in conjunction with internal conflicts at the NGTF over the interests to be associated with the gay identity group. Berrill, for instance, faced push back from some members and other staff for his work on the HCSA. These objections were articulated most vociferously by those who believed that a gay rights bill – more specifically the Equality Act introduced in 1974 that sought to ban discrimination against lesbians and gay men, unmarried people, and women

in employment – constituted a more important or feasible political goal. In Berrill's defense of the HCSA as a political priority, he states:

Nevertheless, at a time when gay civil rights bills are frequently failing, bias crime legislation may offer more promise of success. Indeed, promoting an adequate official response to anti-gay violence is one of the latest controversial issues on the lesbian and gay agenda, and some legislators who are against 'gay rights' may be more willing to consider a bill that would seek to prevent such violence. In addition, hearings and media attention related to such a bill would help law makers [sic] and the general public recognize that this is significant problem which deserves to be treated as seriously as crimes against racial, ethnic, and religious minorities and other groups.<sup>169</sup>

Here, Berrill recognizes that there are a limited number of issues that can be prioritized on the "lesbian and gay agenda," and he supports his argument in favor of concentrating on the HCSA with an analogy that draws parallels to racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. Similar to the use of analogies by Gay Liberationists, the parallels drawn by Berrill attempts to cast lesbians and gay men *alongside* recognized marginalized groups and legitimate claimants to rights in a rights-based political system. As in the case of the Gay Liberationists, however, positioning lesbians and gay men as part of a list of marginalized groups in this way also poses these categories – racial, ethnic, and religious identifications – as distinct and separate identity categories.

Significantly, the use of an analogy here to compare lesbians and gay men to other minority groups that also experience bias-motivated violence implies that these are not overlapping categories of identification, but should rather be understood along a single dimension of identification: sexuality for lesbians and gay men, skin color for race, and perceived gender for sex. In the context of highly-visible conflicts over the issues that should be prioritized by the newly-coherent lesbian and gay group constructed and

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 3.



*Responding to Backlash at the War Conference, 1988*

The War Conference was a 1988 gathering of 47 leaders from lesbian and gay interest groups and political organizations that emerged from the connections made at the 1987 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. Coordinating a strong response to the backlash of the late 1980s – particularly at the site of different legislative goals like AIDS funding being stymied in Congress and the mobilization of opposition by evangelical Christians – figured prominently in the agenda for the aptly titled War Conference. This section explores how the coordinated mobilization in response to backlash further refined the boundaries of lesbian and gay identities as united in political action, albeit in narrow ways, as the following analysis demonstrates.

One need not look further than the title of The War Conference for confirmation of the prevailing context of backlash during the late 1980s. Reflecting the opposition these leaders perceived in broad-brush strokes, the letter of invitation described the event as an opportunity for leaders to maintain the cohesion and political impact from the 1987 National March:

A select group of lesbian and gay leaders nationwide are being invited to this conference. Our purpose is to examine the state of the movement in 1988 – a movement which can bring over a half-million people to Washington to demonstrate our commitment and our numbers to the nation and the nation's politicians, but a movement which, three days later, can be kicked in the gut by those politicians as 96 Senators and 368 Representatives vote in favor of a Jesse Helms' "better dead than gay" restriction on AIDS educational funding. A movement which has blossomed in the past two decades, with thousands of local organizations and institutions and a score of organizations exerting national influence, but with little common strategy and little sense of cohesion in expressing ourselves as an organized national political and educational force.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> 7301, Box 258, Folder 2 "War Conference Planning File 1988," 1.

The letter went on to explain that the invited participants would craft strategies to respond to the obstacles facing them:

We want to build a stronger movement. Not a single organization that replaces or smothers our diversity and the vitality which comes from pluralism, but a psychology and infrastructure for encouraging the diverse elements of the movement to work together in common purpose.<sup>172</sup>

Taking these two excerpts from the invitation letter together shows how the backlash perceived by the organizers of The War Conference shaped the efforts to mobilize and how these efforts, in turn, were expected to influence group identity. Specifically, the objective of presenting lesbian and gay organizations as “an organized national political and educational force,” alongside the desire to build, “a psychology and infrastructure” reveals that the organizers behind The War Conference saw their tasks as twofold. First, the leaders would work to craft a united front “because they are making war on us.”<sup>173</sup> Second, according to this invitation letter, the united front against these opponents would not stifle the diversity of the various groups, but instead achieve the second goal of uniting these diverse groups under the umbrella of a “common purpose.” Referring to the function of a “psychology and infrastructure” suggests that the leaders gathered at The War Conference understood that their actions could be instrumental in defining lesbian and gay identification, as well as mediating those identifications through political organizations by creating a shared ethos for political action. As these statements together make clear, The War Conference hoped to lay the groundwork for framing a unified (counter)movement, one that work in conjunction with efforts to pass legislation like the HCSA and Gay Rights Bill.

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 1.

An update that was circulated about The War Conference gives some insight into the content of the “common purpose” envisioned by organizers and how it would shape understandings of gay identity, particularly as it was formulated in response to a climate of growing backlash. It opened with the following statement to describe The War Conference, “We came to say that all of us are people. That we are all citizens and entitled to the rights of citizens. We came to say that we shall accept denial of those rights no longer.”<sup>174</sup> For the participants, then, the claim to rights and political standing was the central, mobilizing concern. The urgency behind this denial of rights was underscored by the need to put a unified response to backlash in place, specifically by asserting lesbians and gay men as citizens with full standing. Demonstrating the influence of this discourse on identity construction, these repeated claims to citizenship were often made in conjunction with assertions of lesbians and gay men as a unified group who were subjected to oppressions that were similar to other marginalized groups. These comparisons contributed to a narrow construction of gay identity. For example, the update went on to explain: “We came to say that no one is a second-class citizen, and that we shall be silent no longer. They didn’t hear us. Or they heard us but don’t believe us.”<sup>175</sup> The repetition of gay men and lesbians as full citizens and not “second-class citizens” implies that the gay men and lesbians references in The War Conference update are, in fact, U.S. citizens. This limits the membership of the gay identity put forward by these political actors to only include those who are documented, leaving people who are undocumented outside of the construction of gay identity.

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<sup>174</sup> 7713, Box 34, Folder 14, “The War Conference Update,” 1.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

The update continued by forwarding the argument for viewing gay men and lesbians as full citizens with the following analogy: “There are those who remember that Jews were silent as they were herded into trains. They remember that no one cared as the gypsies were trucked away. And they remember the silence as homosexuals disappeared in Dachau.”<sup>176</sup> Analogies to the Holocaust should always be questioned as a rhetorical strategy and this example is not exceptional. In the context of The War Conference update in which repeated references are made to the full citizenship of gay men and lesbians, the comparison of lesbians and gay men to Jews, gypsies, and homosexuals during the Holocaust is employed by the authors to imply that the opposition that lesbians and gay men are confronting is silencing, broad in scope, organized, and intended to obliterate lesbians and gay men. Furthermore, it helps the authors to suggest that “homosexuals” should be considered a legible identity category alongside populations that are recognized as oppressed groups: Jews and gypsies (and presumably many others). These analogies echo the rhetorical strategies used by political actors to prioritize the HCSA, which to cast lesbians and gay men as a minority group similar to – but not overlapping with – people of color and women. In this case, “homosexuals” are placed alongside and not overlapping with Jewish people and other stigmatized minorities.

The perception of backlash experienced by lesbians and gay men was cast in similar analogies in other parts of the update. In one instance, the authors compared their rights as citizens to the struggle for political standing being waged by Black South Africans:

We are a gentle, loving people. We are fighting for our lives. And now we are determined that we shall fight for our lives. We will accept second-

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

class citizenship no longer. We will accept ostracism and repression no longer. And we shall accept abandonment no longer. We are determined to resist the universal apartheid which treats us as non-persons, shunts us to the fringes of society, and would just as soon see us disappear.<sup>177</sup>

Once again, the need to respond to backlash and associated challenges is made salient in this articulation through the comparison to a legible and widely sympathized human rights struggle. Employing a more contemporary reference point than the Holocaust – Apartheid in South Africa – aims to make the political efforts of gay men and lesbians legible to activists and political leaders in the context of late 1980s U.S. politics. More specifically, using “apartheid” links the division and subordination of various racial categories in South Africa under the Apartheid regime to the political experience of lesbians and gay men in the United States. Posed immediately after the assertion that “we are a gentle, loving people,” this statement from The War Conference update effectively casts lesbians and gay men as targets for oppression and, importantly, as a unified group of recipients – i.e., “a gentle, loving people” – of that oppression.

Interrogating the Apartheid analogy as it follows a Holocaust reference reveals yet another objective of this document: to cast concern with lesbian and gay citizenship and rights as the proper province for political struggle. In other words, lesbians and gay men are citizens of the United States, and therefore should not be subjected to systematic oppression (as in South Africa) or genocide and disappearance (as in the Holocaust). This rhetorical strategy effectively poses oppression as something that happens “over there” or “back then,” and in doing so nullifies or renders any opposition to lesbians and gay men as backwards, un-American, and evidence of the worst abuses of power. By eliminating these obstacles, the political actors at The War Conference sought to mobilize gay men

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 (emphasis in original).

and lesbians to political action. The strategies that were taken up and the members mobilized are examined below.

There were other ways that the leaders of The War Conference sought to mobilize a unified front against the oppression faced by lesbian and gay men, which are reflected in the ways they described the meeting and the objectives going forward. Following the analogies to the Holocaust and Apartheid, The War Conference update goes on to outline the vision developed by the leaders who convened at the meeting:

Our beauty and humanity is in our diversity, but our strength is not in our dispersity. We are fighting for our lives because there are powerful forces making war against us. We must organize and mobilize to defend ourselves, and in defending ourselves, to assert ourselves as rightful human beings.<sup>178</sup>

As this statement by the interest group leaders makes clear, the need to assert the humanity of lesbians and gay men is urgent in light of the “powerful forces making war against us.” This perception of backlash is used to urge readers to see that there is a need to unify in order to mount a successful defense, and implies that this unity might be best mediated through political action at the site of politics. Notably, the claim that the strength of this movement is founded in its “diversity,” and not its “dispersity” (or a lack of ideological or physical proximity), together with the assertion of humanity, premises the unity of lesbians and gay men as a given based entirely on the fact that they are “human.” The repeated references to the humanity of lesbians and gay men makes clear that the strength they would draw from this proposed unity is fomented by righteous indignation directed at those who would deny them of the most innate aspects of their being – their humanity. By posing humanity – albeit a diverse humanity – as the common

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 2.

factor bringing lesbians and gay men together, the rhetoric of unity offered by the leaders of The War Conference sought to subsume important differences under the signifier of sexuality. In much the same way that the Gay Activist Alliance asked members to elevate their identification as gay or lesbian above other identifications, particularly with respect to race and gender, the leaders at The War Conference here assert the status of unified lesbians and gay men *specifically* as humans who are in need of political action to claim privileges that are rightfully afforded them as citizens.

After asserting the conditions for unity, the leaders went on to share the vision for the infrastructure that would help to manage and mediate the newly unified coalition of lesbians and gay men, specifically in the face of backlash. The leaders reflected in their overview of the meeting's events:

We are raising more money to support our institutions than ever before, but it is not enough, not nearly enough. Each of us must accept the responsibility to multiply the funding of all our organizations. Without adequate support we can never expect our institutions to meet the enormous responsibilities we place on them.<sup>179</sup>

With these words, the leaders at The War Conference clearly elaborate the relationship they perceived between funding and political action. Indeed, as these leaders elucidate, it is the responsibility of each reader to ensure funding opportunities in order to maintain the important work of these organizations, i.e., “the enormous responsibilities we place on them” because work would cease without these funding streams. The sources for this funding were most readily identified as the growing population of lesbian and gay-identified women and men. For instance, the leaders writing The War Conference overview go on to explain,

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<sup>179</sup> 7301, Box 258, Folder 2 “Final Statement on the War Conference 1988,” 2.

We must do a better job of encouraging people to begin the process of coming out, and to support them when they do. We all know the exhilarating liberation of the process. We must convey that to others. The closet means invisibility, impotence, crippling and even death.<sup>180</sup>

Here, once again, the connections between coming out, political action, and the consequences of neglecting these important facets of lesbian and gay identification are outlined. Coming out is projected as the most important political act that people can undertake. It is also a way for the organizations taking part in The War Conference to generate viable funding opportunities through enhancing their membership rolls.<sup>181</sup> As the previous chapter illustrates, however, the assertions that all people should come out to embrace their gay or lesbian identification neglected to consider the reasons people might have for not coming out. These included fears over losing one's racial community or broader support networks of family and friends.<sup>182</sup> In these ways, the discourse of coming out and fundraising at the site of The War Conference defined membership exclusively for those who could consider coming out.<sup>183</sup>

The leaders at The War Conference recognized that their emphasis on coming out and political action precluded inclusion of various groups. Reflecting this self-awareness, they explained that:

We recognize our failures to adequately reach out and build coalitions with other social movements in our society. We, as individual gay men

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>181</sup> For a history on the evolution of interest group political representation from activism to advocacy funded by monetary contributions, see Matthew Hindman, *Interest Group Citizenship: LGBT Politics from the Closets to K Street* (Doctoral Dissertation, 2013).

<sup>182</sup> For more on race and coming out, see Cohen, *Boundaries of Blackness*, Chapter 3; Essex Hemphill, *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men* (Boston: Alyson Publications, Inc, 1991).

<sup>183</sup> By the late 1980s, many of these interest groups – especially the HRC – had modified their attempts to attract funding from lesbian and gay-identified men who remained closeted, and offered them opportunities to contribute to interest group membership privately without revealing their identities, see Hindman, *Interest Group Citizenship*.

and lesbians, have an obligation to involve ourselves in the struggles of others, in order that we can expect others to involve themselves in ours.

With these words, the leaders describing the vision for united lesbian and gay political action shift their audience from interest group advocacy and takes the opportunity to direct *individuals* in political action. By explicitly stating that gay men and lesbians have an obligation to engage in other social justice struggles, as individuals, the leaders of The War Conference effectively partitioned political action into two fields. In the first, interest group organizations would seek more members and represent them specifically with regard to the identifications as lesbian or gay. The second individual level would be the location from which people would be encouraged to mobilize in coalitions with other groups. Once again, this effectively constructed borders around lesbian and gay identification by asserting it as a primary identification, and other political struggles or political identities as ancillary, or at most, coalitional, projects. This construction of an individual, albeit inclusive, politics elided the many different concerns held by those whose identities and thus political concerns overlapped with the “struggle of others.”

The final vision offered by the leaders of The War Conference entailed establishing umbrella organizations to represent lesbians and gay men in politics, postulating that, “We must establish a gay and lesbian umbrella project to organize and conduct the conference, and realize that cohesiveness and cooperation will be vital.”<sup>184</sup> Proposing future conferences, similar to The War Conference, announced the intention of the leaders present to maintain the unified and organized lesbian and gay political movement. In the following section, I look at the ways that these newly unified lesbian and gay interest groups represented lesbian and gay-identified people, with particular

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<sup>184</sup> 7301, Box 258, Folder 2 “Final Statement on the War Conference 1988,” 5.

attention to how these representations varied across the two sites, revealing the effects constructing a unified lesbian and gay coalition and identity category understood exclusively as a sexual identity, and not one that intersects with race, gender, class, nation, and ability.

### *Representing Gay Identity*

This section examines the ways in which the newly-formed coalition and associated political identity category to unite lesbians and gay men was represented across political venues by political actors including social movement and interest group leaders. Whereas the previous sections in this chapter looked at how political actors framed lesbian and gay identities and the coalition to unite them *internally* to members, this section explores the different ways that political actors and the members themselves represented these identities and the coalition *externally*. Attention to how interest group representatives projected gay and lesbian identities, as well as the coalition to unite these groups in political action, provides insight into how elected representatives and members were educated about the boundaries and interests associated with the new gay and lesbian coalition. These representations consequently played a central role in determining what is known about the boundaries and memberships of lesbian and gay identities as well as the coalition to unite these groups. Representation, in other words, was used by political actors as way to disseminate information about gay men and lesbians, and was especially important to lesbian and gay political actors who were looking to combat backlash and stigmatization of lesbian and gay identities in the 1980s.

With these observations about the influence of representation on the construction of lesbian and gay political identities in mind, the first site of representation explored in

this section is the effort to have the HCSA passed in Congress. The second is the articulation of a national agenda for lesbian and gay interest groups that was circulated by the participants of The War Conference in 1988. Using a situated comparison to explore representations of lesbian and gay identities across these two political venues shows how political actors shifted representations of lesbian and gay identities, interests, and coalition according to varying audiences. Attending to the ways that representations of the boundaries and interests were changed for different political venues and audiences thus shows how political actors are able to privilege certain aspects of lesbian and gay identities and political interests over others. The following section examines the representation of lesbian and gay identities, interests, and the coalition to unite these two groups in relation to the passage of the HCSA.

#### *Representing lesbians and gay men in conjunction with the HCSA*

The earlier discussion of the HCSA in this chapter shows how political actors at the NGLTF framed lesbian and gay identities internally to members, particularly the efforts to have them included for the first time in federal legislation. The goal of inclusion in the HCSA was motivated for members by framing lesbians and gay men as a unified minority group that faces bias-motivated violence and thus requiring protection at the federal level similar to those extended to other marginalized groups. These efforts to project lesbians and gay men as a marginalized and oppressed entailed drawing analogies to other recognized minority groups – most often people who are Black and/or Jewish – in order to define the boundaries of lesbians and gay men as a minority group. Projected internally to members by NGLTF leaders, this articulation of lesbian and gay identities came to be understood as parallel identity categories defined specifically by sexuality

and, importantly, exclusive of race, class, gender, and other identifications. The following review of two sets of documents circulated by the NGLTF – the talking points for members to use when contacting representatives to support the HCSA and Congressional testimony supplied by the NGLTF in 1988 – demonstrates how gay and lesbian identities were represented as a unified and marginalized group across political venues, particularly Congress, and consequently furthered the construction of gay and lesbian identity as exclusive of other racial, class, or gender identifications.

The HCSA was first introduced in Congress by John Conyers, Mario Biaggi, and Barbara Kennelly in 1985 and it was ultimately signed into law in 1990. A highly mobilized effort by lesbian and gay interest groups, specifically the NGLTF and HRC (Human Rights Campaign), took place during the intervening five years to ensure the passage of the HCSA that mandated the collection of data pertaining to crimes based on race, ethnicity, religion, *and* sexual orientation.

One aspect of these campaigns included educating lesbians and gay men about the most effective ways to persuade lawmakers when contacting them through letters, phone calls, or visits. To these ends, the NGLTF circulated a three-page document to members in 1989 titled, “Sexual Orientation and the Collection of Hate Crime Statistics” that outlined talking points. This document was important because although the passage of the HCSA seemed imminent, there was resistance fomenting in both the House and Senate that sought to exclude sexual orientation from the list of protected categories. In anticipation of this opposition and the introduction of an amendment to exclude sexual orientation, the authors of the document offered a series of talking points for lesbians and gay men to use when contacting their representatives to urge passage of the HCSA.

The talking points opened by suggesting that people highlight evidence that lesbians and gay men are often the victims of bias-motivated violence, similar to the members of other protected groups listed in the HCSA. To make this argument, the authors of the talking points suggest citing a report recently published by the National Institute of Justice, which explained that, “the most frequent victims of hate violence today are blacks, Hispanics, Southeast Asians, Jews, and gays and lesbians. Homosexuals are probably the most frequent victims.”<sup>185</sup> Listing gays and lesbians alongside these other groups, which were not being challenged as beneficiaries of HCSA protections, aims to show that any efforts at effective protections against hate crimes would necessarily include the gay and lesbian group. This argument relies upon the potential effect of posing lesbians and gay men as similar to other marginalized groups as victims of violence. Significantly, lesbians and gay men in this argument are not projected as *also* Black, Hispanic, Southeast Asian, or Jewish, a point that is made clearly by the speculation that of all these groups, “homosexuals” are the most frequent victims.

The projection of lesbians and gay men as identities that are discrete and not intersecting with race, religion, or ethnicity was made all the more forcefully in a talking point that suggested that it would be useful to highlight that the perpetrators of bias-motivated violence are often indiscriminate in the groups they target. This talking point explains that:

Sexual orientation should not be separated from other forms of hate violence because the perpetrators of racial, religious, and anti-gay crimes are frequently the same. For example, a neo-Nazi leader convicted in the 1983 arson of a Jewish Community Center in Indiana was also found guilty of torching a gay Metropolitan Community Church in Missouri. In

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<sup>185</sup> As quoted in 7301, Box 54, Folder 45, “Sexual Orientation and Collection of Hate Crime Statistics,” 2. Emphasis in original.

Mobile, Alabama, Klansmen who took part in the 1981 lynching of a heterosexual black man had earlier beaten a man because he was gay. In Arkansas, an Aryan Nations computer bulletin board that has issued messages attacking Jews, Blacks, and Hispanics, has also called for the collection of names and addresses of 'queers' and their 'family members and close associates' to 'be acted upon when expedient.'<sup>186</sup>

Here, the authors propose that people contacting their representatives should highlight that many different marginalized groups are targets for violence and intimidation, often by the same groups or individuals. Holding those who carry out bias-motivated violence constant while also varying the targets of that violence implies that these groups – in one example: Jews and lesbians and gay men – are necessarily discrete and, importantly, not overlapping. This suggests that the targeting of the Jewish Community Center does not impact lesbians and gay men in the same way that targeting the Metropolitan Community Church does not affect Jews. Posing lesbians and gay men as separate from other identifications is repeated in an example from Mobile, Alabama, where a straight Black man was lynched by the same Klan members who later inflicted violence upon a gay man. It is in this last example that the representation of lesbian and gay men as implicitly white and not intersecting with other identities is made most clearly. This example implicitly represents the gay man as white by leaving his race unqualified, and thus presumably white. According to the logic of listing groups in this way, lesbians and gay men are not Jewish, Black, and/or Hispanic. They are white and suggested to be different from these other groups that are also targeted for bias-motivated crime.

The significance of describing bias-motivated crimes in this way extends beyond the projection of lesbians and gay men as white. By aligning lesbian and gay men together with Jews, Blacks, and Hispanics, all of whom are constructed as victims of

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

bias-motivated violence (albeit with “homosexuals as the most frequent victims”), it also constructs lesbians and gay men as incapable of perpetuating racism or oppression of any sort, and consequently poses them outside of criminality. In other words, they are the victims of crime, but not the perpetrators of it. Christina Hanhardt’s work on the development of lesbian and gay neighborhoods shows the effects of this construction on a practical level. Her analysis on “safe spaces” and the citizen patrols implemented to protect residents from violence shows how these street patrols would often isolate working-class men of color for scrutiny as potential perpetrators of hate crimes based on the assumption that all the residents of neighborhoods dominated by lesbian and gay residents are white. This racialized understanding of what came to be known as “homophobia” pathologized working class Black and Latino men as anti-gay, and consequently precluded the possibility for Black and Latino gay-identified men to safely occupy these neighborhoods because they were increasingly targeted by citizen patrols working to protect gay neighborhoods.<sup>187</sup> Extending this logic to the realm of politics, as it was in the talking points supplied by the NGLTF, also foreclosed representation for lesbian and gay-identified people of color because they are erased through the construction of gay identity as similar, but not overlapping, other identities.

Another example of the ways that lesbians and gay men were represented as a united group and associated identity in relation to the HCSA is the testimony provided by Kevin Berrill to Congress in 1988 on behalf of the NGLTF. Here, as in the talking points, Berrill aims to make the case for maintaining sexual orientation in the collection of data on hate crimes. After urging action on bias-motivated violence, likening it to a pernicious “cancer” at one point and on par with “global terrorism” in another, Berrill goes on to

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<sup>187</sup> Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, chap. 3.

articulate the specific ways that lesbians and gay men are targeted for violence and should thus be included in any hate crime legislation.<sup>188</sup> As in the talking points, Berrill projects lesbians and gay men as implicitly white and separate from racial and ethnic identifications. Towards the conclusion of his testimony, for example, Berrill implored representatives to maintain sexual orientation in the HCSA, explaining that:

Indeed, any legislation excluding anti-gay violence sends a message that attacks against gay people are somehow qualitatively different from – and less reprehensible than – crime against members of racial, ethnic, or religious groups. At a time when the AIDS crisis has fanned so much hatred and when anti-gay violence has reached epidemic proportions, we think it is dangerous for any hate violence initiative to ignore this urgent problem.<sup>189</sup>

Berrill connects the need for including sexual orientation to the public health crisis wrought by AIDS, which echoes the justification he provided to NGLTF members that were in favor of prioritizing a Gay Rights Bill over the HCSA. Drawing attention to AIDS, immediately after listing racial, ethnic, and religious groups – all of which are generally recognized by members of Congress as minority groups – seeks to pose “gay people” as a minority group subject to violence in the same ways these other groups are acknowledged as being subject to violence. Once again, however, the listing of “gay people” with a litany of other groups defined by race, ethnicity, and religion forecloses possibilities for viewing these identities as overlapping. Gay people living with AIDS, for example, do not require protections because they are Black and living with AIDS, or because they publicly challenge gender norms and are consequently targeted for violence, but specifically because they are part of a subgroup of gay, white men that is associated

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<sup>188</sup> 7301, Box 54, Folder 34, “Testimony on Federal Hate Crime Statistics Collection, June 21, 1988, by Kevin Berrill,” pages 3 and 6.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

with AIDS. Posing the need for protections in this way neglects to attend to the non-normatively gendered, poor, and people of color who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender and are most often the targets of hate violence. Furthermore, naming recipients who would benefit from the inclusion of sexual orientation in the HCSA as “gay people” neglects to represent the unique concerns for lesbian-identified women. In the context of Congressional testimony, this representation of sexual orientation poses it as a category inclusive of only gay-identified and white men.

The representation of this very narrow swath of gay-identified individuals was evidenced in other sections of the testimony, specifically in the articulation of who would benefit from the inclusion of sexual orientation in the HCSA. Berrill speculates in his testimony that:

Mr. Chairman, federal data collection will result not only in a better understanding of the nature and scope of bias crime. It will also lead to a fundamental change in the way that local, state, and federal law enforcement responds to these episodes. If police agencies are called on to monitor crimes of bias, it will pave the way for improvements in the way these crimes are identified, classified, investigated, and prosecuted.<sup>190</sup>

Here Berrill speaks to one of the main objectives of the HCSA: to promote better education for law enforcement officers responding to hate crimes. On the surface, increasing the capacity of police officers to identify and respond to hate crimes was perceived as a benefit for gay men and lesbians; however, this perceived benefit ignores the many examples where law enforcement officers were the perpetrators of violence and harassment directed at lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender-identified people,

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<sup>190</sup> 7301, Box 54, Folder 34, “Testimony on Federal Hate Crime Statistics Collection, June 21, 1988, by Kevin Berrill,” 5.

specifically those who are poor, living on the streets, and engaging in sex work.<sup>191</sup> In so doing, this benefit of the HCSA cited by Berrill represents the interests of lesbians and gay men who were white, normatively-gendered, and employed, and thus safely outside of situations that would expose them to police or legal scrutiny.

*Representing lesbians and gay men after The War Conference*

The projection of lesbians and gay men as white and gender normative was also manifested in the representation of gay identity put forward by leaders at The War Conference. Recall that the analysis of The War Conference documents earlier in this chapter shows how the context of backlash motivated interest group and social movement leaders present at that meeting to favor a strategy of brokering unity across lesbians and gay men as the most effective political tactic at the national level. Of particular importance was how backlash created the conditions in which the political actors at The War Conference saw incentives for constructing gay identity in narrow ways to include gay, white, and gender normative people as representative of the group with the consequence of shift attention away from gay and lesbian people of color, gay and lesbian people who are poor, and gay and lesbian people who are differently abled.

While these constructions of gay identity were directed primarily to internal audiences, the following analysis of a document titled, “The Final Statement on the War Conference” shows how political actors represented this narrow construction of gay identity to external audiences in order to educate them about the unique political interests held by gay men and lesbians. These strategy points were circulated broadly and helped to further the particular construction of gay identity sought by the leaders at The War

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<sup>191</sup> Transgender (and transsexual) people of color are shut out of employment opportunities because of their gender non-conforming presentation and often resort to the drug trade and sex work, see Susan Stryker, *Transgender History*; David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*.

Conference, and as such, emphasized who comprises the gay political identity group (i.e., the boundaries of it), which interests were priorities, and what further issues – diversity, in particular – remained to be addressed.

The Final Statement began with an outline for channeling interest group energy in electoral politics and media outreach. In connection with urging people to come out, the authors explained that, “we must work to recruit more openly gay and lesbian candidates and to support them fully. And above all, we must get our community registered to vote and we must make sure that they do vote.”<sup>192</sup> The authors went on to recommend that resources ought to be pooled in order to support the entrance in electoral politics with a, “nation-wide media campaign to promote a positive image of gays and lesbians... We must consider the media in every project we undertake.”<sup>193</sup> By advocating for visibility in these ways, the authors of The Final Statement on the War Conference demonstrate a keen awareness for the role of representation and the possibilities for educating the broader public about lesbian and gay-identified people. To this point, the authors speculated that, “Our media efforts are fundamental to the full acceptance of us in American life.”<sup>194</sup> This is a powerful observation, particularly in the context of backlash that preoccupied leaders at The War Conference and the state need to reframe gay identity in ways that would be palatable to both political and mediate audiences. These leaders pursued more avenues to represent lesbians and gay men, in other words, as a way to change stigmas associated with lesbian and gay identity that would, in turn, produce more positive political outcomes for lesbians and gay men. The question of *who*

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<sup>192</sup> 7301, Box 54, Folder 34, “Testimony on Federal Hate Crime Statistics Collection, June 21, 1988, by Kevin Berrill,” 5 (emphasis in original).

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.





prevailing circumstances of backlash have created what leaders perceived to be a crisis, in which leaders felt compelled to put forward the most “acceptable” version of gay identity so as to not draw further stigma. In the context of a writing that critiques the lack of diversity at The War Conference, Yates implies that those represented by the group will more than likely be white, gender normative, and politically active, and consequently exclude the most vulnerable members of the new gay and lesbian coalition and associated gay political identity that the leaders at The War Conference claimed to represent. Yates concluded by asserting that these concerns precluded him from conscientiously participating in The War Conference, “without first reconciling ourselves to those gay men and lesbians whom we have kept persistently in exile.”<sup>201</sup>

It is this final note from Yates that connects the power of representation within The War Conference – for people of color, in this case – and the development of a national agenda on behalf of lesbians and gay men that the leaders of The War Conference seemed well-aware of, given their proposed strategy to attract media attention and enter electoral politics. According to Yates, the exclusion and “exile” of specific groups of gay and lesbian-identified participants will necessarily produce a narrow agenda that will only serve a select few.

War Conference participants took seriously the issues that Yates raised about diversity. In addition to proposing quotas to ensure racial parity in the group, the political actors at The War Conference emphasized the need for gay and lesbian people of color to come out and embrace political activity. This effectively shifted responsibility for diversity away from the leaders of The War Conference and placed it squarely on the shoulders of gay and lesbian people of color themselves. For example, immediately

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.































“transgender” to refer to a nascent political identity and political agenda, continued these conflicts, and worked to establish transgender as a political identity and associated political agenda.

*Holly Boswell: Transgender as a Human Category*

Stone’s essay explicitly and implicitly raised questions about how to counter the coercive silences that shrouded transsexual identity. In “The Transgender Alternative,” published by Holly Boswell in 1992 and featured in the second issue of *Chrysalis Quarterly*, a publication catering to self-identified transsexual subscribers to “promote the nonjudgmental and nondiscriminatory treatment of persons with gender dysphoria, and advocate respect for their dignity, their right to treatment, and their right to choose their gender,” Boswell builds on Stone’s thinking to offer one of the first widely-disseminated articulations of transgender political identity to an audience of transsexual and transvestite-identified individuals.

In the beginning of the essay, Boswell reiterated the debates over gender identity and biological sex initiated by Stone that would shape transgender political identity moving forward:

The middle ground I am referring to is transgenderism. I realize this term (heretofore vague) also encompasses the entire spectrum: crossdresser to transsexual person. But for the purposes of this article – and for what I hope will be a continuing dialogue – I shall attempt to define transgender as a viable option between crossdresser and transsexual person, which also happens to have a firm foundation in the ancient tradition of androgyny.<sup>215</sup>

The spatial metaphors of transgender as a singular middle ground, but also an all-encompassing spectrum, highlights some of the tensions between transgender as an

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<sup>215</sup> Holly Boswell, “The Transgender Alternative,” *Chrysalis Quarterly* (1992), 29.





Rather, she contends that the innate humanity of transgender people necessarily and implicitly affords social and political standing under the political framework of human rights. Boswell, in other words, linked transgender political identity with human rights struggles.

For Boswell, then, confronting these constraints requires a comprehensive solution that contradicts dichotomies of masculine/feminine and male/female that limit the full expression of “humanity:”

I believe the truth of a solution to our dilemma is all-encompassing – not polarized. We know, deep in our hearts, that we are more than our culture dictates. We can reject those limitations, in all their manifestations, if we have a vision that transcends – if we believe we must go beyond.<sup>220</sup>

Recapitulating her vision of transgender identity as “all-encompassing” contradicts her earlier formulation of it as an identity located between the poles of transvestite-identified people and transsexual-identified people, and again underscores the inchoate and continually evolving constructions of transgender identity. As Boswell wants to indicate here, refuting the ubiquitous binaries that have structured the lives of transgender and transsexual-identified people is not only about transcending them. It is also about claiming a legitimate, comprehensive position that defies these binaries in order to achieve unity. Although it is less clear in her closing statement where she stands on the question of whether or not transgender identity should capture multiple identities or construct its own boundaries to contain a strictly androgynous membership, that she envisions transgender identity as flush with social and political possibilities that will be enabled by linking transgender political goals with human rights efforts is clear and

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<sup>220</sup> Holly Boswell, “Transgender Alternative,” 30.







subsequent years. Whereas the mainstream lesbian and gay movement would evolve to pursue legal recognition and inclusion, transgender politics, in contrast, would aim to alter the institutions and laws that regulate binary gender.

In this way, Feinberg's reconfiguration of political demands spoke directly to mainstream lesbian and gay political groups. The political opportunities afforded by the reframing of binary sex and gender identity cumulates in Feinberg's elaboration of relationship of transgender identity with lesbian and gay identities:

Transgendered people are mistakenly viewed as the cusp of the lesbian and gay community. In reality the two huge communities are like circles that only partially overlap. While the oppressions within these two powerful communities are not the same, we face a common enemy. Gender-phobia – like racism, sexism and bigotry against lesbians and gay men – is meant to keep us divided. Unity can only increase our strength.<sup>224</sup>

Feinberg's identification of "gender-phobia" as the shared enemy of transgender men and woman, lesbians, and gay men once again locates politics in opposition to the institutions and social norms that maintain the strict requirements of binary gender. As such, this reframing was one of the first efforts by transgender activists and movement leaders to offer a counter-discourse of shared interests with lesbian and gay groups after the long history of being shut out of gay and lesbian organizing detailed in the previous chapters. Feinberg supported this argument by explaining that the violence directed towards individuals perceived to be lesbian or gay was not based on evidence of private behavior, as Berrill and others proponents of the HCSA cast it. Instead, Feinberg argued that this violence was motivated by anger over the violation of public gender norms. By identifying the source of oppression that lesbian women and gay men face as the

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.























### *Institutionalizing Inclusion*

Many of the organizations formed in the mid-1990s to represent transgender people were derived from the social and political groups listed at the beginning of this section, including Tri-Ess, Transexual Menace, and QLF. These organizations – primarily social clubs – served as mediators of transsexual and transvestite identities beginning in the 1960s by diffusing information about medical procedures in regular newsletters and holding meetings or conventions for their members. Indicative of the moves away from reliance on medical and psychiatric categories that dominated understandings of gender variance, by the mid-1990s, seven of these organizations had shifted towards political advocacy and had obtained Federal 501(c)(3) status, while several others, most notably direct-action protest groups like Transgender Menace and TransNation, were engaged in regular protest actions to educate the public about transgender identities and political agendas. The introduction of interest group advocacy for transgender people thus presented a number of unique hurdles to overcome, specifically the question of how to define membership and issues.

Reflecting these questions, in 1996, AEGIS used its regular newsletters – with its circulation of approximately 1500 issues – to publish a four-part series on the changes taking place across the organizations that previously represented transsexual and transvestite-identified people, but now claimed to represent all transgender-identified people.<sup>236</sup> It focused the series on an overview of the seven organizations that had formal 501(c)(3) status, and although the survey of these organizations in the first part of the

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<sup>236</sup> While a circulation of 1500 might not seem large, especially when compared to other lesbian and gay publications at the time, it was often the case that people would share and borrow these newsletters in order to avoid subscribing to them and possibly revealing their identities. It is consequently fair to assume that the actual readership for the AEGIS newsletters was quite larger than 1500.



primary focus...The only requirement is having a constructive interest in the goals and objectives of Tri-Ess and its chapters.<sup>238</sup>

Fairfax's efforts to both defend exclusionary membership policies while also gesturing towards possibilities for openness reveal the extent to which a rhetoric of inclusion had infiltrated the prevailing construction of transgender identity and politics. That Fairfax was compelled to respond with respect to the membership policies of Tri-Ess is noteworthy for its efforts to challenge the perception of Tri-Ess as exclusionary, and drawing attention to the "friends" category of membership attempts to portray Tri-Ess as inclusive in order to match the policies of the other organizations. Whereas the previous chapters showed that the construction of normative gay identity took place through explicit and implicit marginalizations of certain members to shore up the boundaries of gay identity as white and gender normative, this example from transgender identity construction – particularly as it is mediated by political and social groups like Tri-Ess – shows that the intended construction of transgender identity was as a broadly inclusive identity group.

The question of why it is that Fairfax goes out of her way to pose Tri-Ess differently – i.e., as inclusive and in alignment with other transgender organizations – is further answered in Denny's response to Fairfax's letter:

It was important in the early days to establish a category for heterosexual cross-dressers which was distinct from homosexuals and distinct from transsexualism. But that posture has made less sense with each succeeding decade, and is quite frankly anachronistic in the late 1990s. This is the fundamental change that Tri-Ess has been resisting.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Vision 2001, Part Two, 1996, *AEGIS* 4/96 #7, 7. From the personal archive of Dallas Denny.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 8.













*1994 – 1996: Looking forward*

When coupled with Xavier's emphasis on a transgender interest group presence in Washington, Denny's recommendation that separate organizations should be formed to represent different segments of the transgender community and join in alliance with each other illustrates one of the key issues facing transgender politics going into the end of the decade: The efforts to balance the construction of transgender as an identity category with fluid and vast boundaries and the formation of transgender political organizations in an interest group system that privileges strength in numbers and single issue agendas.<sup>244</sup> As Denny's recommendations points to, these latter elements of interest group politics exerts a homogenizing influence on the groups that comprise the members, which has implications for subsequent identity construction and mediation. Political scientist Rogers Brubaker, in *Ethnicity without Groups*, explains that this tendency to pose groups as discrete and internally homogenous is to be expected when groups are posed as the protagonists of social and political struggles.<sup>245</sup> And Dara Strolovitch's 2007 study of interest groups shows that the *claim* to represent interests impacting intersectionally marginalized members is contradicted by the persistent tendency to put forth issues pertaining exclusively to the most advantaged members.<sup>246</sup> Thus, whereas the original vision at the beginning of the 1990s was transgender identity as an inclusive umbrella category to name, empower, and contain many expressions of gender variance, by the mid-1990s the effort to translate this broad, inclusive identity category into a unified

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<sup>244</sup> Strolovitch, *Affirmative Advocacy*. For the homogenizing influence of interest group politics on a specific identity group, see Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity* that discusses the impact of this context on Latino interest group mobilization.

<sup>245</sup> See Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnicity Without Groups" *European Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 2 (2002), 164.

<sup>246</sup> Strolovitch, *Affirmative Advocacy*, chap. 4.

political movement with formal advocacy organizations to represent it tended towards organizing transgender political interests along a single axis of identity – transgender – and along with it, a narrow view of gender identity as pertaining specifically to white transgender women.

This progressively more narrow construction of transgender political identity put forth by influential political actors further demonstrates how political identity is successfully constructed through the strategic marginalization of members who are perceived as potentially compromising the single axis construction of the group. In the case of transgender political identity, these marginalized groups include people living with HIV/AIDS, transgender men, trans people of color, gender queers, gay and lesbian transgender people, and especially people who are intersex, demonstrating once again that political identity construction takes place through the designation of within-group difference that shore up the boundaries of an identity group defined in unitary and mutually exclusive ways.

The next section shifts attention to examine how these narrow constructions of transgender identity were furthered through efforts to represent transgender people as a unified minority group in politics, looking specifically at the transgender interest groups that formed in the late 1990s to heed Xavier’s advice and maximize influence in Washington. As expected, these new interest groups took seriously the importance of inclusion in their mission statements and political agendas; however, as transgender political identity and the activists and lobbyists to represent it became more visible in Washington, they were exposed to pressures to shift or change meanings and interests associated with transgender political identity. These pressures prompted the evaluation of

the political interests and strategies utilized, and, as the following shows, incentivized increasingly narrow representations of transgender identity and political interests.

*Representing transgender political identity: 1996 – 2000*

This section explores how transgender political identity was further shaped by the increasingly visible representation of transgender people and political interests in Washington, especially with the introduction of a new interest group, GenderPAC (Gender Political Action Coalition), to represent transgender people in national politics. Attention to the ways in which transgender political identity and interests were represented across political venues, especially in Congress, are important to consider given the rapidly changing visibility of transgender-identified people in the late 1990s. Whereas the initial effort to construct transgender political identity was a relatively internal process, concerning primarily those who might identify as transgender, by the late 1990s, attention had turned outward towards efforts to educate the broader public about transgender-identified people and their political interests. On the most basic level, the circulation of information about transgender political identity helped to educate policymakers, interest groups that were potential coalition partners, the broader public, and transgender-identified people about the boundaries of transgender political identity. The sudden increase in visibility across political contexts also exposed transgender people to different influences on the boundaries of transgender identity and interests. Specifically, the increased visibility and representation of transgender identity and interests in Washington put activists and interest groups leaders in the position of critically evaluating the political opportunities available to transgender advocates and the best strategies to exploit them. In many cases, the diffusion of this information prompted

calls for dramatic revisions of transgender identity and modifications to the most important interests mobilizing transgender people in politics.

The following analysis proceeds in two parts. The first part is an analysis of the 1997 book published by GenderPAC's executive director, Riki Wilchins, called *Read My Lips*. In it, Wilchins articulates many of the founding principles of GenderPAC and her vision for transgender political identity and interests, which was strongly informed by the intellectual and political work of Sandy Stone, Holly Boswell, Leslie Feinberg, and Dallas Denny. Of particular interest for this analysis of transgender identity construction, Wilchins extends many of the boundaries of transgender political identity outlined by these thinkers into a vision for GenderPAC and the advocacy it will undertake, using the forum of the book to express three different goals for GenderPAC: 1) posing the transgender political identity and agenda of interests as broad and inclusive; 2) fighting on behalf of "diversity;" 3) targeting oppression stemming from gender discrimination, which Wilchins argues is the root of *all* marginalization. In these ways, the vision of representation for transgender people that Wilchins put forth was one that hoped to push back against the homogenizing tendency of identity-based interest groups.

The second part of this section uses the archived lobbying notes from GenderPAC's political mobilizations in the 1990s to examine the extent to which Wilchins and GenderPAC political actors were successful at implementing this broad and inclusive vision and political agenda while representing transgender people across political venues, specifically Congress. Comparing these two instances of representation – one internal and the other external – further shows how identities are constructed at the site of representation. In particular, the lobbying records for GenderPAC illustrates how

the fluid and inclusive boundaries of transgender identity allowed transgender activists to quickly shift the ways in which transgender identity was projected in order to maximize potential gains. The following analysis shows that these strategic maneuvers often entailed casting transgender identity as a facet of sexuality – not a political identity and agenda concerned with ending gender oppression. That is, the representation of transgender identity in Congress and more broadly collapsed transgender identity into sexual identities, such as gay and transgender, and consequently directed political action towards goals of inclusion and recognition in legislation like the HCSA and ENDA. These shifts in the representation of transgender identity demonstrate once again that identities do not inhere in natural or essential traits, but are rather the products of decisions made by political actors to represent, and consequently construct, identities in particular ways.

The following outlines the initial vision for the representation of transgender people in Washington put forth by Wilchins and GenderPAC.

*Diversity as a Political Interest: Riki Wilchins's Read My Lips*

As the 1990s came to a close, many of the foundational aspects of transgender political identity outlined by Sandy Stone, Holly Boswell, Leslie Feinberg, and Dallas Denny had evolved into salient characteristics that gave transgender identification meaning and defined its boundaries. Key among these was the severing of presumed link between biological sex and gender identity, which broadened the scope of transgender identity to include anybody whose gender expression challenged dominant norms of masculinity or femininity. These conceptual moves, which reflected significant work by feminists to theorize the proper objects of sex and gender, situated transgender identity

decidedly in the realm of self-expression.<sup>247</sup> Another key feature of transgender political identity at the end of the 1990s was an emphasis on broad inclusion, which stemmed from the historic stigmatization and exclusion (i.e., backlash) of transsexual and transgender-identified individuals from progressive politics. The importance of inclusion to transgender politics is illustrated in the articulation of it as synonymous with transgender identity (e.g., “trans-inclusion”) as well as the symbolic emphasis on inclusion foregrounded by many of the social groups and political organizations that formed to represent transgender people during the late 1990s. Many of the organizations to represent transgender people during this period of time held these two characteristics central to their mission statements and agendas of interests; however, it was not until many of these organizations combined in a coalition to form GenderPAC that these aspects of transgender political identity and the interests associated with it were broached in Washington.

Integral to the evolution of transgender political identity was the activism and intellectual work of Rikki Wilchins.<sup>248</sup> In 1994, Wilchins co-founded the Transsexual Menace, which was a direct-action group that formed after news about the murder of a young transgender man, Brandon Teena, received national attention and many transgender-identified people were looking for a way to mobilize against violence and discrimination.<sup>249</sup> Two years later in 1996, Wilchins played a critical role in brokering the coalition of organizations that would eventually be represented in national politics by

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<sup>247</sup> See Judith Butler, “Against Proper Objects,” *Differences* 6, no. 2 (1994) as well as the 2004 *GLQ* Forum, “Thinking Sex/Thinking Gender.”

<sup>248</sup> It is important to note that all of Wilchins’s political activism is united by an effort to destabilize the importance and necessity of social categories like transgender and transsexual. It should come as no surprise, then, that Wilchins refuses to identify as a transgender or transsexual activist, and instead orients herself as an activist against gender oppression, see Rikki Anne Wilchins, “Interview with a Menace,” in *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1997), 185-200.

<sup>249</sup> See Stryker, *Transgender History*, chap. 5.

GenderPAC (of which Wilchins would be instated as executive director), and in 1997 published a book of essays in which Wilchins outlined a vision for transgender politics at the close of the decade and into the next century. *Read My Lips* thus provides intimate insight into the evolution of transgender politics through the eyes of an activist-turned-executive-director at the front lines of translating the founding characteristics of transgender identity – gender identity as self expression and broad inclusion – into an interest group in Washington, GenderPAC.

Wilchins’s commitment to representing transgender identity and political interests as oriented against *all* oppressions is made clear at several points in *Read My Lips*. This vision for politics, according to Wilchins, would serve as a radical departure from the politics undertaken in the name of lesbians and gay men. In the chapter titled “The Birth of the Homosexual,” for example, Wilchins offers an overview of the trajectory of gay and lesbian political organizing that highlights the ways in which it has failed to address the needs of transgender-identified people:

Gay liberation has increasingly focused on mainstream acceptance which will gain for acceptable queers full civil rights, while largely bypassing the issues of those queerer queers who might upset that civil rights apple cart by distressing the straight power structure.<sup>250</sup>

Wilchins divides “queers” into two camps – acceptable queers and queerer queers – to make a point about the need to modify existing political agendas so they address gender identity. For Wilchins, “acceptable queers” are interested in advancing gay civil rights agenda that seeks recognition and inclusion by heterosexuals within heterosexual institutions, such as marriage and the military. This is different than challenging the foundations of these institutions as “queerer queers” – presumably people who are

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<sup>250</sup> Wilchins, *Read My Lips*, 69.

transgender and gender nonconforming – do in order to unsettle the rigidity of male-female binary as its mediated through institutions.

Another important aspect of this statement is the ways that it reflects evolving uses of the term “queer.” Returning to Warner’s 1994 *Fear of a Queer Planet*, queer resists definition but necessarily entails a social orientation that challenges dominant norms. In so doing, queer defies its own categorization or evolution into a norm. Cohen’s “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” however, elucidates the ways that “queer” has been interpreted by some mainstream political actors as the binary opposite of straight, as opposed to rejecting binaries and norms, as Warner’s 1994 elaboration of it outlines.<sup>251</sup> Thus, what Wilchins signals here with “acceptable queers” is the ways in which the use of queer functions in political rhetoric. For many interest group leaders and lobbyists, the strategic use of “queer” pays homage to activists and academics working to in the emerging field of queer theory, while also attending to political interests that are legible within the political realm. These interests, according to Wilchins, entail sidelining gender variance so as to not upset the dominant gender norms. Wilchins goes on to explain the stakes of this divide:

You see this in the approaches of the national gay groups, which appear less interested in the diversity of our community, or in the intersection of oppressions which meet in our complex lives and bodies, than in forwarding a narrow-band gay rights agenda.<sup>252</sup>

By implication, the Human Rights Campaign and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force publicly claim to advocate for the interests of gay and lesbian-identified people, particularly the narrow construction of them examined in previous chapters, but actually

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<sup>251</sup> Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” 437-465.

<sup>252</sup> Wilchins, *Read My Lips*, 87.

only buttress the straight power structure. For Wilchins, then, these organizations serve as a foil against which transgender political interests gain meaning. Here, again, the influence of within-group marginalization in the construction of group identity is evidenced, as Wilchins draws boundaries around a very particular understanding of gender and “queer.” Contrasting “queers” with “queerer queers” serves to organize those interested in a rights-based political agenda (i.e., “queers”) out of the radical vision for transgender identity and political interests that Wilchins puts forth. Thus, according to Wilchins, transgender political interests ought not strive to confirm the foundation of heterosexuality and binary gender. Rather, transgender political interests unsettle the gender binary, address intersections of oppression, and are thus more attentive to what Wilchins refers to here as “diversity.”

The importance of diversity for the political agenda put forth by Wilchins is introduced when Wilchins underscores the stakes of failing to take diversity into account. In the essay titled “Why Identity Politics...Sucks,” Wilchins outlines the repercussions for neglecting to embrace diversity as a central political concern:

I have no interest in being part of a transgender or transexual movement whose sole purpose is to belly up to the Big Table and help ourselves to yet another serving of Identity Pie, leaving in our wake some other, more marginalized group to carry on its own struggle alone.<sup>253</sup>

Wilchins refuses a serving of “Identity Pie,” suggesting that the end of politics is not to have identities recognized. Having rejected the salience of identity for politics, Wilchins refuses a seat at “the Big Table” to ensure that transgender people are not implicated in denying that seat from yet another marginalized group. Rather, according to Wilchins, politics ought to mobilize towards embracing diversity and orient political goals in the

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

direction of challenging structures and policies that mitigate the full range of possible expressions, characteristics, and desires. This expansive view on political mobilization under the heading of “diversity” as a political interest applies the conceptualization of transgender identity as an umbrella category to the realm of politics. That is, in the same ways that transgender as an umbrella category emphasizes the contingency of social categories, transgender political interests should be similarly derived. Differentiating transgender politics from the paradigm of identity politics requires modifications to the ways in which identity tends to mobilize political action:

Our movement shifts its foundations from identity to one of functions of oppression. Coalitions form around particular issues, and then dissolve. Identity becomes the result of contesting those oppressions, rather than a precondition for involvement. In other words, identity becomes an effect of political activism instead of a cause. It is temporary and fluid, rather than fixed.<sup>254</sup>

For Wilchins, then, transgender identity is not a static identification, but is rather provoked by oppression of diversity and solely concerned with challenging the conditions that naturalize narrow constructions of identity, specifically the gender binary. This effectively reconfigures the relationship between identities and politics. Instead of political interests emanating from identifications and being represented in politics accordingly, Wilchins conceives of transgender politics as radical activism that is attentive to a diversity of interests and targets institutions that structure and maintain oppression and marginalization, such as sex-segregated bathrooms, locker rooms, sports, dormitories, and documentation of sex on birth certificates, passports, and driver’s licenses.

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 86.

In sum, Wilchins outlined a radical political agenda for transgender people that emphasized orienting political actions towards challenging the institutions that normalize and naturalize the gender binary. In November of 1996, the national gay and lesbian news magazine, *The Advocate*, reported on a series of meetings during which several transgender organizations united to form the Gender Public Advocacy Coalition (or GenderPAC). Wilchins was identified in the story as the new executive director of GenderPAC, and described the impetus behind the formation of the new interest group: “A lot of people are stuck in the mind-set that there's a gay community, a lesbian community, and a transgender community,” she says. ‘I’m hoping we have an idea for a movement against all the ‘isms’”<sup>255</sup> In line with the vision for transgender politics put forth by Wilchins in *Read My Lips*, the mission statement for GenderPAC defined it as a nonprofit organization “dedicated to ‘gender, affectional, and racial equality’”<sup>256</sup> that would channel resources to lobby representatives Washington. The broader discourse around GenderPAC, however, identified both its constituency and political agenda much more expansively. Alongside already evolving aspects of transgender political identity, such as gender identity as self-expression and broad inclusion of all gender identities, Wilchins and GenderPAC introduced an additional political interest to be advocated on behalf of transgender identity: diversity and opposition to the institutions that structure and maintain binary gender. The following section examines the lobbying notes and Congressional testimonies put forth by GenderPAC to explore the extent to which this vision for transgender politics (and representation of transgender people) was achieved.

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*1996: Lobbying for Diversity*

An important backdrop to the formation of GenderPAC in 1996 was the Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Romer v Evans*. In May 1996, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled six to three that a Colorado constitutional amendment (Amendment 2), which precluded protected status for lesbians and gay men, did not serve any actual legitimate state interest and thus violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Scalia's dissent asserted that Colorado's Amendment 2 did not deny protections, but rather ensured that special privileges would not be conferred upon lesbians and gay men in the future.<sup>257</sup> Writing for the majority, however, Justice Kennedy explained that the amendment's intent to disqualify lesbians and gay men from protected status increased the potential for gay men and lesbian women to be discriminated against and, further, denied them basic protections ensured to all US citizens under the law.<sup>258</sup>

Although the *Romer v Evans* decision constituted an important victory that marked a significant departure from previous Court rulings with regard to gays and lesbians, the differing ways in which Kennedy and Scalia conceptualized homosexuality for the purposes of the ruling raised alarms among transgender, lesbian, and gay political advocacy organizations that were searching for the most strategic ways to advance their agendas. While Kennedy referred to "homosexual *status*," granting it consideration as an immutable trait and a legitimate social identification that would prompt heightened scrutiny from the Court (with implications for the ways lawmakers would view sexuality when making policy), Scalia consistently referred to "homosexual *conduct*" in his dissent. Emphasizing conduct, and in direct contradiction to status, or identity, suggested

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

that lesbian-identified women and gay-identified men could simply choose to behave differently, which would prevent them from being subjected to discriminatory actions, statutes, and laws. In other words, according to Scalia's logic, same-sex desire ought to be considered akin to a crime, and not an identity category in the eyes of the law – like race, for example – as the Court's 1986 ruling in *Bowers v Hardwick* required.

Though Scalia was writing for the slim minority in the case, the on-going threat of sexual orientation being viewed as a behavior rather than an as identity in jurisprudence and by lawmakers sent shock waves through transgender, lesbian, and gay interest groups. They expressed concerns that continuing work on the Hate Crimes Statistics Act detailed in the previous chapter, as well as the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which would protect lesbian and gay employees from discrimination at the workplace and in hiring, would be negatively affected and even made impossible to achieve. Scalia's dissent and consistent reference to "homosexual conduct" denied the grounding assumptions of these proposed bills: that lesbian and gay identities were immutable and thus required protections from violence and discrimination under the law. Thus, by the close of the 1990s an interesting shift had occurred. Whereas the beginning of the decade was marked by the influence of queer theory and the associated rejection of categories – especially those determined by biology – by the close of the decade, transgender, lesbian, and gay interest groups were in the position of reviving the biological determinants of gender identities and sexual orientation. The behavioral roots of these identities, which were once considered to be progressive and radical, were thrust out of the spotlight because of their new conservative connotations.

Records of GenderPAC’s lobbying efforts indicate that it was also impacted by the diverging views on homosexuality articulated by Kennedy and Scalia, and their implications for potential political opportunities for transgender-identified people and political interests. GenderPAC’s director of lobbying, Dana Preisling, reported on the *Romer v Evans* decision in a memo circulated to coalition members:

Part of a successful approach to eliminating the oppression transgendered persons suffer may involve understanding (and the science to do so isn’t there yet), and then explaining to the wider audience (GLB and straight), to what extent being transgendered is not a matter of choice, but stems from biological differences.<sup>259</sup>

Here it is important to recall that early conflicts over transgender political identity emphasized the separation of biological sex from gender identity and attached “trans” to the gender side of this divide. Historian Susan Stryker and activists like Pat Califia identify the salience of this separation as one of the principle mobilizing forces behind transgender politics: gender as self expression, *not* biology.<sup>260</sup> According to Preisling, the consequences of the distinctions drawn by Kennedy and Scalia, however, suggest that yet another radical reorientation of transgender political identity might be necessary to affect political change. Rather than maintaining the definition of transgender identity as a social category – one that is contingent and fluid – Preisling’s speculation here implies that the representation of transgender identity could possibly be shifted to emphasize biological roots of identity in order to gain a more sympathetic audience. Although discussions about shifting the meanings associated with transgender identity back to biological influences were not pursued, the Court’s decision in *Romer v Evans* indicated to lobbyists like Preisling the necessity of framing transgender identity strategically for different

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<sup>259</sup> Dana Preisling. May 22, 1996. Report 96:09: *Romer v Evans* Decision, Internet Archive, [www.web.archive.org/web/\\*/gpac.org](http://www.web.archive.org/web/*/gpac.org).

<sup>260</sup> Califia, *Sex Changes* and Stryker, *Transgender History*.

audiences. The lobbying notes related to two pieces of legislation in 1996 – the Hate Crimes Statistics Act (HCSA) and the Employment Non-discrimination Act (ENDA) – demonstrate that strategically representing varying definitions of transgender identity helped to disseminate and maintain the boundaries of transgender identity as fluid and contingent internally to transgender-identified people while also presenting it as immutable externally to lawmakers. Throughout this analysis, the ways that these varying representations of transgender identity and political interests constructed particular understandings of transgender identity for lawmakers and the broader public are emphasized, particularly as these choices carried implications for the construction of transgender identity.

A flashpoint for the on-going conflict over meanings to be associated with transgender political identity at the site of representation was the 1996 introduction of the Employment Non-discrimination Act (ENDA) in Congress. The historic precursor to ENDA, the “gay rights bill,” was first introduced by representatives Ed Koch and Bella Abzug in 1974 and proposed the addition of sex, sexual orientation, and marital status to the 1964 Civil Rights Act. By the 1990s, the legislation had evolved into ENDA and outlined protections for gay men and lesbian women from employment discrimination.<sup>261</sup> The 1996 debate and vote on it in the Senate was the first time legislation of its kind made it out of committee in twenty years, with the version offered mentioning *only* protections pertaining to real or perceived sexual orientation.<sup>262</sup> By mid-May, lobbyists working on behalf of GenderPAC accepted that the inclusion of gender identity alongside

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<sup>261</sup> Currah, “Expecting Bodies,” 332-333.

<sup>262</sup> Protections similar to the ones outlined by ENDA had been enacted by the Minneapolis City Council in 1975. These were adopted as Minnesota state law in 1993. In both instances, the city/state was the first in the country to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

sexual orientation was a distant possibility, and began exploring forming coalitions with the national lesbian and gay interest groups to somehow inject GenderPAC's voice in the upcoming Congressional debate. The reports of these meetings demonstrate the efforts by GenderPAC to educate potential coalition partners about transgender identity as well as the willingness to strategically frame transgender identity for different audiences to maximize political efficacy.

Preisling reports on one such meeting with Rich Tafel, the executive director of the conservative lesbian and gay interest group, the Log Cabin Republicans (LCR), in which the boundaries of transgender identity are elaborated for the purposes of educating a broader gay and lesbian-identified audience. Preisling relates an anecdote from the conclusion of their meeting:

On the depressing side, one of Rich's colleagues asked whether transfolk think they are part of the larger queer community, and if so, why? This provided an opportunity for a brief lecture on (1) who we are, (2) how many of us identify as TG and gay, lesbian or bisexual, and (3) how the bigots who harass and kill us certainly consider us queers.<sup>263</sup>

Once again, the evidence of Feinberg's influence on transgender political identity is illustrated. Recall that Feinberg offered the first articulation of the overlap of interests across transgender, lesbian, and gay politics, specifically with respect to violence. Feinberg explained that transgender men and women, lesbian women, and gay men are targeted for violence by bigots not for their private behavior in the bedroom, but the ways that their appearances suggest a challenge to the gender binary (and consequently heterosexuality). Four years later, Preisling recapitulates this logic to educate a potential coalition partner about the necessity of including transgender people in legislation like ENDA, a point that is made all the more forcefully by locating "queers" – an inclusive

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<sup>263</sup> Dana Preisling, May 30, 1996, Report 96:11: ENDA & More, Internet Archive, [www.web.archive.org/web/\\*/gpac.org](http://www.web.archive.org/web/*/gpac.org).

signifier defined by its orientation against dominant norms – as the recipient of bigotry. In this way, Preisling does not address the question of whether or not transgender people see themselves as part of the broader queer community. Preisling instead poses the boundaries of transgender identity as necessarily central to queer identity.

In a similar meeting with NGLTF’s director of lobbying, Melinda Paras, the source of resistance to adding gender identity *alongside* sexual orientation is made clear.

Preisling reports that Paras:

[A]dmited that many gays and lesbians still see transfolk as obstacles to gaining legislative protection for gays and lesbians, rather than as members of the same community and allies in the struggle for such protection. Hoping to change that perception, Alison and I explained that on May 5-6, 1997 we’ll have more than 100 constituent-lobbyists on Capitol Hill, and we’re willing to carry water for the rest of the queer community while we’re there. (I’ve made the same offer to HRC’s Elizabeth Birch.)<sup>264</sup>

Here again, Preisling aligns GenderPAC with lesbian and gay interest groups like LCR, NGLTF, and HRC by referring to a broad “queer” community. Representing the affected groups as queer, rather than lesbian, gay, and transgender, attempts to foreground the similarities of the interests across these groups. Mirroring Wilchins’s use of “acceptable queers” and “queerer queers,” its unqualified use here also further obscures the boundaries presumed of lesbian, gay, and transgender categories and prescribes a course of action to GenderPAC’s member organizations. Having asserted the relationship of transgender-identified people and interests to the lesbian and gay political advocacy, Preisling communicates to coalition members that they should be prepared to demonstrate the fact that they belong by the willingness to “carry water.” By

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

demonstrating a willingness to work on behalf of, and indeed serve, lesbian and gay political interests, Preisling challenges the seemingly dominant view that those expressing gender variance are an obstacle. They are, instead, willing allies and potential coalition partners. In the context of a growing reliance on biological roots of identity, the offer to “carry water” takes on a different valence, one that emphasizes belonging on behavioral terms rather than biological determinants.

The efforts to support a reauthorization of the Hate Crimes Statistics Act (HCSA) in 1996 provided another opportunity for GenderPAC and transgender advocates to educate potential coalition partners about transgender identity. Recall from the previous chapter that the HCSA required that the Attorney General’s office collect statistics on violence directed against people based on the victim’s race, religion, disability, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, but did not include protections for transgender-identified people or require the documentation of violent crimes motivated by gender bias. Transgender advocates, especially those active in relation to GenderPAC, expressed the urgent need to protect transgender-identified people and pursued several avenues to ensure that they would be included.

Preisling’s lobbying notes offer an overview of the ways in which GenderPAC sought to have transgender people included in the protections outlined the HCSA, once again by pursuing alliances with other, more powerful, organizations. For example, in a bid for an opportunity to sign onto a letter directed to Senator Kennedy’s office regarding HCSA by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Preisling once again strategically modifies the meanings associated with transgender identity in an attempt to have it considered by a potential coalition partner:

I had earlier made the case (to ADL) for inclusion by conceptually expanding the definition of sexual orientation without using red-flag terms like 'cross-dresser' or 'transsexual.' Apparently ADL has chosen not to act on that request.<sup>265</sup>

Here Preisling nests transgender identity in sexual orientation by offering to vacate transgender identity of its associations with cross-dressers or transsexuals. This strategic modification sends a powerful message to both the ADL as well as the member organizations comprising GenderPAC. Whereas transgender identity carries connotations of inclusion *within* the transgender community, this example of representation outside of the transgender community shows how the transgender umbrella can be used to obscure the boundaries to exclude presumably more flamboyant cross-dressers and transsexuals. The effort to obscure the membership of cross-dressers and transsexuals attempts to situate transgender as an orientation alongside sexual orientation, rather than as a facet of self-expression or gender identity.<sup>266</sup> In other words, Preisling introduces the possibility of producing marginalizations within the category of transgender-identified people in order to gain access to political influence. Those marginalized would be the most vulnerable members of the transgender identity group, such as transgender people of color who are disproportionately targeted for violence and gender non-conforming people who do not “pass” as male or female and thus attract increased scrutiny and violence. Although the ADL ignores Preisling’s plea, the large national lesbian and gay groups – HRC and NGLTF – used their influence to arrange a series of meetings with lawmakers to assert the urgency for transgender inclusion in HCSA.

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<sup>265</sup> Dana Preisling. May 6, 1996, Report 96:02, Internet Archive, [www.web.archive.org/web/\\*/gpac.org](http://www.web.archive.org/web/*/gpac.org).

<sup>266</sup> The listing of transgender at the end of lists comprised of lesbian, gay, and bisexual has been argued by some as implicitly defining transgender identity as a desire and not a gender identity, see Stryker, “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity,” 145-157.

Lobbyists from HRC were able to arrange one such meeting for GenderPAC with Judiciary Committee members to discuss transgender inclusion. The reports from the meeting indicate that Preisling's efforts to locate transgender identity within sexual orientation were not entirely fruitless. While the representatives present at the meeting made plain their view that the addition of transgender people to HCSA was not a political reality, especially given the Republican majority, they speculated to GenderPAC representatives that transgender-identified people might benefit from the "actual or perceived sexual orientation" language in the HCSA.<sup>267</sup> Preisling reported this development to coalition members as a positive one, if not indicative of the tremendous amount of work that remained to be done on the Hill to educate representatives about transgender identity.

In the meantime, GenderPAC lobbyists seized the opportunity presented by this strategy as they turned their energy to the upcoming ENDA vote. Appealing to the willingness of representatives to collapse and link sexual orientation with transgender identity required a challenging balance of priorities and illustrates just some of the ways that the boundaries of political identities are shaped at the site of representation. On one hand, GenderPAC representatives were keenly aware that they stood to benefit from the intimate association with sexual orientation, especially given the power and influence of groups like HRC on the Hill. On the other hand, GenderPAC and transgender advocates were also influenced by knowledge of transgender political identity as an umbrella category in its own right, which – as the analysis in this chapter shows – was lent coherence by an orientation towards gender variance, not sexual orientation. In written

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<sup>267</sup> Dana Preisling, May 14, 1996, Report 96:08: Hate Crimes, Internet Archive, [www.web.archive.org/web/\\*/gpac.org](http://www.web.archive.org/web/*/gpac.org).

testimony regarding transgender inclusion in ENDA, representatives writing on behalf of GenderPAC members used the opportunity to educate members on the boundaries of transgender identity by providing a thorough breakdown of relevant terminology:

The term “transgendered” includes not only transsexuals and cross-dressers, but also hermaphrodites and intersexed persons. Because ENDA addresses only the issue of sexual orientation, none of these persons would be protected against discrimination directed against them as transgendered persons.<sup>268</sup>

Here, again, the expansive and inclusive boundaries of transgender are put forth. Having explicated the boundaries of transgender identity for lawmakers, the testimony goes on to offer a compromise that exploits the opportunity to combine sexual orientation and transgender identification. It concludes with GenderPAC’s recommendation that:

The omission of transgendered persons from ENDA could be remedied by broadening Section 17(9), ENDA’s definition of sexual orientation, to include gender characteristics, behavior, expression or identity, regardless of chromosomal sex.<sup>269</sup>

That is, rather than naming transgender identity or gender characteristics alongside sexual orientation, GenderPAC advises a modification to the conventional understanding of sexual orientation to include transgender-identified people. This nested transgender within sexual orientation, thus obscuring the radical political agenda and expansive boundaries of transgender political identity put forth by Wilchins and others.

To some extent, this caveat helped to educate policymakers about what they perceived to be the actual source of discrimination against gay men, lesbian women, and transgender-identified people. Discrimination, as communicated by GenderPAC lobbyists, did not stem from disgust over private behavior, but public challenges to

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

gender norms manifested by transgender men and women as well as some lesbian women and gay men. Absorbing transgender into sexual orientation, however, had the negative effect of silencing the unique political concerns of transgender people as they were put forth by activists and political actors, including Stone, Feinberg, and Wilchins. These included the political goal of challenging and altering institutions and laws that produce and maintain binary gender, such as the documentation of sex on state-issued identification. In other words, casting transgender identity as a facet of sexuality came at the cost of broad social and political reforms and instead focused on the particularity of inclusion and recognition.

### *Conclusions*

The contrast between the internal representation of transgender identity by Wilchins and the external representations of it by GenderPAC lobbyists shows that one of the benefits offered by the construction of transgender political identity as an inclusive umbrella category without a static referent was the opportunity to shift and modify transgender identity in order to present it strategically to political audiences. These open-ended possibilities for transgender produced challenges as well, as political actors attempted to maintain an emphasis on unconditional inclusion with the pressures to marginalize and silence certain segments of the transgender population in order to gain a voice in Washington.

As the preceding analysis demonstrates, representing transgender political identity to lawmakers often entailed finding ways to collapse the multifaceted transgender identity initially imaged by transgender political actors into a single axis of identity. In some cases – such as the vision for political action put forth by Dallas Denny’s

organization – this resulted in the elevation of gender identity as the defining feature of transgender identity, to the simultaneous marginalization of other identifications, particularly those pertaining to ability, age, and race. The strategic exclusion of these groups and identifications thus posed transgender identity as discrete and mutually exclusive of other identifications. Transgender identity, in other words, became transgender identity concerned solely with gender identity by excluding people whose identifications were multiple, and these exclusions were the result of concerted choices made by political actors.

The example of GenderPAC lobbying shows another approach to the narrow construction of transgender identity that was achieved by conflating gender identity with sexuality, which was perceived to be more legible and, by association, strategically advantageous given the growing success of lesbian and gay interest groups in Washington. These strategies, however, shifted attention away from the principle political changes sought by transgender activists and political actors. In particular, nesting gender identity within sexual orientation for the purposes of advancing inclusion and recognition in legislation such as the HCSA and ENDA elided the political priorities held by transgender people at the time, including efforts to ensure unmitigated access to health care and administrative changes to eliminate the documentation of sex on state documents.

Furthermore, in lobbying efforts, the emphasis on transgender people who are able to pass as gender normative men or women required the simultaneous marginalization of people who are gender nonconforming. This tradeoff in the name of strategy consequently constructed transgender identity narrowly for lawmakers and the

broader public. Whereas transgender identity was initially conceived of as a broad identity category to include all iterations of gender identification, by the end of the 1990s, transgender identity was becoming increasingly associated with transgender men and women who were able to pass.

The next chapter explores efforts by political actors to unite lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups into a coalition and cohesive identity-based group: LGBT and the issues of inclusion and exclusion that vexed this new alliance and political identity group.

## CHAPTER SIX: Framing Unity: LGBT and Queer

### *Introduction*

In March 1998, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) issued a press release detailing the third meeting of the National Policy Roundtable: “a semi-annual meeting of executive directors and leaders of national GLBT groups sponsored by the Policy Institute, a think tank inside NGLTF dedicated to research, policy analysis, and strategy development.”<sup>270</sup> Bringing together anywhere from 20 to 40 executive directors at a time to represent their respective interest groups and organizations, the National Policy Roundtable was described by Urvashi Vaid – the director the Policy Institute and the founder of the National Policy Roundtable – as, “a forum for the creative and strategic thinking which is the basis of united action.” Reflecting these goals, the press release detailed the agenda taken up at the March 1998 meeting, including: strategies the upcoming mid-term elections, how public policy is shaped by the debates over the origins of sexual orientation, race and leadership in national LGBT movement organizations, and how to respond to an “increasingly shrill and hostile right.”

These four agenda items provide a general overview of the goals prioritized by the leaders of national lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender interest groups during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Specifically, questions about how to create a more diverse and representative movement, how to frame the origin of lesbian and gay identities, and how to respond to the growing aggression of the Conservative Right are significant because they indicate the importance that members of the National Policy Roundtable placed on generating a common frame and a collective identity for the movement. Taken

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<sup>270</sup> “NGLTF Convenes Third National Policy Roundtable” *Oasis Magazine*, 1998. Accessed using The Internet Archive: [www.waybackmachine.org](http://www.waybackmachine.org)

together, these agenda items highlight the broader purpose of the National Policy Roundtable: to join lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender organizations into a cohesive political group united by a shared agenda. In other words, forming an enduring coalition and associated identity to most effectively represent the political interests pertaining to sexuality and gender identity in US politics.

This chapter explores the processes of brokering the coalition to unite lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender interest groups that took place at the National Policy Roundtables between 1997 and 1999.<sup>271</sup> In addition to providing answers to one of the questions at the core of this study – how and why did LGBT evolve as a political identity category and associated agenda of interests – this chapter offers insight into the continued development of alternate political identities and agendas to represent sexuality and gender identity in politics, specifically queer identity and queer politics. The following analysis of the archived meeting minutes from the National Policy Roundtables illustrates how race, class, and gender divisions within the evolving lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender coalition at the sites of conflicts, backlash, and representation contributed to the evolution of three competing frames for sexual and gender political identities and associated political agendas. The first two – the assimilation and the queer liberalism frames – ultimately provided the grounds for the formation of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender coalition, political identity, and agenda of interests as “LGBT.” The third frame – queer politics – was posed in direct opposition to the assimilationist and queer liberalism frames and was consequently organized as a set of identities and interests that resisted classification: queer identity and politics.

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<sup>271</sup> I list each identity used to qualify the objectives of the respective interest groups when the groups are acting discretely yet in concert with each other, and reserve the “LGBT” initialism for when I discuss the specific “LGBT” category that evolved over time at the site of coalitions brokered across these groups.

The following section begins the chapter by outlining the conditions of backlash and ensuing conflicts that characterized this period of politics pertaining to sexuality and gender identity in the US.

*Backlash and Conflicts While Making a Coalition: 1997 – 1999*

The first National Policy Roundtable was convened in Washington, DC over two days in September of 1997. Facilitating the meeting of 40 executive directors who represented a variety of interest groups, such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the Intersex Society of North America, and BiNet USA, Vaid opened by elaborating the vision that motivated the National Policy Roundtable:

It is my hope that ideas and collaboration will emerge from this roundtable. The first goal is to create a space, to meet, share information that can continue in an on-going manner....The second goal is building trust among our organizations and us a leaders. The final goal is to establish a mechanism for the national leaders to think strategically and creatively.<sup>272</sup>

Conspicuously absent from Vaid's introduction was an explicit mention of forming an institutionalized coalition to unite the organizations in attendance. However, the interest in working together in political action – specifically as a coalition – was articulated by several participants from the outset, with many identifying the need to respond to stigmatization of sexuality by evangelical Christians and the perceived unity of the Christian Right as a model for their own collaboration.

The following provides a brief background to the Christian Right and to show how its evolution influenced the construction of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender political identities and political agendas in two ways. First, the Christian Right provided a model of a political coalition that successfully drew together many disparate groups to

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<sup>272</sup> “National Policy Roundtable,” HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 12, 1.

effect political change. Second, the Christian Right's legislative and electoral successes in efforts to preserve normative sexuality and gender highlighted to some lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender political the need to work in unison politically in order to pose a challenge to the Christian Right.

### *Background on the Christian Right and Sexuality*

The ascendancy of evangelical Christians in U.S. politics dates to the 1930s, when a series of ideological conflicts among Protestant denominations precipitated the splintering of fundamentalist Christians from mainstream Protestants. Almost immediately, the withdrawal and seclusion of these fundamentalist Protestants from secular life became the source of yet another set of rifts, with some fundamentalist reformers agitating for an increasingly engaged role in social, political, and cultural aspects of U.S. society. In 1942, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) was founded by a group of self-identified neo-evangelicals to institutionalize a national movement of “engaged orthodoxy” through which fundamentalist Christians could maintain their beliefs while also becoming involved in evangelical outreach efforts.<sup>273</sup> Sociologist Christian Smith describes how the founders of NAE contradicted the tendency of fundamentals towards isolation by issuing a broad invitation for NAE membership to Pentacostals, Anabaptists, and other nonfundamentalist Christian sects, urging “unity and love among different Protestant traditions for the sake of Gospel and the world.”<sup>274</sup>

This unity across many disparate Christian denominations was achieved through two closely intertwined projects advanced by the NAE. The first was the development of

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<sup>273</sup> Christian Smith, Michael Emerson, Sally Gallagher, Paul Kennedy, and David Sikkink, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 10.

<sup>274</sup> Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 11.

parachurch organizations, such as summer camps for youth and Bible studies for both adults and children. These organizations facilitated the dissemination of evangelical Christian ideals by creating a variety of centralized sites for people to gather, discuss their faith and values, receive mentorship, and form relationships with each other. The second was a broad and constantly-growing network of evangelical media – spearheaded by Billy Graham, of contemporary television evangelical fame – in the 1940s with radio shows and magazines, and eventually a handful of dedicated television channels beginning in the 1980s.<sup>275</sup> These two important features of the NAE combined to create a large, unified, and well-connected network of evangelical Christians between 1940 and 1970. Sociologist Tina Fetner credits the growing network of parachurch institutions and the vast scope of evangelical media with the introduction of evangelical Christians to politics during the 1970s, who claimed to be drawn into political action out of growing concern over the ways that the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), abortion, and pro-gay attitudes that, according to them, risked upsetting the gendered order of the family.<sup>276</sup>

It was concern with the latter – pro-gay attitudes and the increasing visibility and political activity of openly gay and lesbian-identified people – that evangelical Christians cited as the need to intervene in secular politics.<sup>277</sup> Reflecting these motivations, in 1977, Anita Bryant launched her Save the Children campaign, which successfully mobilized evangelical Christians in efforts to challenge political gains made by gays and lesbians in south Florida. By the 1980s, evangelical Christians used their broad network to influence

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<sup>275</sup> Graham quickly gained wide notoriety as a preacher, and this attention attracted the interest of the heads of big business and various corporations who were interested in advancing the US as a Christian nation with free-market ideals at the core, see Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

<sup>276</sup> Fetner, *The Religious Right*, 10.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

the election of Ronald Reagan and successfully mobilize the efforts to criminalize commercial sex in cities, and by the 1990s, evangelical Christians had led a fierce and victorious attack against the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to force the defunding of what evangelical Christians perceived to be sexually explicit art, typified in the photography of Robert Mapplethorpe.<sup>278</sup>

*First Meetings of the National Policy Roundtable*

It was in the context of unified and growing political influence by the Christian Right and the opposition to political gains for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people in the 1990s that the National Policy Roundtables were convened. The perceived unity of evangelical Christians – particularly in their efforts to stigmatize homosexuality and wage attacks against the various groups participating in the Roundtable – figured prominently in the motivations to form a coalition and unified group that was articulated by some participants. The following analysis of the minutes from the first National Policy Roundtable, held in September 1997, shows how some participants advocated for a strategy to combat this backlash by forming an equally large and powerful coalition of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender political actors to combat the Christian Right. The coalition proposed by the executive directors in attendance was imagined as one that would pursue goals both inside and outside of formal politics, as well as contribute to the on-going construction of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender political identities and political agendas.

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<sup>278</sup> Tina Fetner, *The Religious Right*, 106. The gentrification of urban cities was often premised upon the criminalization of sex work, see Hanhardt, *Safe Space*; Rene Esparza, *From Vice to Nice: Race, Sex, and the Gentrification of AIDS in the Twin Cities* (doctoral dissertation, 2015). For more on Mapplethorpe's photography and the significance of his eventual defunding by the NEA, see: Kobena Mercer, "Looking for Trouble," *Transition* no. 5 (1991): 184-197.

Kate Kendall, the newly appointed executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR), illustrates the influence of threat from the Right in her articulation of the ways she saw her organization fitting into the meetings and her hopes for what the Roundtable would accomplish. According to Kendall, the NCLR is:

Mostly reactive as legal organization, responding to legal problems within legal structure...Radical Right is organized; speak with one voice on queer issues. Our community is not adequately poised to respond. Gay agenda is not capable of definition. Lack of coalescence – issues defined for us. How can we speak with one voice while honoring our differences? Would like to have an agenda for the community.<sup>279</sup>

With these comments, Kendall identified the concerns mobilizing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender political action in the mid-1990s. Most notable is the perspective on the “gay agenda” as lacking clear associations with established meanings and, by association, a defined set of political interests. For Kendall, this is the result of two causes. The first is the perpetual need to respond to attacks from the Right, which effectively dictates the issues prioritized by her organization and others at the table. By posing the need to unify as “the community,” alongside her assertion that the Right is organized and “speaks with one voice,” Kendall’s comments introduced the need to develop a shared agenda to combat the Right and the possibility of forming a coalition to advance it. The second cause for the lack of unity identified by Kendall in this opening remark is the heterogeneity of groups comprising the constituents of the “gay agenda,” which Kendall indicates by asking participants to consider how they can balance speaking as a unified group while also respecting the different identities and interests that comprise that group.

Echoing Kendall, many of the executive directors attending this first Roundtable identified the rigid boundaries that separated, and consequently isolated, lesbian, gay,

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<sup>279</sup> “National Policy Roundtable,” HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 12, 8.

bisexual, and transgender people from uniting in political action. Rea, a participant of the Roundtable from the National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC), reflected the lack of unity in negative terms, speculating that the lack of coordination across identities and groups resulted from, “something going on of ghettoizing our organizations.”<sup>280</sup> The use of “ghetto” as a metaphor to describe the isolation of these different groups reflects broader concerns held by many leaders of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender organizations in the context of 1990s politics, specifically that lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people were increasingly siloed into disparate identity-based movements.<sup>281</sup> Moreover, using “ghetto” as a metaphor helped to capture and convey the ways in which the evolution of narrowly-drawn identity categories was the result of external factors. In particular, referring to the “ghettoizing” of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender political organizations alludes to the ways that the stigmatization and isolation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people from society and politics furnished the conditions for the construction of rigid identity boundaries and the policing of those boundaries.<sup>282</sup>

The maintenance of these boundaries that isolated groups from unified political action was reflected in other comments made at this meeting of the Roundtable. Jessica Xavier, from It’s Time, America!, a national interest group advocating for transgender-identified people, echoed Kendell’s wish for a unified agenda and exhorted the participants of the Roundtable to see that: “we really need to stop trashing each other. We

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<sup>280</sup> “National Policy Roundtable,” HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 12, 9.

<sup>281</sup> The growing problem of identity politics structuring the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender movements was detailed and critiqued in great length by leaders across these organizations, see Urvashi Vaid, *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995).

<sup>282</sup> The political uses of “ghetto” are elaborated in Mitchell Duneir’s 2016 *Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, The History of an Idea* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux) and highlights the ways in which ghettos and space are used to impose difference on groups, particularly for Jewish and Black people.

cannot possibly ask our straight society to respect us if we don't."<sup>283</sup> Xavier's plea for coordinated action articulates the competition across groups as the primary problem to address. Rather than being separated by rigid boundaries and acrimony across different groups, Xavier proposes embracing respect for each other and alliances across interest groups and political organizations, explaining that, "Internalized self hatred can victimize us."<sup>284</sup> By calling for openness to difference and self acceptance, her solution echoes the logic of coming out introduced by Gay Liberation groups in the 1970s, through which respect and personal authenticity – i.e., combatting "internalized self hatred" – is seen as the result of publicly asserting one's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender identification and modeling the acceptance they wish to see reflected by broader society.<sup>285</sup> By implication, Xavier asks the executive directors present at the Roundtable to stop policing boundaries and instead publicly embrace a unified image in order to model the respect they wish to gain in politics. Xavier's call for unity and plea to disrupt past acrimonious relationships across identity categories, in other words, encouraged the participants of the Roundtable to have their organizations come out as politically and socially connected to each other.

For many participants at the Roundtable, the conflicts over the proper scope of political action between identity groups articulated by Rea and Xavier – coupled with external opposition in the form of the Conservative Right, i.e., backlash – created the need for unified action in any form, and there was a contingent of attendees at this first meeting who urged forming a coalition in response. These advocates identified the potential for a coalition to enhance power and influence in politics as the main benefit.

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<sup>283</sup> "National Policy Roundtable," HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 12, 9.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Breines, *The New Left*.

Gary, from American Boyz – an organization to facilitate dialogue among a community of gender-variant men, transgender men, and gender-queer identified people – proposed that in the face of threats from the Right and internal divisions across lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups, a united front could be accomplished by making the effort to: “acknowledge differences, take on issues that aren’t necessarily our own. If we share resources, create more than we have.”<sup>286</sup> Gary’s argument addressed the concerns raised by Rea and Xavier by articulating the broader philosophical motivations underpinning coalition formation identified by feminist activists, most notably Bernice Johnson Reagon’s call to see coalition as powerful because, “You have to give it all. It is not going to feed you; you have to feed it.”<sup>287</sup> Gary’s suggestion that groups should share interests thus recasts the conflicts identified by Rea and Xavier in productive terms: by actively re-prioritizing objectives, the groups present – according to Gary and other like-minded participants – stand to educate each other about their respective agendas and consequently amplify their influence in politics with the ability to speak more directly to issues where the disparate agendas overlap. In so doing, Gary explains, the participants stand to overcome the problematic boundaries dividing groups and consequently generate “more than we have.”

This concluding observation, taken alongside the problems identified by Rae and Xavier, suggest that an added benefit of a coalition to draw together the independently-operating lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender organizations might be the development of a *new* collective identity and corresponding political agenda to represent the groups and project an illusion of critical mass when faced with opponents. Linking the need to

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<sup>286</sup> “National Policy Roundtable,” HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 12, 1.

<sup>287</sup> Reagon, “Coalition Politics,” 361.

overcome the rigid boundaries that defined the many identity-based groups in attendance with the formation of coalitions laid the foundation for future discussions among participants regarding the particular form such a coalition would take and the issues it would advance.

The September 1997 Roundtable thus concluded with an agreement among executive directors to continue dialogues about the scope and boundaries of a possible future coalition to unify their respective groups.

### *Coalitions and Unity*

The agenda for the next meeting, which was convened six months later in March 1998, shifted away from introductions and focused on educating participants about strategies to target federal agencies with the most impact. Drawing on this goal for the Roundtable, many of the facilitators directed participants to see the potential power of coalitions for targeting the diffuse federal bureaucracy, if only because it would allow them to pool resources in service of a seemingly overwhelming task. As the following examination of the minutes from this meeting shows, the coalitions advocated for by the participants of the Roundtable were unique in that they were projected as a way to attend to the multiple issues prioritized by the different organizations, rather than developing a shared single-issue oriented agenda to unify the groups.

For the March 1998 Roundtable, the facilitators of the meeting called on a panel of experts to educate participants on strategies to target federal agencies. Many of these experts had been active in the struggles to urge federal action on AIDS in the face of the apathetic Reagan administration during the 1980s, and they emphasized the potential power of utilizing coalitions to target the many large agencies that comprise the federal

bureaucracy. One panelist, identified only as Marj from the Lesbian Health Advocacy Network, instructed participants to:

[P]ick an agency to lead in an area and make a coalition and go for it....I encourage the national groups to say they will do coalition building and take a lead around a department, but don't assume the department belongs to you....I really fervently believe that our agenda can only be implemented if national organizations pick a department to run a coalition around.<sup>288</sup>

Whereas the previous meeting had focused primarily on articulating the lack of cooperation across groups and taking up the question of whether or not the groups present should unite in coalitions with each other, Marj's advice here strongly urged participants to see the political expediency offered by coalitions. She used the remainder of her time on the panel to coach participants through the necessary steps for forming particular sorts of coalitions – they would be small, with only a few organizations, and flexible enough to facilitate direct communication among member organizations. Marj's instruction and the minutes from the March 1998 Roundtable show that by the time of the second meeting, many of the participants embraced using coalitions to advance political agendas shared by groups with similar objectives. Significantly, the collection of coalitions imagined by participants at this meeting was seen as a way to represent a diverse agenda of interests, which many saw as a way to address the previously unitary focus associated with gay, lesbian, and transgender political mobilizations.

The newfound commitment to organizing in small, loosely-defined coalitions and representing a broad range of issues was demonstrated in subsequent discussions about the agendas to be pursued. For instance, a participant identified as Deb cautioned

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<sup>288</sup> “National Policy Roundtable: Selected Minutes on Federal Agencies and Outcome of the 2000 election,” HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 17, np.

Roundtable participants to keep in mind that, “It’s compelling to staff up these advisory panels but let’s think also on a broader agenda and on other issues,” adding that, “The role we play as a community can be expanded to include issue outside of our immediate concerns.”<sup>289</sup> Other participants vehemently echoed the emphasis on a broad agenda that could be achieved by forming alliances with organization perceived to be “outside” of the Roundtable. For example, a speaker identified as Tim encouraged others to think of political agendas in relation to coalitions with other political organizations with missions and foci that were not explicitly about sexuality and/or gender identity:

People are talking about non-gender identified coalitions (e.g., GLBT elderly poor people). You can go to organizations like the AARP and ask to be included in their work. Same thing with Families, USA. I believe that many GLBT people end up in poverty. We don’t need to reinvent the processes; sometimes, coalitions already exist.<sup>290</sup>

Broaching coalitions with outside groups was a theme picked up by other Roundtable members. One participant, who was identified as an employee at a Federal agency, offered another interpretation for attendees to consider, and immediately followed Tim’s comment with a plea for participants to use him and other Federal employees as a “coalition” to advance their political interests, explaining that:

I want to pursue the idea of forming coalitions. I will help as much as possible as a worker in the government. Those of us serving in the administration with the President and Vice President are starting to think about our legacy as members of the first gay presence in an Administration. We need input in shaping that legacy. Make use of us.<sup>291</sup>

These alternative uses of “coalition” – one used to propose branching out beyond lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups and the other used to describe a potential

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid., np.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

coalition across political actors and bureaucrats – effectively de-centered a formal coalition of interest groups and organizations. In other words, during these early meetings of the Roundtable, participants avoided officially defining a single lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender coalition comprised of the interest groups present at the Roundtable and, as the previous two excerpts illustrate, advocated many different forms for coalitions to take. In so doing, they also circumvented brokering a unified agenda that would necessarily entail prioritizing some issues over others.<sup>292</sup> Instead, the participants at the March 1998 meeting located the alliances that they were shaping in relation to a shifting agenda of interests to ideally benefit as many segments of their lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender memberships as possible, which they articulated as serving broader ideological commitments to inclusion and openness. By prioritizing the formation of several small coalitions like these during the period between 1997 and 1998, the political actors participating in these Roundtables attempted to avoid falling into the trap of single-issue politics that preoccupied the participants of the earlier Roundtable.

The next Roundtable, which took place in September 1998 and on the eve of a mid-term election, shows how the leaders and activists struggled to maintain this commitment to multi-issue agendas contra the pressures to unify behind a single agenda of political interests. The following section illustrates how debates over the content of shared agendas took place in relation to conflicts over the framing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender political identities and political agendas.

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<sup>292</sup> As previously discussed, interest groups often claim to represent their most marginalized members while advocating primarily on behalf of their most advantaged members, see Strolovitch, *Affirmative Advocacy*.

*Engaging in Conflicts over the Meanings of Sexual Orientation*

The main issue taken up at the September 1998 National Policy Roundtable was how to respond to the recent surge of “gay conversation therapies” and the promulgation of narratives by self-identified “ex-gays” in the media. These media campaigns were perceived as a threat by the executive directors participating in the Roundtables because they called into question the existence and validity of sexual and gender identities. The following elaborates on the specifics of these conditions of backlash in the form of these “conversion therapies” and then shows how political actors at the Roundtable responded to it through efforts to (re)frame lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities.

A new group called Love Won Out promoted “conversion” programs and therapies as part of a media blitz to challenge to increasing social and political visibility of lesbians and gays.<sup>293</sup> Although Love Won Out was a new organization in the context of the 1990s, treatments and therapies for the conversion of same-sex sexuality have a long history in the United States. Cynthia Burack’s 2014 study of the Christian Right shows how the declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in 1973 provoked the formation of a new professional organization called the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexual (NARTH) to serve as a centralized resource for conversion therapists.<sup>294</sup> NARTH, the membership of which was comprised of the National Association of Social Workers and members of the APA who disagreed with the declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness, would eventually become the overarching coalition for organizations

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<sup>293</sup> The parent organization for Love Won Out was the Colorado Springs-based Focus on the Family.

<sup>294</sup> See also Tina Fetner, *The Christian Right*, chap. 6.

offering gay rehabilitation therapies to fill the void left by the APA's declassification.<sup>295</sup> Many iterations of these therapies proliferated between the 1970s and 1990s, and Burack explains that the organizations offering these treatments, such as Exodus International and Love in Action (founded in 1976 and 1979, respectively), used pseudo-scientific discourse to validate evangelical Christian beliefs about presumably natural and necessary complementary gender roles – masculine and feminine.<sup>296</sup> Although there were many different versions of these treatments used, common across them was the emphasis on facilitating an “ex-gay’s” proper gender role – i.e., husband or wife, son or daughter – and by association, membership in his or her family, which was considered the central unit for the dissemination of values espoused by evangelical Christians.

In 1998, NARTH launched a national media campaign, called “Truth in Love” to disseminate narratives by “ex-gays.” Taking out full-page ads in national publications and purchasing television airtime for commercials, these narratives served two key functions. First, they helped to reify evangelical Christian collective identity by casting the presumed transformations from lesbian or gay to heterosexual as a way to mitigate the misery of living outside of a strong and supportive Christian community.<sup>297</sup> Narratives such as these helped evangelical Christians to construct the communities fostered by churches as places of acceptance and safety (as long as one conformed to established norms for behavior and sexual conduct). Second, the testimonies offered by “ex-gays” served as a sort of reverse coming out through which now “ex-gay” men and women could disarticulate the link between self-recognition and behavior. Whereas Gay

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<sup>295</sup> Cynthia Burack, *Tough Love: Sexuality, Compassion, and the Christian Right* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 30.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

Liberation rhetoric of coming out encouraged people to identify as lesbian, gay, or queer based on their behaviors and desires, the “ex-gay” narratives encouraged people to view their celibacy – the enduring denial of desire – as the act that defined their identification as “ex-gay.” Coming out, in other words, was no longer a political act if one could simply sever the link between desire, behavior, and identification.

The promulgation of these narratives and the strong institutional backing of the organizations comprising NARTH disrupted the tight relationship between same-sex desire and gay and lesbian identities that Gay Liberationists and those who followed them fought so hard to secure, and in doing so, furthered the stigmatization of same-sex desire and relationships. Furthermore, the introduction of *Love Won Out* in 1998 and the assertion that there were no biological roots for same-sex attraction was perceived by political actors at lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender political organizations as an effort to define same-sex sexuality as a set of stigmatized behaviors rather than the roots of identity and the basis for marginalized group status recognized by the courts and by policymakers. Thus, by the time of the third Roundtable meeting, the very existence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities as social identity categories and potentially legible minority groups was under attack. The upcoming election and the diffusion of “ex-gay” narratives drew the attention of the executive directors at the Roundtable, many of whom were especially worried about the impact of posing gay and lesbian identities as mutable on future claims to civil rights.

Reflecting these anxieties, the September 1998 Roundtable agenda channeled the attention of participants to the most strategic way to (re)frame lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities in response to this stigmatizing rhetoric. The following three

frames – assimilation, queer liberalism, and queer – were introduced and developed by leaders at the National Policy Roundtable.

### *Assimilation Frame*

One strategy advocated for by many of the participants prioritized responding to these attacks by shifting the discourse on the origins of sexual orientation and gender identity away from a discussion of mutable characteristics and in the direction of how lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender-identified people are model citizens and stand to benefit society when granted equal access to rights like marriage and the military. Dixon Osborn, from the Service Members Legal Defense Network, summarized the debate over the origins of sexuality and gender identity as he and other participants saw it:

Often posed question to the community is, is this biology or choice. Seems to me to be separate sets of questions that pose false either-ors...Opponents suggest that identity of self is a matter of choice or if we act on it then it's a choice. Discussion we should have is one about morality, that it's morally good to be who we are.<sup>298</sup>

Here, Osborn proposes reframing gay and lesbian identification as an act of morality, or personal authenticity, that only stands to benefit society more broadly. Proponents of the morality framing extended their arguments to the necessity of personal authenticity for the maintenance of healthy families where each person is valued for his or her uniqueness, with one participant explaining that they: “have to make the argument that we are redefining the family, but not tearing down the family, talking about families coming in different shapes.”<sup>299</sup> In other words, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender-identified people and their families are valuable members of a heterogeneous and multicultural democratic society who deserve consideration under the law, with the

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<sup>298</sup> “National Policy Roundtable Minutes: September 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, 1998” HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 13, 26.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

emphasis on families grounding the proposed frame. This framing of sexuality and gender identity as manifestations of good morality and model citizenship effectively sidestepped the question of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identifications as mutable or essential, and sought the change the discourse initiated by evangelical Christians on their own terms, specifically by underscoring that gay men and lesbians also have families, just *different* families. Locating families central to this political strategy aimed to confront the opposition on its own terms, namely the importance placed on the family as the primary social and political unit.

Many Roundtable participants embraced the morality framing advanced by Dixon and expressed an interest in adopting it as a strategy. Others, however, worried that the emphasis on morality and good citizenship would erode at the urgency of their political demands, particularly for the most vulnerable members of their organizations. Chief among these concerns was the ways that stressing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people as model members of society would require even further narrowing of the boundaries of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities to conform to expectations of morality or respectability. The centrality of families to the morality frame illustrates these concerns. By elevating normative families – two parents who live together with their biological or legally adopted children – as political strategy, the morality framing excluded those who did not conform to these expectations, either by choice or due to a lack of material and economic resources, with the latter disproportionately affecting chances for people of color, people who are poor, and non-

gender normative gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people to form and maintain families that adhered to these norms.<sup>300</sup>

Cultural theorist Lisa Duggan terms the efforts to align lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities with good morals, model citizenship, and paradigmatic American families as the “new homonormativity” that advances:

[A] politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized and depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.<sup>301</sup>

When viewed through the lens of Duggan’s new homonormativity, the articulation of lesbian and gay-headed families as necessary and complementary additions to the American social landscape by Dixon and other participants effectively removes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender-identified people from politics by situating them squarely within the private domestic sphere. From this location, and presumably with the benefit of relatively strong consumer power, lesbian and gay-headed families are able to assert their belonging in the polity based on the necessary similarity to heterosexual families: they vote, have children, go to work, and own cars and homes, just like straight people do, and do not advocate for radical transformation of social, political, or economic institutions.

### *Queer Liberalism Frame*

There were, however, some participants who pushed back against the morality framing, and they urged the Roundtable to see the political and legal expediency of

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<sup>300</sup> Marriage rates in the US have declined significantly for people who are poor, regardless of race, while marriage rates for those who are affluent and highly educated have climbed, but only for white respondents. These diverging trends are referred to as the “racial marriage gap,” see Ralph Richard Banks, “The Racial Gap in Marriage: How the Institution is Tied to Inequality” *The Atlantic* (October 27, 2011).

<sup>301</sup> Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 50.

posing sexuality and gender identity as in fact essential and a core aspect of identity. Chai Feldblum, the Director of the Georgetown University Law Center, pressed participants to see the legal and political reasons for posing identity as immutable:

I would say yes there's something called orientation and defines a set of people, very hard to change or impossible to change, and it's central to the person's identity. All those things are essential for constitutional and political activity.<sup>302</sup>

Here, Feldblum alludes to the need to pose discrete identities as fundamentally impossible to alter and consequently linked to a unique history and pattern of discrimination that merits consideration under strict scrutiny by the courts. While this position captured the support of some of the participants – particularly in the wake of the 1986 *Bowers v Hardwick* Supreme Court decision that denied Constitutional protection for gay men based on presumably scientific, historical, and moral reasons – there were many participants who expressed reservations about the turn to immutability for many of the same reasons that some protested the morality framing. Representatives from various bisexual and transgender oriented groups, for instance, voiced strong objections, with one unidentified participant explaining that: “If you’re really going to actually support bi and trans have to drop the immutability thing...So much about being intersex or transgender it’s not just a matter of feeling like I’m both with it, some of it’s trying things out.”<sup>303</sup>

These conflicts over immutability and contingency of identity gave rise to two alternate framings to join alongside the assimilation frame: queer liberalism and queer politics.

Literary scholar David Eng’s “queer liberalism,” describes the framing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities as immutable in order to advance rights claims.

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<sup>302</sup> “National Policy Roundtable Minutes: September 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, 1998” HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 13, 21.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

In brief, advocates of what Eng terms “queer liberalism” posit sexuality and gender identity as embodied and inherited characteristics that draw unjust discrimination and subordination in patterns that are similar to the historic and on-going discrimination directed to people of color in the United States. Queer liberalism consequently poses the rights claims made by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people as fundamentally similar to those made by historically marginalized groups, especially the Black Civil Rights movements. By claiming inclusion in economic and political spheres based on the assertion that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender-identified people are the next logical beneficiaries of the gains made by the Black Civil Rights movement, Eng explains that queer liberalism abets rather than resists the willful ignorance of race in U.S. politics.<sup>304</sup> In other words, efforts to reframe lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities as discriminated against in the same ways as people of color relies upon a logic of similarities cast between lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people on one hand and the presumptive gains of groups perceived to have succeeded in rights struggles – particularly Black Americans – in another. Queer liberalism consequently elides the enduring discrimination directed to people of color. Moreover, the analogies that mobilize queer liberalism buttress the construction of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities as implicitly white (and middle class and gender normative) by posing them as analogous, but not intersecting with, other identifications, specifically racial identities.

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<sup>304</sup> David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 4.

### *Queer Politics Frame*

Comments that aimed to remind participants that sexuality and gender identity should neither be considered strictly in relation to morality and the family nor constructed as immutable resulted in the third frame – queer politics – introduced at the Roundtable. Recall the opponents to the queer liberalism framing drew attention to the perspective that sexuality and gender were not concrete identifications as much as, as one speaker put it, “trying things out.” Views such as these, which were borrowed from academic queer theory, shunned categorization and identity politics, and were echoed by other participants, many of whom argued that all the members of the Roundtable would be well-served to remember that, as one participant put it, “heterosexism is the common oppressor.”<sup>305</sup>

Similar to the arguments made by transgender-identified activists, who urged lesbian and gay political actors during this same time period to see gender normativity as the common oppressor, these participants urged others at the Roundtable to keep in mind that questions of the origins of sexual orientation and gender identity were irrelevant in the face of socially-constructed categories that are used to maintain the dominance of straight-identified people over all other possible relationship configurations. Challenging dominant construction of “normal,” in other words, ought to comprise the foundations of sexual and gender identities, as well as the political agendas advanced in the name of “queer politics.” By urging the end of institutions that structure and maintain normative sexuality and gender identity, including marriage, the queer politics framing advocated for politics that resisted the normalizing impetus of the assimilationist and queer liberalism frameworks.

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 22.

### *Conflicts Over Frames*

Across these three competing frames, the systems that laws and institutions that resulted in limited standing for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, and the criminalization of same-sex sexuality, specifically at the site of the federal government, informed the concluding comments of the Roundtable. One participant explained their resistance to defining the origins of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identity because, “The Constitution doesn’t differentiate between GLBT and non-GLBT [*sic*] we need to call religious folks when they are trying to influence the government – the constitution does talk about that and religious right is trying to annex the Constitution.”<sup>306</sup> With this concluding statement, the September 1998 Roundtable was adjourned without a consensus as to how to reframe lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities to best defend against attacks from the Conservative Right. This lack of consensus over assimilation, queer liberalism, and queer politics framings, however, should not be viewed as a deficiency or evidence of a failed agenda. The discussion over the origins and goals of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities that took place at this meeting of the Roundtable successfully introduced the myriad possibilities for reframing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in politics that would inform later conflicts over how to represent sexuality and gender identity in politics.

### *Conclusions*

Thus, by the end of the September 1998 meeting, three potential frames emerged as options for representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and political interests in politics. The first frame prioritized morality as a key feature of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identification, and the emphasis on similarity between these

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 26.

groups and heterosexuals channeled political goals towards assimilation. These political goals prioritized issues like marriage equality and civil unions. The second frame – queer liberalism – elevated the biological determinants of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities so as to present these identities as immutable and subject to unique discrimination that would merit strict scrutiny by the courts and the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation by lawmakers. Issues advanced in conjunction with the queer liberalism frame included anti-discrimination protections in housing and employment as well as chances to serve openly in the military. The third frame to emerge – the queer politics frame – rejected assimilation and queer liberalism in favor of constructing identities and political agendas that sought a radical restricting of the social, political, and economic institutions that privilege heterosexuality and stigmatized lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people.

The next chapter explores the agenda of political interests and the strategies to represent the LGBT group generated by the leaders taking part in the National Policy Roundtable between 2000 and 2001. During this time, the question of how to craft and represent an inclusive movement – particularly with respect to race – occupied the agendas of the Roundtable. The debates over the appropriate frame to use continued, and as the following shows, exerted significant influence over the continued development of LGBT politics, on one hand, and queer politics, on the other, with further implications for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer political identities and agendas.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: Representing Queer, Representing LGBT

### *Introduction*

In just a short amount of time, the National Policy Roundtable evolved into the site where executive directors discussed ways to make the movement more efficient and effective by developing shared agendas and delegating tasks, such as lobbying and public outreach. As the coalitional work across various groups became more institutionalized, and in conjunction with the development of the assimilationist, queer liberalism, and queer politics frames, the question of *how* to represent sexuality and gender identity in politics became more pressing. Examining the minutes from meetings held between 1999 and 2001 shows how participants of the Roundtable attended to questions of representation, focusing specifically on race.

Between 1999 and 2000, several meetings of the Roundtable were convened to address the structural and attitudinal features of the movement that were perceived by some to result in the predominantly white leadership of the organizations comprising the National Policy Roundtable, and the September 1999 Roundtable meeting was devoted to taking up these questions.<sup>307</sup> These two days of meetings made a special effort to include leaders from interest groups and political organizations representing Blacks and Latinos, with Vaid leading the attendees in a conversation about two issues: the structural factors that channeled white members into leadership positions and developing a plan for the next three to five years to address these causes.

Phil Wilson, the executive director of the AIDS Social Policy Archive and founder of the National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum, chaired the first panel

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<sup>307</sup> “National Policy Roundtable Minutes, September 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, 1999” HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 15, np.

for this Roundtable. His opening for the meeting succinctly introduced the issues characterizing the questions of race across the coalition and in the LGBT movement during this particular time period:

What is our message? The core of the message is that “We are just like you.” Well, if you can imagine this statement being said in the current Congress – with its old white men. What does it mean to be just like them? These are old racists. What does it mean to be just like them? The goal is not to make me equal by diminishing my blackness, to be just like them. That is not the goal. I once said about the definition of gay rights: “gay rights are the rights of white GLBT people to oppress the rest of us like straight people.”<sup>308</sup>

By highlighting the rhetoric of “we are just like you,” Wilson’s comments are directed to the assimilationist frames and strategies advanced by some of the Roundtable’s national interest groups. Importantly, Wilson’s characterization of assimilationist frame underscores the ways in which assimilation precludes representation for people of color who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender. As Wilson incisively indicates, the assertion that “we are just like you” relies upon the reduction of sexuality or gender identity to a single axis of identification – sexuality – that consequently erases consideration for people who carry multiple identifications.

As such, Wilson’s satirical comparison of himself to members of Congress as, “old racists,” illustrate just one of the ways that the predominant political strategy of assimilation necessarily foreclosed representation of Black and Latino lesbian women and gay men by national interest groups. The political project of assimilation and the accompanying assertions of similarity require posing identity categories as commensurate and, as Wilson points out, the commensurability upon which these assimilationist claims rests is the presumed shared experience as white and gender-normative subjects. The

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid., np.

assumed commonality consequently precludes those whose claims that, “we are just like you,” were shaped by race, gender identification and presentation, class, immigration status, and ability. According to the assimilation frame, lesbian or gay desire is the same as straight desire, with the exception of the gender of the person desired. Similarly, gender identity for people who are transgender is the same as people who are not transgender, with the only difference being the means of confirming and expressing gender identity. In each of these examples, identity is reduced to a single axis of either sexuality or gender identification, at the cost of posing these identities as intersecting with race, ability, gender, class, or immigration status. Wilson’s concluding comments explain to the Roundtable participants that in order to be able to make this claim to similarity, it would be incumbent upon him to “diminish” his blackness and consequently render invisible a significant facet of his identity.

The erasure of these identifications from the political agendas of the national interest groups that Wilson identified in his speech had important implications for the issues brought to lawmakers, and many other participants followed his opening remarks by articulating these lapses in representation. They buttressed Wilson’s comments with anecdotes of their personal experiences as disaffected Black, Latino, and transgender lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender-identified people who had left many of the national organizations for other interest groups that focused on advancing issues specifically pertaining to race, class, or gender identity.

In particular, many attendees identified the HRC as the predominant organization responsible for mobilizing an assimilationist political agenda, with several expressing anger at the fact that HRC failed to send a representative to a Roundtable meeting

dedicated to the question of race and representation.<sup>309</sup> One unidentified participant targeted HRC as the main promulgator of assimilationist strategies. His comments underscore the ways in which the assimilation frames further marginalized people of color out of political agendas:

HRC has built a racist structure. We have to talk about this, about how that place had an event in this city, this city [Washington, DC] in which there were no black face there [sic]. The social justice is that black gay men, when they are left out, not represented, they are left along [sic] and they are left to die. This is where social justice does not happen. I have to look at where, I am as a person, choose to invest in. A lot of what we have is built on the infrastructure of the black civil rights movement. Yet, what is ironic is that neither do the civil rights movements have any investment into black gay men and poor gay men.<sup>310</sup>

For this participant, the assimilationist political agendas advanced by HRC is closely connected to the lack of descriptive representation offered by the organization at its events, in its leadership, and its membership – i.e., its “racist structure.” The absence of representation, however, extends beyond there being no Black people present at an HRC event. For this participant, this lack of descriptive representation for Black gay men carries with it implications for the substantive representation offered, and the speaker articulates these costs for Black gay men in bleak terms: social isolation and eventual death. The silencing of political concerns to address the struggles of Black gay men and poor gay men is cited by this participant as the main cost of assimilationist political agendas such as the one advanced by HRC, consequently prompting a question that echoes Wilson’s opening remarks: assimilation, for whom? As this speaker indicates, the assimilation pursued by HRC is premised upon inclusion and recognition in a political

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<sup>309</sup> The anger at HRC in this section of the minutes is palpable. For more on affect and social movements, particularly in lesbian and gay organizing, see Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics*, chap. 2.

<sup>310</sup> “National Policy Roundtable Minutes, September 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, 1999” HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 15, np.

system that has historically marginalized the needs and standing of people of color, poor people, women, people with disabilities, and those who are not considered citizens or members of the polity because they are undocumented.

It is thus telling that many participants also considered taking part in the assimilationist agenda promulgated by many of the national groups as the wrong goal to advance from within the coalition active at the Roundtable. Vaid even went so far as to speculate about the possibility of forming an entirely separate movement and group of organizations dedicated to race and class:

What we can then do is to create a progressive wing of the GLBT movement and resign ourselves to work with THE movement on the “sexual orientation” issue in COALITION and that there will be other ways in which THE movement cannot be together. And we can work with other groups on the race and economic justice issues.<sup>311</sup>

Whereas the earlier Roundtables were devoted to forming coalitions across the disparate groups representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender memberships and advancing many different but coordinated agendas, here Vaid poses the possibility of two completely independent, but interrelated, movements, each advancing a different frame. The new progressive wing proposed would join in coalition with “THE” movement – comprised of organizations presumably preoccupied only with sexual orientation, i.e., HRC – to draw attention to issues of economic and racial marginalization. Vaid’s introduction of a potential progressive flank – queer politics – to the more mainstream and assimilationist movements evidences another way that within-group marginalization is productive of meanings and boundaries associated with identity-based groups. In this instance, the marginalization of agendas and interests that do not support the

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid., np (emphasis in original).

assimilationist goals held by organizations such as HRC results in the need to form an alternate group, one that would be associated with a political agenda to address the needs of lesbian, gay, and transgender people of color.

While some participants supported introducing a progressive, queer politics flank to the increasingly assimilation-oriented movement, others resisted this strategy on the grounds that it would serve to further naturalize the associations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities with sexuality and whiteness by directing attention away from assimilationist political agendas and the organizations advancing them. In this way, these debates about race exerted a significant influence on meanings associated with sexuality and gender identity in politics. Would LGBT politics be characterized by diverse and inclusive coalitions, such as those advocated for by proponents of queer politics? Or should there be many different interest groups continue to do their work in relative isolation from each other, pursuing assimilation?

One participant offered an answer to these questions when describing her resistance to leaving the National Policy Roundtable, even in the face of feeling marginalized in national LGBT interest groups: “sadly, I feel safer as an out lesbian when at the ACLU than I do as a black woman in the GLBT movement. I do not feel like it is about leaving or giving up however.” This participant went on to give her reasons for not leaving because, “It is possible to create a very racial diverse group, without there being a diversity of perspective.”<sup>312</sup> The solution, in other words, is not simply bolstering the numbers of Black or Latino members and leaders. For this Roundtable member and others, what was needed was the reorientation of the newly unified political agenda to

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., np.

prioritize a wide range of issues that would ideally help the most precarious gay, bisexual, and transgender-identified people.

This vision for a broad agenda fell in line what Vaid described in 1995 as the difference between “multicultural” and “diversity” organizations.<sup>313</sup> While the former attempted to assemble and recognize many different groups into a coalition, these coalitions were often, “paper structures, involving the exchange of signatures rather than the exchange of ideas, bodies energies, and commitment.”<sup>314</sup> Diversity organizations, by contrast, were organized around ideas that motivated queer politics: opposing racism and sexism in society. As the following shows, the queer politics framing – or diversity organizations, in Vaid’s terms – were favored by leaders taking part in the Roundtable meeting on race, specifically in relation to questions of funding.

#### *Funding and Representation*

Though the majority of the executive directors attending this particular Roundtable generally agreed that interest groups should strive to fit what Vaid described in 1995 as “diversity organizations,” or queer politics, conflicts among attendees took place over how, exactly, to mobilize the agenda to oppose institutionalized and systemic racism and sexism. The task of implementing a queer politics agenda was perceived by some participants as a especially daunting goal in the context of a political field dominated by large national organizations, specifically HRC, which many perceived as working against broad inclusion and attracting a disproportionate share of funding dollars to support that work. Building on this critique of HRC in conjunction with concerns over maintaining budgets for their organizations, many of the participants at this Roundtable

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<sup>313</sup> Vaid, *Virtual Equality*, 297.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

were quick to cite the outsize influence that funders had on deciding political priorities as a problem to address.<sup>315</sup> One attendee introduced the discussion of money in organizations, urging participants to, “look at the movement, which institutions have the funding, those that don’t, those that are white run, have white issues...etc. We see the hierarchy of oppression in terms of funding.”<sup>316</sup> Another executive director offered a more specific example of the role that funding played in deciding the agenda for organizations:

My organization got big gift from gay male couple with promise for more. Six months later we took position against death penalty and funding was pulled. Spoke to individual about this, wrote letter. He said this was not a gay issue. I said we are lesbian, but also feminist and that agenda is more broad. He said that was unfortunate.<sup>317</sup>

Here, funders not only influence the initial development of agendas, but can also use the denial of money as a way to punish organizations and aim to limit the issues they address. As this executive director explains, funders have specific ideas about the content of “gay issues” and use their money and influence to advance them, often elevating efforts towards assimilation. As this excerpt shows, the effects of funders extended beyond the development of a particular political agenda oriented towards assimilation. Funders were also able to obstruct the development of alternative political agendas, especially those that were perceived to be more radical, such as activism directed towards opposing the death penalty.

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<sup>315</sup> For a detailed study of the ways that the growing emphasis placed on funding shaped the contours of citizenship for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender interest group members and constituents, see Hindman, *Interest Group Citizenship*.

<sup>316</sup> “National Policy Roundtable Minutes, September 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, 1999” HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 15, np.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, np.

Another executive director built on this point to explain how funders are attracted by the simplicity of single-issue politics: “Loss [*sic*] of funders when we incorporate more complex missions. The very notion of identity politics has helped to create this kind of isolationist structure.”<sup>318</sup> For this speaker, the political backdrop of identity politics – with its focus on narrowly-constructed groups, whether gay men, lesbian women, or transgender-identified men or women – gives rise to funders who are concerned solely with advancing the interests of their respective identity groups. The advantage of this strategy is that it projects a well-bounded gay, lesbian, or transgender groups and furnishes opportunities for like-minded people to find each other and mobilize together politically. However, these statements by executive directors also show that the influence of funders in narrowing the agenda of political interests to accommodate very specific identity categories has a limiting effect on the types of issues that are taken up, with consequences for the particular type of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people represented in politics. Funding consequently shapes not only the political agendas taken up, but also the construction and representation of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in politics.

To this latter point, by shifting attention away from efforts to oppose the death penalty, funding decisions such as the ones reported by the executive directors at this meeting obscured the long history of lesbian women, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender-identified people as subject to disproportionate scrutiny and punishment by

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid., np.

law enforcement and the courts.<sup>319</sup> This effectively silenced the representations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender-identified people who are arguably the most vulnerable, and further marginalized them within the population of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender-identified people, with two effects. The first is the projection of a normative lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender interest group member that is considered mutually exclusive with people who are incarcerated or subject to police and legal scrutiny. The second is the erasure of people who are incarcerated or undocumented from the agendas of national LGBT political organizations, with implications for who is represented as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. In this case, the elevation of people who are not incarcerated in political goals – when joined to the history of political actors constructing these identities as implicitly white, middle-class, and gender normative – represents lesbian women and gay men as white, middle-class, law abiding, and gender normative, a construction that excludes a broad swath of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender, including people who are gender nonconforming, people of color, people who are poor, and people who are undocumented.

The extent to which funding decisions bolstered the representation and construction of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities in these narrow ways was demonstrated in other examples presented by Roundtable participants. One executive

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<sup>319</sup> Specific instances where the mismatch between crime and punishment are mediated by the perceived sexual orientation or gender identity of the accused are too numerous to list here. The case of CeCe McDonald (a Black transgender-identified woman), who received a 41-month prison sentence for stabbing a man in self-defense when he threatened and pursued her through a parking lot in the Seward neighborhood of South Minneapolis, is just one local example. For more on the criminalization of sexuality and gender identity, see Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality*, chap. 2; Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of the Law* (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 2011).

director fused the concerns over the role of funders to hiring decisions that resulted in the predominantly white leadership: “When a person of color applies for an ED [executive director] job, a board of that organization may be struck with great fear. They won’t be able to fundraise.”<sup>320</sup> Using “great fear” to describe the response of board members to a job candidate who is of a minority racial group provides a particularly stark example of ways that the influence of funders was felt beyond the content of agendas. They also shaped the racial (and gender) demographics of the leaders and employees on staff at various organizations. This participant went on to offer a solution to this problem: “Allies need to be developed to promote the candidacy of these individuals. . . . Also, once an ED has been appointed, these allies may need to come together again to assist with fundraisers.”<sup>321</sup> Although this executive director was quick to identify the root cause of the predominantly white leadership – the influence of funders – their solution does not offer a challenge to the role of money in organizations. Rather, this participant suggests using the Roundtable and the relationships cultivated there as way to circumvent their influence.

#### *Overcoming Funding Constraints With Diverse Membership*

With the Roundtable participants in agreement on the issue of the disproportionate influence of funders, Vaid challenged the attendees of this Roundtable to look outside of the concerns with budgets to the more urgent issue of attracting a diverse membership for each organization, explaining the need for this as stemming from the observation that:

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<sup>320</sup> “National Policy Roundtable Minutes, September 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, 1999” HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 15, np.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., np.

Racism in leadership reflects racism in life. Who the constituents that you serve will affect how you can transform [sic]. How can we add or change focus of organizational priorities to serve a broader constituency.<sup>322</sup>

These comments by Vaid can be read for the ways that she encourages the executive directors to see possibilities for democratizing their organizations by making them attractive to many more potential members and consequently off-setting the disproportionate influence of only a handful of funders. For Vaid, changes in the membership to a broader constituency would necessarily entail shifting agendas of political interests that – in turn – stood to mitigate what was perceived as the implicit and explicit racism of the assimilationist-oriented movement.

Many participants took this opportunity to articulate their reflections on race in the movement alongside the task of developing a “vision.” One participant explained how race needed to be central to the issues identified by the group because people of color already comprise the memberships of the organizations at the table:

I was struck when hearing we were going to deal with racism, and I was struck in the agenda “unmasking how race affects our movement” I had no idea that I was not part of the movement. The idea that race is something we can play with, that we can make part of the agenda, when for of us it is something we cannot ever walk away from. There is inherent racism in these assumptions. This is a great learning experience for Anglo focused organizations, but it does not involve organizations working in these areas.<sup>323</sup>

For this participant, convening meetings dedicated specifically to discussing “how race affects the movement” belies the goal of helping executive directors and leaders to develop a more inclusive movement because it is premised on the idea that people of color need to be brought in, when, according to this executive director, people of color

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., np.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., np.

already comprise these organizations and shape the agendas. Building on some of the points regarding the incompatibility of assimilation agendas and race raised by Wilson in his opening to the Roundtable, this participant draws attention to the ways that staging discussions in this way locates race as something outside “the movement” to be considered by leaders *post hoc*, and consequently only serves to reify the very divisions they seek to address.

The serious charge that there is an “inherent racism” in these assumptions sparked the attention of the other executive directors. One immediately followed this statement to echo their own frustration with locating race outside of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender politics, saying:

I want to support what you are saying and add to it. It is right and productive to be creating a vision. That vision has been articulated for about 30 years by progressive queer people of color. Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith. You could fill a library with what we have said. There is a level of frustration about when that translated into, “Okay, enough talking, let’s do it.” The notion that economic injustice is a queer issue is not a new fight. Ten years ago we had this fight at the task force. Now it is 1999 and we are not talking about economic injustice....The more that we do this type of thing, the more relevance this movement will have to Latino people.<sup>324</sup>

Once again, the need to assess the priorities is raised to highlight how issues pertaining to economic injustice have been displaced over the past ten years. The shifts away from issues such as these and ENDA, according to this speaker, render the goals advanced by the organizations at this Roundtable irrelevant to Latinos, and by association, other minority groups. Another executive director expressed similar frustration with the task of generating a more inclusive vision for LGBT politics, saying, “there is something about

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid., np.

the topic...people of color telling white people how to do the work is an old model which hasn't work [*sic*],” to which Vaid responded:

I disagree with the notion that this is what the meeting was about. I think what your [*sic*] bringing up is about what we mean by ‘THE’ movement...and in that sense it would have been better to talk about ‘movements’ rather than THE movement.<sup>325</sup>

When taken in the broader context of this discussion at the Roundtable, Vaid’s comments do more than the work of a good meeting facilitator who attempts to refocus the group on the task at hand. By urging the executive directors present to see that there is no one monolithic movement (“‘THE’ movement”), Vaid once again introduced the possibility for multiple versions of politics organized in relation to sexuality and gender identity that could be represented by the various groups at the Roundtable. The reminder that there could possibly be many different versions of “the movement,” contra the predominant influence of the HRC in politics (“‘THE’ movement”), was adopted by participants as a useful way to describe what they saw as the main obstacles to the work of attempting to integrate racial concerns in their agendas and attracting more marginalized groups to their memberships. In this way, HRC became a target in the following discussion about crafting their own movements, and the examination of these exchanges below shows how the political actors at this meeting on race in the movement used HRC as a foil for developing their own queer political identity and agenda to better reflect to existing diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. Associating assimilation with HRC, in other words, helped the leaders opposed to assimilation to further develop their alternate queer identity and agenda framing.

### *Queer Identity Against Assimilation*

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid., np.

The executive directors targeted the perceived dominance of assimilationist LGBT political agendas and used the following characterizations of HRC's agenda of interests and political priorities as a baseline from which they would craft their alternative agendas. The umbrage taken with groups such as HRC demonstrates the role that conflict plays in helping to determine the boundaries of group identities and agendas of interests. For example, immediately after the discussion of there being many possible LGBT movements, one participant eloquently urged executive directors to see that a:

Paradigm shift needs to happen. There is a limit to what "civil rights" as the pinnacle to the movement. This is the pinnacle for the HRC. There is a place for one organization to have that focus. But it is not what these people need to be doing. "Liberation" – old word new era. Social change. Or focus cannot be either civil rights or equality...of course this is not just about "equality" this is about my mother, jobs, food, prison. Today, okay, we will just get ENDA passed. But there needs to be an articulation about what it means to be part of a broader social rights movement...That may not be what we are GLBT movement. We may need to do that in other venues. We need to develop a training institute to develop leadership. But we must do it with understanding that our goals are different from that of some others. We need a different paradigm.<sup>326</sup>

Here, the speaker poses "civil rights and equality" – i.e., political goals advanced for the purposes of enhancing assimilation and queer liberalism – and "liberation" as two separate ideologies for organizing political interests moving forward. The latter is concerned with a broad range of issues that extend beyond sexuality and gender identity, which the speaker illustrates by associating it with poverty, mass incarceration, and hunger. Significantly, this speaker does not advance liberation and associated political interests as achievable only through a radical restructuring of the institutions that organize and maintain marginalization as his or her Gay Liberation predecessors did, but

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid., np.

instead acknowledges that some within-system political goals ought to be prioritized, specifically anti-discrimination legislation such as ENDA. These goals, however, should only be advanced in conjunction with a discursive shift to a more intersectional politics.

Other participants built on this by articulating the discursive shift called for as a turn to a specifically queer politics. Recalling Warner and Cohen's definitions of queer, advancing queer politics would provide a necessary counterpoint to the hegemonic paradigm of assimilation or queer liberalism. For example, one executive director spoke about recent mobilization of death penalty opposition as an instance of different organizations, which were in many cases unlikely partners, uniting as a coalition:<sup>327</sup>

I was very struck in the press by the death penalty stand and the impact of several organizations getting together. There has always been a mainstream and a more progressive wing within the queer movement. The difference is now we are not made of volunteers but are organizations and the hills are bigger. The weight can start to shift about what is a "queer issue" if a group of organizations can get together and make a public statement in which two issues are declared as "queer issues."<sup>328</sup>

By locating to the coalitions mobilizing protests against the death penalty under the heading of "queer issues," this speaker underscores the longstanding separation between mainstream and progressive politics. It also echoes Vaid's earlier musings about an alternative coalition of interest groups and political organizations as progressive flank to work in conjunction with "THE movement." However, what is most notable about this speaker's articulation of the possibilities for many different movements is referring to the

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<sup>327</sup> Earlier that year, the Log Cabin Republicans and NGLTF – conservative and progressive organizations, respectively – held a public debate about the death penalty. They agreed beforehand on how to stage the conflict in order to emphasize what each organization saw as important issues in relation to the death penalty and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. See Chris Bull, "A Matter of Life and Death," *The Advocate*, March 16, 1999.

<sup>328</sup> "National Policy Roundtable Minutes, September 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, 1999" HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 15, np.

progressive political agenda as one comprised of “queer issues.” Although “queer” and its connotations of opposition to hegemonic conceptions of “normal” were used throughout the meeting by some to articulate their individual self identifications as queer, this is one of the first instances in the Roundtables when an executive director uses it to modify a proposed agenda of issues. This use of “queer” here, and at other times during this meeting of the Roundtable, is thus notable for the ways that it is implicitly posed in opposition to assimilationist political agendas and “LGBT/GLBT politics.”

The substance of these alternative queer issues was further defined by the following statement, in which an executive director discusses HRC:

One of the things that still fills me with hope is that conservative perspectives in GLBT movement is that they are still explicitly defined as the conservative perspectives [sic]. We shouldn't concede this. Around the issue of race, there is not a choice around if it is addressed or not addressed, it is there. *To be inactive is to have made a decision on it.* Raising the bar on race also will screen people out as well, but I would rather lose those people.<sup>329</sup>

Reading this comment in the context of a conflict over how to develop and represent an agenda of interests pertaining to marginalization and inequality further establishes the queer and LGBT/GLBT divide articulated by other executive directors, particularly as they attempted to address the history of marginalization within lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender political organizations. Significantly, it recasts that divide as one that separates those interested in maintaining the status quo – conservative and assimilationist – and those political actors who are compelled to take up issues concerning race under the aegis of “queer” politics. These repeated divides between organizations, political agendas, and members effectively centered race as the reference

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid., np (emphasis mine).

point for locating interest groups and their corresponding agendas as assimilationist and LGBT or radical and queer.

Participants used this new typology to generate ideas for common features of their agendas for the remainder of this Roundtable meeting. HRC's silence on issues pertaining to race, in addition to not sending a representative to a meeting convened on the subject, was interpreted as a decision to advance political interests from what was evolving as a perspective considered to be conservative and assimilationist. The conservative and assimilationist approach epitomized by HRC, in turn, was used by political actors as the guide for what an alternate agenda of political interests would emphatically *not* be. In other words, internal backlash – that is, opposition directed to both radical and assimilationist approaches – contributed diverging meanings associated with “LGBT/GLBT politics” on one hand, and “queer politics” on the other.

### *Representing LGBT, Representing Queer*

The development of queer political identity in explicit contrast to LGBT/GLBT political identity that evolved out of the 1999 Roundtable reverberated in subsequent meetings during which political actors convened to discuss political strategies in the context of the upcoming 2000 elections.<sup>330</sup> Examining the minutes from National Policy Roundtable meetings convened between March 2000 and March 2001 illustrates two important developments that further shaped the construction and development of identities and agendas associated with sexuality and gender identity during this time.

The first is that queer political identity was increasingly associated with broad political agendas that aimed to address the political priorities of those who carry multiple

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<sup>330</sup> The LGBT and GLBT initialisms were both used during this period. Both are indicated here to maintain consistency with the excerpts from political actors, some of whom used GLBT.

and intersecting identities. As such, these political goals were less concerned with introducing narrowly-defined sexual and gender identities to make claims for rights and inclusion, and more focused on effecting political changes that would alter the social, political, and economic institutions that structure and maintain inequality for a broad range of people. These goals included, for example, the end of mass incarceration and ceasing the documentation of sex and gender on state documents. Queer identity and the associated agenda of political interests, in other words, developed as a radical critique of identity politics at the same time that political actors working to develop it advocated for queer identification and queer politics.

As shown in the preceding examination of the 1999 Roundtable meeting, the continued development of the queer political identity and agenda channeled efforts of queer-identified political actors *away* from intervening in assimilationist LGBT political identity and agendas, leading to the second major development to sexual and gender identities during this time period. That is, the redirection of energy towards developing queer political identity and agendas by some political actors furnished the conditions for other political actors to focus on the continued construction of LGBT political identity and political agendas as *solely* concerned with sexuality. The exclusive focus on sexuality was achieved through a political agenda that advanced issues aimed at achieving assimilation for the LGBT group, including issues such as civil unions for same-sex couples, anti-discrimination legislation to protect lesbians, gay men, and transgender people in employment, and removing barriers to openly gay and lesbian people serving in the military. LGBT, in other words, was increasingly oriented towards assimilation and queer liberalism.

The National Policy Roundtable meetings held immediately before and after the 2000 elections show how these two developments influenced the diverging constructions and associated representations of LGBT/GLBT and queer political identities and political agendas. While queer political identity and agendas continued to pursue ways to be relevant to people across many different identities, including race, gender identity, class, and ability, and thus captured the political interests of those who carry multiple identifications, the following shows how the decision to cease participation in the National Policy Roundtable by advocates of the queer framing consequently allowed the remaining interest groups convened at the National Policy Roundtables to construct LGBT/GLBT political identity and interests narrowly to pertain solely to same-sex sexuality.

#### *LGBT and Assimilation*

The political actors convened at the March 2000 meeting were especially concerned with developing effective strategies to influence the upcoming November elections in ways that would benefit the LGBT/GLBT group and political agenda. This specific political context, as well as the decision by political actors from the evolving queer political groups to not attend the March 2000 National Policy Roundtable due to frustration over the lack of action on issues pertaining to race and gender identity, produced a focus on defining LGBT/GLBT political identity as an influential segment of the electorate. Asserting the voting power of the LGBT/GLBT group projected lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender voters as a unified voice in politics. For example, Virginia Apuzzo, from NGLTF, opened the meeting with the observation that:

GLBT electorate has raised steadily...We are 11% of the Democratic primary and 2% of the Republican primary in California. 11% of voters

identify as African, Latino, or Jewish [sic]. Here we are as a voting bloc right up there with every other voting block.<sup>331</sup>

For Apuzzo, the GLBT electorate should be taken seriously because it comprises a similar share of the population as Black, Latino, and Jewish voters. The comparison to established “voting blocks” places the GLBT alongside these other groups as equals, at the same time that this analogy poses the GLBT group as separate from “African, Latino, and Jewish” voters. This further demonstrates the diverging understandings between queer and LGBT/GLBT identities. GLBT, for Apuzzo and others at this meeting, is an influential segment of the electorate that is understood as separate from, and similar to, other minority groups in politics; whereas queer, as previously discussed, was increasingly aligned with seeing race and concerns with racial politics as a constitutive part of queer identity.

Others at the meeting continued the focus on voters and assimilation politics. The executive director of HRC, Elizabeth Birch, elaborated on HRC’s vision for the GLBT group as an influential group in the electorate:

What is at play is 57 seats. How can GLBT community invest on the edge to swing those seats? HRC’s PAC is 8% of our budget. Goals are to: Energize the GLBT community to participate in the elections...Support openly GLBT candidates.<sup>332</sup>

Birch builds on Apuzzo’s assertion of the GLBT group as a significant and influential part of the electorate by introducing the possibility that it, alone, can determine the outcomes of elections. The connection between the GLBT group as part of the electorate and the construction of GLBT identity is demonstrated in Birch’s subsequent outline for the plan to “energize” GLBT voters. She details one such campaign, saying, “National

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<sup>331</sup> “National Policy Roundtable Minutes, March 16, 2000” HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 16, 4.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 4.

Coming Out program in election year includes voting promotion among youth. Also working with NGLTF on campuses. Important investment.”<sup>333</sup> Here, Birch refers to National Coming Out Day, which is held annually on October 11 and was established in 1988 – at the height of HIV/AIDS activism – as an opportunity to assert the social and political visibility of gay men and lesbians by coming out en masse on a designated day. Unlike the grassroots vision for coming out, however, in which coming out was imagined as a way to overcome personal discomfort and a political act to alter stigmas directed at lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people through modeling self acceptance and authenticity, the political action promoted by HRC and NGLTF encourages people to come out in conjunction with registering to vote. Consequently, programs such as get out the vote efforts staged in conjunction with National Coming Out Day aimed to link LGBT/GLBT identification with a different form of political activity: voting.

Having agreed on the importance of voting and electoral politics, leaders at this Roundtable meeting discussed the potential power and political impact of a mobilized LGBT/GLBT voting block. Virginia Apuzzo, for instance, introduced a strategy of issuing penalties for elected officials who failed to deliver on promises to the LGBT/GLBT group. The ability to furnish or deny campaign contributions figured prominently into Apuzzo’s proposal:

If Congress isn’t ready to act on hate crimes, could get money so first time offenders don’t become second timers. Must have real change not transitory appeasements. Understand difference between access and responsiveness.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 7.

Apuzzo's use of "first time offenders" followed by "second timers" evokes the terms used in the criminal justice system to describe people who are accused of repeatedly breaking the law. Employing these words to describe legislators who fail to support hate crimes legislation consequently links these legislators with punishment, which, in this metaphor, takes the form of denying campaign funds and potentially imperiling reelection efforts, all in the name of accountability to the LGBT/GLBT voting block.

There were additional ways that the political actors envisioned the power of a mobilized LGBT/GLBT group in electoral politics, specifically with respect to potentially opposing the various ballot initiatives introduced across the states that sought to define marriage as one man and one woman. To help executive directors craft a coordinated response, the March 2000 Roundtable featured a special session on how to most effectively challenge these ballot initiatives, and many of the discussions focused on how to use public opinion to the advantage of the LGBT group. As the following shows, the reliance on public opinion channeled the strategies adopted by the Roundtable participants towards assimilationist goals, such as same-sex marriage, social security benefits, and inheritance rights. The discussions at the March 2000 Roundtable, in other words, focused on how the LGBT/GLBT group might be recognized and given standing in the existing political system – assimilation – as opposed to pursuing radical social and political changes, as their queer political activist counterparts did. For instance, Vickie Shabo, a pollster commissioned to conduct a study of attitudes towards LGBT people, reported the findings of her study:

While participants in every group said that gay and lesbian and same sex couples are jut [sic] like other people and resisted characterizations that distinguish gays and lesbians from heterosexual, it is clear that they are still strong positive and negative stereotypes associated with gays and

lesbians. People feel threatened by overt sexuality and public displays of affection.<sup>335</sup>

Although the results of this focus group appear contradictory on the surface – respondents report no differences between gay men and lesbians and heterosexuals, yet still carry negative stereotypes of them – the ending observation that respondents expressed discomfort and defensiveness in response to “overt sexuality and public displays of affection” illustrate that at the core of opposition to gay men and lesbians is the perception of deviant sexuality. Building on this particular finding presaged a discussion among Roundtable participants of how to appeal to voters in ways that diminished associations with *deviant* sexuality.

To combat the associations of the LGBT group and deviant sexuality among the general public, Shabo recommended reframing the LGBT group as one concerned primarily with equal rights. She explained how variations in wording could potentially change the outcomes at the polls:

If civil rights laws are equal or special rights, see a lot of improvement. In May of 1995 we had a 3% lead and now in Nov 1999 a 22% lead on equal rights response. People support hospital visitation rights, social security benefits, inheritance rights. The numbers are better among those that know GLBT people.<sup>336</sup>

The growing acceptance for regular features of family “rights” – hospital visitation for ailing partners or visits by gay or lesbian parents to sick children, for example – among respondents in Shabo’s study is used here to derive the most advantageous and potentially successful LGBT/GLBT agenda – one that would focus on asserting the

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

similarities across heterosexual families and LGBT families. For instance, Shabo also observed in relation to her findings that:

When we asked people to define marriage, they spoke in very gender neutral terms. Definition of marriage should work more in our favor. People described marriage in terms of commitment and values not gender. Looking to future suggested an ethic of commonality across relationships. This is a window for us in the future.<sup>337</sup>

Shabo's speculation that respondents in the general public are looking to see similarities between straight and LGBT people suggests that drawing out these potential overlaps might be an effective strategy for leaders at the Roundtable to adopt, especially Shabo's conclusion that analogies such as these might help to create opportunities – "a window" – in the future.

Shabo's emphasis on a political strategy based on drawing out the parallels between straight people on one hand, and LGBT people on the other, directed the participants at the Roundtable to adopt a strategy focused on goals that fell squarely within the bounds of what has been previously outlined as assimilation or queer liberalism. There were, however, some participants who expressed concerns over adopting the tactic of asserting similarities between straight people and LGBT people. These moments of push back indicate that the tendency towards single-issue politics or the assimilation frame, in the case of the LGBT/GLBT group is not an inevitable path for interest group politics. Rather, as these moments of disagreement or contradiction show the ways that the construction of a political identity along a single axis of identity is in fact a product of choices made by political actors to do so. This is illustrated most compellingly by the growing split between LGBT/GLBT identity and politics, on one

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

hand, and queer identity and politics on the other. One respondent, for instance, explained that a better strategy for combatting ballot initiatives might be found in accessing established activist networks:

One thing I haven't been hearing is that timeline probably started sooner. Had Prop 209. What level of organized queer involvement was there in those campaigns, laying groundwork for anti-gay initiatives? I am of the mindset that we will never win anything alone. Coalition problem.<sup>338</sup>

The unidentified speaker in this excerpt refers to the mobilization that worked for the passage of California proposition 209, which amended the state constitution to prohibit state government institutions from considering race, sex, or ethnicity in public employment, contracting, or education. Here, the speaker theorizes that it was actually the networks of people of color activists and political operatives put in place to advance Proposition 209 that laid the groundwork for mounting a resistance to the Knight Initiative (Proposition 22) that defined marriage as strictly between one man and one woman. Significantly, the use of “queer” by this speaker articulating alternatives to an assimilationist and queer liberalism strategy illustrates the deepening divide between queer political identity and LGBT political identity. Whereas the LGBT strategy advocated for by the majority of political actors present at this Roundtable meeting tended towards assimilation, and with it, a narrowly bounded understanding of LGBT identity as commensurate with heterosexuality, this speaker interjects to introduce the possibility that the gains made in conjunction with the Knight Initiative were the result of coalitions comprised of people of color and LGBT people. The final observation that, “...we will never win anything alone” suggests that the efforts to assert the LGBT/GLBT

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 19.

group as a group with a unique set of political goals might not be as effective as pursuing alliances across many different, but like-minded, political groups.

The focus on developing assimilationist strategies resulted in the withdrawal of some members from the Roundtable, once again demonstrating how the narrow orientation of the LGBT/GLBT group was not inevitable, but instead the result of choices made by political actors. One participant identified her concerns with the increasingly narrow boundaries of the LGBT/GLBT group that resulted from the repeated comparison to straight people, and used the open time at the end of the meeting to announce her departure from the group:

I have enjoyed all these meeting [sic] tremendously. I feel that these meetings have helped in developing professional relationships, but only 3 presenters included bi and trans language. The NPR participants I feel personally have really gotten better at this. I still leave with sadness of the funding panel and a lot of opportunity in tactical decisions. Do people understand what I mean when I say that bisexuals have potential to reconstruct our whole notion of sexual liberation and strategies? There is a level of understanding that doesn't exit [sic].<sup>339</sup>

This speaker, identified as Deb Kolodny from BiNet, expresses concern for a relative lack of attention to bisexuals in the development of strategy. The speech announcing her exit from the group reveals two features of the evolving LGBT group. First, the exclusion of bisexuals that Kolodny points to here shows the unequal status of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people under the heading of the LGBT political identity group and agenda. Bisexuals, in other words, are only nominally included in the name of the group, but not substantively represented in the strategies developed or the discussions held. Second and relatedly, Kolodny's comments allude to the possibility that bisexuals might not be best represented by the LGBT group's increasingly assimilationist political

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 27.

agenda. This is captured in her concluding theorization that the true inclusion of bisexuals would “reconstruct” understandings of sexuality as well as political strategies, and implies that this would push the LGBT group away from assimilation and in the direction of radical rethinking of sexuality. Kolodny’s ultimate departure from the group furnishes an additional illustration of the diverging LGBT political identity and agenda and queer political identity and agenda.

Kolodny was not the only Roundtable participant to announce that the March 2000 meeting would be her last based on dissatisfaction with what was becoming an increasingly assimilationist political agenda. Roger Leishman, co-chair of the Federation of State Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Political Organizations, also used the conclusion of the meeting to announce his departure from the group and his reasons for doing so. Leishman explains:

This is also my last meeting. I was troubled that we didn’t integrate race into this discussion since it was the center piece [sic] of the last meeting. The work that Nadine and I do, working with people at state level, this has been in the discussion and has come up very naturally and appropriately and a lot more attention is being paid to the states than when we joined the Roundtable.<sup>340</sup>

For Leishman, the scant attention paid to issues pertaining to race at the Roundtable is incongruous with the simultaneous increase in attention to state politics because, as he alludes to in his departing remarks, the conversations about race are necessary features of LGBT politics at the local level, and should be at the national level as well. This departure on the basis of relative lack of attention to race, along with Kolodny’s with respect to bisexuality, shows the effects of the increasingly narrow LGBT political identity and political agenda constructed and represented by the national organizations

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 27.

convened at the National Policy Roundtable. By asserting the similarity of LGBT people to heterosexuals as well as their belonging in social institutions, such as marriage, the political actors invested in constructing the LGBT political identity group and agenda succeeded in further associating the group primarily with sexuality. As Kolodny and Leishman's departures from the Roundtable signal, the increasingly tight association of the LGBT group with sexuality, defined exclusively as same-sex desire, came at the exclusion of issues pertaining to race, bisexuality, and gender identity.

The following analysis of the National Policy Roundtable meeting held in March 2001 demonstrates how the increasingly oppositional political context furthered the construction and representation of LGBT political identity and the associated political agenda in these narrowly raced and gendered ways, and furthered the diverging meanings associated with the LGBT/GLBT and queer groups.

#### *Reframing and Representing the New LGBT Group*

The March 2001 National Policy Roundtable meeting was the first held after the election of George W. Bush, and the executive directors convened spent the majority of the two-day meeting crafting a political agenda that would potentially be successful in what they perceived to be an inhospitable political climate for LGBT people. The following shows that the discussions about the LGBT group as both a political identity and political agenda revolved around how to appeal to Republican lawmakers, with the eventual decision to underscore *sexuality* as the defining characteristic of the LGBT group. Advocates of this strategic reframing of LGBT identity and political interests argued that maintaining the centrality of sexuality would potentially attract more members to the group and thus allow for the projection of critical mass in political

mobilizations. The following analysis demonstrates that the efforts to construct LGBT/GLBT identity and interests in this single axis way also entailed the marginalization, silencing, and exclusion of various groups that were seen as contradicting the singular focus of the group. These exclusions implicitly impacted people of color through the normalization of white gay men and lesbians as the proper members of the LGBT/GLBT group; however, most telling was the willingness of those invested in this unitary construction of the LGBT/GLBT identity to jettison representation and membership for bisexual and transgender people from the LGBT/GLBT group.

The meeting began with the executive director of the Log Cabin Republicans (LCR), Rich Tajfel, offering a briefing about the White House to acquaint the participants with the Bush administration and provide some insight into the potential victories that could be won in the next four years. His introduction included a panel discussion about the current state of the Republican Party featuring a returning speaker, Vicki Shabo, who provided the polling data used in the March 2000 meeting, and a new guest speaker, David Boaz, from the Libertarian Cato Institute.

Boaz opened the panel with the following summary of how the representation of the LGBT political identity group and political agenda would benefit from strategic shifts in language to appeal to the new Republican administration:

When I was asked to do give [sic] this presentation, I was surprised that I was asked to advise you on tactics and goals. We do agree on goals. We at least agree that increasing tolerance on GL issues is one of our goals. There are groups on the right and the left who don't share this as a goal. I think this is consistent with the best of American values. I think one principle is that goals should be for the common good. We should agree

that we are seeking common good, not just handouts for special interests. The latter is what Republicans think that gays want.<sup>341</sup>

As posed by Boaz, the solution to disputes over the promotion of “tolerance” for gay men and lesbians – on both the right and the left – should focus on developing a shared investment in what he terms the “common good,” which is defined in opposition to “special interests.” The meaning of “special interests” was revealed in Boaz’s description of what a political agenda promoting the “common good” would accomplish:

You’ll make more headway if you look at overall law and not at just specific issues. Talk about things as a moral thing and individual rights and equality – this would make it easier for libertarian and conservative Republicans to support your issues.<sup>342</sup>

Here, Boaz urges the political actors present at this meeting of the Roundtable to see how they stand to benefit from directing energy towards legal gains premised on morality, individual rights, and equality, and *not* efforts to enhance visibility for the LGBT group in politics and society by pushing an agenda comprised of political and social issues specific to sexuality or gender identity. Boaz’s elaboration of how to make this revised political agenda appeal to the new Republican administration, as well as the tradeoffs these revisions would entail, reveal the meaning of “special interests” for Boaz and other Libertarians and Republicans:

Republicans can tolerate the word gay, but when bisexual and transgender come in they just start thinking about hypthenated Americans. It triggers their identity politics issue especially where transgender is concerned.<sup>343</sup>

“Special interests,” in other words, are identities that are salient to some members, but are perceived to disrupt the status quo conveyed by an unqualified “American” identity.

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<sup>341</sup> “National Policy Roundtable Minutes, March 1, 2001” HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 20, 3.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

“Gay” is therefore tolerable for some Republicans, mostly libertarians, because it functions a similar, but different, expression of sexuality, while “bisexual and transgender” are perceived as introducing uncertainty and challenges to the dominant model for relationships.

To some extent, Boaz’s suggestions at this meeting were in line with the assimilationist agenda that was steadily gaining in popularity at the Roundtable. Boaz’s recommendation that it might be advantageous to exclude bisexual and transgender members, organizations, and issues from the political organizing taking place at the Roundtable, however, was met with opposition from some members. In response, Boaz responded by shifting the meaning of diversity. After conceding that keeping people who are transgender on the LGBT agenda would be a reasonable goal for a different type of movement, Boaz suggested that:

You also need to recognize diversity in the gay movement. Libertarians and Republicans feel there is a lot of pressure for ideological conformity within the gay community. This drives them away from wanting to work with you.<sup>344</sup>

According to Boaz, the way to succeed in the current political climate would be to expand the meaning of diversity to facilitate the inclusion of Libertarians and Republicans in the LGBT group, presumably because their goals and complaints might be more legible to the Republican administration. Though on the surface Boaz’s comments are a simple plea for Republicans and Libertarians to be embraced in the LGBT group, his efforts to redefine diversity for the group also effectively elevated *sexuality* as the common identification uniting the group, which is evidenced in his conspicuous use of “gay” to define the group, rather than LGBT. Thus, for Boaz and

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

other conservative members of the Roundtable, gay and lesbian Republicans and Libertarians should be considered when crafting the political agenda because they, like the others at the Roundtable, have similar sexual identities. Party affiliation and political interests might vary, but gay or lesbian identification are constant across these other identifications. The elevation of sexuality as the defining feature of the group is only clarified by Boaz’s grudging admission that transgender people should be provisionally maintained in the group and his complete silence on bisexual inclusion.

There were some members of the Roundtable who protested the elevation of sexuality as the defining feature of the LGBT group and political agenda, particularly for the ways that it resulted in the exclusion of those who carry multiple identities. One participant followed Boaz’s presentation to offer a prediction of how an assimilationist agenda that elevates sexuality as the common factor would exclude racial groups, saying that, “the common good is defined as what the majority is which is perceived as white males. How to frame the common good in ways that don’t leave out Americans?”<sup>345</sup> Here, the speaker indicates the limitations of an agenda premised on advancing the common good, or assimilationist, agenda by pointing out that the reference points for these types of rights claims are “white males.” The implicit point about how white men do not provide adequate examples for political goals advanced by a diverse LGBT group made up of many different sexual, gender, and racial identities was lost, however, in Tajfel’s response to the question. He explained that:

The way to get to common good is to not go in as the self interested group. For example African American women with breast cancer can join a health coalition and ask them, “what is the best way, strategically?”<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

According to Tajfel, identity – such as race in his example – should be minimized in favor of viewing the unifying conditions, such as breast cancer, as the basis for political action. Extending the implications of this response to the LGBT group suggests that sexuality, yet again, ought to be the shared characteristic motivating political action, much like breast cancer is a shared characteristic in Tajfel's example. In other words, it is not lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender *identifications* that brings the LGBT group together in this formulation, but rather *expressions* and *experiences* with same-sex sexuality that should motivate politics. For Tajfel and other advocates of the LGBT assimilation agenda at this meeting of the Roundtable, representing sexuality in these ways was viewed as a strategy that would ultimately be more successful in the context of a Republican administration.

With these suggestions in mind, the executive directors used the remainder of the meeting for two tasks. The first was to discuss ways to elevate sexuality as the defining feature in representations of the LGBT group and the second was to make plans for how this formulation of LGBT identity and political agenda might provide the basis for enhanced coalition work. As the following shows, the elevation of sexuality alongside the renewed interest in forming coalitions with groups viewed outside of this emphasis on sexuality reinforced the construction of the LGBT group as unified in narrow ways but positioned politically *alongside* other groups. LGBT, in other words, would be its own discrete political identity and agenda to advance issues pertaining to sexuality, specifically those held by gay men and lesbians who were interested in assimilationist political goals.

Eric Rofes, the former executive director of NGLTF, for instance, articulated the following vision for the LGBT/GLBT group in line with the suggestions made for prioritizing sexuality:

I adhere to big tent picture of the GLBT community. I don't believe that gay male leaders should look de-sexed or pretend that they are in a monogamous relationship if they aren't. If we are in a participatory democracy, that means that people who organize their sexual lives in ways outside of heterosexual norms should allow full access to our communities.<sup>347</sup>

For Rofes, the GLBT community is one that is united underneath the shared tent of sexuality, which is defined as “outside of heterosexual norms.” As captured by this metaphor, diversity would and should be encouraged and permitted, but only in relation to sexuality, which excluded gender identity, gender, and race as a result. Other members of the Roundtable echoed the continued focus on sexuality at the expense of gender identity. A participant identified as Amber followed Rofes's comments with the observation that:

We need to integrate a sexual politics into the bigger picture of social change. Sex in isolation doesn't make sense. It has to be framed in the way of the lives that we live. It has to be integrated and part of our agendas and all for the policy work that we do.<sup>348</sup>

The resonances between Amber's proposal and queer identity and politics are notable. Both are concerned with social change, however, rather than expressing interest with structural and institutional shifts that aim to alleviate inequalities for all oppressed group, as with the queer agenda, Amber's objectives for the LGBT group is focused specifically on finding ways to incorporate sexuality in policy work. This demonstrates how the renewed interest in sexuality as the core of the LGBT group was imagined within the

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 44.

confines of an assimilationist agenda focused on policy changes. Mary Francis Berry reiterated the core of Amber's proposal, asserting that:

We are here because of why people are punished. This movement is a lagging indicator. At a time when most people in the country are prepared to talk about sex all the time, people in this movement are worried about talking about sex. We need to take advantage of this time. We choose to define people as just like everyone else instead of stressing individual freedom to choose our partners.<sup>349</sup>

Sexuality, for Amber and others at the meeting, provides the unique basis for intervening in policy as well as the basis from which the group should argue for "individual freedom." This focus on sexuality was perceived as offering the most effective route to political change, but also foreclosed opportunities to consider overlapping identities and political interests.

The ways that the focus on sexuality organized race, gender, and gender identity out of the LGBT group was evidenced repeatedly during this Roundtable meeting. For example, other executive directors applied the combined emphasis on sexuality and policy to contemporary issues, with one participant explaining of Don't Ask, Don't Tell:

Regarding the showers argument for gays in the military, when I look at racial integration, that debate was very sexualized. It was said blacks would bring in higher rates of STDS and that they would rape people. Maybe we don't desexualize certain arguments in order to win. The way I've responded in debate is to turn it around quickly and say that that fear is based on a stereotype – the gay male predator.<sup>350</sup>

For this speaker, sexuality should not only comprise the basis of political action. Sexuality should also be seen as the main source of opposition that is akin to race. This analogy consequently poses the historical efforts for racial integration in the military as separate from the contemporary efforts to have openly gay and lesbian service members

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 35.

included in the military. By arguing that the political actors present at the Roundtable should not “desexualize” particular issues, and linking this assertion with a policy such as Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, this participant furthers the connections between identity defined along a single axis: sexuality. Analogies such as these implicitly posed those seeking inclusion in the military as doing so solely on the basis of gay or lesbian identification. The continued elevation of sexuality as the defining feature of the LGBT group in political goals, such as the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, created the perception that the LGBT group should pursue coalitions with *other* groups to advance political goals. Once again, these coalitions were based on the assumption that sexuality – and not gender or racial identities – bound the LGBT group together.

The coalitions proposed by the political actors present at this meeting of the Roundtable were premised on creating alliances across groups that *also* experienced oppression based on sexuality. Amber, for example, argued for coalitions as follows:

[W]e need to be talking in a vibrant way about where we have natural allies and build a movement that expands from this core to bring any more constituencies that are attacked around sexuality. We’re really not the only ones. The reason we remain isolated is because we haven’t built voices to broaden the scope. As long as gayness is used as sex and straight people are there to represent everything else, we are in trouble. Our ability to envelope other voices on sex before we are attacked is important. Our ability to defend ourselves would shift because we would not be in isolation around the frame of “dangerous” sexuality.<sup>351</sup>

For Amber, the motivation to form potential coalitions is identified solely in relation to sex and sexuality. Her plea for expanding the group in these ways is contrasted to the persistent failure to reach out to others who are similarly attacked in relation to sex. By implication, a political agenda that develops a shared interest in sex and sexuality is the

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 44.

key to future success. It is notable, however, that unlike the Roundtables convened in relation to race in the movement, there is no explicit mention of *who* comprises these other groups. The only criteria for coalition, in other words, is shared experiences of sexual oppression. Casting coalitions in this way, while attempting inclusion and broad representation, effectively silenced the specific groups targeted for “dangerous sexuality.” The losses entailed by failing to mention specific groups is evident in the lost alliances between LGBT people and women of color during this time period, many of whom were stigmatized as single mothers who are promiscuous and growing rich off of the US welfare state.<sup>352</sup>

Other participants at this meeting agreed that the pursuit of coalitions would be the best strategy moving forward based on recent successes. Most notable among these was what participants referred to as the “Ashcroft coalition,” in which various groups representing many different political agendas and identities united to oppose Bush’s nomination of John Ashcroft as Attorney General. One participant urged the political actors at the Roundtable to seriously consider coalitions such as that one as a way to get around the single axis focus on sexuality, suggesting that:

There’s two choices: first, allow sanitized gay folk that will drop BT and who look “normal” and who will only get certain things done; or two, find effective way to combat complacency and apathy of last eight years to continue the Ashcroft coalition type thing.<sup>353</sup>

For this speaker, the solution to what is posed as the pressing need to mobilize exclusively in relation to sexual oppression – indicated here by the proposal to exclude bisexuals and transgender people – can be found in the formation of coalitions, such as

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<sup>352</sup> Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens.” See also, Ange-Marie Hancock, *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Melissa Harris Perry, *Sister Outsider*; Joe Soss, *Unwanted Claims*.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

the one mobilized to oppose Ashcroft's nomination. By posing the exclusion of bisexual and transgender people in opposition to continuing broad, coalitional work, the speaker implies that the coalitions formed would be effective precisely because they bring gay people in alliance with people who are bisexual and transgender.

This call for enhanced coalition work to bring together many different groups can be read in two ways. The first confirms the growing association of the LGBT group with sexuality, and sexuality as a facet of identity that is mutually exclusive with other identifications. The second reading demonstrates that the energy devoted to coalitions by the political actors at this Roundtable meeting only reified the boundaries of these groups, with gay-identified people pursuing strategies to work *alongside* other groups. Regardless of these diverging interpretations, the growing association of the LGBT group with sexuality, and *not* other intersecting identities, is revealed as an enduring feature of the LGBT group. This effectively cast the LGBT group as white and gender normative. Furthermore, the resistance to seeing the ways in which sexuality intersects with other identifications, namely race, gender, and class, exerted a regulatory influence on what came to be known of the LGBT identity and agenda. In other words, the repeated assertion of coalitions *with other groups* established and maintained the illusion that these groups are separate and not overlapping and mutually constitutive of each other. As the preceding analysis shows, this narrow construction of LGBT identity was produced through decisions and choices by actors to either pursue or deny coalitions.

The elevation of sexuality and the renewed interest in forming coalitions was reflected in the conclusion of the meeting, as the participants debated revising the

structure of the National Policy Roundtable meetings. Two reasons were cited for a revisiting the rules and expectations governing the group.

The first was the withdrawal of a number of participants from the Roundtable in favor of focusing on organizations and movements more directly affiliated with queer politics. In some cases, the departure of these individuals was received with hostility by those at the Roundtable. For example, at the conclusion of this meeting, during which a discussion about these absences took place, one unidentified participant offered to tell the members of the Roundtable why certain members refused to attend meetings, and implied that the participants at the Roundtable would not be receptive to the information. This participant vaguely threatened to, “tell you why they aren’t coming, if you want to have the conversation,” to which another retorted, “No, we don’t.”<sup>354</sup> These tense exchanges over the previously engaged members of the Roundtable suggest that the proposed coalitions would not seek queer movements and organizations as allies, only furthering the divide between the LGBT/GLBT identity and agenda and the queer identity and agenda.

The second concerned how to structure the National Policy Roundtables to promote more of the coalitional-type work discussed at the March 2001 meeting. Here again, the question of attendance and who would be invited to the meetings took center stage. After a quick debate, the participants voted on inviting two representatives, preferably including an executive director, to attend each meeting. By phrasing these revised rules as contributing to the National Policy Roundtables as a “shared power structure,” rules such as these established the formal coalition between groups in attendance. Furthermore, revisions such as these also created the conditions for very

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 46.

particular types of organizations to participate in the National Policy Roundtables, specifically those with a formalized institutional structure with designated executive directors and other officers, who would be invited to meetings. This effectively organized political movements that typically do not have formalized structures *out* of the National Policy Roundtables and the political agendas taking shape there, which resulted in the exclusion of many of the queer politics organizations engaged in activism at the time.

These two decisions about the structure of the National Policy Roundtables show how the divides between LGBT political identity and politics and queer identity and politics were not natural evolutions of different interests away from each other, but instead hotly contested political developments that were institutionalized by interest group and social movements. Significantly, the diverging LGBT and queer identities and agendas were able to distinguish the boundaries of their groups and the interests they favored by using each other as foils. That is, political actors used the exclusion of some interests and members from the group as a way to assert specific meanings about each group. Once again, LGBT would be associated with assimilation and the elevation of sexuality as the defining feature of the group. Queer, on the other hand, would be anti-categorical and thus strive towards political goals that would target the institutions, laws, and practices that produce oppression for all marginalized groups: people of color, women, people who are poor or homeless, people who are undocumented, and people with disabilities.

### *Conclusions*

The analysis in this chapter shows how political actors working to advance political agendas concerned with sexuality and gender identity adopted either a queer

politics frame or an assimilationist frame to represent sexuality and gender identity in politics. The conflicts in conjunction with these diverging frames consequently contributed to varying constructions of sexual and gender identities. Queer, as this chapter illustrates, became increasingly associated with people who carry multiple identifications, especially people of color, people who are undocumented, people who are poor, and people who are disabled. These boundaries of queer identity aspired to be intersectional and as a result contributed to a political agenda founded in opposition to the institutions that structure and maintain inequality for various groups. Queer politics was not about particular identities, but was rather a shared orientation against normativity. Queer politics thus turned attention to challenging the death penalty, mass incarceration, police violence, and the documentation of sex, all of which were viewed as using violence and coercion to maintain a gendered and racialized status quo.

In contrast to queer, the evolving LGBT/GLBT identity achieved meaning through the elevation of sexuality as a core facet of identity that was understood to be mutually exclusive with other identifications. This further contributed to the construction of a normative LGBT group member, one who was projected as white, gender normative, able bodied, educated, and of relative class privilege. The tight relationship between the construction of LGBT identity along a single axis was further reflected in the political agendas developed to represent the interests of the group. As the preceding analysis shows, the LGBT group evolved in conjunction with the assimilationist political agenda, and thus pursued political goals such as open inclusion in the military and relationship recognition. The LGBT group was also projected as a significant and influential segment of the electorate, one that could determine outcomes of elections. The LGBT political

identity and agenda, in other words, was constructed so as to operate most effectively within the constraints of liberal democracy.

In light of these splits, the executive directors at this meeting of the Roundtable established the understanding among participants that there could be various approaches to politics. One would highlight electoral gains, visibility, and civil rights objectives, such as inclusion in the military and advancing the work on marriage equality. These issues would be taken up by organizations such as HRC, which would eventually revise its mission statement to claim its role as the “largest national lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender civil rights organization.”<sup>355</sup> The other approach would be centrally concerned with broad social inequality and consequently target issues related to sexuality and gender identity as these identity categories intersected with race and class. These organizations would commit to working together in coalitions to advance these broad, social justice-based goals, and would self identify the movement as “queer.”

Thus, by the close of the 1990s, the dynamics of within-group marginalization that primarily shaped the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people of color, people with disabilities, people who are gender nonconforming, and people who are undocumented were reconfigured. While HRC would continue to represent and elevate the construction of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in narrowly racialized, gendered, and classed ways, alternate movements and political organizations were developed to work in coalition with each other to push back against these constructions to advance much broader political goals concerned with social justice and equity for women, people of color, people who are disabled, people who are undocumented, and most importantly, those who carry multiple identifications.

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<sup>355</sup> “HRC Story,” [www.hrc.org/hrc-story](http://www.hrc.org/hrc-story) (website)

## CONCLUSION

One year after the White House protest that I detailed in the introduction, Jennicet Gutiérrez offered the following reflections on how her activism has been shaped by the LGBT political actors who silenced her and asserted that issues pertaining to transgender people in ICE detention is not a priority for the LGBT political group:

I think it's been really critical for me to make connections with other communities who are fighting for the liberation of all of us, and not the ones who want to assimilate. It's not going to make our life better. That's why being intersectional to me is important. I think many people shut down without giving people an opportunity to really share their pain and the experience under the system that we live in.<sup>356</sup>

The perceived dominance of assimilationist strategies put forth by LGBT groups furnishes the background for her comments, but for Gutiérrez, assimilation is not a political tactic that will address the problems facing transgender women of color in ICE detention. Nor will assimilation stop the deportations that are a priority for immigration rights activists. Claiming that she has no interest in reaching out to those who favor assimilation, and perhaps addressing the political actors who silenced her a year ago at the White House, Gutiérrez underscores in her comments the importance of pursuing connections across many *different* groups in the name of advancing a more intersectional politics. Thus, by the close of the interview, one is left with the impression that while the LGBT interest groups Gutiérrez alludes to have made an effort to bring together many different groups as members, including transgender people, these inclusions are in name only because the assimilationist political agendas put forth by these interest groups and political organizations do not address the concerns that are most pressing for people who

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<sup>356</sup> Orié Givens, "Obama Disrupter Jennicet Gutiérrez: Still Resisting" *The Advocate*, June 10, 2016, <http://www.advocate.com/transgender/2016/6/10/obama-disrupter-jennicet-Gutiérrez-still-resisting>

are transgender, people of color, people who are undocumented, or women, among many others.

This study has aimed to address the tensions regarding inclusion and exclusion that Gutiérrez attributes to the LGBT identity group and political agenda, asking through what political processes within group marginalization is produced, and to what effect. Using a theoretical framework grounded in intersectionality, the preceding six chapters illustrate how through conflict, backlash, and representation, political actors constructed the LGBT identity group along a single axis of identity: sexuality. As I show throughout this study of LGBT identity construction, the decisions by political actors to center and assert sexuality as the defining characteristic of the group was premised on and indeed enabled by the marginalization and silencing of multiple and intersecting axes of identity, such as race, gender, ability, and class.

By focusing analysis on the moments when political actors chose to elevate sexuality as the defining characteristic for lesbian, gay, and LGBT groups, this study shows that what comes to be known of identity-based groups does not inhere in essential behaviors or traits, but is rather the result of decisions made by political actors. These choices made in the construction of an identity based group entail consequences for determining *which* members come to be representative of the group. As this exploration of LGBT identity demonstrates, the construction of LGBT identity along the single axis of sexuality entailed the elevation and naturalization of white, middle-class, gender normative gay men as representative of the LGBT group and the consequent marginalization and othering of people of color, people who are transgender, people who are poor, women, people who identify as bisexual, people with disabilities, and those who

are undocumented within the LGBT group. Of political importance, by foreclosing membership for these groups, this narrow construction of LGBT identity exerts a regulatory influence on *who* identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender and *which interests* are advanced in the name of the LGBT political group.

Building on this latter point regarding interests, this study of the LGBT identity group shows that it is not only the construction of a normative group member that results from within group marginalization, but also the ordering of political priorities. That is, the narrow construction of the LGBT group as white, middle class, and gender normative helps to shape the issues put forth in the name of the LGBT group, such as those that focus marriage equality, inclusion in the military, and second-parent adoption rights. As indicated throughout this study, the focus on assimilation, recognition, and rights put forth by this particular LGBT political agenda comes at the cost of political priorities that would aim to address the political needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized members of the LGBT group. These concerns include the rising number of transgender women of color who are murdered each year, the disproportionate rate of incarceration experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer people of color, and the criminalization of transgender and gender nonconforming people using gender appropriate restrooms.

The relative lack of attention devoted to these most vulnerable lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender people that results from a singular focus on sexuality as mutually exclusive with other identifications is cause for concern and alarm, particularly as the failure to attend to these intersectional identities in the predominant LGBT political agenda entails consequences such as poverty and homeless, physical violence,

deportation, incarceration, and sometimes death for these groups.<sup>357</sup> The recent passage of a piece of legislation in North Carolina referred to as the “bathroom bill” demonstrates the implications of an LGBT identity constructed as white, middle class, and gender normative and a political agenda focused on rights, recognition, and inclusion.

In brief, HB2 – or “bathroom bill” – criminalizes any individual apprehended in a sex segregated bathroom or locker room that does not match the sex documented on that individual’s birth certificate. Since updating sex on birth certificates is an expensive and administratively cumbersome process, which is legally impossible in many states, it is often the case that people who identify as men or women do not have birth certificates that have been updated to index them as male or female, respectively.<sup>358</sup> As a result, HB2 has been widely interpreted as legalizing discrimination against people who are transgender and provoked significant public outcry. The online auction site, eBay, for example, circulated a press release detailing the cancellation of a new facility in North Carolina and the consequent loss of thousands of potential jobs for North Carolinians, US Attorney General Loretta Lynch announced that the Justice Department stands by transgender people and filed a civil rights lawsuit against North Carolina, and Bruce Springsteen cancelled an upcoming sold out concert.

Joining the fray, newspaper advice columnist and self-appointed champion of the LGBT political agenda, Dan Savage, squared off with conservative author and media pundit, Anne Coulter, to discuss the need for laws such as HB2. The debate, which

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<sup>357</sup> For more on incarceration and deportation as “social death,” see Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: NYU Press, 2012). See also, Spade, *Normal Life*.

<sup>358</sup> The majority of states require that an individual provide medical proof of sex confirmation treatments before updating birth certificates and three states do not allow updates at all. This forecloses the possibility for updating birth certificates to those who are physically and financially able to access these gender conformation treatments, see “Birth Certificate Laws,” *The Movement Advancement Project*, [http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/birth\\_certificate\\_laws](http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/birth_certificate_laws).

centered on who could enter a restroom to help their child while shopping, ended with Savage emphasizing that it is *not* transgender people who are the criminals perpetrating sexual assaults in public restrooms and that transgender people have a *right* to access public restrooms.<sup>359</sup> As a result, the defense of transgender people offered by Savage relied upon constructing them as law-abiding citizens who are parents, conform to gender norms, and have the material means to frequent commercial centers such as shopping malls. Transgender people are, in other words, rightful members of the LGBT group and therefore just like you, with the “you” being people who are not transgender, people who are not criminals, people with class privilege, and people who are citizens.

This narrow raced and classed representation of transgender people that poses them as subset of the LGBT group and beneficiaries of a rights based LGBT political agenda was subject to trenchant critiques from transgender people of color, transgender people who are undocumented, people with disabilities who rely on care providers who need unmitigated access to restrooms, and people who are gender nonconforming. Leaving aside the question of why Savage – a cisgender gay man<sup>360</sup> – was representing transgender people in this debate, these activists countered Savage and others who claimed to represent transgender people as a subset of the LGBT group by explaining that the emphasis on rights and this particular construction of transgender people diverted attention away from the *de facto* criminalization of transgender bodies by legislation such as HB2. To support this argument, they cited the empirical fact that it is actually

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<sup>359</sup> Hilary Hanson, “Dan Savage Takes on Anne Coulter over Transgender Rights,” *Huffington Post*, May 8, 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/dan-savage-ann-coulter-transgender-bathroom-rights\\_us\\_572f9c74e4b0bc9cb0472f03](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/dan-savage-ann-coulter-transgender-bathroom-rights_us_572f9c74e4b0bc9cb0472f03)

<sup>360</sup> The prefix cis- is used to note correspondence between one’s presumed biological sex and their gender identification. Some argue that the cis- prefix maintains a binary of transgender and cis bodies and maintains the normativity of the latter, see Finn A. Enke, “The Education of Little Cis: Cisgender and the Discipline of Opposing Bodies,” in *Transgender Studies Reader 2*, 234-47.

transgender people of color who are frequently harassed and subject to physical violence while accessing public restrooms because of their perceived genders.<sup>361</sup> Furthermore, they explained that the criminalization of transgender bodies would impact transgender people who are undocumented by subjecting them to detention and deportation simply for using the restroom. Finally, they argued that the criminalization of transgender bodies in public restrooms, specifically those located in public schools, would reinforce and maintain the school-to-prison pipeline by criminalizing students who are gender nonconforming or have yet to seek gender confirmation treatments.<sup>362</sup> By locating these critiques of rights and the narrow construction of transgender identity at the intersection of many different identities – racial identity, national identity, citizenship status, ability, age, and class – these activists underscored the costs of constructing identities along a single axis and assimilationist political strategies. That is, the erasure of many of the most precarious transgender-identified people, *even while* political actors and commentators such as Savage attempted to defend and include them people in the rights-based LGBT political agenda in order to demonstrate a commitment to equality, rights, and inclusion.

In sum, the political responses to HB2 varied, however, the particular emphasis on transgender people as law-abiding citizens with political standing, and thus a claim to rights, recalls some of the dissatisfaction with the LGBT political agendas that Gutiérrez indicated in her recent interview. By announcing her opposition to assimilationist political agendas and specifically identifying her politics as intersectional, Gutiérrez puts forth an alternate understanding of political identity and political agendas, one that does not cohere around presumably shared traits and seek recognition for those unique

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<sup>361</sup> Spade, *Normal Life*, chap. 1.

<sup>362</sup> On the school-to-prison pipeline, see Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* (New York, The New Press, 2010).

features, but is instead attentive to what she describes as the “pain and experience under the system we live in.” Much like the queer-identified political actors who resisted the homogenizing tendencies of LGBT identity and politics that I discuss in chapters six and seven, Gutiérrez suggests that politics ought to focus on addressing and disrupting the state, rather than seeking inclusion in the state. Thus, while within group marginalization carries severe consequences for those whose interests are not prioritized, what this study has also shown is that these patterns of silence and exclusion can also be conditions of possibility, through which alternative movements might form and take action.

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