

BROKERING IDENTITY: EXPLORING THE CONSTRUCTION OF LGBT
POLITICAL IDENTITY AND INTERESTS IN U.S. POLITICS, 1968-2001

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Zein Murib

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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August 2016

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am thankful to many people and institutions for support as I worked to complete this degree. First and foremost, I thank my committee – Dara Strolovitch, Joe Soss, Andrew Karch, and Kevin Murphy – for intellectual, professional, and the occasional emotional support that created the best conditions possible for writing this dissertation. Many people describe dissertation writing as a fraught experience, and it is at times, but I have also found it to be a source of great pleasure knowing that this committee would read this work and pose provocative questions that would ultimately improve it and challenge me to develop as a scholar.

I would like to give special thanks to Dara Strolovitch for the close readings and the comments she has offered on the drafts of this dissertation, as well as other recent writings as I have positioned myself to make the transition from graduate student. Her feedback and advice have been an education in not only how to be a political scientist who strives to pose timely and pressing questions about politics, but also how to mentor students. Thank you for sharing your expertise with me.

I would also like to thank the political science faculty at the University of Minnesota for the education on political science as a discipline, comprehensive subfield knowledge, and fostering an intellectual environment where students are encouraged to take risks. In particular, I want to write huge thanks to Terri Caraway, Katherine Pearson, and Dara Strolovitch for the education on gender, sex, and sexuality in politics, specifically the prodding to critically approach these categories as they animate political science research. There was a unique education in the sub-subfield of gender and politics, and I am very grateful for it. Thanks to Joanne Miller for early and on-going

mentorship. Andy Karch pressed me to refine the analytic framework that I introduce in this dissertation, and I thank him for being the voice in the back of my head as I am writing that reminds me to be as precise as possible with my language. Joan Tronto, August Nimtz, and Daniel Kelliher offered comments on this project at various stages of its development, and this final version is improved because of their interest and interventions. Joe Soss convened a dissertation group for the two years that I wrote this dissertation, and I would like to thank him and that group for helping to puzzle out various methodological questions as well as substantive issues. This dissertation was also greatly improved by line-by-line feedback that Joe provided for one of the earliest drafts of chapter five, which subsequently served as the model for how to convey the analysis in this dissertation; my many thanks to Joe.

I have benefitted from help offered by faculty outside of political science as well. I thank Kevin Murphy for sharing his deep knowledge of the history of sexuality with me. I left several meetings with him energized by the conversation we just had and armed with a list of citations that proved invaluable as I attempted to educate myself in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender history in the US. With respect to method, thanks to Annie Hall in Communications for detailed feedback and instruction in Critical Discourse Analysis and Ron Aminzade for the introduction to historical social science approaches. Jigna Desai from Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies (GWSS) posed challenging questions about coalitions when I presented a version of this research at a GWSS colloquium two years ago, and I thank her so much for setting me down that path. I owe many thanks to Kathie Hull in Sociology for help crafting the questions and methodological approaches during the early stages of this project.

This dissertation was completed thanks to generous financial support from University of Minnesota's Graduate Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship and two semesters of dissertation fellowship provided by the Department of Political Science at the University of Minnesota. I was able to conduct two summers of archival research thanks to a generous research grant from Cornell University's Zwickler Memorial Research Fund, and I thank the archivists at the Cornell Human Sexuality Collection under the supervision of Brenda Marston for their assistance in navigating the collection.

Colleagues and friends at the University of Minnesota warrant many thanks. Matt Hindman and Adam Dahl are my Seward buddies, and I thank them for their friendship and countless close and helpful readings of the many different versions of this project that contributed to its development tremendously. Charmaine Chua, Ashley English, Elena Gambino, Rachel Mattson, Emily Baer-Bostis, Chase Hobbs, and David Temin have generously read many drafts of each of these chapters and offered helpful feedback during our dissertation group meetings – my gratitude to them. Phil Chen, Maron Sorensen, Magic Wade, and Brooke Coe are dear grad school friends who I would like to thank for fun times that helped make coursework (especially MLE!), dissertating, and job marketing much brighter.

I wrote this dissertation during a two year stint of living in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and I would like to thank the people there who offered support and chances for fun: Sara, Jeff, and Gina Frenette; Christina Berchini; José Alvergue and Stephanie Farrar; Pam Foreman and Ellen Mahaffy; and the queer students who came to dinner at our house or attended talks I gave at UWEC and generously engaged me on this project. Thanks are also due to the city of Eau Claire, itself, for being so “calm” that I had nothing better to

do than write this dissertation. Last but not least, I have benefitted greatly from the advice and mentorship of my neighbor, Katherine Schneider, who is an emeritus professor and committed activist on issues impacting people with disabilities. Thanks, Kathie, for the chats over the fence and the encouraging words and wisdom that always gave me the extra motivation to go back to the computer and continue writing.

I have a wonderful chosen family who were integral to the completion of this dissertation. I was lucky to meet Hillary and Caitlin Conboy during the first week of graduate school at a university sponsored BBQ. They are the greatest of friends, and I thank them for so many cocktails, dinners, Wilson/Common Roots writing dates, and dog walks, as well as advice and encouragement as I finished this degree. Rebecca Trinite and Jess Kutch are my DC friends who have always challenged me to balance my development as an academic with a commitment to activism. I thank them for that and I hope I do right by them in the classroom and beyond. I thank Jackie Burns and Shehab Jafari for helping to brighten the occasionally dull and trying moments of graduate school with their friendship and general love of life. Of my bonus family, the Detournays, I thank Emmanuel for sharing his expertise as a professor to offer invaluable career advice as well as the even more important education on single malt whiskeys. Thanks to Christine for really good pep talks! My gratitude to Charlotte, and her partner Nic, for beer and pasta and friendship in Chicago.

Thanks to my immediate family are many. My parents left Lebanon because of civil war when they were young, and as a result I grew up in a family that was continually engaged in discussions about politics. I thank my parents for this upbringing that cultivated some of the sensibilities that have made the questions in this dissertation

possible, in particular the insight that politics is not just what happens when people vote. To my dad: thanks for teaching me that framing an argument matters, no matter the subject. To my mom: thank you for showing me how to always ask tough questions and for being so incredibly tough yourself – seriously, thank you. I also want to thank my mom for extending her habit of asking millions of questions to taking the time to learn about my studies and this project. My brother actually *does* politics, and I thank him for being my best buddy and for being on-call to clarify some minute detail about the 107th Congress or electoral gerrymandering that I might be wondering about on any given Saturday afternoon. Beyond these lofty gifts, I would like to thank my family for the emotional and material support that made completing this degree possible.

I always appreciate when people thank their pets so I would like to thank mine. Oscar receives gratitude primarily in the currency of dog treats, but it would be irresponsible if I didn't make it publicly known that this dissertation would have never been written were it not for his constant company, snoring on the couch in my little office, and his perpetual excitement to go for a walk that always did the trick for clearing my head of writer's block. Bidou is a cat and cannot read, either, but I thanked the dog so I would like thank him, too, for always alerting me when it was time to end my day of writing and feed him dinner.

Finally, it is my strong opinion that every aspiring social scientist should have a critical feminist theorist to have dinner with at the end of the day. Mine is Diane Detournay and I owe her many thanks. Diane: thank you for being a most caring and loving partner, thank you for sharing your always incisive (yet generous!) intellect with me, thank you for continually reminding me to *not* pull my punches, and thank you for

your love of and expertise with fresh produce, heirloom grains, and legumes. You have my unending gratitude for these and the many other ways you nourish my life.

For my families, inherited and chosen, with gratitude.

ABSTRACT

This study introduces a theoretical framework grounded in intersectionality to the study of identity-based groups in politics, raising and addressing the following questions: how within group marginalization develops, why within group marginalization occurs, and to what effect? By focusing on the construction of the LGBT group and through discourse analysis of three bodies of archival evidence from 1968 through 2001 – the institutional records of several national LGBT interest groups and social movements, a variety of LGBT publications, and transcripts of germane debates from the *Congressional Record* – this study shows how political actors framed the representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities as a cohesive and unified coalition by presenting LGBT people as a minority group defined along a single axis of identity: sexuality. The unity of this new LGBT minority group – organized exclusively around sexuality – was achieved by foregrounding the political interests of gender-normative lesbians and gay men, particularly those who are white, middle-class, able bodied, and gender normative. Consequently, issues such as marriage and second-parent adoption were elevated as the predominant political interests on behalf of the LGBT group, while others, such as the passage of gender-inclusive employment anti-discrimination legislation or political mobilizations to end the documentation of sex on state documents, were deprioritized. Throughout this study, attention is drawn to the ways in which this projection of LGBT group unity obscured intersecting identifications, such as race, gender, class, nation, ability, and immigration status, with significant political and material consequences for the most marginalized members of the LGBT minority group: people of color, people who are transgender, lesbians, people who are gender nonconforming, people who are poor or homeless, people with disabilities, and people who are undocumented.

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INTRODUCTION

Initially, I was embraced by the stakeholders of the mainstream LGBT movement. I quickly noticed that despite the unifying acronym, the people at the table often did not reflect me or my community. These spaces and the conversations were dominated by men, specifically upper-middle-class white cis gay men. Women, people of color, trans folks, and especially folks who carried multiple identities were all but absent. I was grateful for the invitation but unfulfilled by the company. This was my political awakening.
-- Janet Mock, transgender activist and author¹

In June 2015, an undocumented transgender activist named Jennicet Gutiérrez drew considerable media and political attention for a protest she staged during President Obama's opening of LGBT Pride festivities at the White House. Using the spotlight of an event that convened many prominent lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender activists and political leaders, Gutiérrez interrupted Obama's speech several times to call for the end of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) policy of housing detainees by sex, a practice that reports have shown leads to the disproportionate sexual assault of transgender women and men in ICE detention, and sometimes even death. Although staging loud, attention-grabbing protests has been a hallmark tactic used by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender activists since the 1970s, and while this was a gathering of political actors well versed in that history, the other attendees at the White House Pride event did not join Gutiérrez's protest in a show of unity and solidarity or maintain respectful silence as she articulated her demands. Rather, they met her calls to reform ICE regulations and end deportations with loud booing to drown out her voice, with one participant near Gutiérrez repeatedly attempting to silence her by explaining, "This is not for you. This is for all of us."² The question of who, exactly, comprises the "us" to whom

¹ Janet Mock, *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love, and So Much More* (New York: Atria, 2014), 256.

² Liam Stack, "Activist Removed After Heckling Obama at L.G.B.T. Event" *New York Times*, June 24, 2015.

the speaker referred was answered when the booing and jeering quickly changed into clapping and cheers as Gutiérrez was ultimately ejected from the room by the Secret Service.

Two days after Gutiérrez staged her protest at the White House, the Supreme Court's decision in *Obergefell v Hodges* was announced, immediately making marriage between same-sex couples legal across the United States. Many of the political actors from various LGBT interest groups who had attended the White House ceremony seized the moment to take center stage alongside elected officials and celebrate what was seen as a monumental moment in the political history of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender. Vice President Joe Biden, for example, issued a statement announcing his support of the Supreme Court decision, saying that it marked a victory for, "generations of advocates – gay, lesbian, transgender, straight – who for decades fought a lonely and dangerous battle."³ And the national lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender interest group, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), added to the celebration by live blogging the various marriage ceremonies that took place immediately after the announcement in states such as Alabama and Texas, where voters previously amended state constitutions to define marriage as between one man and one woman. Making clear their role in vanquishing the opponents of same-sex marriages, HRC introduced the social media hashtag, "#lovewins" to mark the victory and index the celebrations taking place across the country.

In addition to marking what was largely perceived as a political victory many years in the making, LGBT political leaders exploited the media attention that resulted

³ "Statement by the Vice President on the Supreme Court Decision in *Obergefell v Hodges*" *The White House* (website), June 26, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/06/26/statement-vice-president-supreme-court-decision-obergefell-v-hodges>, June 26, 2015.

from the Obergefell decision to offer their opinions on what the LGBT political agenda should focus on next. Beth Shipp, executive director of LPAC (Lesbian Political Action Committee), explained in an interview that she hoped having the marriage question settled would allow more attention to be directed to the unique concerns held by lesbians. And the BiNet USA executive directors echoed Shipp, saying that they saw the settling of marriage equality as a chance to finally turn attention to the problems facing people who are bisexual.⁴ Alongside these specific wishes, the general sentiment conveyed by the political actors offering commentary was that the most pressing issues for the LGBT group to take up concerned the status of transgender people, in particular the alarming fact that by the time of the Obergefell decision in June, ten transgender women of color had been murdered in 2015.⁵ Thus, while many political actors articulated goals that would benefit specific and narrow groups, and in spite of the silence and condemnation some of these political actors had recently directed at Gutiérrez, they all seemed to agree that broader social change also needed to take place to ensure the health and safety of those who are most marginalized, both in society and within the LGBT group.

At issue across each of these recent events is the question of *who* comprises the LGBT group and *which* interests should be advocated for on its behalf. Although these examples are drawn from contemporary politics, debates such as these are not new developments, nor are the tensions over group unity and the efforts to silence or marginalize particular people within the group unique to the “LGBT community.” As I

⁴ Samantha Allen, “LGBT Leaders: Gay Marriage is Not Enough” *The Daily Beast* (website), June 26, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/06/26/same-sex-marriage-is-legal-now-what.html>.

⁵ By June 2015, ten transgender women of color had been murdered in the U.S. That number would reach the highest ever recorded by the close of the year, at a total of 21 transgender men and women of color murdered in 2015, see Khorri Atkinson, “More transgender people reported killed in 2015 than any other year” MSNBC.com (website), November 20, 2015, <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/more-transgender-people-reported-killed-2015-any-other-year>.

will show in subsequent chapters, who constitutes the proper membership of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups and which members should play a role in shaping political agendas has been contested throughout the political histories of these groups. To some extent, these debates were resolved by the early introduction of sexuality as the unifying characteristic that brings these disparate identities together. However, this study illustrates that the construction of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities along a single axis of identity – sexuality – has also resulted in the simultaneous silencing and marginalization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people who carry multiple and intersecting identities, particularly people who are transgender or gender non-conforming, people of color, women, transgender men, people who are disabled, and people living in poverty or homelessness. As I will demonstrate throughout this study, within-group marginalizations and exclusions such as these have been used by political actors to define and reinforce the boundaries of the LGBT group as white, middle class, gender normative, able-bodied, and male. These patterns of within-group marginalization endure in contemporary politics, even as these identities have been ostensibly unified as a political identity group that journalists, academics, politicians, and the members themselves refer to as “LGBT,” or what legal scholar Dean Spade cynically but revealingly calls, “LGB...fake T.” Put another way, and returning to the events that open this introduction, at perpetual issue has been the question of who constitutes the “us” or the “we” of the broadly defined LGBT group.

This study takes these tensions regarding inclusion and exclusion in identity-based political groups as a point of departure, asking the following questions about the construction of identity-based groups in politics: through what processes is within-group

marginalization produced, and to what effect? I answer these questions by exploring the construction of LGBT political identity, and argue that these dynamics of within-group marginalization are in fact productive of what comes to be known of identity-based groups politically and socially. In other words, the construction of a cohesive and politically powerful LGBT group that is able to win victories such as marriage equality and opportunities to serve openly in the military has resulted in – and relied upon – the silencing and marginalization of the most precarious members of the LGBT group in order to put forth a representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people as natural and deserving claimants for rights and political standing.

Drawing on intersectionality – specifically the critical insight that no social group is unitary or homogenous, but is rather shaped at the intersections of many different identities over time⁶ – this study develops a framework of three political processes to denaturalize the LGBT identity-based group, and thus advance these arguments about within group marginalization and its effects. This framework centers on: 1) conflicts that take place among political actors and members concerning the boundaries of the group, 2) backlash as a context for group identity construction, and 3) the representation of groups across political venues. Using this framework to study identity group construction reveals that the marginalization that takes shape within groups is not an inevitable or natural consequence of group politics. In other words, it is not simply that some members enjoy less attention and receive fewer benefits due to relative lack of political power (*i.e.*,

⁶ Cathy J. Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Patricia Hill Collins, “Intersectionality’s Definitional Dilemmas” *Annual Review of Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2015); Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, iss. 1 (1989); Ange-Marie Hancock, “Intersectionality as a Normative and Empirical Paradigm” *Politics & Gender* 3, no. 2 (2007); Dara Z. Strolovitch, *Affirmative Advocacy: Race, Class, and Gender in Interest Group Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

fewer members) or are disadvantaged because of a dearth of material and economic resources. Rather, as the following exploration of the LGBT case through this framework of conflict, backlash, and representation illustrates, within-group marginalization is produced by active and concerted decisions by political actors to elevate some members and characteristics while simultaneously (and consequently) marginalizing or completely silencing other members and characteristics. Indeed, as this study will argue, it is these very exclusions that are *productive* of political group identities and the boundaries that give them meaning.

This central argument – that within-group inequalities shape the political identity of groups and their associated political agendas – harnesses the insights of intersectionality to introduce a different approach to the study of groups, identities, and marginalization in political science. While the dominant approaches to these topics compellingly theorize and empirically investigate the dynamics of marginalization between groups – showing how political identities are constructed by political actors to unite people who share similar traits, backgrounds, or behaviors – these studies tend to approach groups as unitary and organized around a single axis of identity. Identities, in other words, are assumed to be mutually exclusive and not overlapping or intersecting. By shifting analytic attention from marginalization *between* groups to focus on marginalization *within* groups, this study attempts to reframe how scholars understand identity-based minority groups in politics: as being made and re-made through political processes and strategic considerations to negotiate among many competing political demands. Centering analysis on the moments when these choices are made – during conflict, backlash, and representation – underscores that political identity groups are not

unitary and static, and do not cohere around presumably inherent traits, but are rather products of politics. Analyzing identity-based minority groups through the lens of intersectionality thus opens up the possibility for better understanding how within-group marginalization not only contributes to the ordering of political priorities associated with particular groups, but also the construction of *normative* and representative members of identity-based groups.

I advance these arguments in the following chapters. The first provides a literature review, an outline my theoretical framework, and details my archive and method of approach. I then explore processes of identity group construction in six empirical chapters, which cover the period between 1968 through 2001. The analysis across each of the chapters shows how lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities were constructed as discrete identities, with specific attention paid to the ways that race, gender, and class divisions *within* the group, as well as consequent silence and marginalization, were used to give these broader categories specific meanings.

Chapters two and three explore the nascent years of lesbian and gay political activism between 1968 and 1972, referred to as Gay Liberation. These chapters show how conflicts over coalitions, particularly with the Black Panthers, ultimately directed political actors to two diverging constructions of lesbian and gay identities: radical and assimilationist. The latter would be understood as implicitly white, as assimilationist movements made explicit efforts to break alliances with Black and Third World movements. The former would seek alliances with Black and Third World movements in the pursuit of broad social changes aimed at ending inequality and oppression for *all* marginalized groups. These competing political commitments, captured as assimilationist

or radical politics, resonates throughout subsequent political organizing in the name of sexuality and gender identity.

The period explored in the fourth chapter begins in 1980 and continues through 1990, which marks a period of conservative ascendancy in US politics as well as the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It is in this context of backlash that political actors shaped what would come to be known as the lesbian, gay, and bisexual coalition and associated identity group, particularly as they were asserted by leaders as immutable sexual identities, and not subject to change by conversion therapy or religious intervention. This chapter shows how the construction of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities as immutable and in necessarily coalition with each other relied upon the marginalization of members who seemed to draw attention away from sexuality as the unifying feature of these groups, specifically people of color.

Chapter five is devoted to exploring the emergence and construction of transgender as a political identity between 1993 and 1996. It shows how political leaders constructed transgender political identity in a context of backlash as an umbrella category to contain and represent all variations of gender expression: butches, queens, genderqueers, drag queens, and intersex people. Over time, however, this broad and inclusive identity category was slowly narrowed as choices about how to represent transgender people in politics were made by political actors and activists. This chapter demonstrates that while the identity group, “transgender,” nominally asserted a broad and inclusive identity, the choices made by political actors to represent transgender political identity group to lawmakers relied upon the exclusion of the most precarious members of

the transgender group, especially those who are gender non-conforming, transgender people who are poor or homeless, and transgender people of color.

The sixth chapter examines the period of time between 1996 and 2001, when lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer political actors began to work in concert to develop a unified interest group presence in national politics. Through a detailed exploration of the conflicts that took place over these negotiations regarding coalition or alliance formation, this chapter traces continued evolution of the assimilation frame from chapters two and three alongside two new frames for sexual and gender identity politics: queer politics and queer liberalism. As the analysis in this chapter shows, the queer politics frame and associated identity became the primary political home for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer people concerned with racial and gender inequality both within the LGBT movement and in broader society. This group would evolve as the queer political identity and associated agenda. In contrast, the evolving LGBT movement was unified by a shared emphasis on sexuality as the characteristic unified lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups, and consequently directed political goals and identities under the aegis of “LGBT” towards assimilation, or rights gains.

The seventh chapter examines the period of time when political actors built on the assimilation frame and introduced the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender initialism – LGBT – as a broad and inclusive signifier to convey a commitment to diversity and, by implication, social justice. The analysis of this time period shows that the elevation of interests pertaining to white, middle-class, and gender-normative lesbian and gay-identified members, however, belied the inclusionary ethos that gave rise to LGBT,

particularly for transgender and bisexual people, lesbians, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people of color.

I begin this study in the following chapter by providing an overview of the existing social science scholarship on groups, political identity, and marginalization in order to illustrate the need for studying within-group marginalization through the lens of intersectionality. Having outlined the need for a more intersectional approach to group identity construction, it goes on to elaborate the theoretical framework of backlash, conflict, and representation, followed by the details of the methodological approach used in this study.

CHAPTER ONE: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, Empirical Approach

Questions of how, why, and to what effects groups form and become active in politics is a central and defining question in political science.⁷

The following review of the social science scholarship on identities, groups, and marginalization proceeds in three sections. The first presents the scholarship from social psychology, sociology, and political science on groups and political identities as political constructions. The second section reviews empirical studies of groups and identities that draw on the frameworks outlined in the first section, showing how the predominant theories of political identities and groups in the social sciences rely upon the assumption that groups and identities are unitary and monolithic constructions. The third section introduces some of the recent empirical studies of groups and identities that draw on intersectionality to explore identity-based group construction. I then draw upon these latter studies to develop the intersectional framework used in this study of LGBT group identity construction.

Political identities and groups as political constructions

Perhaps the most influential theorization of collective identity in the social sciences is Henri Tajfel and John Turner's 1979 Social Identity Theory.⁸ In brief, Social Identity Theory builds on other theories of identification by social psychologists, which hold that individuals carry with them many different identities simultaneously. This primary assumption directs questions towards understanding how people negotiate these many different identities and translate them into political and social action. Tajfel and

⁷ Frank R. Baumgartner and Beth L. Leech, *Basic Interests: The Importance of Groups in Politics and in Political Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), xv-xxii.

⁸ Henri Tajfel and J.C. Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Inter-Group Behavior" in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds. Stephen Worchel and William G. Austin (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1986): 7-24.

Turner underscore the role of social and political contexts in these negotiations of group identity by theorizing that varying levels of salience for that particular identification predict feelings of in-group solidarity and positive identification with a specific collective identity. This in-group solidarity is given meaning through what Tajfel and Turner called “social comparison” to an out-group.

These three components for analysis – salience, in-group identification, and out-group comparison – have allowed researchers to develop compelling understandings of racial and ethnic group identification and expectations for social and political behavior; however, the strength of Tajfel and Turner’s model of collective identity is also its weakness when it comes to understanding groups that are comprised of many heterogeneous members. This is especially the case for the LGBT political identity group. The LGBT case shows that the integral role given to “social comparison” in Social Identity Theory limits analysis of collective identities to a single-axis of identification. In other words, Social Identity Theory and the conceptualization of salient in-groups and defining out-groups provide a compelling account of discrimination, marginalization, and antipathy that occurs *between* groups to define group boundaries, but leaves relatively unaddressed the question of *within*-group dynamics of marginalization to define group boundaries. Using Social Identity Theory as a framework for understanding LGBT group construction, in other words, leaves unaddressed the question of why and to what effect certain members of the group have been silenced in a group over time. This primary weakness of Social Identity Theory for studying the LGBT group stems from the fact that it departs from the assumption that identities precede groups, rather than considering the ways that groups mediate identities for members.

These concerns with Social Identity Theory have been taken up by sociologists who theorize collective identity construction by focusing on how social movements play a significant role in educating members about the meanings associated with group identities. Whereas the predominant theories of social movement mobilization – Resource Mobilization and Political Process theories – attend to the question of *how* movements mobilize, looking at the ways that structural shifts (i.e., political opportunities) and material conditions predict movement mobilization and success, studies of what scholars call “Identity Work” in social movements takes an approach that examines cultural and social factors to better understand *why* they organize.⁹ As such, these studies stand lend some analytic clarity as to why and how groups like LGBT – which focus on political demands as well as identity construction – are formed.

Focusing on why movements mobilize, scholars interested in Identity Work in social movements argue that better understandings of the role identification plays in social movement mobilization provides more robust explanations of the political strategies used by movements than the research on Resource Mobilization or Political Process are able to furnish.¹⁰ Proponents of Identity Work contend that this is because Resource Mobilization and Political Process theories of social movement mobilization have focused analyses on case studies of the American Civil Rights movement and

⁹ Jo Reger, Daniel J. Myers, and Rachel L. Einwoher, “Identity Work, Sameness, and Difference in Social Movements,” in *Identity Work in Social Movements*, eds. Jo Reger, Daniel J. Myers, and Rachel L. Einwoher (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 1-17.

¹⁰ Political Process Theory and Resource Mobilization Theory use the concepts of political opportunity structure, framing, and mobilizing structures to argue that social movement mobilization is predicted and shaped by shifts in political and social context, see Doug McAdam, *Political Process and The Development of Black Insurgency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); David S. Meyer and Suzanne Staggenborg, “Movements, Countermovements, and the Structure of Political Opportunity” *American Journal of Sociology* 5, no. 1 (1996); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action, and Mass Politics in the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1978).

consequently make two assumptions. The first is that protesters are rational actors who behave instrumentally to maximize outcomes and thus direct protest exclusively at the state. The second relates logically to the first and assumes that these outcomes are based on presumably static identities defined along a single axis, specifically race. As a result of these assumptions, these approaches do little to account for identities and movements that mobilize as a coalition of many different groups, such as the LGBT political identity group. Furthermore, the focus on the rational actor precludes consideration for protest action that appears to be irrational or not directed at the state, many of which have been the tactics favored by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. These include protest actions such as throwing a pie into the face of an elected official or media figure to draw attention to issues that impact gay men and lesbians or staging “kiss ins” in commercial centers.¹¹

In contrast, New Social Movement theories of Identity Work contend that people are not only rational or means oriented, but are also motivated by identifications and related issues that are often complex, multifaceted, and pertain more to one’s identity in the social and political milieu, in addition to explicitly material concerns.¹² According to this scholarship, identification with a group can be a strategy of protest, a manifestation of a particular political outlook, and/or shaped by the state through legal categories. Each of these different manifestations of collective identity necessarily produces different

¹¹ Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), chap. 2; Don Teal, *The Gay Militants* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971).

¹² Reger, Myers, and Einwohner, *Identity Work*. For New Social Movements, see Steven M. Buechler, “New Social Movement Theories” *The Sociological Quarterly* 36 (1995); Bert Klandermans, “New Social Movements and Resource Mobilization: The European and American Approach Revisited” *Politics & the Individual* 1, no. 2 (1991); Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

political strategies. Some will be directed at the state while others will be directed toward the pursuit of cultural change.

For instance, Joshua Gamson's 1995 study of queer identity in San Francisco shows that queer identification was asserted by some as a protest against what they perceived to be assimilationist goals of lesbian and gay identified people.¹³ Queer identity, in this case, is much more than sexuality; rather it is a way for a group of people who identify as queer to conduct what sociologists Mary Bernstein and Kristin Olsen describe as identification to, "critique to confront dominant values."¹⁴ Gamson thus uses this study of queer identity to argue that considering the many different possible expressions of collective identity *within a group*, in conjunction with movements, helps researchers to understand how interests emerge and change over time, rather than taking them as a given and associated with static identities, groups, or explicitly material demands.

While studies of Identity Work in social movements such as Gamson's compellingly present the wide range of political mobilizations available to a group, this scholarship on a whole does not provide a framework for determining the exact type of political mobilizations that might be taken on by groups or the identifications that will result. Studies of Identity Work, in other words, do not provide insight into why some groups of people identify as queer, for example, while others identify as gay or lesbian. The following empirical studies of political identities and groups offer frameworks of steps through which collective identities are translated into what actors understand as political action and associated identifications.

¹³ Joshua Gamson, "Must Identities Self-Destruct? A Queer Dilemma" *Social Problems* 8, no. 1 (1995).

¹⁴ Mary Bernstein and Kristine A. Olsen, "Identity Deployment and Social Change: Understanding Identity as a Social Movement and Organizational Strategy" *Sociology Compass* 3, no. 6 (2009), 872.

Empirical studies of political identities and groups

The most common approach for investigating how political actors mobilize political action using collective identity is Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier's 1992 analytic framework.¹⁵ This framework of boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation offers a way for understanding how political actors frame collective identities and how these framings, in turn, influence the particular type political action that groups undertake. Using the case of lesbian feminist collective identity in the 1970s, Taylor and Whittier show how efforts to mark the boundaries of the group as different from the mainstream work to enhance consciousness with group identification, and negotiations over the essential differences between the group and mainstream society all play a significant role in making a particular collective identity as a salient identification for participants that directs political action.

Sociologists have used this framework of boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation to develop compelling understandings of a variety of identity-based movements, including women's labor movements and anti-gay activists, all of which show the power of framing a group as markedly different from the mainstream for group identity construction.¹⁶ As in Social Identity Theory, though, the emphasis placed on binary understandings – in-group and out-group for Social Identity Theory and differences between the group and the mainstream for the Taylor and Whittier framework

¹⁵ Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier, "Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization" in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, eds. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

¹⁶ For examples of empirical applications of the boundaries, consciousness and negotiation framework put forth by Whitter and Taylor, see Toorjo Ghose et al., "Mobilizing Collective Identity to Reduce HIV Risk Among Sex Workers in Sonagachi, India: The Boundaries, Consciousness, Negotiation Framework" *Social Science & Medicine* 67, No. 2 (2008); Silke Roth, "Dealing with Diversity: The Coalition of Labor Union Women" in *Identity Work*; R. Anthony Slagle, "In Defense of Queer Nation: From Identity Politics to a Politics of Difference" *Western Journal of Communication* 59, no. 2 (1995).

– does not address how political actors frame differences *within* groups, if at all. Thus, while the Taylor and Whittier framework helps to explain the steps through which group identities are shaped, often resulting in many different but similar groups, the framework of boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation does not address the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that shape a group. Also neglected, then, are the ways that these within-group inequalities – such as the exclusion of transgender interests from the LGBT political agenda – influence what comes to be thought of as the group’s identity and interests. This suggests that what is needed in the study of identities and group is an approach that maintains awareness of the contingency of groups. The political science scholarship detailed below begins from the assumption of group contingency.

Much like the Taylor and Whittier framework, the political science scholarship on political identity takes the boundaries drawn to contain and frame identity-based groups as empirical and theoretical starting points. Identity is conceptualized by political theorists as contingent and thus produced through various actions taken by leaders and members to unite people into groups that seek political change or membership in the polity. Underscoring the contingency of identity, political theorists use words like identification (rather than identity), performance (instead of category), and groupness (as opposed to group) to substitute for conceptualizations of identity as static and immutable. The focus on processes that give rise to boundaries and the divisions to designate similarity for group members means that identity is understood by political scientists as a paradox in that assertions of belonging and membership require the simultaneous articulation of boundaries to exclude outsiders that give the group’s identification and

groupness meaning.¹⁷ In the words of theorist William Connolly: “Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty.”¹⁸ Studies of identity in political science draw on these theorizations for critical explorations of state-recognized identifications, including nation, race, and ethnicity. Rogers Brubacker and Frederick Cooper outline the steps through which identities are made meaningful:

We should seek to explain the processes and mechanisms through which what has been called the 'political fiction' of the 'nation' – or of the 'ethnic group,' 'race,' or other putative 'identity' – can crystallize, at certain moments, as a powerful, compelling reality. But we should avoid unintentionally *reproducing* or *reinforcing* such reification by uncritically adopting categories of practice as categories of analysis.¹⁹

Denaturalizing identities by attending to the processes and mechanisms that give them meaning holds identities like nation, ethnicity, and race open to social science inquiry. Political identity groups are not analytic categories that explain outcomes, in other words, but are outcomes to be explained.²⁰

Taking identity groups as social and political phenomena to explain directs political scientists to examine the political effects of the processes and mechanisms that give rise to identities. These questions about the broader impact of identity construction are seen as particularly pressing given the paradox of identity outlined by political theorists: if identities are constructed by political actors and members as a way to claim membership in the polity, as political theorist Anne Norton explains it does, then how do

¹⁷ Anne Norton, *Reflections on Political Identity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988);

¹⁸ William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 64.

¹⁹ Rogers Brubacker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’” *Theory & Society* 29 (2000), 5.

²⁰ Using the language of positivist social science, the differences underscored here can be thought of as approaching identities as dependent variables – factors to be explained – rather than independent variables – factors that explain outcomes.

we reconcile that these acts of identity construction and associated claims of belonging require the simultaneous designation of an outsider, or other, who is excluded and potentially discriminated against? Iris Marion Young takes up this question about the effects of identity, specifically at the site of the state. She argues that while some might claim that the state should be a neutral with respect to identity and difference in the name of equality, it is in fact the state's obligation to not only recognize groups, but to also engage in redistributive practices that attend to the discrimination and marginalization that these groups face.²¹ The stakes of theorizing and examining the effects of identity construction are highlighted by Rogers Smith and Frederick Cooper's critique of Young, who they claim engages in the same erasure of difference as the state when she asserts that marginalized groups are unified by shared goals and, by implication, internally homogenous.²²

Wrestling with the assumed internal homogeneity of groups has directed political scientists and theorists to acknowledge that there are, in fact, variations within groups that shape the projection of their memberships, interests, and political strategies. In the next section, I show how political scientists drawing on feminist and critical race theory, in particular, demonstrate the many ways that the internal heterogeneity of groups is minimized in efforts to present a cohesive and united front in a political context and interest group system that seems to demand and reward issues that are presented in unitary and discrete ways.

²¹ Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 10.

²² Smith and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" 32.

Intersectional interventions in the study of identities and groups

Cathy Cohen's 1999 study of Black political identity and political action shows how cross-cutting issues, such as activism and political responses to HIV/AIDS and sexuality, were minimized by political actors to project the boundaries of Black identity and group as assimilating with dominant monogamous, heterosexual, and gender-normative norms. Cohen's in-depth case study shows that Black people living with HIV/AIDS are silenced in political agendas advanced by interest groups that claim to be concerned with the survival and success of Black people in the United States.²³ Cohen explains that:

By exaggerating out-group differences and minimizing in-group variation, many African Americans use racial group interest as a proxy for self-interest. The progress of the group, therefore, is understood as an appropriate, accurate, and accessible evaluative measure of one's individual success.²⁴

The need to minimize in-group variation and silence cross-cutting issues like HIV/AIDS to project Black people in these ways, Cohen argues, can only be understood against the backdrop of a long history of social policies (and associated social science) that pathologize Black sexuality and families, and social stereotypes of Black sexuality that are deployed to define and maintain racial difference and marginalization.²⁵ Black

²³ Cathy J. Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁵ Cohen, *Boundaries of Blackness*, chap. 3; for more on stereotypes of Black sexuality as a way to naturalize racial difference, see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Melissa V. Harris Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

political identity is consequently shaped by political actors within the group as well as in response to broader political and social contexts.²⁶

Similarly, Cristina Beltrán traces the processes through which political actors constructed group and identity boundaries to bring together Cubans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans – among many other groups – under the signifier of Latino at the sites of social movement activism and later interest group advocacy.²⁷ Beltrán’s posing of Latino as a category that requires denaturalizing, as feminist theorists have posited for the category of woman, strive show that the unique political demands of each of these groups are erased in the construction of Latino group unity. Exploring sexuality and gender within these identity groups, for example, Beltrán illustrates that it is not solely the unique demands of each nation-based group that are elevated or silenced within Latino depending on strategic considerations, but more importantly, women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender-identified members and the interests they hold *within* the categories of Cuban, Mexican, and Puerto Rican are almost always erased in political activism and advocacy under the aegis of Latino politics.

Calling on feminist and critical race theory, Cohen’s and Beltrán’s in-depth case studies of marginalization within identity-based groups reveal varying degrees of silencing and erasure for members who have relatively less power and are seen as contradicting the constructions of Black or Latino identity as unified and assimilating to dominant social and political norms. Each of these studies describes how leaders justify the shelving of political priorities for some members as a necessary feature of social

²⁶ For a more contemporary exploration of these dynamics of within group marginalization in Black politics and its effects, see Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

²⁷ Cristina Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

movement activism and interest group advocacy, which is seen as more successful when unified groups with cohesive demands articulate strategic and feasible claims to the state. Dara Strolovitch's 2007 study of interest groups further reorients understandings of marginalization and erasure within groups, showing through a systematic analysis of interest group representation that while leaders in interest groups claim to represent the needs of all group members, interest groups often do not advocate on behalf of the political interests that affect what she terms "intersectionally marginalized" members.²⁸ There is rather an expectation expressed by leaders that their advocacy work will combine with the efforts of others interest groups and eventually "trickle down" to benefit intersectionally disadvantaged members. One of the troubles of this assumption, as Strolovitch points out, is it fails to see the ways in which other organizations are also structuring their advocacy and political work in ways that benefits the most advantaged members, perpetuating neglect for those who are most in need of interest group advocacy. Strolovitch explains the stakes of this relative lack of representation:

Failing to make the case for these multiply marginalized subgroups within their constituencies and within the broader community of organizations representing marginalized groups *limits* the possibility that they will do so effectively to the larger polity. This limitation *reinforces* rather than alleviates the marginalization of intersectionally disadvantaged constituents.²⁹

The implications of these findings are particularly pressing given that interest groups and social movements play a strong role in mediating identities and interests for members, projecting the concerns and political issues that then come to be representative of the group in broader politics as well as culturally. As Strolovitch explains above, the

²⁸ Dara Z. Strolovitch, *Affirmative Advocacy: Race, Class, and Gender in Interest Group Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 10.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 209 (emphasis mine).

constructions of group identities along a single axis reinforces – and is indeed premised upon – the organization of large portions of the membership *out* of the group, specifically those who are intersectionally disadvantaged.

These three important studies of groups and identity-based politics in the US demonstrate the ways in which feminist and critical race theories can be used by researchers to open up identity-based groups to further inquiry, revealing the ways that marginalization occurs not only between groups – as the predominant theories of identity and groups in social psychology, sociology, and political science hold – but also *within* groups. Intersectionality, specifically the critical insight that race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, religion, and ability are not unitary and mutually exclusive, but rather always relationally defined, furnishes the theoretical framework that makes these examinations of within-group marginalization possible.

Of further importance, drawing on intersectional thinking, these studies show that the implication of within-group marginalization is the ordering not only of political priorities, but also the construction of a *normative* and representative member of that identity-based group. As a consequence, the needs of the most precarious members of these groups are left unaddressed and those members are effectively erased from projections of identity-based groups, both in politics and society. The marginalization of certain members of identity-based groups that are struggling for standing and membership in the polity thus presents a political problem that is important for social scientists to theorize and investigate in order to develop more robust understandings of inequality, marginalization, struggles for standing, and identity in groups.

This dissertation aims to theorize and examine within-group marginalization in identity group construction, asking: through what specific political processes is within-group marginalization produced, and to what effect? In the following section, I draw on this literature review and theoretical background to introduce an intersectional framework for studying within-group marginalization.

Intersectional framework: conflict, backlash, and representation

Intersectionality for the study of within-group marginalization

Intersectionality is rooted in two core ontological assumptions. The first is that axes of marginalization, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and nation are not unitary, static, or mutually exclusive categories, but are rather interrelated and thus mutually constitutive of subject positions.³⁰ By implication, then, no social group is homogenous, and “each category of difference has within-group diversity that sheds light on the way we think about groups as political actors in politics.”³¹ The second is that these subject positions are contingent and variously shaped by political and social factors, such as through interactions with institutions, the law, and activism. Theorizing subjectivity as “differently and differentially constituted through relations of privilege and penalty, with real material effects,”³² intersectionality breaks with the predominant approach to identity and groups in the social sciences by attending to dynamics between *and* within groups that give rise to social and political inequality. Inequality and marginalization, in other words, are not predicted by factors such as race and gender, but are rather the starting points for analysis that illustrates the ways in which subject

³⁰ Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing,” 64.

³¹ Hancock, “Intersectionality as Normative Paradigm,” 251; see Evelyn M. Simien, “Doing Intersectionality Research: From Conceptual Issues to Practical Examples” *Politics & Gender* 3, no. 2 (2007).

³² Rita Kaur Dhamoon, “Considerations on Mainstreaming Intersectionality,” *Political Research Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2011), 240.

positions are influenced by ideological structures, such as sexism, racism, heteronormativity, and classism.³³ In these ways, intersectionality furnishes a powerful theoretical and analytic lens for a study of within-group marginalization that takes place at the site of identity group construction. I now turn to describing the analytic framework that I have developed for the study of political identity construction that draws on these key ontological assumptions.

There are three parts to the analytic framework I propose for studying political identity group construction, with specific focus on revealing dynamics of within-group marginalization: conflict, backlash, and representation. I take each of these in turn below, describing how I define each process and my expectations for how each one operates in identity group construction.

Conflict

The first component of the framework is conflict. I define conflict in this study as debates or disputes that take place among political actors regarding the boundaries and meanings of political identity groups. In other words: conflicts over who is included and excluded from the group. Attending to conflicts that take place among political actors directs attention to discourse and especially narrative, including origin stories that are used to give the group a sense of coherent emergence. Kimberlé Crenshaw describes what this focus on conflict and narrative reveals about identity:

[W]hen identity politics fail us, as they frequently do, it is not primarily because those politics take as natural certain categories that are socially constructed but rather because the descriptive content of those

³³ Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis," *Signs* 38, no. 4 (2013); Ange-Marie Hancock, "Empirical Intersectionality: A Tale of Two Approaches" *University of California Irvine Law Review* 312 (2013).

categories and the narratives on which they are based have privileged some experiences and excluded others.³⁴

The focus on conflict in this framework strives to address the issues raised by Crenshaw. Attending to conflicts over the boundaries, membership, and meanings associated with a group furnishes an opportunity to examine how and to what degree some members and their interests are privileged, while others are silenced and even erased from group membership, and in so doing, illustrates the political stakes of these exclusions, as they are often self-consciously identified by political actors as they take part in these debates.

Backlash

The second component of the framework is backlash. I define backlash as opposition or stigmas that are directed against the group. As such, backlash is assumed to emanate from political actors who consider themselves opponents of the LGBT groups. Additionally, and quite logically given my interest in within group marginalization, I also assume that backlash can be directed at certain members by political actors *within* the group in efforts to define and shore up the narrow boundaries of a group.

I am interested in identity construction that takes place in the context of backlash for three reasons. The first is that backlash provides sufficient circumstances for what scholars of social movements refer to as “stigma transformation” to occur.³⁵ In brief, stigma transformation describes the processes through which political actors attempt to *reframe* meanings associated with the group – taking negative connotations with identities and projecting them as positive associations. Examples include the Black

³⁴ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color” *Stanford Law Review* (1991), 1298.

³⁵ Mitch Berbrier, “Making Minorities: Cultural Space, Stigma Transformation Frames, and the Categorical Status Claims of Deaf, Gay, and White Supremacist Activists in Late Twentieth Century America,” *Sociological Forum* 17, no. 4 (2002); Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000).

Panther call to pride with “Black is Beautiful” or the appropriation of the term “queer” as an empowering identification rather than a pejorative slur. I expect that focusing on backlash in this study, particularly with respect to stigma transformation, will reveal those members who are constructed as members of the group, and those who are constructed out of the group.

Second, backlash provides the ideal context for the promotion of dialogue about stigmatized groups, and recent scholarship shows that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender political actors have been notably successful at using the increased awareness about sexuality and gender identity to enact meaningful political and social change.³⁶ The context of backlash consequently provides the conditions for political actors respond in order to exploit this attention, and provides an important site to pay attention to in a study of identity construction. I expect that efforts to harness media attention in the context of backlash will provide insight into how political actors are putting forth these different groups.

Third, and finally, backlash is important to examine for the ways that it creates opportunities for countermovements to form. Since many identity groups initially mobilize as countermovements, taking backlash as a point of departure directs attention to the nascent stages of a movement and associated identity group, and thus provides an opportunity to examine how the boundaries and meanings associated with a group change

³⁶ Tina Fetner, *How the Religious Right Shaped Lesbian and Gay Activism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), chap. 7; for these dynamics outside of the United States, see Phillip M. Ayoub, “With Arms Wide Shut: Threat Perception, Norm Reception, and Mobilized Resistance to LGBT Rights,” *Journal of Human Rights* 13 (2014).

over time.³⁷ By focusing on backlash, I expect to see not only *how* countermovements form, but *why* and *to what effect*.

Representation

The third component of the framework is representation. Representation is important in this study of political identity construction because it is the primary way that political actors convey meanings and interests associated with the group across political venues, and thus plays a significant role in how the broader public comes to understand various identity groups, including LGBT. I explore representation as part of identity group construction by considering how groups are represented in the context of activism and advocacy that is directed to political institutions in pursuit of administrative and legal changes to benefit groups. Furthermore, I use representation as an opportunity to underscore the ways in which lobbying and Congressional testimony help to disseminate understandings of particular groups, not only externally, but also internally to explain the linked fates of members, in a process that political theorist Melissa Williams terms “representation as mediation.”³⁸ Representation, in the language of political theory, plays

³⁷ The ways that organized opposition mobilizes the construction of identity-based groups and countermovements has been explored in depth by social movement scholars, see Shauna Fisher, “It Takes (at Least) Two to Tango: Fighting with Words in the Conflict Over Same-Sex Marriage,” in *Queer Mobilizations: LGBT Activists Confront the Law*, eds. Scott Barclay, Mary Bernstein, and Anna-Maria Marshall (New York: NYU Press, 2009); David S. Meyer and Suzanne Staggenborg, “Movements, Countermovements, and the Structure of Political Opportunity,” *American Journal of Sociology* 101, no. 6 (1996); Suzanne Staggenborg, “Coalition Work in the Pro-Choice Movement: Organizational and Environmental Opportunities and Obstacles,” *Social Problems* (1986). For these dynamics at play in interest group advocacy, see Baumgartner and Leech, *Basic Interests*; Jessica E. Boscarino, “Setting the Record Straight: Frame Contestation as an Advocacy Tactic,” *Policy Studies Journal* (2015); Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, “Counterframing Effects,” *The Journal of Politics* 75, no. 1 (2013).

³⁸ Melissa S. Williams, *Voice, Trust, and Memory: Marginalized Groups and the Failings of Liberal Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), chap. 1; see also, Strolovitch, *Affirmative Advocacy*, 58-60.

a constitutive role.³⁹ Across each of these varieties of representation are chances for political actors to assert the membership and interests of the groups, consequently defining the boundaries of the group. Elected officials, in turn, have opportunities to shape the meanings and interests associated with the groups, as they indicate to leaders which representations will be successful.⁴⁰ By centering analysis on representation as part of this three-part framework for exploring group identity construction, I expect to see instances of alignment (or lack thereof) between the ways that political actors and activists talk about the group internally and the ways that they represent groups externally. These disconnects can then be used to indicate within group marginalization that is thus constitutive of group identity and political agendas.

In sum, it is important to note that although the elements of this three-part framework are outlined here separately, the political world is often messy, and these three processes often occur simultaneously, in response to each other, or in feedback loops to shape political outcomes. For the purposes of advancing this framework to demonstrate its analytic potential, each process is taken separately in the empirical analysis that follows to show *how* each operates to determine the inclusions and exclusions that define groups, even while it will be abundantly clear throughout this study that these three processes – backlash, conflict, and representation – all act in concert to shape within group marginalization and group identity construction.

³⁹ Lisa Disch, “The Impurity of Representation and the Vitality of Democracy,” *Cultural Studies* 26, no. 2-3 (2012); Michael David Forrest, *Dilemmas of Political Representation: Antipoverty Activism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Doctoral Dissertation, 2014).

⁴⁰ Anne L. Schneider and Helen Ingram, *Policy Design for Democracy* (Wichita: University Press of Kansas, 1997), chap. 4; Joe Soss, *Unwanted Claims: The Politics of Participation in the U.S. Welfare System* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), chap. 6

The next section outlines the archival materials used in this study and the method of approach.

Archive and method

Archives

The evidence used in this study can be roughly organized into three sets: institutional documents, publications, and the Congressional Record.

The first set contains the archived institutional documents of a number of different social movement organizations and interest groups that conducted political work at the national level during the time period between 1968 and 2001. I define institutional documents as lobbying notes, meeting minutes/transcripts, and internal emails, and include documents from National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the Gender Political Action Coalition (GenderPAC), and the International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment (ICTLEP).⁴¹ With the exception of GenderPAC documents, which were accessed using The Internet Archive (www.waybackmachine.org), these institutional documents were assembled during two research trips to the Cornell University Human Sexuality Collection.

The second set of documents overlaps with the first and contains the archived publications that were circulated by social movement organizations and interest groups. These include publications circulated by NGLTF, HRC, GenderPAC, and ICTLEP, as well as publications circulated by the following organizations: the American Gender Information Service (AEGIS), the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), the Gay Activist Alliance

⁴¹ These organizations changed names many times between 1968 and 2001. This study relies upon the name cited during that time period. For example, the National Gay Task Force will be used until 1984, when the organization changed to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, etc. See footnotes for appropriate indications of name changes.

(GAA), and the Lavender Menace. The AEGIS documents were accessed through the personal archive of Dallas Denny (www.dallasdenny.com). The GLF and GAA publications were accessed through a copy of the *Come Out! Reader* that was purchased online (www.stephendansky.com/thecomeoutreader.html). Additionally, archived copies of *The Advocate*, *The Lesbian Ladder*, *The Washington Blade* were accessed through the online database Lexis Nexis.

The third set of documents is comprised of the relevant Congressional hearings and debates regarding legislation pertaining to lesbians, gay men, bisexual, and/or transgender people. This includes hearings and debates addressing: The 1974 Gay Rights Bill, the Employment Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA) from 1994 through 2001, the 1990 Hate Crimes Statistics Act (HCSA) and the 2009 update called the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act. These transcripts were accessed using the Lexis Nexis Congressional database and are drawn primarily from the *Congressional Record*.

The following section describes how I assembled these three sets of documents for analysis and the approach used.

Method

Much has been written about bridging the unique ontological assumptions of intersectionality with an appropriate method for empirical research.⁴² Drawing on the power of discourse and narrative highlighted by Kimberle Crenshaw, who argues that: “identity politics fail us...because the descriptive content of those categories and the

⁴² Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies,” 785-810; Dhamoon, “Considerations on Mainstreaming Intersectionality,” 230-43; Ange Marie Hancock, “Intersectionality as a Normative and Empirical Paradigm,” 248-53; Simien, “Doing Intersectionality Research,” 264-71; Dara Z. Strolovitch, *Affirmative Advocacy*, chap. 2.

narratives on which they are based have privileged some experiences and excluded others,”⁴³ I am primarily interested in analyzing how political actors *discursively* render the gay and lesbian group as a unified and cohesive one in politics. As such, I use a method of approach called Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).⁴⁴

CDA is as a close cousin to content analysis, which is used by researchers to do two things. The first is to enumerate the numbers of times particular words are used in speeches, publications, and/or texts. The second uses sophisticated software packages to identify ideological framings. The analytic power of content analysis comes from the potential it has to illuminate the frequency with which political actors use specific terms, and how these frequencies change over time or predict the use of other germane terms.

CDA is often used with very similar types of documents. In contrast, however, it is a method focused on systematically analyzing the *meanings* that attached to particular terms or frames in political discourse. Like content analysis, CDA examines change over time, with particular focus on two aspects of discourse.

The first aspect of interest in CDA are the *analogies* that political actors use to communicate the boundaries of groups and their political agendas, particularly as they endure or change over time. For example, the formulation, “gays and lesbians, like African Americans...” is commonly used to describe the gay and lesbian group and its movement/political strategies. Analogies such as these are powerful shortcuts in political discourse because they can be used to indicate a particular political strategy and group orientation. For instance the analogy of gays and lesbians to African Americans conveys

⁴³ Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins, 1298.

⁴⁴ Francisco Panizza and Romina Miorelli, “Taking Discourse Seriously: Discursive Institutionalism and Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory” *Political Studies* 61, no. 2 (2013); Ruth Wodak, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 2009).

that gays and lesbians ought to be considered a bounded and legible minority group that is struggling for rights in the context of a long history of oppression. The effectiveness of analogies for pointing to the definition of groups and their associated agendas, however, comes at the cost of portraying each of the compared groups as separate and not overlapping. Consequently, the analogy of gays and lesbians *like* African Americans poses each of these groups as discrete and bounded entities, and implies that gays and lesbians are *not* African Americans. Analogies, when used repeatedly by political actors, thus play a significant role in conveying particular meanings about groups and interests in politics, and are attended to in CDA because they are central to the discursive construction of groups by political actors.

The second focus of CDA is *linkages* made in discourse. For example, though contemporary audiences may take phrases such as “gay *and* lesbian” for granted, this linkage was innovative in the context of the 1980s and was used by political actors to introduce and maintain a new unified group in politics. The same is true of repeated efforts to link gay men and lesbians with sexuality, to the exclusion of other characteristics, such as gender identity. Linkages are thus used to by political actors to define what the group is and what it is not, and are a fruitful site for CDA in an exploration of group construction. Furthermore, attending to linkages such as “gay and lesbian” in CDA also illustrates change over time. For example, “gay and lesbian” has evolved into many different significant permutations, including the contemporary “lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender” signifier in politics.

The key assumption driving CDA is that analyzing discourse for meaning is important because the *repetition* of certain analogies or linkages plays a significant role

in shaping what is considered sayable, knowable, and legible in politics over time. Norms of group identity, in other words, are constructed and naturalized through discourse in the repetition of certain characteristics, meanings, and boundaries, which are conveyed by these analogies and linkages. Discourse consequently exerts a regulatory force on identities by defining what a group *is* and, importantly, what it is *not*. For these reasons, CDA furnishes a powerful approach for studying the subtle dynamics of within-group marginalization.

The following six chapters demonstrate how I use CDA to show dynamics of within group marginalization and its effects in the construction of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and LGBT political identity groups.

CHAPTER TWO: Come Out! The Mobilization of Gay and Lesbian Identities

Introduction

The now-famous riots at the Stonewall Inn widely viewed as the moment when gay and lesbian identities changed from hidden and private to public and political occurred in New York City late on the night of June 28, 1969.⁴⁵ Less typically associated with this significant shift in lesbian and gay identities is a meeting that took place a few weeks later on July 16, 1969. That night, a prominent homophile organization, the Mattachine Society, held an open meeting for members and activists to discuss ways the way the organization could exploit the energy generated by the Stonewall protests. As Dick Leitsch, the president of the organization, advocated taking a slow, cautious route and proposed a candlelight vigil in a park to the 200 men and women in attendance, he was interrupted by Jim Fouratt, one of the founders of the counter-culture, public-protest oriented Youth International Party.⁴⁶ Loudly protesting what he viewed to be Leitsch's conservative approach, Fouratt has been widely reported to exclaim, "We don't want acceptance, goddamn it! We want respect! Demand it!"⁴⁷

With these words, Fouratt articulated an important shift in the approach to politics by lesbian-identified women and gay-identified men that motivated the Stonewall Riots in the summer of 1969. Rather than maintaining the veil of privacy around same-sex relationships that was fostered by the post-World War II homophile organizations like the Mattachine Society, Daughters of Bilitus, and Society for Individual Rights, many of the

⁴⁵ Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Suzanna M. Crage, "Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth" *American Sociological Review* Vol. 71, No. 5 (October 2006); David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010); Martin Baumi Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Plume, 1994).

⁴⁶ Lorenzo Ligato, "The faces of Jim Fouratt," *The Villager*, July 3, 2012, <http://thevillager.com/2012/07/03/the-faces-of-jim-fouratt/>.

⁴⁷ Neil Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present* (New York: Alyson Books, 2006), 338-339. See also: Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Penguin Books).

people who protested at the Stonewall Inn wanted to openly declare their lesbian and gay identities and assert the centrality of these identifications to their politics. The public embrace of gay and lesbian identity advocated by activists and epitomized in Leitch's outburst at the Mattachine Society meeting thus marks an important juncture in the evolution of gay and lesbian political identities and political interests.⁴⁸ Whereas the homophile organization established in the period after WWII focused energy on providing social connections for men and women interested in same-sex relationships and put in place many different measures to ensure privacy for members, including *discouraging* political action,⁴⁹ young gay and lesbian-identified activists in the late 1960s saw themselves as part of a larger social movement of young people working to address the systemic oppression of all marginalized people.⁵⁰ Many had been involved in various radical political groups active at the time, referred to by scholars as the "New Left," and wanted to appropriate militant tactics to advance their standing as gay-identified people both within the New Left and in society more broadly.⁵¹ With the assertion that there would be "No revolution without us!" gay and lesbian-identified activists sought their place in radical politics.⁵² Those present at the brainstorming session that took place after the Mattachine Society meeting where Leitch's outburst

⁴⁸ The Stonewall Riots are used here to epitomize the shift towards public protests that precipitated the beginning of the Gay Liberation period; however, there were other equally radical riots that precipitated the Stonewall Riots, see Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press), chap. 3; Armstrong Crago, "Movements and Memory".

⁴⁹ Ensuring privacy for members was a priority for these organizations because members risked losing their jobs, homes, families, and friends if their interest in same-sex relationships was revealed. Privacy was maintained through elaborate organizational structures modeled in similar ways to terrorist cells, see John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: the Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 63-4i.

⁵⁰ See Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities*, chap. 3.

⁵¹ Teal, *Gay Militants*, 50-51.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 55.

occurred formed a new organization, the Gay Liberation Front, and a new phase in lesbian and gay politics began: Gay Liberation.⁵³

The following two chapters explore this juncture in the evolution of lesbian and gay identities, when they changed from being defined by private behaviors and relationships characterized by fear and stigmatization to identifications that were openly articulated, actively sought public attention through political protest, and created movement organizations for the cultivation of lesbian and gay political identities and political interests. In this chapter, I focus on two political organizations active during the period of Gay Liberation: the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA). In the next chapter I focus on various lesbian feminist groups, especially the Radicalesbians. The analysis of these three groups reveals two important aspects of gay and lesbian identity construction in U.S. politics at the site of interest group mobilization.

The first is that within-group marginalization is a way that political actors assert the boundaries of groups as well as define particular meanings with the group. The following analysis demonstrates how political actors defined gay and lesbians groups along a single axis of identity – sexuality – and how this emphasis on sexuality silenced representation for those members who carried multiple identifications, particularly gay and lesbian people of color. Furthermore, this analysis shows that the marginalization of gender and gender identity in conjunction with sexuality (i.e., lesbians and people who might have identified as transgender in today’s terms or gender non-conforming) was a

⁵³ For histories of the GLF founding, see Elizabeth Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950 – 1994* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002); John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*; Kissack, “Freaking Fag Revolutionaries: New York’s Gay Liberation Front, 1969–1971,” *Radical History Review*, no. 62 (1995); Miller, *Out of the Past*, chap. 23; Teal, *The Gay Militants*.

critical step in the construction of gay and lesbian identities as associated strictly with sexuality, and *not* gender or gender identity.

The second is that group identities are made through politics, specifically at the sites of backlash, conflict, and representation. In other words, the elevation of sexuality as the defining feature of the lesbian and gay groups resulted from decisions made by political actors to construct these identities and political agendas in narrow ways.

I begin below by introducing the Gay Liberation Front (GLF).

GLF: Confronting Backlash

GLF's founding and the different approaches to politics than those espoused by homophile organizations were strongly influenced by various New Left political groups active during the 1960s, many of which drew inspiration from the model of Black Power political organizing and activism. The interest of GLF members in mirroring the revolutionary momentum of radical groups like the Black Panthers and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) is reflected in words of one of the founding members who explained the founding of GLF as an effort to "fill the void" left by the Mattachine Society's lack of a "lively" response to the Stonewall riots.⁵⁴ Martha Shelly, another founding member of GLF, explains:

In Mattachine and DOB we couldn't openly state that we were against the Vietnam War because they believed that getting mixed up in other struggles was a bad strategy....But those of us in GLF felt that the struggles should be united: the black civil rights movement, the struggle against the Vietnam War, the women's movement, feminist politics, socialist politics. And of course, the gay cause.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Eric Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2002), 137.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

In this statement Shelly articulates how the revolutionary ethos of the New Left movements played an influential role in the formation of political interests espoused by GLF. The members of GLF did not seek assimilation into mainstream society or to avoid what were perceived to be pressing political questions like the war in Vietnam, as the members of homophile organizations did for fear of attracting attention and having their identities revealed. Instead, as Shelly's statement conveys, they saw themselves as aligned with other movements that sought the radical transformation of the societal structures, also referred to by movement activists as, "The Establishment," that maintained white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism.⁵⁶ Prioritizing the contestation of oppression for all minorities and across political issues signaled the evolution in gay and lesbian identities and interests fostered by the GLF. Gay and lesbian identities, in the eyes of GLF and its members, were not related to unique political objectives pertaining specifically to same-sex sexuality or gay and lesbian identification. Rather, in GLF discourse, gay and lesbian identities and interests evolved from the belief that they were aligned with other minority groups in the effort to challenge the institutions that structure and maintain oppression for all. As one of the founders of GLF, Shelly's explanation that, "those of us in GLF felt that the struggles should be united," directly addressed the prevailing ideas among members about how GLF would fit into existing radical politics. Since members of the GLF saw their objectives as necessarily aligned with other movements, Shelly and other GLF founders believed that GLF members should actively work to forge alliances with them.

⁵⁶ See Betty Luther Hillman, "'The Most Revolutionary Act a Homosexual Can Engage In: Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964-1972'" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 1 (January 2011); Kissack "Freaking Fag Revolutionaries"; Justin Suran, "Coming Out Against the War: Antimilitarism and the Politicization of Homosexuality in the Era of Vietnam," *American Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (2001).

The efforts to have GLF members incorporated in New Left movement organizations often faced intense opposition to potential participation by openly-identified gay and lesbian people. Historian Terrance Kissack notes that the resistance to gay-identified men and lesbian-identified women openly participating in New Left organizations stemmed from anxieties over perceptions of the masculinity of leaders in the New Left, which were epitomized in the pejorative description of men in these groups by opponents as “long-haired hippies.”⁵⁷ Kissack explains that it was common for some male activists in these movements, specifically the SDS, to respond by asserting their masculinity and commitment to radical struggle, often by posing themselves unequivocally in opposition to “faggots,” who they argued were perceived to be passive and apolitical.⁵⁸ “Faggot,” in other words, became a way to mark an outsider or enemy of radical politics. Illustrating the stigmatizing effect of this pejorative, Black Panther founder Huey P. Newton summarized the intention behind this use of “faggot” by leaders in the New Left in a 1970 speech, calling for the end of its use:

We should be careful about using those terms that might turn our friends off. The terms “faggot” and “punk” should be deleted from our vocabulary, and especially we should not attach names normally designed for homosexuals to men who are enemies of the people, such as [Richard] Nixon or [John] Mitchell. Homosexuals are not enemies of the people.⁵⁹

Here, Newton reminds his audience that “faggot” is a word that is attached to an actual population of people who are sympathetic to the demands of radical movements, and

⁵⁷ Kissack, “Freaking Fag Revolutionaries,” 123

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Huey P. Newton, “A Letter to Revolutionary Brothers and Sisters About The Women’s Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements,” in *Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality*, eds. Rudolph P. Byrd and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 2001), 281-283.

should consequently not be conflated with the true enemies of radical politics, such as Richard Nixon.

At the same time, Newton's speech shows that pejoratives such as these from leaders of New Left movements worked to exclude gay-identified men as well as lesbian-identified women from involvement in radical movements, especially those who hoped to publicly embrace their gay or lesbian identification. This pervasive exclusion of gay men and lesbians – or context of backlash – effectively foreclosed opportunities for lesbians and gay men to participate in radical politics, including the movements against the Vietnam War, Black Power, and the Women's Movement. This backlash from New Left politics and the stigmatization of gay men and lesbians helped to mobilize the construction of gay and lesbian political identities in two ways. First, by closing gay men and lesbians out of radical politics, backlash from the New Left created the conditions for gay men and lesbians to form their own radical movements and associated identities – gay and lesbian – that would fight *alongside* other New Left groups. Second, the context of intense backlash from the New Left provided the motivation for some political actors to (re)frame gay and lesbian identities as facing similar histories of oppression to people of color, which shifted meanings associated with gay and lesbian identities away from sexual abnormality and pathology to social identification that was forged in the context of a long history of oppression.

The following four sections focus on the Gay Liberation Front to illustrate how lesbian and gay identities were constructed and represented by Gay Liberation Front political actors in this context of backlash.

Backlash From the New Left and the Construction of Gay and Lesbian Identity by GLF

The interest in forming strong alliances or coalitions with other activist groups like the SDS or Black Panthers meant that the early moments of GLF were shaped by backlash, or contestation over the explicit and implicit exclusions of gay and lesbian-identified people from New Left movement organizations. The activism during the early period of Gay Liberation focused on combatting backlash by asserting gay and lesbian-identified people as a discrete and relevant marginalized group in order to take part in New Left politics. Analogies to these groups were often key to claims that gay people were a discrete and bounded group that experienced oppression. For example, in 1969, members of the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations (NACHO) Youth Committee, which had strong affiliations with GLF, articulated the backlash gay and lesbian-identified people experienced in relation to New Left activism and put forth an understanding of lesbian and gay identities as similar to other marginalized identity groups:

The NACHO Youth Committee has unanimously declared its support for the struggles of the black, the feminist, the Spanish-American, the Indian, the hippie, the young, the student, the worker and other victims of oppression and prejudice. *We must note with sadness, however, that many in these oppressed groups have swallowed whole the Establishment's propaganda and have joined in its oppression of those of us who are homosexual or bisexual. We offer our support to you, and so often receive by calumny, ridicule, ostracism, degradation in return. Too many radicals are so uptight about their heterosexual public images that they cannot tolerate us in their midst.*⁶⁰

According to Martin, concerns over the public image of various New Left movements – such as those representing feminists, Black people, and hippies – motivated some

⁶⁰ “Letter for Bob Martin, Chairman of the Youth Committee of NACHO addressed to the Marchers on Washington, November 15, 1969,” *Come Out!* 1, no. 2 (January 10, 1970), 50 (emphasis mine).

political actors in those movements to exclude lesbian and gay-identified people from membership. This backlash necessarily fostered a hostile environment for publicly identified gay men and lesbian women. Martin's statement on behalf of NACHO directly confronted this backlash by asserting lesbians and gay men as discrete political groups who experience oppression and seek outlets for political activism that are not different (i.e., similar to) from other New Left movement organizations comprised of other marginalized groups, including students, Marxists, and people of color. Martin went on to say:

Our message to our heterosexual brethren, then, is this: re-examine your attitudes, your actions, and eliminate anti-homosexual bigotry from them; treat your gay brothers and sisters as the valuable and dignified human beings they are; support our cause as we support yours.

By identifying "gay brothers and sisters" as "brethren" to heterosexuals, Martin aims to close the gap between straight activists on one hand and gay and lesbian activists on the other, linking them as family members in the same struggle. This projection of all radical groups as a family consequently aimed to mitigate backlash and exclusion of "gay brothers and sisters" from radical politics. Furthermore, emphasizing the value and dignity of gay people in this statement locates sexuality as a facet of humanity that should be taken as natural. This directly contradicted the prevalence of deviance in behavior as the reason for excluding gay men and lesbians from social and political groups, and in so doing, asserted "gay" as an identity, *not* a set of behaviors to be stigmatized. Martin's concluding offer to exchange support reveals yet another layer of gay identity he aims to project here, specifically its political orientation and necessary place in radical political movements.

Claiming this visibility for gay men and lesbians was radical for the late 1960s and early 1970s for a number of reasons. First, and perhaps most significantly, Martin's introduction of gay identity and people alongside other oppressed groups offers an early articulation of lesbians and gay men as groups with recognizable and established boundaries for the purposes of political engagement. Second, and in relation to this assertion of group identity, Martin's claim that to deny the open participation of lesbians and gay men in radical politics would only perpetuate the oppressions that New Left organizations were working to challenge introduced the necessity of including lesbians and gay men among the ranks of radical groups. By explaining that the rejection of alliances with gay and lesbian-identified people stems from what can be understood as a false consciousness (e.g., "swallowed whole the Establishment's propaganda"), Martin and the NACHO statement asserted the necessary fit of "gay men and women" in New Left politics alongside other marginalized groups, as another discrete and unified identity group.

The following two sections show how political actors in GLF developed "coming out" as a practice to further solidify gay and lesbian identities as legible social and political categories, and how these analogies to other minority groups effectively foreclosed gay and lesbian identification to other identifications, specifically racial, class, and gender identifications.

Coming Out in the Face of Backlash

The evolving construction of a cohesive gay identity group to take part in radical politics was pursued by GLF political actors through promoting the idea that people should "come out" and publicly proclaim their gay or lesbian identification to combat

stigmas against same-sex sexuality. Coming out, in GLF discourse, was viewed as a necessary act in order to become politically engaged as well as an act of political engagement in and of itself. In the first step of coming out, one articulates his or her gay or lesbian identification to family, friends, and co-workers. Embracing these identities was viewed as naturally leading to the second step of coming out as political action, in which one pursued broader social acceptance to mirror his or her own self acceptance.⁶¹ Steve Dansky, one of the founders of GLF, summarizes this dynamic and the motivation behind GLF advocating for people to come out: “liberationists understood that ‘coming out’ had the capacity to be transformative because it turned personal action into political statement.”⁶² Coming out, in other words, was considered political for its potential to align personal identity with the efforts to change the political standing and visibility of gay men and lesbians. Visibility would thus take on political importance – an action in and of itself. By emphasizing individual self-knowledge and authenticity as linked to political action, Gay Liberationists sought to portray coming out as a grassroots political act with the potential to incite broader social change and acceptance for gays and lesbians.

The importance of coming out as a grassroots political action to potentially combat backlash against lesbians and gay men was highlighted in many of the personal narratives featured in the pages of GLF’s flagship publication, tellingly titled *Come Out!*. The dissemination of these personal narratives – filled with triumph over disapproving family members or coworkers – provided examples of strategies for readers to use when coming out as gay or lesbian. These narratives also helped to pose coming out as a rite for

⁶¹ Shane Phelan, “(Be)Coming Out,” *Signs* 18, no. 4 (1993), 774.

⁶² Stephen P. Dansky, “*Come Out!* And the Pursuit of Identity,” *The Come Out! Reader* (2012), 17.

attaining membership in the growing community of politically-active lesbian women and gay men. In one such interview in the first issue of *Come Out!*, a woman identified only as Kay captures the significance of the self-recognition associated with coming out:

I see half of gay liberation as a sort of attempt to try to change other people outside of ourselves – to try to make them stop oppressing us. But the half that interests me most now, at the beginning of my gay liberation, is self liberation.⁶³

That is, in addition to coming out as a political act to contest the stigmas typically associated with gay and lesbian identities and behavior, coming out, according to Kay, is initially an opportunity to reconcile individual discomfort with gay or lesbian identification. One not only comes out to family and friends, but one also comes out to herself, and is thus liberated from internalized oppression and is better positioned to participate in radical politics as a result of this liberation. In this way, GLF's discourse of coming out as a necessary first step towards political mobilization constructed an understanding of lesbian and gay identities as authentic, visible and public, constitutive of group membership, and radical, all of which aimed to combat the broader social and political environment of backlash against same-sex sexuality.

Kay's phrasing of the newfound sense of pride associated with coming out and lesbian identification as "liberation" highlights the more broadly held view in New Left political organizing that there is an intimate connection between self-knowledge – or authenticity – and political action.⁶⁴ This political action, according to GLF discourse,

⁶³ Pat Maxwell, "Homosexuals...in the Movement," *Come Out!* 1, no. 3 (April – May 1970), 9.

⁶⁴ On Oct. 30, 2014, Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, publicly identified himself as gay (i.e., he came out), explaining his motivation to do so as, "If hearing that the C.E.O. of Apple is gay can help someone struggling to come to terms with who he or she is, or bring comfort to anyone who feels alone, or inspire people to insist on their equality, then it's worth the trade-off with my own privacy." His remarks about the connection between coming out and politics rearticulate the logic of coming out advocated for so strongly

would necessarily result in political alliances across gay and lesbian-identified people in the form of GLF, and also seek coalitions with other marginalized groups to take part in New Left politics. Coming out, in other words, was not only about self-acceptance, but also about combatting backlash, or broader social exclusion, and pursuing an important political agenda shoulder-to-shoulder with other lesbians and gay men, mobilized as a collective identity group. An article in the first issue of *Come Out!* by Dr. Leo Louis Martello articulates this relationship:

It works like this: If I secretly think of myself as shit then anyone who is involved with me, or who is like me, must be shit too. This is the brainwashed role that all minorities have been forced into: The blacks, Chicanos, poor whites, homosexuals, etc. In order not to be alone join the GAY LIBERATION FRONT. Learn about yourself and others, and more importantly, learn to like yourself.⁶⁵

Like Kay, coming out for Martello is an act of self-recognition that reconciles internalized discomfort, i.e., learning to “like yourself.” Politics, for Martello, is linked to self-awareness and personal authenticity. This first step of self-recognition should be understood as a process similar to those undergone by members of established minority groups to combat social isolation and political demobilization. Whereas Martin’s NACHO Youth Committee statement used linkages to assert the proper place of gay people in radical politics, by placing “homosexuals” alongside other groups, Martello uses an implicit analogy to pose “homosexuals” as a group similar to Blacks or Chicanos, with obvious implications for political mobilization when Martello emphatically urges membership in a political organization such as GLF. This analogy consequently has two

by Gay Liberationists, beginning in the 1970s. See James B. Stewart, “Tim Cook’s Coming Out: ‘This Will Resonate’” *The New York Times*, Oct. 30, 2014.

⁶⁵ Leo Louis Martello, “A Positive Image,” *Come Out!* 1, no. 1 (November 1969), 16 (emphasis in original).

effects on group identity construction. It casts the litany of “all minorities” as discrete, and not overlapping at the same time that this comparison helps Martello assert “homosexuals” as a bounded and politically oriented group. Posing these various groups as separate and yet similar effectively marginalized the voices of these racial and ethnic groups within the evolving gay identity group, constructed through coming out. Self-recognition was therefore not to be contained only to private expression or internal liberation. Coming out would also constitute a particular membership in a recognizable minority group and, by extension, entail political mobilization *alongside* other politically active minorities.

Coming out thus became a rite performed by those interested in reconciling their individual discomfort with gay or lesbian identification, and the ritual of coming out was considered a political act by encouraging gay and lesbian-identified people to model the acceptance they sought from friends, family, and society more broadly. In this way, the discourse of coming out effectively constituted the population of gay and lesbian-identified people to take part in GLF. The context of backlash – in which gay men and lesbians were actively excluded from New Left groups, specifically, and social and political standing more generally – created the conditions for coming out as a political act and also helped to define gay and lesbian identities along a single axis of identity: sexuality. The evolving association of gay and lesbian identities with sexuality – and not gender, race, or class – was not inevitable or based on shared immutable traits, but rather the result of choices made by political actors to confront an inhospitable political climate by framing sexuality as a unique source of oppression that merited the formation of a new movement. Backlash, in other words, fostered an environment in which political actors

saw significant incentives for asserting identification, pride, and a visible presence in politics, specifically in association with their sexual identities.

GLF Representation of Gay Men and Lesbians in Politics

As might be imagined, the discourse of coming out advanced by GLF led to widespread and rapid increases in the number of people identified as lesbian, gay, and a GLF member. The question of how the rapidly increasing numbers of new GLF members should be politically active was answered in GLF discourse by using other minority groups as reference points, and these analogies and linkages to other minority groups played an important role in the continued construction of gay and lesbian identities as legible, political, and oriented towards activism. The following examination of GLF representations of gay and lesbian identities in politics shows how these repeated analogies to other groups, specifically racial groups, alongside the continual call to form coalitions with them, resulted in the construction of gay and lesbian identity as a discrete identity-based group. Through the constant claim that gay men and lesbians should work in alliance with people of color and feminists, GLF discourse of coalition building projected gay and lesbian identities as *separate* from women and people of color, and therefore sealed gay and lesbian identities off from race and gender. In other words, the political actors articulating the need to establish coalitions with other radical groups suggested that those movements were rooted in identities and interests that *did not overlap* at the site of sexual identities. These silences and the marginalization of members within the heterogeneous lesbian and gay groups resulted in a very particular understanding of gay and lesbian identities: as implicitly white. I elaborate how these analogies functioned in GLF discourse of coming out and coalitions below.

The first issue of GLF's publication, *Come Out!*, captured an orientation towards coalitional work and radical politics with its editorial mission statement: "Through mutual respect, action, and education, *Come Out* hopes to unify both the homosexual community and other oppressed groups into a cohesive body of people who do not find enemy in each other."⁶⁶ Key to this editorial statement of purpose is the role of "other oppressed groups." Lesbian and gay people would fight alongside these groups to direct their protests towards the power-holders in society who were seen as perpetuating war in Vietnam and maintaining structures of oppression that fostered racism and sexism in the United States, but the boundaries of these different groups were not considered to be overlapping. Significantly, and as a result, GLF discourse promoted a representation of gay men and lesbian women as joined in struggle with other radical or identity-based groups to fight against marginalization in all forms, rather than as concerned solely with issues pertaining to sexuality.

The construction of gay and lesbian people as an oppressed minority in conjunction with an emphasis on coalition building continued to evolve as a central aspect of lesbian and gay collective identity in GLF discourse. These articulations of gay and lesbian identities, however, often relied on analogies to other minorities that represented gay and lesbian identity as implicitly white. A 1969 *San Francisco Free Press* article titled, "In the Streets for the Revolution," for example, argued the need for individuals to come out and embrace coalitional activism:

Unluckily for us passing is the easiest thing in the world. We have only to pretend to be what we are not and show indifference to the suffering of oppressed peoples everywhere – Chicanos, Black, Gay, Third World and others. All too many of our brothers SUCCEED in passing. They become

⁶⁶ "Come Out!," *Come Out!* 1, no. 1 (November 1969), 1.

straighter than straight....We will build a new society in the streets, not by giving up on our bothers and sisters who have accepted their oppression, but by continuing to hammer at the chains that bind all of us.⁶⁷

Equating “passing” – an appropriation of a term used by Black people perceived as white to describe their differential treatment – with political apathy highlights the potential power that those active in GLF accorded to coming out, particularly for its potential to constitute a grassroots political movement.⁶⁸ The need for coming out as it is presented here, however, relies on the assumption that the gay or lesbian audience they are addressing is able to pass because they are *not* Chicano, Black, or Third World. The logic of coming out, in other words, relies on the invisibility of gay or lesbian identification that is markedly different from identities that are presumed to inhere in one’s physical body, i.e., skin color. Using analogies to other marginalized groups, specifically racial groups, consequently represented lesbian and gay identities as *separate* from race. Implicit and repeated marginalizations of people of color from the gay and lesbian identity group such as this resulted in the construction of gay and lesbian identity as identities associated primarily with people who are white, and not gay or lesbian identified people of color.

As Gay Liberation discourse about coming out such as this diffused across the US, it conveyed that privacy and invisibility regarding gay and lesbian identification would be impossible to maintain alongside the urgent need for political mobilization. Instead, by coming out, claiming gay or lesbian identification, and working to change politics in the streets, gay-identified people were chipping away at “the chains that bind all of us.” The metaphor of being bound together by chains tied the political agenda of

⁶⁷ “In the Streets for Revolution,” *San Francisco Free Press*, November 14, 1969 quoted in Don Teal, *Gay Militants*, 74.

⁶⁸ Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identity*, 67.

lesbians and gay men to the minority groups listed – Chicanos, Black, Gay, and Third World. This explicit association with other oppressed groups represented gays and lesbians as a cohesive group *alongside* other oppressed minorities, not as overlapping. In this way, posing Black and Chino movements as reference points and natural coalition allies for gay men and lesbians in radical politics, the GLF and *Come Out!* defined gay and lesbian politics in opposition to racism and sexism at the same time that these writing also constructed gay and lesbian identities in particularly narrow racial terms. Gay men and lesbians, in other words, were represented in GLF discourse as implicitly white through the emphasis on coalition formation. This limited construction of gay and lesbian identities thus provided the need for coalitions with other groups in order to capture a commitment to anti-racist struggles. The emphasis on coalitions thus evolved as a defining feature of gay and lesbian political identity in GLF discourse.

The practical realization of these coalitional aspirations for lesbian and gay politics took concrete institutionalized forms beyond the abstract mission statement of *Come Out!*. For example, GLF provided space and channeled significant resources into facilitating opportunities for various consciousness raising groups, or “cells,” to provide a political home for feminists, Third World activists, and Communists *within* GLF. These cells were important for representing New Left movements (i.e., “other oppressed groups”) by ensuring safe spaces for people to discuss relevant issues and to foster alliances across different groups active in radical politics. They also illustrate how GLF’s construction of lesbian and gay collective identity and associated interests were understood to be intimately connected to, yet also separable from, the political work of other minority groups seeking radical social change.

For example, Allan Warshowsky and Ellen Bedoz, both prominent members of GLF, wrote in *Come Out!* about the GLF cells:

Our participation in Movement actions (e.g., the Moratorium, Panther rallies) is a beginning. Each time we appear at a Movement function identified as GLF we reinforced the bonds between us. This is our work! Power to all people includes our power to be ourselves.⁶⁹

According to Warshowsky and Bedoz, the members of various cells facilitated these alliances by ensuring that GLF would be represented across as many Movement actions as possible. The cells are also linked to the politics of coming out and authenticity by drawing attention to the links between activism, “our work!” and the “power to be ourselves.” The emphasis on the choice to “appear at a Movement function,” however, highlights that the linked fate envisioned by Warshowsky and Bedoz is premised upon gay men and lesbians as separate from, in their example, Black Panther activism. This poses gay men and lesbians as not inherently part of Black Panther activism, a theme that was echoed by other *Come Out!* authors. For instance, Steve Gavin – one of the founding members of GLF, wrote of the movement he and other envisioned:

It remains for all of us to develop a joint consciousness, to be able to transcend our own oppression to reach a common ground with our sisters and brothers in all true liberation movements: the gay liberation movement, the women’s liberation movement, and the third world liberation movements. Working together we can create a force that will shake sexist and racist America to its foundation. The time may not be completely ripe.....but it is imminent.⁷⁰

Here again, in the midst of imagining “joint consciousness” and “common ground” with the women’s movement and Third World movements, Gavin implies that the members of

⁶⁹ Allan Warshowsky and Ellen Bedoz, “G.L.F. and the Movement,” *Come Out!* 1, no. 2 (January 10, 1970), 5.

⁷⁰ Steve Gavin, “Consciousness Raising Exposes the Orwellian Lies of Sexist Amerika,” *Come Out!* 2, no. 7b (Spring – Summer 1971), 19.

the gay liberation movement are separate and in need of work to bridge the gaps that divide these groups. Thus, while these political actors sought alliances across different racial and gender groups, they also helped to further entrench the presumed separations between them.

Although statements such as Warshowsky and Bedoz's, as well as Gavin's, erected boundaries between racial groups and the lesbian and gay groups, it is important to note that the vision of allied struggle against a common enemy helped to construct gay and lesbian identities as radical, and consequently resisted the elevation of sexuality as the defining feature of gay and lesbian identities. Consistent with the *Come Out!* mission statement, the importance of the bonds across radical politics groups was articulated as the formation of a unified community of many different identity-based groups, not the prioritization of lesbian or gay political interests above all other possible political objectives. For example, Ellen Brody, writing on behalf of New York University's chapter of Gay Student Liberation, explains that although everybody has different motivations and objectives when they participate in protests:

[T]he base upon which any action rests must be a revolutionary ideal, a new way. This kind of commitment would bring along a much needed sense of community – knowing that...the enemy is common to all, whether in the guise of imperialism, racism, or sexism.⁷¹

This orientation of politics against the shared “enemy” of imperialism, racism, and sexism in which Brody echoes the mission statements of *Come Out!* and GLF is noteworthy for the ways that it poses gays and lesbians as a unified community alongside other radical activists. That is, rather than prioritizing political interests along a single dimension of identity – gay or lesbian identification, in this case – Bedoz and others

⁷¹ *Come Out!* 1, no. 7-8 (December – January 1970-1), np.

active in GLF during this period saw lesbians and gay men as a natural fit in radical politics, which prioritized comprehensive changes to the institutions that structure and maintained oppression for all minority groups. Across these examples of GLF discourse, gay and lesbian collective identity was not solely organized in relation to sexual identities. They were rather radical identities that fought shoulder to shoulder with other oppressed groups for liberation.

The repeated calls to coalesce with other groups by GLF leaders and political actors reveals how within-group marginalization is productive of what comes to be known of group identity. While representing gay political identity and interests in alignment with other groups served the purpose of introducing and inserting gay people in politics, the use of analogies to pose the gay group as similar to other groups, namely racial groups, posed gay identity as mutually exclusive with racial identity. This effectively cast people of color who identify as gay or lesbian to the margins of gay identity, and in some cases entirely outside of it. In other words, by representing gay people as similar to other groups, these articulations of gay identity asserted a very particular understanding of gay identity – one that was white and most often middle-class and gender normative – to take part in politics as coalition partners with other groups.

Backlash Precipitating Ruptures to Lesbian and Gay Solidarity

There remained obstacles, however, to the formation of cohesive coalitions with different political organizations active at the time, with backlash to openly-identified lesbians and gay men enduring as the main impediment. In fact, the following shows that in some cases, backlash against lesbians and gay men seems to have intensified, even

in spite of efforts such as coming out to combat stigmas and the pursuit of alliances with other radical groups.

For example, a 1972 issue of *Come Out!* documents the backlash to GLF participation in a rally to support the release of Angela Davis by members of the Communist Party. In line with the ethos of coming out as a significant political act, the GLF members participating in the Angela Davis march attempted to dramatically unfurl a GLF banner to announce GLF's support for Davis and, by association, radical and militant political activism. However, their efforts to display it were obstructed by Communist Party members who threatened to call the police to silence the GLF (presumably unaware of the irony of threatening to call the police at a rally to free Angela Davis from prison).⁷² This instance of being publicly silenced and excluded at the site of a protest is an example of explicit backlash from another radical, New Left political organization. However, GLF members also faced subtle resistance, even when they succeeded in forging alliances with other groups. Though not as blatant as the Communist Party efforts to silence GLF at the Davis rally, the many experiences of backlash generally affected members of GLF differently, with lesbians often claiming that they faced more opposition than gay men due to prevailing sexist attitudes in society. The ensuing conflicts over coalitions with other radical groups – particularly between the gay male members of GLF and lesbian members – exerted an influence over the evolving boundaries of lesbian and gay identities, with splits between the two groups – gay men and lesbian women – becoming more common.

⁷² Ellen Broidy, "Commies Freak Out at Pinko Queers" *Come Out!* 1, No. 7 (December – January 1970-1), 3-4.

One specific example of the differential impact of backlash directed at gay men and lesbian women occurred during the 1970 Black Panther Revolutionary Peoples Constitutional Convention. That meeting provides a useful illustration of the ways that the dynamics of backlash influenced the evolving constructions of lesbian and gay collective identity, particularly as the two groups began to diverge into separate, but intertwined, movements.

In 1970, gay and lesbian-identified representatives from GLF were invited to participate in the Black Panther Revolutionary Peoples Constitutional Convention. Upon arrival, the gay and lesbian representatives from GLF were segregated by sex into different sessions – one for men and the other for women. While the gay men reported feeling that they successfully communicated the interests of gay men to the male participants of the convention and achieved a sense of acceptance, the lesbian women in attendance protested what they viewed to be sexist treatment by the Black Panthers, who reportedly outlined in the female-only session that the proper role of women is as caretakers of children.⁷³ One lesbian-identified participant wrote of the convention that:

It is my conviction that the reason gay males were fairly well treated at the Convention was that they simply asked to be allowed to be gay and to fight alongside the Panthers. Women asked for "that amount of control of all production and industry that would ensure one hundred percent control over our own destinies."⁷⁴

In other words, the lesbian participants at this particular Black Panther convention articulated demands that resonated not only with the right to control one's body in sexual relations, which faithfully represented the shared political interest of GLF members to

⁷³ Kissack, "Freaking Fag Revolutionaries," 126.

⁷⁴ Martha Shelly, "Subversion in the Women's Movement" *Come Out!* 1, no. 7 (December – January 1970-1), 8.

sexual autonomy and sexual liberation, but also in reproduction and employment, i.e., feminist demands. Many lesbian participants and GLF members subsequently debriefed the Black Panther Revolutionary Peoples Constitutional Convention in negative and frustrated terms.

The silence imposed on lesbian-identified participants at the Black Panther Constitutional Convention was viewed as stigmatization directed specifically at lesbians and consequently spawned internal conflicts between lesbian-identified women and gay-identified men over the types of coalitions that GLF should pursue. *Come Out!* subsequently featured stories by lesbian-identified members that conveyed the sense of dissatisfaction with the proceedings at the Black Panther convention, with members of GLF Women and the Radicalesbians explaining that to some extent they were fighting battles for visibility and recognition on two fronts: both among male members of GLF and the broader sexism of society. The sense captured in these writings was that gay men and lesbian women faced different attitudes in broader society and within radical politics. These different experiences foreshadowed intense disagreements over gay and lesbian collective identity that would take place in the GLF in the coming years. The next section explores how these internal conflicts such as these resulted in a series of transformations and splits within GLF that produced different organizations to represent diverging constructions of gay identity, which varied according to diverging opinions about the common features of gay identity and the types of political agendas that should be pursued.

Conflict: Ruptures in GLF

Internal conflicts over the pursuit of coalitions with other New Left groups resulted in a series of dramatic ruptures in GLF, particularly as GLF's efforts to forge coalitions with other oppressed groups contended with backlash over the participation of openly gay and lesbian people. In the face of intensifying backlash, many members of GLF argued that the strategy of coalitions ought to be abandoned and that GLF should focus instead on political issues pertaining solely to sexuality. Others suggested that an organization dedicated specifically to gay and lesbian people was no longer necessary, and that gay and lesbian-identified activists should join other political struggles, such as those representing women's liberation. At the core of these debates in GLF was the question of whether or not to establish coalitions with other groups, and these conflicts over the appropriate use for coalitions as a political strategy illustrate the shifting constructions of gay and lesbian identities going into the early 1970s. Whereas early GLF activism focused on constructing gay and lesbian identities as oppressed people to join alongside others in radical *social movement* struggles, the political organizations that split off of GLF in the early 1970s concentrated efforts on constructing gays and lesbians as minority groups that would be legible in *electoral politics* and the struggles to advance civil rights claims in the courts. These new organizations focused on representing what they perceived to be the unique political interests of gay men and lesbian women in politics, and as such channeled resources into constructing lesbians and gays as minority groups that would be legible in law and politics. This entailed GAA political actors articulating reasons for splits between the groups, i.e., conflict over meanings associated with groups.

The first such conflict over the definition of gay and lesbian political identity and associated agenda of political goals occurred when some members split off of GLF to form the Gay Activist Alliance. Once again, coalitions with the Black Panthers were at the center of the dispute. In 1969, the Black Panthers requested the assistance of different New Left organizations in their efforts to post bail for the Panther 21, a group of twenty-one Black Panther members who were arrested and accused of planning coordinated attacks on New York City police officers.⁷⁵ Although the GLF conducted meetings without any sort of hierarchy, it did adhere to the notion that participation should be democratized and put the question of contributing to the Panther 21 to a vote for all members. The debates over whether or not to spend a portion of the GLF's small treasury for the Panther 21 was divisive, with many believing that the GLF simply did not have enough funds to justify the contribution.⁷⁶ A majority of GLF members ultimately voted to support the Black Panthers, but there remained a strong contingent of members in opposition. The vote and the germane debates caused a rift in GLF with those against the allocation of GLF funds led by GLF treasurer Jim Owles, who promptly resigned from the organization and formed an alternative Gay Liberation group: the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA).

Conflicts Over Gay Identity: Gay Activist Alliance

The founders of GAA immediately set to the task of defining the organization's structure, goals, and membership, and the model of GLF, of which many GAA founders had been members, served as a useful foil. In fact, many lesbian and gay-identified people were initially members of both organizations, and the ensuing conflicts between

⁷⁵ Armstrong, *Forging Identities*, 86-7; Kissack, "Freaking Fag Revolutionaries," 166-7.

⁷⁶ Martha Shelly, one of the founders of GLF, detailed these debates to fund the Panther 21, see Marcus, *Making Gay History*, 137-138.

the GLF and GAA over which political interests that should be prioritized by Gay Liberation organizations shaped what would come to be competing characteristics associated with lesbian and gay identities: separatist and assimilationist, or what Elizabeth Armstrong terms “gay power” and “gay pride” models for political engagement.⁷⁷

GLF’s political actions, for instance, remained oriented towards radical societal change to combat widespread oppression and fostered gay and lesbian identities that were adamantly radical and counter-culture – “gay power.” As time went on, the expression of these political interests by members of GLF tended more towards the creation of separate communities for gay and lesbian-identified people, who were increasingly disillusioned with the possibility of fundamentally altering mainstream – i.e., heterosexual – society and politics.⁷⁸ Separatism, in other words, became the new political agenda for GLF members and those who expressed affinity for radical politics.

In contrast, GAA focused exclusively on asserting consideration for gay-identified people in electoral politics – “gay pride.” GAA members accomplished this by the rhetorical elevation of gay identity to the status of a distinct minority group. As in GLF discourse, gay-identified people, according to GAA, were no different from any other minority group that was seeking recognition and rights. However, rather than working shoulder to shoulder under the aegis of radical or revolutionary political visions – however fraught those alliances might be – GAA discourse contended that gay people merited their own *separate* political organization and political identity category to represent political concerns and interests stemming from discrimination related

⁷⁷ Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities*, 90.

⁷⁸ “Five Notes on Collective Living,” *Come Out!* 1, no. 7 (December-January 1970-1), 7.

exclusively to sexuality. Asserting gay identity as constitutive of a discrete political identity category was realized in the formation of GAA in the image of an interest group, with GAA members arguing that they ought be afforded equal status, political representation, and access to the same rights enjoyed by straight-identified people.

GAA was structured in specific ways to achieve its goals of representing gay political identity in politics. For example, it was decided very early in the founding of GAA that it would be devoted only to issues it determined were germane to the experiences of gay men and lesbian women. Unlike the GLF, the GAA would not pursue coalitions with other organizations so as to not obscure the organization's focus on issues related to sexuality. Viewing the break with the Black Panthers as the motivating impetus behind GAA indicates how the emphasis on gay men and lesbians was implicitly racialized, specifically as leaders in GAA took umbrage to working in coalitions with Black activists. Leaders were aware of this criticism, however, and portrayed the policy of precluding coalitions as a way to avoid the conflicts that were seen to characterize the sometimes slow-moving politics of GLF, which were rife with prolonged debates about how to best direct political resources and manage competing alliances. Alluding to the often-stymied political proceedings of GLF, Owles defended the GAA policy against coalitions by explaining that: "No alliances with other oppressed minorities could be argued over, for none were to be sought."⁷⁹ Concern over time spent debating political agendas was not the only worry that led to the GAA policy against coalitions. The GAA's founding document, "The GAA Alternative," explained to members that, "A one-issue commitment in a gay organization builds an intense sense of common gay identity in its

⁷⁹ Tobin, *The Gay Crusaders*, 36.

members.”⁸⁰ That is, rather than identifying radical social change as the principle political objective pursued or cultivating identities as activists, as expressed by GLF and other New Left groups, the GAA directed its political efforts internally to the task of constructing a “common gay identity,” which would be achieved by urging the elevation of gay or lesbian identities above all other identifications. The resulting construction of gay identity as a discrete identity category along a single dimension – sexuality – was seen by leaders to be more amenable to representation across political venues because it would project a different kind of unity. As opposed to seeking coalitions across other oppressed groups and cultivating a sense of politically linked fate based on alliances across marginalized groups, as was strategy by GLF, the GAA put forth a construction of common gay identity to bind together all gay-identified people and *only* gay-identified people. The cohesion of gay political identity around sexuality offered the benefit of a unified gay identity to represent in politics, but required the subordination of other identifications, most especially race, class, and gender in ways that were much more explicit than GLF construction of normative gay and lesbian identities. The following shows how this emphasis on sexuality shaped the political agendas advanced by GAA in these narrow raced and gendered ways.

Whereas GLF relied on coalitions and alliances to build critical mass and inject concerns of gay and lesbian-identified people into radical politics with the hopes of effecting broader social and political changes, the GAA political strategy borrowed from the model of interest group advocacy and focused on drawing the attention of elected officials to issues related to discrimination against gay-identified people. Since elected

⁸⁰ Gay Activists Alliance, “The GAA Alternative,” *Speaking for Our Lives: Historic Speeches and Rhetoric for Gay and Lesbian Rights (1892 – 2000)*, ed. Robert B. Ridinger (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2004), 150-9.

officials were often silent or willfully ignorant on issues pertaining to sexuality, the GAA policy for political action prescribed a strategy of “militant tactics” to draw attention to gay political issues.⁸¹ An example of a militant tactic that the GAA used to draw attention to issues related to gay-identified people was the “zap,” during which a group of GAA members would disrupt a political event to draw attention to political issues affecting gay-identified people. These interruptions often took the form of glitter or a pie being thrown into a politician’s face during a press conference, or the monopolization of a question and answer session during a town hall event.⁸² The key architect of the GAA constitution, Arthur Evans, saw the GAA “zaps” as a way to tell politicians and elected officials that, “they are going to become responsible to other people. We will make them responsible to us – or we will stop the conduct of the business of government!”⁸³ The “zaps,” in other words, would be employed as a strategy to combat the backlash against gay-identified people in politics that most often manifested as silences about civil rights concerns pertaining to sexuality. GAA discourse on “zaps” maintained the GLF emphasis on coming out and publicly embracing gay identity as an essential first step towards political engagement. It also located electoral politics as the main target for activism.

In this way, “zaps,” particularly in conjunction with protests directed to elected officials, were also used as a site for identity construction by GAA, where members of the GAA would call lesbian and gay identities into being and demand their representation in formal politics. Another GAA founder, Marty Robinson, shows how the conception of gay political identity had taken hold when he explains the logic of the “zap” as necessary because, “gays comprise one of the largest minorities in America. They are capable of

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 191.

getting the representation they need, but can only do so, it seems, by public confrontations that *make* politicians face and respond to issues they otherwise avoid.”⁸⁴ Whereas GLF discourse saw gay men and lesbian women as a small segment of a larger minority community with which they sought coalitions to fight oppression, GAA discourse posed gay-identified people as one of the *largest* minority groups in the United States and deserving of political representation and civil rights on their own terms. This perception of gays and lesbians as a large, yet disconnected, population was used to justify the creation of GAA as an interest group concerned with providing political advocacy on their behalf. As suggested by the rhetoric of the “zap,” the political interests represented by GAA were to be used to draw attention exclusively to gay identity as a political identity category.

Conflicts to Elevate Sexuality

The construction of gay identity along a single dimension of identity – sexuality – allowed leaders and members of GAA to represent a unified political identity category and associated political agenda in both local and national politics. Cristina Beltán’s study of similar mobilizations by Latinos explains that this projection of unity by heterogeneous groups is advantageous in an interest group system that privileges cohesive political objectives and critical mass.⁸⁵ There were, however, ways that this projection of unity required the silencing of concerns that often entailed within-group marginalization. For example, sociologist Elizabeth Armstrong notes of this new unity that, “This pragmatic decision involved setting aside the issues specific to lesbians, gay

⁸⁴ Ibid., 168 (emphasis in original).

⁸⁵ Beltran, *The Trouble With Unity*, chap. 1; see also, Strolovitch, *Affirmative Advocacy*.

people of color, and poor gays.”⁸⁶ This elevation of sexuality, in other words, entailed within group marginalization that helped to continue the narrow construction of gay and lesbian identities, particularly the association of these identities with whiteness.

As was the case in the GLF discourse, the construction of gay identity by GAA political actors as separate from racial identity was achieved through repeated analogies to the Black Civil Rights struggle. GAA founder Marty Robinson articulates the model that informed GAA’s political objectives and identity construction as: “lesbians and male homosexuals striving to define their identities and life-style are much like the Blacks and other minorities who have found that throughout history they have allowed themselves to be defined by others.”⁸⁷ In order to wrest control over the defining characteristics of gay identity, GAA should engage in what Robinson referred to as “image reversal.”

The awakening of Black pride provided a lesson to gays who had many of the same problems as Blacks: a poor self-image and a poor public image in an endless feedback loop. The concept of ‘Gay Pride’ and ‘Gay is Good’ closely parallels the Black efforts for a more positive identity.⁸⁸

GAA would thus provide representation of gay identity as a minority group with unique interests, similar to political organizations to represent Black people. However, in a noteworthy departure from the rhetoric of GLF, which imagined its politics as analogous *and* aligned with Black politics, Robinson and other leaders in GAA argued that gay identity was analogous, or to use Robinson’s word, “parallel” to Black identity and, by extension, Black politics. Posing gay identity and Black identity as analogous in GAA discourse relied on the conception of these two groups as discrete and operating in relative isolation from each other. This is illustrated in the founding document – The

⁸⁶ Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities*, 96.

⁸⁷ Tobin, *The Gay Crusaders*, 180.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

GAA Alternative – which explains that, “Unlike the members of many multi-issue gay organizations, we do not come to think of ourselves as primarily men or women, blacks or whites, we come to think of ourselves primarily as gays.”⁸⁹ With these words, the authors of the organization’s founding document suggest that one’s identification as a black person or as a woman can be isolated from one’s identity as “gay.”

This separation of gay identity, Black identity, and gender (especially with respect to women, but also including transgender women and men) explicitly poses each as discrete identity categories that can be prioritized, or not, at will. The political importance of this distinction lies in what is lost in the assertion that one aspect of identity can be emphasized over another, as it necessarily forecloses conceptualizing of gay identity as one that is inflected by race and gender.⁹⁰ Equally important, it sacrifices an understanding of normative sexuality (and non-normative sexuality) as a category of behavior that achieves its very meaning from racialized and gendered assumptions, all of which combine to erase differences and consequently naturalize male sexuality. The rhetorical elevation of gay identity as a discrete category thus projected it as a narrowly defined group with white, gay men (who are gender normative) as the central referent. The evolution from gays and lesbians as a collective identity to gay identity as a political identity category and minority group was reflected in the political interests subsequently taken up by GAA, which often focused on the concerns of gay, white, gender-normative, middle-class/professional men.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 155.

⁹⁰ Scholars have written extensively on how this effectively created two movements: one for white gay people and another for people of color who identify as gay. See, Cohen, *Boundaries of Blackness*, 91-9; Susan Stryker, “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity” *Radical History Review* no. 100 (2008); David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham: Duke University Press), 239.

Representing Gay Identity

The agenda of political interests advocated for by GAA was formulated to reflect the construction of gay identity as exclusive of race, gender, or class identification, and leaders of GAA saw strict organizational structure as a way to achieve a narrow focus on gay identity and what it deemed to be germane interests. Key amongst these structural adaptations was a reliance on parliamentary procedure to determine the agenda of interests to be advocated for by GAA. Owles explained in a 1972 interview the reasons for relying on parliamentary procedure: “There was to be room in GAA for gay people of every political hue, as long as they were willing to work in a structured organization with parliamentary procedure and work militantly, though non-violently, for gay liberation.”⁹¹ As with the issue of whether or not to pursue coalitions, Owles and other leaders of GAA saw parliamentary procedure as an important departure from other Gay Liberation and New Left organizations, which were viewed as stymied by debates and too much discussion on important decisions regarding the allocation of political resources towards coalition partners. Against this backdrop, parliamentary procedure and the prioritization of democratic votes were advocated for by GAA leaders for their capacity to facilitate discussions and effectively put forward a political agenda that aggressively sought the representation of gay people in politics. The creation of strict rules to govern GAA also signaled its designation as an interest group, and not an activist collective. Furthermore, parliamentary procedure would also be used to secure unity, which is revealed in Owles statement that there was to be “room in GAA for gay people of every political hue.” Qualifying the diversity that would cohere as “political” elides racial and gender diversity and underscores ideological diversity as a feature of unity.

⁹¹ Tobin, *Gay Crusaders*, 36.

Although Owles and other leaders imagined that parliamentary procedure would help to ensure a voice for all members and aid in the projection of GAA as a serious political organization similar to an interest group, there were many instances of members expressing different ways that the reliance on a tight organizational structure actually silenced their voices. Especially affected were gay and lesbian-identified members who were Black, Third World, and working class. In one of the last issues of *Come Out!* before GLF folded due to financial troubles, a piece titled simply “an article by eben clark” elaborated the joy of being an out gay-identified person active in the political work of GLF and GAA, but expressed strong reservations about the ways that the various rules of GAA organized minority voices out of meeting proceedings.⁹² Clark writes, “i [*sic*] watched parliamentary procedure destroy minorities within the group. minorities that did not know how to use parliamentary procedure for them and so had it used against them.”⁹³ Whereas Owles outlined the vision of broad inclusion to be achieved through parliamentary procedure, Clark’s experience of it is that it silences, and is even used to “destroy,” the voices of minorities within the group. These contradictory observations calls into question *whose* voices were to be heard in GAA organizing. The shift of the gay political agenda in the direction of a liberal, rights-based paradigm to be taken up by interest group advocacy is reflected in Clark’s conclusion that:

i soon discovered that while i was talking gay liberation those in control were talking gay power. while i was talking freedom they were talking politics. while i was talking honesty-to-self they were talking success.⁹⁴

⁹² The anti-hierarchical organization of radical groups such as GLF often resulted in charismatic members dominating conversations and consequently further silencing the most marginalized members of these movements, see Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in American, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 17.

⁹³ eben clark, “An Article,” *Come Out!* 2, no. 7b (Spring-Summer 1971), 15.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

The binaries that Clark puts forward – “liberation” contra “power,” “freedom” in opposition to “politics,” and “honestly-to-self” versus “success” – reflects a political agenda for GAA that made a dramatic rupture with the model of Gay Liberation’s strong emphasis on personal authenticity, liberation, and radical politics, and instead prioritized a set of political interests that sought recognition and political change from elected officials. Clark’s essay shows that the turn towards the rights-based political agenda advocated for by GAA entailed the loss of some of GLF’s founding principles. Gay identity, in other words, was shaped through conflicts that defined it away from the grassroots and multicultural aspirations at the core of the gay and lesbian political agenda articulated by GLF. Clark’s essay highlights that increasingly dominant orientation towards power, politics, and success entailed narrowing the construction from a broad, inclusive collective identity category to a political identity category with a definition achieved primarily in relation to sexuality as a minority group. In the context of GAA activism, sexuality – defined as same-sex desire – was the defining characteristic of gay and lesbian identities, and not shared experiences of marginalization alongside and as people of color, as GLF rhetoric asserted. Put differently, the marginalization of race, gender, and class from gay identity enabled the construction of gay identity as solely associated with sexuality.

Coming Out in GAA

The increasing focus on sexuality as the central characteristic of gay political identity to the exclusion of racial identity was also reflected in GAA discourse on coming out. The process of coming out often meant the loss of support systems provided by family and friends. The communities fostered by GAA and its satellites across the

country were seen as potentially offsetting the loss of these networks by providing alternative sources of support from other gay-identified people, and in many cases breaking with communities of origin to join gay communities was touted as an essential step in the direction of fully integrated gay and lesbian identities.⁹⁵ According to the GAA vision for coming out, gay men and lesbian women were to be united in the face of backlash from society that was triggered by coming out and proudly asserting gay identification. Coming out, in this way, necessarily required the privileging of gay and lesbian identity and politics above other identifications, most often racial identities. Just as in the case of analogies to the Black civil rights struggle entailed the construction of gay identity as separate from racial identities, the elevation of gay identity in GAA discourse on coming out was often premised on the importance of gay identity alongside and separate from race, class, gender, and ethnicity. That is, rather than viewing sexuality as intersecting with and shaped by race, class, ethnicity, and gender, the GAA political actors urging members to come out as gay and lesbian often saw sexual and racial identities as parallel, and implicitly discrete, identifications that could be prioritized or silenced at will. By failing to recognize these losses, this construction of gay political identity put forth by GAA effectively projected its boundaries as white, middle-class, and often male.

This articulation of gay political identity and the centrality of coming out as the first, most important, political act foreclosed gay identity to those outside of these boundaries and unable to take part in the associated rites of coming out, such as finding a new community of gay-identified people for support. Issac Julien and Kobena Mercer

⁹⁵ Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities*, 136.

write of feeling compelled to come out as gay men in order to be considered politically active:

Sometimes we cannot afford to live without the support of our brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, yet we also need to challenge the homophobic attitudes we encounter in our communities. But white gays have passed all this by because race is not an issue for them. Instead, the horizon of their political consciousness has been dominated by concerns with individualized sexuality."⁹⁶

Julien and Mercer articulate the significance of the breaks required by fully coming out for Black gay men and lesbian women: the potential loss of one's Black community and family. Rather than elevating gay identity, or "individualized sexuality" as white gay-identified people have done, Julien and Mercer imagine possibilities for challenging the homophobic attitudes of their "brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers" from within the Black community. This implies a necessary balancing act for Black gay men and lesbians that was often very challenging to strike. Cathy Cohen explains, however, that, "The acceptance of this conditional black membership is not irrational when we consider the threat of racism faced by many black lesbians and gay men outside of black communities."⁹⁷ The loss of black communities for Black lesbians and gay men is particularly daunting because threats of racism that Cohen points to here are ubiquitous and were especially pressing in the context of 1970s political activism. Thus, while white gay men and lesbian women seemed to be enjoying unprecedented visibility for their identifications and political concerns through coming out, paradoxically, black gay men and lesbian women were increasingly rendered invisible as Black within the GAA and as lesbian or gay-identified in Black communities. Kobena and Mercer's statement about the

⁹⁶ Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer, "True Confessions: A Discourse on Images of Black Male Sexuality," *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men*, eds. Essex Hemphill and Joseph Beam (Boston, 1991), 168.

⁹⁷ Cohen, *Boundaries of Blackness*, 92.

difficulties of coming out, read through Cohen's observations, illustrate how within group marginalization functions to shape identity, not only for the construction of the normative gay subject, but also for those organized to the margins. In this example, Black gay identity is constructed as seeking political and social changes within Black communities, and not purporting to effect change in electoral politics.

Conclusions

The increasingly dominant articulation of lesbian and gay identification defined by sexuality and separate from race by GAA was further cemented when GLF was officially shuttered in 1971. The end of GLF organizing marked a critical juncture in the Gay Liberation period when the multicultural "gay power" model attempted by the organization through its focus on radical social change gave way to the rights-based "gay pride" mode of political organizing advocated by GAA.⁹⁸ The withdrawal of GLF from political activism also heralded the end of a centralized hub for gays and lesbians interested in radical politics. This is not to say that gay and lesbian radicals disappeared entirely. Rather, in the context of increasing political conservatism in the early 1970s, they splintered into different identity-based movements: Chicano gays and lesbians, black gays and lesbians, lesbian feminists, and radical feminists, to name just a few.⁹⁹ The broad, inclusive construction of gays and lesbians as a collective identity that was premised on the formation of coalitions across different movements, in other words, evolved into several discrete identity-based groups represented by different movements. GAA, on the other hand, succeeded in representing gay political identity strictly as a sexual identity category to the exclusion of all other identifications. This included the

⁹⁸ Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities*, 96.

⁹⁹ Mark Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 126.

marginalization and minimization of race, class, and gender identifications among members in order to prioritize gay identity in terms of sexuality.

The following chapter examines one of the organizations that evolved from the dissolution of the GLF, which was based on a former GLF cell: the Radicalesbians. It illustrates the extent to which the narrowly-conceived boundaries of gay identity projected by GAA – to encompass white gay men to the exclusion of all other dimensions of identity – provoked the departure of lesbians for the women’s movement. The following analysis of this period during the early 1970s, when lesbians made dramatic breaks with GLF and GAA, shows how processes related to conflict, backlash, and representation shaped the boundaries of lesbian identification, particularly as it evolved further away from gay identity and more towards lesbian feminist identity.

CHAPTER THREE: Constructing Lesbian Identity and Interests

Introduction

Jean O'Leary, whose life of activism on behalf of lesbian and gay political issues spanned the founding of several organizations and the creation of an annual National Coming Out day, reflected on lesbian-identified women in Gay Liberation organizations during the period of time between 1968 and 1972:

We were trying to establish our identity and, wherever we could, gain visibility. Just as gay people have had to become visible in society, lesbians had to become visible with the gay community, as well as in the larger society. Up until that time, whenever people thought about gays, they thought only about gay men.¹⁰⁰

The examination of writings and speeches by lesbian women that follows illustrates how the extension of lesbian identity to the political realm described by O'Leary and other lesbian activists and political leaders was premised on the need to render lesbian identity visible in a political context dominated by gay men. I show how these conflicts to assert lesbian identity by distinguishing it from gay identity helped to create a bifurcated community of lesbian-identified women, with some directing their attentions to the political efforts mounted by Women's Liberation organizations – what I term the women's movement – and others choosing to remain active in Gay Liberation organizations. In both cases, lesbian-identified women engaged in conflicts over the meanings associated with lesbian identity to differentiate their political issues from those prioritized by feminists and gay men. In view of the backlash or exclusion of lesbian political interests by feminists in Women's Liberation and by gay men of Gay Liberation (particularly GAA), the following shows how conflicts and subsequent efforts to represent lesbian identity during the period of Gay Liberation shaped the continued

¹⁰⁰ Marcus, *Making Gay History*, 154.

evolution of lesbian political identity. As such, the influence of within group marginalization is underscored throughout the following analysis, with particular attention to how the location of lesbians on the margins of gay identity and feminist identity created the motivation to construct lesbian identity.

Conflicts with Gay Dominated GLF and GAA

The construction of gay identity that was closely associated with white, gay male experience during the period of Gay Liberation explored in the previous chapter attracted criticism from those who were constructed at the margins or outside of those boundaries. In particular, social events drew the most attention for being male dominated and demonstrative of the power exerted by men in different Gay Liberation organizations. Steve Dansky, one of the founders of GLF, explained to his male colleagues in a *Come Out!* article that, “lesbianism in practice is exclusive of men....That is why women, from GLF, from the women’s bars, or the women’s movement, don’t come to our male dominated GLF dances.”¹⁰¹ Male GAA members were similarly self-reflexive. Dennis Altman observed in a *Come Out!* piece that, “it is impossible to ignore the extent to which GAA is male-dominated, and I do not see any easy solution to this.”¹⁰² Although these men expressed awareness for the increasingly marginalized position of women within Gay Liberation organizations, leaders in GLF or GAA never took up the question of differentiating lesbian identity from gay identity. To some extent, the belonging of lesbians in GLF and GAA was assumed because of the shared focus on sexuality, particularly in light of GAA’s elevation of sexuality to define membership and political agendas. The lesbian-identified members of GLF and GAA were disappointed, however,

¹⁰¹ Steve Dansky, “Hey Man” *Come Out!* 1, no. 4 (June-July 1970), 6.

¹⁰² Denis Altman, “One Man’s Gay Liberation” *Come Out!* 1, no. 7 (December – January 1970-1), 20.

by the lack of attention to their unique political interests – such as parenting and access to work – in the name of advancing gay (*i.e.*, male) identity and associated political concerns first. In response, some lesbian-identified members of GLF and GAA staged public departures from these organizations for the women’s movement.

These public conflicts and subsequent departures took place in widely-circulated publications, speeches, and essays by lesbian-identified women. Many of these pieces staged conflicts over the meanings to be associated with “lesbian” as a political identity category by posing it in opposition to “gay identity.” The most widely circulated example was an essay by Del Martin titled “If That’s All There Is,” which was featured in several publications between 1970 and 1971.¹⁰³ Martin’s large audience for this essay is likely linked to her role as one of the founders of the predominant homophile organization for lesbians, the Daughters of Bilitus (DOB). Although DOB’s membership had decreased during the period of Gay Liberation, along with other homophile organizations, Martin and her partner Phyllis Lyon maintained active leadership roles in the burgeoning community of lesbian-identified women. With the benefit of this wide influence, Martin’s essay helped to shape the ways that lesbian-identified women thought about themselves within both the Gay Liberation and the women’s movement.

Martin’s essay began with her announcement that:

After fifteen years of working for the homophile movement – of mediating, counseling, appeasing, of working for coalition and unity – I am facing a very real identity crisis...I have...been forced to the realization that I have no brothers in the homophile movement.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ “*The Ladder*, *Come Out!*, and *Motive* are the publications with national circulations, and it is likely there were many smaller, local publications that featured the essay as its popularity drove its diffusion across audiences.

¹⁰⁴ Del Martin, “If That’s All There Is” *The Ladder* 3/4 (Dec 1970/Jan 1971), 4-6.

From this opening revelation, Martin then lists her experiences with marginalization within homophile organizations, including the minimization of lesbian voices in homophile publications and the silencing of lesbian concerns in the articulations of political objectives. Martin's response that she consequently has "no brothers in the homophile movement" reads as an incisive departure from gay men because it denies their status as a coherent "chosen family," which is how some gay and lesbian identified people referred to the support networks that replaced estranged family members upon coming out. According to Martin, they must pursue a dramatic break to transition from within group outsiders to their own, separate group. The marginalization of women within Gay Liberation politics and gay identity, in other words, presaged Martin's introduction of lesbian identity as an alternative identification.

Reflecting this evolution away from homophile activism to contemporary Gay Liberation politics, the GLF and GAA were caught in Martin's sights as well:

Goodbye to Gay Liberation, too....There is reason for the splits within their own movement, why there is a women's caucus in GLF in New York and why there is a Gay Women's Liberation in the San Francisco Bay Area. Like the tired old men they berate they have not come to grips with the gut issues. Until they do, *their* revolution cannot be ours. Their liberation would only further enslave us.¹⁰⁵

Referencing the "splits" in Gay Liberation alludes to the prioritization of a specifically gay identity by other Gay Liberation organizations, especially the GAA, which saw sexuality – defined as same-sex desire, often understood as occurring between two men – as the shared concern for all gay-identified people. This rhetorical elevation of sexuality minimized lesbian identification, as well as race, class, and gender identification, and

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. (emphasis in original).

thus minimized political issues seen to fall outside of the concerns most relevant to gay, white, gender-normative men.

These narrow and exclusive boundaries were reflected in the political agenda put forth by GAA and consequently drew critiques and frustrated responses from lesbians, who saw themselves excluded from the growing political activity of GAA. For instance, figuring centrally in the political agendas advocated by gay men in the GAA was the decriminalization of same-sex sex (particularly public sex), whereas women identified legal provisions to protect them from losing their children or jobs after they came out.¹⁰⁶ According to Martin, the cost of these competing priorities are so severe that lesbians are “enslaved” by “*their* revolution” when they remain aligned with Gay Liberation organizations. The perceived lack of attention to issues affecting women was consequently used as justification by Martin and others to leave Gay Liberation organizations and instead join the women’s movement, with many lesbians asserting: “We’re angry, not gay!”¹⁰⁷

In addition to the departure of many lesbians from Gay Liberation organizations, these conflicts over the meanings associated with gay identity – with women abandoning it in favor of lesbian identity – had the further effect of posing men and women in opposition to each other, rather than as united. Martin’s conclusion to her essay makes clear that she views the women’s movement as the best alternative home for lesbian politics, explaining in glowing terms that: “It is a revelation to find acceptance, equality,

¹⁰⁶ Deborah Coleman Wolf, *The Lesbian Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 67. For an analysis of the disparate impact of the criminalization of public sex, see Dara Z. Strolovitch “Intersectionality in Time: Sexuality and the Shifting Boundaries of Intersectional Marginalization” *Politics & Gender* Vol. 8, No. 3 (August 2012): 386-396.

¹⁰⁷ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 21.

love and friendship – everything we sought in the homophile community – not there, but in the women’s movement.”¹⁰⁸

Backlash from the Women’s Movement

Martin was not alone in thinking that the women’s movement might be a better suited home for lesbian politics; however, it was also well known that the women’s movement, specifically the institutionalization of it in the National Organization for Women (NOW), was not hospitable to openly-identified lesbians. In the first issue of *Come Out!*, Martha Shelly discussed the more abstract roots of the resistance to lesbians in the women’s movement while describing a protest of the 1968 Miss America Pageant organized by various women’s liberation groups. She recalls how lesbians and straight women were united in their opposition to the pageant until counter-protesters began to use “lesbian” pejoratively to harass the protesters. Shelly notes that many of the straight women burst into tears upon hearing “lesbian” used against them as a slur, and speculates that the stigmatization of lesbians by straight women results because, “Society has taught most lesbians to believe that they are sick and has taught most straight women to despise and fear the lesbian as a perverted, diseased creature.”¹⁰⁹ In view of this systematic and broad backlash, out lesbians engaged in conflicts over the meanings associated with “lesbian” in order to shift the associations of lesbian identity away from illness. These shifts were often achieved by marking explicit differences with gay men and gay identity. Instead of connoting illness or behaviors stemming from psychological trauma, lesbian activists positioned lesbian identity as an integral characteristic of feminist identity, and

¹⁰⁸ Martin, “If That’s All There Is,” 6.

¹⁰⁹ Martha Shelly, “Stepin Fetchit Woman,” *Come Out!* 1, no. 1 (November 1969), 7.

as the most authentic expression of “woman.”¹¹⁰ Shelly, reflects this shift when she concludes her essay with, “I have met many, many feminists who were not lesbians – but I have never met a lesbian who was not a feminist.”¹¹¹ By deploying rhetoric to absorb lesbian identity into feminist identity, lesbian activists engaged in conflicts to reframe lesbian identity as a central aspect of feminist identity in the face of growing resistance to out lesbians from members of the women’s movement.

Lesbian activists worked to construct lesbian identity as an integral part of feminist identity in order to respond to the backlash to out lesbians in the women’s movement. NOW furnished the most visible target for this activism, particularly because then-president of NOW, Betty Freidan, was the most vocal critic of lesbians in the women’s movement. In a 1973 *New York Times* interview, she described the presence of lesbian-identified women at a meeting of feminists as a “lavender menace” and worried more generally that lesbians should “stay in the movement’s closet” for fear of them “turning off Middle America women,”¹¹² who she implied were the rightful members of the women’s movement. The backlash experienced by lesbians in the women’s movement gained in intensity as more women who had previously hidden their lesbian identity began to claim it publicly under the aegis of Gay Liberation and the liberatory promise of “coming out.” This backlash against lesbians in NOW was especially directed at the lesbian-identified women who held leadership positions, particularly in the NY branch of the organization.¹¹³ To maintain the consistency of the straight-only public

¹¹⁰ Taylor and Whittier. “Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities,” 181-2.

¹¹¹ Shelly, “Stepin Fetchit,” 7.

¹¹² Freidan also publicly speculated that lesbians were CIA infiltrators dispatched disrupt the NOW. See Laurie Johnston, “Mrs. Friedan’s Essay Irks Feminists,” *The New York Times* March 8, 1973.

¹¹³ For a comprehensive first-hand account of the lesbian purges at NOW in the late 1960s and early 1970s see Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman* (Volcano, CA: Volcano Press, 1991), 262-76.

image that Freidan articulated in the *New York Times* interview and other places, she and other executives of NOW initiated a purge leadership positions to ensure that a particular image of the women's movement, one that would be palatable to "Middle America women," would be projected.

In direct response to this backlash from NOW, a group of GLF members from the Radicalesbian cell was prepared to use protest tactics to combat Freidan's discriminatory rhetoric and assert their place within the women's movement. They chose an annual event to gather all the branches of NOW and allied organizations called the Second Conference to Unite Women as the site for their protest action. Appropriating Freidan's pejorative phrase "lavender menace" as their own proper noun – The Lavender Menace – the Radicalesbians printed T-shirts and banners with it, and composed a ten-page lesbian feminist manifesto titled "The Woman-Identified Woman" to distribute to participants at the conference. In what was to become the most successful GLF protest action in the history of the organization, the Radicalesbians made a dramatic entrance to the plenary session by shutting off all the lights and plunging the attendees in darkness.¹¹⁴ The lights were then dramatically turned on to reveal the Radicalesbians on the stage brandishing Lavender Menace banners and seizing the microphone to initiate a conversation about the place of lesbians in the women's movement.

The Radicalesbian protest action at the Second Congress to United Women illustrates the role of backlash and conflict over meanings in the evolving construction of lesbian identity. At the most basic level, the appropriation of the exact words used to stigmatize them – "the lavender menace" – as a rallying call demonstrates the ways in which response to backlash creates conditions to shape what comes to be known of its

¹¹⁴ Kissack, "Freaking Fag Revolutionaries," 122.

boundaries. For these lesbian-identified women seeking membership, claiming The Lavender Menace became a source of pride and identification to combat the stigmas they faced. Furthermore, the role of conflict over meanings to be associated with a group cannot be understated. By using a public protest to reclaim “the lavender menace” as a positive and political identity, the activists staging the Radicalesbian protest used conflicts over meanings to contribute to the construction of lesbian identity as political, public, powerful, and proud.

Political Lesbians: Conflicts with Behavioral Definitions of Lesbian

Beyond these shifts, the Radicalesbians also took issue with the elevation of sexuality as central to gay and, by association, lesbian identity. Instead, the Radicalesbian articulations of lesbian identity sought distance from behavior and desire, and emphasized general opposition to patriarchal oppression as the defining trait for lesbian identity. This served the purpose of explicitly aligning lesbian-identified women with the Women’s Movement though continued conflicts over meanings associated with lesbian identity. These conflicts were executed with two goals in mind. First, it would effectively establish a rupture with GAA and the centrality of white gay male experience to gay identity. Second, the articulation of patriarchy as the stated opponent of lesbian-identified women aimed to align lesbians firmly within the women’s movement by posing biological sameness as females as the reason for united political action.

These two goals were pursued by Radicalesbian political actors through protest actions and widely-circulated publications. For example, a key aspect of the Radicalesbian protest at the Second Conference to United Women was the circulation of the “The Woman-identified Woman” essay to all participants. In it, the Radicalesbians

outlined the terms of their resistance to the backlash they faced from the women's movement with what would come to be the famous opening provocation: "A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion."¹¹⁵ This opening line illustrates the strategy used by the Radicalesbians to contend that lesbian-identified women belong within the women's movement. Specifically, in an effort to situate lesbians as necessary members of the women's movement, the authors of the essay redefined "lesbian" to evacuate it of any connotations with sexuality and emphasize lesbian identity as the authentic embodiment of "woman."

The reformulation of "lesbian" and "woman" was achieved discursively in a variety of ways, namely through staging conflicts over the issues that ought to be prioritized by the women's movement. The essay explains, "It should first be understood that lesbianism, like male homosexuality, is a category of behavior possible only in a sexist society characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy."¹¹⁶ Similar to the GLF, the Radicalesbians viewed the institutionalization of sexism that constructs and maintains difference between women and men, "sexist society," as the location for political struggle. By logical extension, then, defining "lesbian" as a set of behaviors, rather than a politicized identity category, worked to complicate the categories of "woman" and "lesbian" by minimizing the particularity of same-sex sexuality and desire typically associated with lesbian identity. For the Radicalesbians, "lesbian" was only meaningful as an identity category in the context of patriarchal oppression, which ought to be challenged by feminist activism. Arguing that lesbian identity is produced by a sexist society allowed the Radicalesbians to contend that denying the participation of

¹¹⁵ Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman," The Digital Scriptorium, Special Collections Library, Duke University (1970).

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 1.

out lesbians in the women's movement merely replicates the very same oppressions that feminists in the women's movement seek to overcome.

Furthermore, by minimizing the close association of same-sex behavior with "lesbian," the reframing of lesbian identity promulgated by Radicalesbians also produced conflicts with GLF and GAA conceptualizations of gay identity, which saw same-sex desire as the key distinction between gay and straight people, and the logical core of gay political identity. Sociologists Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier explain in their study of radical and lesbian feminists that these activists sought, "Removing lesbian behavior from the deviant clinical realm and placing it in the somewhat more acceptable feminist arena establishes lesbian identity as distinct from gay identity."¹¹⁷ These shifts were reflected in discursive strategies employed by activists, with many lesbian-feminists using "woman" or "womyn" as a synonym for "lesbian" in political writings.¹¹⁸ By eroding the boundaries of lesbian with respect to same-sex desire in these ways, the Radicalesbians accomplished their principle goal of eliminating obstacles for lesbian-identified women to participate openly in the women's movement. Whereas the initial exclusion of lesbians from NOW and the women's movement was advanced on the grounds of stigmatization of same-sex relationships, the Radicalesbians reframed feminist identity to be based entirely on the assumption that women shared immutable experiences of sexism by virtue of being born female. "Woman," for radical lesbians and lesbian feminists would thus be the proper object of feminism, and preclude efforts to exclude any biological female – even if she engaged in same-sex relationships – from membership in the women's movement. The activists working to alter the boundaries

¹¹⁷ Taylor and Whittier, "Collective Identity," 181-182.

¹¹⁸ Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 218.

of “lesbian” to be synonymous with “woman” also shifted the political objectives to be pursued by the Women’s Movement. Much like the GAA discourse, which argued for the elevation of gay identity – and sexuality – above all other identifications, lesbian-feminists asserted the priority of identification as a woman, often understood in narrow racial, biological, and classed terms. According to the Radicalesbians, “It is the primacy of women relating to women, or women creating a new consciousness of and with each other, which is at the heart of women’s liberation, and the basis for cultural revolution.”¹¹⁹ This cultural revolution, emanating from the construction of the woman-identified women, was oriented towards a purported radical approach to politics. Rather than seeking admission to mainstream political institutions and working to achieve representation in politics, as the male-dominated GAA and liberal feminists seeking formal representation in politics did, the newly-constructed “political lesbian” (i.e., a woman who removes herself from all male-dominated institutions and personal relationships), feminists, and lesbian-feminists should unite to advance a unique, woman-oriented political agendas that strive to uproot patriarchal dominance.¹²⁰ They pursued this broad goal through specific projects, such as advocating for state-funded childcare and opposing negative or objectifying representations of women in the media.¹²¹

The woman-oriented political stance advocated for by lesbian-feminists hoped to meet its radical potential in the creation of lesbian separatist communities, which sought to establish matriarchal, non-monogamous lesbian spaces that excluded men because, in their view, monogamy and male domination were social systems produced by patriarchy

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁰ For first-person accounts of the Radicalesbian action at the Second Congress to Unite Women, see: Abbot and Love, *Sappho Was a Right On Woman*, 108-14; Wolf, *The Lesbian Community*, 62-5.

¹²¹ Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 4.

to oppress women. Lesbian separatist communities would therefore aim to provide communities of liberation from patriarchy, where one could visit a woman mechanic, raise children exclusively with women, and engage in open relationships with other female friends and lovers. Although becoming a part of a lesbian separatist community required that one be biologically female as a precondition for membership, it did not require that one identify as a lesbian in terms of same-sex desire. In fact, the “political lesbian,” or a woman who privileged love for women (but did not express it sexually) and identified sexist society as the target for political activism, comprised the majority in these enclaves.¹²²

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.¹²³

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

¹²² Wolf, *Lesbian Community*, 66.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 67.

“lesbian” as the authentic practice of feminism. From this vantage point as “the vanguard of the movement,” lesbian feminists, much like their peers in the GAA, argued for the elevation of “woman” above all other identifications, often with similar results for the construction of group identity. As sociologist Alice Echols explains of the women’s movement during this time, the elevation of *woman* as the defining characteristic of feminist identity was seen by some as a way to absorb the differences – particularly class, race, and gender identity differences – that were seen by some as potentially distracting from the goals of feminism.¹²⁴ By claiming “sisterhood is universal,” this feminist discourse produced the identity categories of “woman” and “lesbian” that required the minimization of other identifications and portrayed lesbian identification as biologically female, typically middle-class, and as the next section illustrates, implicitly white and gender normative.

Excluding Women of Color

Black and Third World feminist activists writing during this period compellingly argued that separatist feminist identity and politics based on the biological sameness of women (and difference from men) relied upon the marginalization of women of color from the women’s movement and the representation of feminist issues in politics. In addition to erecting rigid and essentialist boundaries around feminist identity and consequently excluding gender non-conforming people and people who are transgender, these writers explained that the elevation of biological femaleness as a precondition for membership created a false choice between mobilizing one’s identity as a woman *or* one’s identity as a person of color. In other words, as a result of the strict tenant of separatism that one must avoid and oppose interactions with men, one could be a feminist

¹²⁴ Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 10.

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.¹²⁵

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

¹²⁵ 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.¹²⁶ 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.¹²⁷

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.

¹²⁶ 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).

¹²⁷ “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.¹²⁸

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."¹²⁹ 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.

¹²⁸ 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.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

These choices and their regulatory affects extended beyond marginalizing women of color from separatism and the women's movement. Those who did not conform to the separatist tenet of androgyny and a particular understanding of lesbian identity also expressed feeling coerced out of the women's movement and denied both feminist and lesbian identification.¹³⁰ Chrystos, a Native American feminist, for example, explained at length the ways in which the rigid boundaries and requirements of separatism resulted in their¹³¹ exclusion:

I have felt less understanding between difference races and from many lesbian women than I do from straight people [sic] At least their heterosexual indifference allows me more freedom to be myself I felt so much stricture and censorship from lesbians I was supposed to be a carpenter to prove I was a real dyke My differences were sloughed over None of them came to a pow wow or an AIM fundraiser to see about me¹³²

In this statement, Chrystos identifies the ways that the boundaries of lesbian and feminist identities put forth by those advocating separatism resulted in their intense discomfort and also isolation. This latter sense of being cut off from solidarity or coalitions is evidenced in the observation that while Chrystos was provisionally welcomed in the women's movement, members of the women's movement did not make an effort to express solidarity with Native politics by giving money or attending American Indian Movement (AIM) events. Furthermore, like Yamada, Chrysto's reference to the need to "prove I was a real dyke" demonstrates the ways in which the narrow boundaries put forth by separatists regulated expressions of identity. More specifically, Chrystos conveys

¹³⁰ Separatists critiqued presenting in feminine ways as an attempt to appeal to men and patriarchal expectations of beauty. On the other hand, presenting as masculine was also condemned for the ways that it suggested that power and access could be obtained by imitating masculinity.

¹³¹ Chrystos does not use gender pronouns and I use "they" or "their" as a result.

¹³² Chrystos, "I Don't Understand Those Who Have Turned Away from Me," in *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds. Cherríe L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002), 72 (emphasis mine).

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.¹³³ After comparing the presence of a transsexual woman¹³⁴ 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.*”¹³⁵ 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.¹³⁶

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.”¹³⁷ 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

¹³³ 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.

¹³⁴ 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.

¹³⁵ Morgan, “Lesbianism,” 180 (emphasis in original).

¹³⁶ 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).

¹³⁷ 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.¹³⁸ Transsexual-identified lesbian women were also targeted for exclusions and were often subject to vitriol.¹³⁹ 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.¹⁴⁰ Much like Morgan, these

¹³⁸ 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.

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

¹⁴⁰ 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

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.¹⁴¹

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)

¹⁴¹ 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.¹⁴²

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.”¹⁴³ 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.”

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ 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.¹⁴⁴

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:

¹⁴⁴ 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.

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference; those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are black, who are older, know that *survival is not an academic skill*. It is learning how to make common cause with those other identified as outside the structures, in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths.¹⁴⁵

Lorde's refusal to link these politics explicitly with coalitional mobilizations, as Reagon does, as well as Lorde's focus on "society's definition" and "structures" directs politics towards mobilizations against all sources of oppression. That is, whereas coalitions can be put together and dissembled quickly and rely upon the maintenance of boundaries between groups, the politics advocated for by Lorde prioritize on-going solidarity and enduring opposition to patriarchal and racial domination as they are mediated by laws and institutions. In these ways, the boundaries between groups are not adhered to, as they are with coalitions, but are rather generative of politics.

Conclusions

By the conclusion of the 1970s, several competing constructions of lesbian feminist identity and politics were evolving. Black and Third World feminists continued to challenge the perceived dominance of separatist constructions of lesbian identity by advocating political identities and agendas that were in opposition to feminist identity as androgynous, biologically female, and white. As the preceding analysis shows, these political solutions favored tapping differences as a source for political mobilization, either through coalitions or through a politics of solidarity. At the same time, and as I will show in chapter four, radical lesbian feminists continued to put forth the normative construction of lesbian feminist identity as white and biologically female by defining

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 108 (emphasis in original).

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."¹⁴⁶

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*

¹⁴⁶ 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.”¹⁴⁷

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

¹⁴⁷ 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.¹⁴⁸ 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 1973.¹⁴⁹ 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.¹⁵⁰ 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

¹⁴⁸ 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).

¹⁴⁹ Stein, *Rethinking*, 114.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

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

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.¹⁵² 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.¹⁵³ 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,

¹⁵¹ 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.

¹⁵² Ghaziani, *The Dividends of Dissent*, 54.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 42.

“Activists had their hands too full with gender parity and racial inclusion to deal with this particular issue.”¹⁵⁴ 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.¹⁵⁵ 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

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 63.

¹⁵⁵ 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.¹⁵⁶ 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.¹⁵⁷

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.¹⁵⁸ 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

¹⁵⁶ Stein, *Rethinking*, 147

¹⁵⁷ 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.

¹⁵⁸ 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.¹⁵⁹

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.¹⁶⁰ 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.¹⁶¹ 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.

¹⁵⁹ Stein, *Rethinking*, 150; Stryker, *Transgender History*, 113.

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

¹⁶¹ *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.”¹⁶² 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

¹⁶² 7301, Box 1, Folder 2 “1976 NGTF Founding Documents,” 1.

enforcement training for officers responding to crimes.¹⁶³ 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.¹⁶⁴ 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

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

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

Act.¹⁶⁵ 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.¹⁶⁶

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

¹⁶⁵ 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).

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

lesbian communities.”¹⁶⁷ 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.¹⁶⁸

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

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

¹⁶⁸ 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.¹⁶⁹

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

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 3.

represented by NGTF, analogies such as these project a specific lesbian or gay-identified subject under the aegis of “lesbian and gay politics” by foreclosing the potential for seeing sexuality as intersecting with racial, ethnic, or religious identification. This construction, advanced through analogies, effectively presumes a particular lesbian and gay subject – one who is out of the closet and white – and furthermore implies that those who inflict violence on lesbians and gay men are outside of the boundaries constructed by these analogies. In other words, the perpetrators of violence against lesbians and gay men are implicitly poor people of color who act out their racial or cultural prejudices against homosexuality through physical and verbal abuse.¹⁷⁰

This analysis shows that conflicts pertaining to the definitions of lesbian and gay identities along with debates over the priorities to be advanced in the name of “gay and lesbian” politics were resolved by constructing lesbian and gay identities along a single, legible axis of identity: sexuality. Political actors pursued this unitary construction of gay identity in efforts to pose gay people as a large, unified, and marginalized group in need of legal recognition that should be considered similar to, but not overlapping with, other marginalized groups. As this analysis of HCSA mobilizations demonstrates, the political goals advanced in conjunction with this dominant framing of lesbian and gay identity, specifically the HCSA, further defined these borders of lesbian and gay identity in association with whiteness.

¹⁷⁰ The association of people of different racial and ethnic groups with anti-gay violence was premised on the idea that these groups were influenced by cultures of “homophobia” that made them act out violently. Linking racial and ethnic groups with naturalized violence against gay men and lesbians effectively erased lesbian and gay people within these groups and successfully constructed perpetrators of violence exclusively as people of color, see Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, chap. 4.

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.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ 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.¹⁷²

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.”¹⁷³ 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.

¹⁷² Ibid., 2.

¹⁷³ 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.”¹⁷⁴ 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.”¹⁷⁵ 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.

¹⁷⁴ 7713, Box 34, Folder 14, “The War Conference Update,” 1.

¹⁷⁵ 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.”¹⁷⁶ 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-

¹⁷⁶ 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.¹⁷⁷

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

¹⁷⁷ 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.¹⁷⁸

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

¹⁷⁸ 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.¹⁷⁹

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,

¹⁷⁹ 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.¹⁸⁰

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.¹⁸¹ 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.¹⁸² 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.¹⁸³

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

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹⁸¹ 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).

¹⁸² 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).

¹⁸³ 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.”¹⁸⁴ 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

¹⁸⁴ 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.”¹⁸⁵ 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

¹⁸⁵ 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.'¹⁸⁶

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

¹⁸⁶ 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.¹⁸⁷ 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

¹⁸⁷ 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.¹⁸⁸ 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.¹⁸⁹

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

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

¹⁸⁹ *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.¹⁹⁰

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,

¹⁹⁰ 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.¹⁹¹ 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

¹⁹¹ 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.”¹⁹² 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.”¹⁹³ 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.”¹⁹⁴ 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*

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

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

would be represented in these electoral and media strategies was broached in other parts of The Final Statement, particularly with respect to gender and racial diversity.

On this latter point, the “Final Statement on The War Conference” continued by identifying that those who took part in the meeting were, “woefully underrepresented by people of color.” It also cited the slim representation for those who are “physically challenged” alongside noting concern for the lack of geographic diversity among the participants at The War Conference.¹⁹⁵ It outlined the proposed solutions to these problems, including the suggestion that, “In order to ensure full participation of all the members of our diverse community, we must commit to gender parity, and to inclusion of at least twenty-five percent people of color in all aspects of our organizing and political work.”¹⁹⁶ This proposal reflected the strategy for representation used by the organizers of the 1987 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights and was seen as a way to structurally address the lack of representation for people of color in the agendas of lesbian and gay interest groups.¹⁹⁷ Articulating this goal in a document intended to set the national agenda of lesbian and gay politics concentrated attention on strategies to ensure gender and racial diversity.

Structural shifts to enhance racial and gender diversity such as these were met by skepticism from those who were shut out of gay political organizing by the construction of gay identity as white, male, and gender normative, and critics underscored in their writings and speeches that mandating quotas for diversity would be largely symbolic

¹⁹⁵ 7301, Box 258, Folder 2, “Final Statement on the War Conference, Feb. 28, 1988,” 2.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ The 1987 National March on Washington organizing committee required that each participating organization send equal numbers of male and female representatives and meet racial quotas, see Ghaziani, *The Dividends of Dissent*, chap. 7.

inclusions with little to no impact on shifting the dominant construction of gay identity as something pertaining specifically to gay, white, and gender normative men.

Darrell Yates Rist, a journalist, raised these and other issues in letters and articles targeting political actors at the helm of The War Conference.¹⁹⁸ These publications reveal the extent to which the focus on concerns held by white, gay men by the political actors at The War Conference organized other voices out of the gay identity and politics. For example, in a letter to one of The War Conference organizers, elements of which were later published in *The Nation*, Rist introduced the problem of racial diversity in The War Conference from his perspective, writing that:

It is enough for me to say that we – an organizing committee whose active members are all white but one and whose 47 listed members are all white (I believe) but two – cannot speak or think for others whose lives are at best a vague conception to us.¹⁹⁹

Yates went on to explain that while the invitation letter for The War Conference had made the urgency facing lesbian and gay men very clear, he could not attend because: “AIDS and the rising political aggression of bigots is not excuse. We have been in an emergency situation since the inception of the movement – and have always condoned our narrow mindedness by appealing to the exigency of immediate action.”²⁰⁰ These reasons for refusing the invitation to The War Conference by Yates reflect the ways that backlash influenced the narrow construction of gay identity. According to Yates, the

¹⁹⁸ Rist also published a widely-read piece on gay and lesbian politics in *The Nation* shortly following The War Conference meeting. In it, he criticized the gay (and lesbian) preoccupation with AIDS when compared to the relative neglect for the large number of homeless gay youth, many of whom engaged in sex work for survival. His most trenchant critique pointed to the vast disparity of funding between the Gay Men’s Health Crisis, which was well-funded and predominantly served white gay men, and the less-funded Hetrick-Martin Institute, which served gay and lesbian youth, the majority of whom were Black or Latino. See Darrell Yates Rist, “AIDS as apocalypse: the deadly costs of an obsession,” *The Nation*, February 13, 1989.

¹⁹⁹ 7301, Box 258, Folder 2 “Letter from Darrell Yates Rist to Michael Shower, Jan. 20, 1988,” 1.

²⁰⁰ 7301, Box 258, Folder 2, “Final Statement on the War Conference, Feb. 28, 1988,” 2.

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.”²⁰¹

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

²⁰¹ Ibid.

following the call for increased diversity in lesbian and gay interest groups, The Final Statement goes on to explain that:

We are mindful of the invisibility of our community. As long as the overwhelming majority of our community remains closeted we will continue to be dismissed. 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.²⁰²

Here, again, the political actors responsible for The War Conference articulate the tight and purportedly necessary relationship between coming out and political action. This is achieved in the discourse of The War Conference Final Statement by casting remaining in the closet as an act that has severe consequences for politics (“invisibility”), sex (“impotence”), the body (“crippling”), and life (“even death”). Reading this forceful articulation of the need to come out in the context of an extended meditation on how to enhance diversity within gay and lesbian political organizations reveals that the authors of The War Conference strategy saw the lack of diversity in the organization as a burden for people of color to shoulder. Statements such as these carried pressing implications for what came to be known of gay identity. By shifting the blame to people of color for not coming out, articulations such as these re-centered what was gradually evolving as the normative construction of gay identity: gay men who are white and gender normative, and thus more advantageously positioned to come out with relatively few consequences. This effectively defined the boundaries of gay identity to only include those who come out, which limited the external representation of gay identity put forth by War Conference leaders to white gay men who are gender normative.

²⁰² Ibid., 3.

Conclusions

The preceding exploration of representation at two different sites reveals how and to what effect within-group marginalization influences the boundaries and meanings associated with particular political identities. With respect to the construction of gay political identity, the mobilization of support for the HCSA shows that the need to articulate lesbians and gay men as a unified minority group in order to motivate legislative gains entailed elevating sexuality as the defining feature of lesbian and gay identities. Elevating sexuality in this way served the purpose of casting lesbian and gay identities – and the discrimination faced by lesbians and gay men – as unique and in need of legal intervention. This construction of gay identity was achieved in the context of the HCSA by listing gay identity *alongside* other recognized minority categories – racial and religious – in order to underscore consideration for gay identity as a marginalized group in need of federal recognition. Gay identity (with lesbian identity absorbed into it) is thus unified in this articulation, but does not intersect with race, ethnicity, ability, gender, class, or religion. Gay identity is instead represented as a discrete identity category with sexuality as the defining feature.

Analysis of The War Conference plan to pursue a more visible presence in electoral politics and the media illustrates that these strategies for representation were premised upon challenging stigmas associated with lesbian and gay identities, and were consequently seen by leaders to merit a similarly narrow projection of lesbian and gay identities as a unique and bounded minority group. Gay identity, in War Conference discourse, is not characterized by internal diversity. It is furthermore not the work of The War Conference organizations to foster diversity in meaningful ways. Rather, according

to the War Conference representations, gay identity is first and foremost distinguished by the unique concerns and stigmas that stem from same-sex sexuality. This is demonstrated in the emphasis put on coming out to enhance diversity with relatively little attention paid to fostering political, social, and legal changes that might alleviate some of the pressures faced by gay and lesbian people of color, people who are poor, and transgender people in coming out and taking up political activity. In sum, the goals of The War Conference to enhance both electoral and media visibility for lesbians and gay men entails the projection of a monolithic representation of lesbian and gay identities, one that constructs white, middle-class, and gender-normative lesbians and gay men as the normative lesbian and gay subjects.

Whereas the Gay Liberationists fractured into many different identity-based groups – particularly the split between gay men and lesbians – this chapter shows how the increasingly formalized efforts on behalf of gay men and lesbians premised unity across these groups based on their shared whiteness to the exclusion of other identifications, specifically race but also gender identity.

The following chapter explores these dynamics in relation to the evolution of transgender political identity, which was introduced in the early 1990s as a way to describe a wide variety of non-normative gender identifications.

CHAPTER FIVE: Transgender Political Identity as a Coalition

Introduction

In 1994, Phyllis Frye, the founder of the International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy (ICTLEP), circulated an open letter to protest the exclusion of transgender people from the title of a march to be held in New York City that spring. Stonewall 25: The International March on the United Nations to Affirm the Human Rights of Lesbian and Gay People was organized by the International Lesbian and Gay Association (IGLA) and used the anniversary of the Stonewall riots as an occasion to target the United Nations to make the case for including gay and lesbian people in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Though the IGLA mission statement, platform, and organizing documents for the march emphasized the inclusion of bisexual, drag, and transgender communities alongside lesbian women and gay men in the Stonewall 25 activities,²⁰³ Frye passionately argued that the exclusion of transgender people from the title of Stonewall 25 underscored the lack of attention to transgender concerns by lesbian and gay interest groups in Washington:

The title is important. If we do not make the title, we do not make the language. If we do not make the language, we are left out of legislation? [sic] Is transgender defined in "sexual orientation" or is "gender identification" anywhere to be found in the proposed federal civil rights legislation being pushed in Congress by "lesbian and gay" activists?

²⁰³ Listing bisexual, transgender, and drag communities alongside lesbian and gay was an effort to recognize that many people who choose to dress in men or women's clothing do not necessarily identify as transgender. The organizers of the protests to include transgender people in the title of the Stonewall 25 march consequently included drag communities as a gesture of solidarity. See Leslie Feinberg speech at Cornell University, April 20, 1994, Human Sexuality Collection, #7572, Cornell University, New York. Franklin Fry, one of the lead IGLA organizers defended the inclusion of bisexual, transgender and drag communities in an open letter to march supporters, see Letter to community members, May 1994, Human Sexuality Collection, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Collection #7301, Box 20, Folder 2, Cornell University, New York.

Without being disingenuous, I think not. If I am wrong, I will celebrate being corrected.²⁰⁴

In addition to making a strong claim for the inclusion of transgender people in gay and lesbian political actions and interests, Frye's statement on the eve of the Stonewall 25 march succinctly captures the inchoate status of transgender as an identity category in the early 1990s. Although "transgender" was occasionally used to describe individuals living as men or women since the 1970s, the terms transsexual (to describe a person who has pursued either surgery or hormones to alter their sex) and transvestite (a person who dresses in women's or men's clothing) were more regularly used, and historians have argued that was not until the early 1990s that "transgender" began to circulate as a social and political identity category with connotations of gender variance associated with it.²⁰⁵ Frye's questions in 1994 about how to define "transgender" – as either gender identity or sexual orientation – shows how the boundaries of transgender identity were relatively unsettled as recently as twenty years ago.

This chapter examines the ways that transgender activists and political leaders worked to construct meanings associated with transgender identity during the 1990s, particularly as they made concerted efforts to formulate the boundaries of transgender as both a unified identity category and a burgeoning political movement. It explores why, how and with what consequences what is currently taken as a unified political identity category based on similar embodied experiences and shared social positions was actually constructed by leaders and activists from a coalition of various identities, or what

²⁰⁴ Phyllis Frye, Letter to followers of the unfolding Stonewall 25 events. May 12, 1994, Human Sexuality Collection, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Collection #7301, Box 20, Folder 24, Cornell University, New York.

¹³⁸ For a comprehensive history of the emergence of transgender as a complement or alternative to transsexual and transvestite, see Stryker, *Transgender History*, chap. 1.

transgender-identified activist Leslie Feinberg described in 1991 as an umbrella term to unite “gender outlaws: transvestites, transsexuals, drag queens and drag kings, cross-dressers, bull-daggers, stone butches, androgynes, diesel dykes or berdache.”²⁰⁶ In the following analysis, these varied and disparate groups are foregrounded as they were brokered into a political coalition by leaders and, over time, constructed into a unified political identity category. Devoting attention to the groups listed above in transgender identity construction – specifically as they are held central to (or distanced from) the meanings and boundaries of transgender identity constructed by political actors – furthers the argument that within-group marginalization is productive of identity-based groups.

The three political processes focused on in this dissertation are used to examine the construction of transgender identity in the discourse of transgender activists and leaders during the 1990s. In the first section, I examine conflicts over meanings of biological sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation in the discourse of the early thinkers of transgender identity. I show how conflicts over the definitions of each of these categories were resolved at the site of transgender identity by advancing what was understood to be the socially constructed and contingent nature of gender identity alongside the rejection of rigid conceptions of binary sex rooted in biological markers such as chromosomes and physical traits. The next section traces the ways in which this evolving understanding of transgender identity as fluid and broadly inclusive shaped the goals of the organizations established to represent transgender people in politics. This analysis shows how backlash in the form of exclusions and stigmatization from other progressive organizations conditioned the boundaries of transgender political identity,

²⁰⁶ Leslie Feinberg, “Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader Volume 1*, eds. Susan Striker and Eric Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 206.

specifically in the direction of broad inclusion to capture various identities and forge coalitions across other groups. The final section details the representation of political interests by transgender organizations at the close of the decade. By comparing how the transgender identity and group was represented across varying sites, this analysis illustrates how internal exclusions and marginalizations – particularly for transgender men, transgender people of color, and people who are gender nonconforming – within the transgender group were produced alongside the construction of transgender political identity. The analysis begins below with a focus on conflict and transgender identity construction.

Background on Transgender Identity: 1991 – 1994

Although the first use of the word “transgender” has been disputed by scholars, it is widely agreed that Virginia Prince – the founder of various organizations and publications for men who sought social connections with other men who enjoy wearing women’s clothing – revived it in the 1970s to echo the introduction of gender identity in scientific circles.²⁰⁷ Initially advanced by Robert Stoller, a psychiatrist working in the areas of sex and sexuality, the concept of gender identity was used to consolidate the varying terms that medical and psychiatric professionals used to describe the “tremendous areas of behavior, feelings, thoughts, and fantasies that are related to the sexes and yet do not have primarily biological connotations.”²⁰⁸ Stoller’s introduction of gender identity attempted to sever biological sex from psychosocial or performed gender identity, allowing biological sex and gender identity to be considered discrete categories

²⁰⁷ Cristan Williams, a trans-identified historian, has written extensively on this subject on her personal website. See “Tracking Transgender: the Historical Truth” at cristinwilliams.com

²⁰⁸ Robert J. Stoller, *Sex and Gender: The Development of Masculinity and Femininity* (London: Karnac Books, 1994), vii.

in both scientific and academic circles. For Prince, then, the term “transgender” described the sense of moving across (i.e., transiting) masculine and feminine identities (i.e., gender) without surgery or other medically-mediated steps to align gender identity with gender presentation. Although Prince’s transgender appellation faded away in favor of existing terms that dominated medical and psychiatric contexts like transsexual (one who pursues surgeries or hormone therapies to confirm one’s sense of gender identity) and transvestite (one who engages in cross-dressing) a few years after Prince’s initial use of it, it resurfaced in the early 1990s as some activists and movement leaders revived it as an umbrella term to describe a coalition of disparate groups that all were seen to fall outside of perceived gender norms.

As the description of Prince’s initial use of transgender suggests, the transgender political identity that emerged in the 1990s build directly on the analytic separation of sex and gender identity established in the United States beginning in the early twentieth century. Historian Joanne Meyerowitz describes the historical shift from viewing what is now referred to as gender identity – one’s sense of femininity and masculinity in interpersonal and social contexts – as necessarily emanating from biological sex to gender identity as a function of psychological and social influences.²⁰⁹ Meyerowitz explains that at the beginning of the twentieth century, the term “sex” was expansively defined by doctors to include both anatomy and behavioral traits. By the mid-twentieth century, however, doctors and social scientists began to explore different ways to parse physical traits from behaviors, and by the close of the century deployed three categories to explain what had been previously been understood simply as sex. Embodied and inherited traits, such as

²⁰⁹ Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

chromosomes, genes, hormones, and physical markers were indexed under biological sex. The individual's internal sense of masculinity and femininity, and the social roles associated with each, were conceptualized as gender identities. A third distinct category emerged at the end of the twentieth century as "sexuality," defined by desire, attraction, and related behaviors. The significance of the separation of sex, gender identity, and sexuality in contemporary transgender identity is argued by historian Susan Stryker to point to, "the central issue of transgender politics – that the sex of the body does not bear any *necessary* or *deterministic* relationship to the social category in which that body lives."²¹⁰ Thus, whereas gender identity was previously seen as emanating from biological sex, the evolving understanding of transgender identity maintained that gender identification does not inhere in the body, but is instead contingent and situated in the realm of self-expression, social roles, and perceptions. This emphasis on the separation of gender identity and biological sex played a strong role in shaping the boundaries of transgender identity and associated interests as transgender evolved as a salient category for identification, which is evidenced by the move to detach "sex" from "transsexual" and replace it with "gender," i.e., *transgender*.

The influence of the analytic separation of gender identity from biological sex that took place in medical and psychiatric contexts is illustrated in the discourse and debates of activists and political figures in the early 1990s working to revive "transgender" as a signifier and introduce it as a cohesive identity category, specifically in the realm of politics and political action. Central to these conflicts over the various meanings to be associated with transgender identity were questions related to how it is that gender variance should be understood: is it a fact of biological traits that can and should be

²¹⁰ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 11.

medically altered with surgeries and hormone therapies in order to align gender identity and gender presentation; or is gender identity a product of social and cultural factors that is open to many different possible gender expressions? Would transgender be its own discrete category or one that would contain within it a variety of disparate categories and groups? How should transgender people relate to the diagnostic categories imposed upon them or the medical and psychiatric professionals who claimed to help them?

The following discourse analysis of the writings and speeches produced by the early thinkers of transgender as a political and social identity traces how the above questions were resolved through conflicts to introduce and assert the very existence of transgender identity. Whereas previous chapters focused on conflicts that took place internally among similarly identified members, this analysis of transgender political identity construction is necessarily different for a number of reasons. To begin, transgender identity and a significant group of people identified as transgender during this period did not yet exist because the predominant identity categories were transsexual or transvestite. The conflicts explored below consequently were not waged among transgender-identified people, but rather directed towards medical and psychiatric doctors as well as radical lesbian feminists (such as Robin Morgan from the previous chapter), all of whom imposed categories such as transsexual and transvestite (among many others) on people who expressed the desire to live as or pass as men or women. The disputes and ruptures sought by the following political actors put forth transgender as an alternative to these diagnostic and politically stigmatized identities.

Sandy Stone: Counter-discourse

The very early phases of the debates over these questions about transgender identity were staged against the backdrop of the terms “transsexual” and “transvestite” as the dominant ways to describe gender variance, both inside and outside of medical discourse. Since transsexual was a category derived by medical doctors for medical purposes – namely diagnosing people for sex confirmation treatments like hormones and surgery – it adhered to the conception of gender identity as rooted in biological sex and associated traits.

One of the first efforts to shift meanings associated with biological sex and transsexuality was articulated by Sandy Stone, a self-identified transsexual lesbian pursuing a PhD under science studies feminist Donna Haraway.²¹¹ Stone’s widely-circulated 1991 essay, “The *Empire Strikes Back*,” challenged the exclusion of transsexual women from lesbian feminist politics and group membership as it was articulated by many radical and feminists, including Robin Morgan’s speech from chapter three. Stone specifically addressed lesbian radical feminist activist Janice Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire* in her essay, taking aim at three themes put forth by Raymond to justify the exclusion of transsexual people from lesbian and feminist political organizing: 1) the presence of transsexuals in female only spaces as a violation tantamount to rape, 2) transsexuality as performance rather than an identity with social and biological roots, and 3) transsexuals as boundary violators. As the previous analysis of identity construction during Gay Liberation shows, lesbian separatists used analogies and linkages such as the three above to foreclose membership for transgender women in ways that aimed to shore

²¹¹ “Transgender” is used throughout this chapter. “Transsexual” or “transvestite” are used when the political actors themselves use these terms.

up the boundaries of both lesbian and feminist identities. In other words, the very meanings and boundaries of these identities were achieved by marginalizing and engaging in violent exclusions of all those who were lesbian-identified but challenged the predominant construction of lesbian as biologically female, including butch and femme lesbians as well as transsexual women.

It was against this backdrop that Stone launched her campaign to systematically dismantle radical lesbian justifications for stigmatizing and excluding transgender women. Stone begins her essay by synthesizing these themes to highlight the urgent need to reconfigure discourses about transsexual identity:

Here on the gender borders at the close of the twentieth century, with the faltering of phallographic hegemony and the bumptious appearance of heteroglossic origin accounts, we find the epistemologies of white male medical practice, the rage of radical feminist theories and the chaos of lived gendered experience meeting on the battlefield of the transsexual body: a hotly contested site of cultural inscription, a meaning machine for the production of ideal type.²¹²

Although radical lesbian feminists and the white male medical practice make for strange bedfellows in almost any account, Stone's association of them here lays out the ways that the transsexual body has been used by various actors to assert definitions of male and female (biological sex) and masculinity and femininity (gender identity). Indeed, for Stone, the transsexual body is a "battlefield" where medical science attempts to assert its dominance over biology to alter bodies and thus confirm cultural and scientific expectations of men and women. Similarly, radical feminists are able to assert the coherence of "woman" by posing it in opposition to its binary other – man – and by extension, the transsexual woman, by locating transsexuals strictly in the realm of

²¹² Sandy Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" in *Transgender Studies*, 230.

performance, and not biology. The paradox, and political challenges faced by transsexuals, thus emerges in Stone's account in a particular form: If transsexuals are viewed by medical doctors strictly within the province of biological sex and by radical feminists as squarely within the realm of gender identity (i.e., performance), then what social and political possibilities are available to transsexuals other than, as Frye puts it (in the introduction to this chapter), to disappear?

Rather than disappearing into the silences imposed by doctors or the peripheral status decreed by radical feminists, Stone contends that transsexuals should shrug off their invisibility in politics to disrupt the gender binary and challenge the societal structures that reinforce it:

I am suggesting that in the transsexual's erased history we can find a story disruptive to the accepted discourses of gender, which originates from within the gender minority itself and which can make common cause with other oppositional discourses....For a transsexual, as a transsexual, to generate a true, effective and representational counterdiscourse is to speak from outside the boundaries of gender, beyond the constructed oppositional notes which have been predefined as the only positions from which discourse is possible.²¹³

Stone takes for granted the separation of biological sex from gender identity, but does not see possibilities for either to represent transsexual experience or identity in their current, predefined formulations. At issue here is not the limited possibilities of the terms themselves. Rather, it is the fact that the categories of biological sex and gender identity have not been shaped or defined by those identifying with gender variance, but are instead imposed from outside by doctors, psychologists, and social stigmas. By "generating a representational counterdiscourse," Stone makes two simultaneous calls to political action by engaging in conflict over the meaning of transsexual identities. The

²¹³ Ibid.

first is for transsexual-identified people to claim ownership over the terms used to describe and identify their experiences. The second is to attempt, as much as possible, to have this counterdiscourse faithfully convey experiences of transsexual-identified people themselves.

Stone continues to explain that in making the call for a representational counterdiscourse, she is: “rearticulating one of the arguments for solidarity which has been developed by gays, lesbians and people of color.”²¹⁴ For Stone, then, solidarity across transsexual-identified men and women, self-identified transvestites, drag queens, and butch lesbians would be gained by forming authentic relationships through experiences with each other, rather than across impersonal narratives and categorizations mediated by doctors, psychiatrists, or feminists. Recalling Audre Lorde’s call to see differences as a generative of political action, Stone’s urging to build bridges across experiences of gender identification suggests that these relationships will align them with other progressive movements since, as Stone implies with her analogy, the same societal structures that produce inequality for women and people of color are often the same structures that impose sex and gender ideals on transsexuals.

These analogies to women and Black people function as they do elsewhere in the discourse of identity construction. In the case of Stone’s articulation, analogies are used to pose transsexual as an explicitly political identity, one that is comparable to gays and lesbians and various groups comprising “people of color,” all of which were engaged in protracted (and occasionally successful) rights struggles at the time. Thus, with the call for a “representational counterdiscourse,” Stone finalizes the significant move away from medical and psychological discourses of gender variances, and situates transsexual-

²¹⁴ Ibid., 232.

identified people in explicitly political terrain by aligning them with groups that were represented by very active social movements and political organizations at the time. This rupture with medical and psychiatric categories and movement towards explicitly political terrain set the stage for other activists and thinkers of transgender political identity.

As illustrated throughout this study, however, these analogies and simultaneous efforts to link transsexual people with active political groups put forth a construction of transsexual as a group that does not overlap with those to which it is being compared. In this case, the comparison to people of color, in particular, suggests that the transsexual individuals to whom Stone refers are likely white and heterosexual because the solidarity that she believes they should seek is *similar* to the solidarity developed by other groups, specifically “gays, lesbians, and people of color.” Considering an alternate construction that emphasizes *extending* solidarity across groups, rather than imitating it *within* the transsexual group, reveals the narrowness of the construction of transsexual put forth by Stone. While her vision succeeded in articulating the pressing need for solidarity across transsexuals, it did so by posing them as a discrete and bounded group that is not comprised of multiple and overlapping identifications.

Though Stone did not use the word transgender to describe her intervention until many years later, her work to engage in conflict over the meaning of gender variance in order to disrupt the adherence to biologically determined sex – male and female – and her post-structural turn to experience instead of narrative was used by activists as the motivating impetus to revisit the term *transgender*, in opposition to *transsexual*. An activist named Holly Boswell, who was one of the first political actors to explicitly use

“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.²¹⁵

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

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

umbrella term – or an identity category defined along a single dimension – that would characterize the “continuing dialogue” regarding transgender identity moving forward. It is then important to note that for Boswell at this point in her essay, transgender identity does not contain within its boundaries *all* possible gender identifications. Rather, her conceptualization of transgender is located on a spectrum anchored by the poles of biological sex (“the transsexual person”) and gender identity (“the crossdresser”) as its own, discrete category that would be similar to the “androgyne,” or an individual who purposefully blends masculine and feminine characteristics.

The stakes for this conceptualization of transgender identity becomes clear when Boswell writes:

Many people confuse sex with gender. Sex is biological, whereas gender is psychosocial. So if biology does not truly dictate gender or personality, then dichotomies of masculinity and femininity only serve to coerce or restrict the potential variety of ways of being human.²¹⁶

Here again, the conflicts to separate sex and gender from medical discourses are evidenced. Boswell indicates the separation of biological sex from gender identity that shapes her thinking with respect to the boundaries of transgender identity. Gender identity, however, mirrors the binary of biological sex with masculinity and femininity, which Boswell argues is too limiting for the full expression of “being human.”²¹⁷ This appeal, and linkage, to the humanity of transgender people is noteworthy with respect to future transgender political organizing for two reasons.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ These allusions to the socially constructed nature of sex alongside gender echo Anne Fausto Sterling’s influential 1985 *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women and Men* that critically explored many of the scientific attempts to identify and settle sex difference in the body, including chromosomes and secondary sex traits.

First, it implicates medical and psychiatric categories and identifications as having the effect of dehumanizing transgender subjects. Returning to Stone's essay, for instance, this dynamic is explained as:

The foundational idea for the gender dysphoria clinics was first, to study an interesting and potentially fundable human aberration; second, to provide help, as they understood the term, for a "correctable problem."²¹⁸

Outlining the mobilizing impetus for the gender dysphoria clinic with terms that range from "human aberration" to "correctable problem" illustrates the ways in which transsexual people were not viewed as autonomous or agentic subjects, but rather as scientific and medical puzzles to be solved with new treatments and surgeries. Boswell's assertion of the "humanity" of transgender people is influenced by this specific history, and should be read as an effort to make a radical break (i.e., engage in conflict) with that history to move transgender away from scientific discourse and towards social and political discourse.

Second, Boswell's emphasis on the humanity of transgender people occurs against the backdrop of a growing "women's rights are human rights" discourse from feminists.²¹⁹ These appeals to humanity across both feminist and transgender political rhetorics sought to shift rights claims away from the particularity of gender – experiences and socialization – to situate rights claims in the paradigm of universalism. Put another way, the appeal to the humanity of transgender subjects posed by Boswell does not aim to make claims about difference that are often paired with calls for inclusion in the polity.

²¹⁸ Stone, "Empire," 227.

²¹⁹ For instance, Charlotte Bunch's influential "Women's Rights are Human Rights: Towards a Revision of Human Rights" was published in 1990 and made the argument that the narrow definition of human rights in relation to state violations of civil and political liberties precluded serious consideration of women's rights. She contends that women's right ought to be reconceptualized specifically as women's human rights.

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.²²⁰

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

²²⁰ Holly Boswell, “Transgender Alternative,” 30.

provides some insight into why it is that she concludes on the note of transgender as an “all-encompassing” identification.

Boswell writes at the conclusion of her essay that, “many of the woes of this world might be resolved through gender liberation.” Phrasing the promise of transgender identity specifically as “liberation” echoes Stone’s interest in locating transgender identity firmly in *political* terrain alongside women’s liberation and black liberation movements, the successes of which are attributed in large part to the unity they are able to project in a political system that privileges cohesive movements that demonstrate critical mass. By projecting transgender identity in this way, Boswell foreshadows two aspects of transgender identity that would continue to evolve in the following years. The first is the efforts of future leaders and activists to pursue unity across different groups and the competing tendency to present transgender as a singular political identity category in its own right. The second aspect foreshadowed by Boswell was the ongoing tensions between casting transgender identity as broad and inclusive or narrow and exclusive of racial difference. These tensions over the boundaries of the transgender political identity and its proper membership demonstrate the ways that political actors play a significant role in shaping what comes to be known of groups, particularly as they make choices to include some groups and seek distance from others.

The following examination of another influential transgender political actor, Leslie Feinberg, gives some indication as to how these internal marginalizations and exclusions would continue to develop alongside the construction of transgender political identity.

Leslie Feinberg: Transgender as a Political Identity

In “Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come,” a widely-circulated pamphlet that was first published in 1992 and later appeared in a book-length project on transgender politics, the author, Leslie Feinberg, builds on the political possibilities outlined by Boswell, but with more precision. Whereas Boswell alternated between transgender identity as an all-encompassing identity category that would defy boundaries as well as a category located at the center of two poles anchored by cross-dressers and transsexuals, Feinberg frames the essay by explaining: “We are talking here about people who defy the ‘man’-made boundaries of gender. Gender: self-expression, not anatomy.”²²¹ By situating gender identity in opposition to categories of male and female imposed from the outside (and by “man,” no less), Feinberg refines the positions previously outlined by Stone and Boswell, and lays the intellectual foundations for two important features of transgender political identity. First, that the boundaries designating biological sex are, in fact, social constructions (i.e., “self-expression”) and not natural, preexisting truths. In addition to settling some of Boswell’s ambivalence around both gender identity and biological sex, this repudiation of biological sex helps to set the stage for the second defining feature of transgender politics: if biological sexes are social constructs, then gender identities are determined by the presentation and perception of one’s gender that can change on a daily basis, if one wishes, as a facet of self expression that can be erotic, social, or – importantly – political. In other words, gender identity can offer the opportunity for people to take control of the constructed categories that previously acted upon their lives as constraints and definitions imposed from the outside.

²²¹ Leslie Feinberg, “Transgender Liberation,” 205.

Feinberg's theoretical moves to establish both biological sex and gender identity as social constructions successfully suggests the political possibilities of transgender identity and people identifying with it:

In recent years a community has begun to emerge that is sometimes referred to as the gender or transgender community. Within our community is a diverse group of people who define ourselves in many different ways. Transgendered people are demanding the right to choose our own self-definitions.²²²

For Feinberg, transgender is not a singular and discrete identity to figure in between self-identified transsexuals and cross-dressers, or alongside lesbian and gay identities, as Stone and Boswell pose it. It is a coalition of identities that coheres around shared experiences of oppression that stem from the maintenance of gender norms, and as such includes anybody who has ever been subject to standards of hegemonic masculinity and femininity. According to Feinberg, then, a necessary first step for transgender liberation is about "trying to find words, however inadequate, that can connect us, that can capture what is similar about the oppression we endure..."²²³ Feinberg's conceptualization of transgender identity attempts to settle the conflict between transgender as a singular identity and an umbrella category by resisting a model of politics that locates political claims in presumably static identities. Feinberg instead endeavors to locate political demands in relation to the institutions that structure and maintain gender normativity, consequently resulting in oppression for all people who are perceived as challenging dominant gender norms. The significance of this construction of transgender identity and political agenda cannot be overstated, as this radical approach towards the institutions that create and maintain binary gender would come to define transgender politics in

²²² Ibid., 206.

²²³ Ibid.

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.²²⁴

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

²²⁴ Ibid.

stemming from the public policing of gender norms, Feinberg posed a significant challenge to the dominant gay and lesbian rights agenda at the time, which, in the context of the Supreme Court's ruling in *Bowers v Hardwick*, saw privacy and legislation to ensure safety as the most important issues facing lesbian women and gay men.

Posing this challenge to the gay and lesbian political agenda while also reconceptualizing the source of the dominant, and shared, threat for all of the groups demonstrates one of the first efforts by transgender activists to forge a type of prefigurative politics premised on broad inclusion. Elaborated by sociologist Wini Brienes, prefigurative politics refers to the alternative practices of social organization utilized by New Left movements to express disagreement and dissociation with mainstream social and political norms.²²⁵ For example, an anti-war group might express its solidarity with feminist politics by ensuring gender parity in leadership roles and mark a critique of the few women in positions of power at dominant institutions.²²⁶ In this case, Feinberg does not call upon gays and lesbians to admit transgender people into their movements to make a point about mainstream politics that typically serves the interests of straight-identified people. Rather, Feinberg models the inclusion central to transgender political identity by extending consideration of gay and lesbian political concerns alongside transgender identity and political interests. Envisioning transgender, lesbian, and gay politics as fluid and overlapping identities served as a critique of lesbian and gay political organizations, which the previous chapter shows had historically maintained

²²⁵ Wini Breines, *Community and Organization on the New Left, 1962-1968: The Great Refusal* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

²²⁶ These prefigurative practices of groups comprising the New Left has been described as an effort to foreshadow the utopia sought by movements, see Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 16.

rigid and impermeable boundaries to lesbian and gay identification that marginalized and actively excluded people identified with gender variance.

1990 – 1994: In Review and Looking Forward

Reviving transgender as the preferred way to refer to all iterations of gender variance marked a significant shift away from the identity categories derived by doctors and psychiatrists, such as transvestite and transsexual, and imagined a future for transgender as an explicitly public and political identity. Transgender identity, in other words, would not be imposed from the outside, but rather constructed and identified with by people who saw themselves as expressing iterations of gender that would fall under the umbrella of “transgender.” This rupture with medicalized discourse of gender normativity, as well as the erasures sought by radical lesbian separatists, offers an example of political actors constructing political identities through conflicts to assert particular meanings with a group. Transgender identity did not inhere in bodies, but was rather a *political* identity.

As evidenced in the discourse of transgender activists and thinkers in the early 1990s, the efforts to pose transgender as a political identity category did not come without complications, and further conflicts were staged in relation to the appropriate scope of the new identity. The linkage of transgender identity with human rights, in particular, subsumed many of the various identities that overlapped with transgender identity, such as race. This marginalizing dynamic was further demonstrated in the articulation of transgender political identity by some leaders as analogous to other politically active groups. The effects of these linkages and analogies – together with the conflicting spatial metaphors of transgender as a location between two poles on one hand,

and as an umbrella to capture all gender variance on the other – carried implications for the political agendas developed by political actors who sought to introduce organizations to represent transgender people in local and national politics.

The next section explores the ways that backlash, in the form of the historic stigmatization of gender variance from lesbian and gay organizing, further influenced the unsettled boundaries of transgender political identity and shaped the agenda of interests put forth by political actors.

A Movement Whose Time Has Come: 1993 – 1996

Stepping back in time to revisit the social groups that formed to provide a safe space for transsexual and transvestite-identified individuals underscores the ways in which transgender identity served as a radical departure from these rigidly-bounded and discrete identity categories derived from medical and psychiatric contexts. From the 1960s and through the 1970s, the conceptual separation of biological sex, gender identity, and sexuality informed the formation of several distinct groups and organizations to provide social spaces for those who identified as transsexual or transvestite. For example, men who identified as cross-dressers might have sought membership in Virginia Price's private social club, Tri-Ess, which limited membership to straight-identified men who enjoyed wearing women's clothing. Those who were active in the Civil Rights and anti-poverty movements of the Bay Area during the late 1960s might have also been members of activist groups like Conversion, Our Goal (COG) for self-identified transsexuals, or a group called Vanguard, which was comprised of people who did not pursue gender confirmation treatments, but lived their daily lives in their masculine or feminine gender identities. On the East coast, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, or STAR, was

founded by Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson after the 1969 Stonewall riots. It translated the “house” culture of drag balls into explicitly political work, providing food, shelter, and education to Black and Latino youths.²²⁷ Much later, groups like the Transexual Menace attracted those interested in grassroots activism to challenge the exclusion of transsexual-identified people from various progressive movements and spaces.

The social and political groups in this brief list provide just a few examples of the social organizations that proliferated to provide a safe space for various expressions of gender variance indexed under transsexual and transvestite. By the mid-1990s, however, the efforts by thinkers and activists such as Sandy Stone, Holly Boswell, and Leslie Feinberg to construct these varying identity categories as a unified identity – transgender – began to influence the formation of new social and political organizations. Whereas the social groups for people expressing gender variance historically represented identities along a single axis – transsexual, transvestite, or drag queen, for example – the political organizations founded in the mid-1990s to represent transgender-identified people aimed to mirror the broadly-drawn boundaries of the evolving transgender identity. In the same ways that transgender activists and thinkers projected transgender identity as an umbrella category to capture all those perceived to challenge dominant gender norms, the newly emerging transgender organizations of the mid-1990s fostered membership policies that

²²⁷ Drag balls in New York City were sites for dance and fashion competitions across different “houses,” many of which were organized by neighborhood, ethnicity, race, etc under the tutelage of a “house mother.” See Jennie Livingston’s 1991 documentary, *Paris is Burning*, which captured drag balls in New York City at the beginning of the 1990s.

were emphatically inclusive – they would not deny membership to anybody interested in becoming a “gender activist.”²²⁸

Backlash and Stigma

An important factor for understanding how it is that the transgender political identity constructed by political actors cohered around the value of inclusion is the fraught history of self-identified transsexuals and transvestites in other progressive political organizations, many of which stigmatized gender variance and excluded people with non-normative gender expressions from membership as a result. As detailed in the chapters on Gay Liberation, in the early 1970s, for example, self-identified transsexual women were targeted for their participation in feminist and lesbian feminist movements and aggressively excluded from “women-only” spaces. Indeed, the very definition of lesbian feminist politics was achieved through the elevation of biological woman and the consequent exclusion of transgender women. And the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was so successful at barring membership to people expressing gender variance that a variety of alternate liberation groups sprung up, including the Queens Liberation Front, which offered a political outlet for drag queens and self-identified transsexuals and transvestites. It was not only self-identified transsexuals who were stigmatized and excluded from progressive organizations and movements. Sociologist Henry Rubin describes the many ways that butch-identified lesbians (and their femme-identified counterparts) were organized out of lesbian social clubs for fear that they would confirm fears about lesbians as “mannish” (and femme women excluded as victims of false consciousness), and

²²⁸ Pat Califia, a self-identified transgender activist and prolific poet, explains that, “the growing visibility of the transsexual community has created an alternative: to identify as transgendered rather than female or male, and question the binary gender system that generates these labels. People who cannot ‘pass’ as men or women have little to lose by becoming outspoken gender activists.” See Pat Califia, *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1997), 225.

historian Nan Boyd's work on queer San Francisco recounts the emphasis on gender normativity in the membership policies of many of the homophile organizations active during the 1950s, which stigmatized feminine men and masculine women.²²⁹

By the 1980s, the pattern of explicitly organizing people expressing gender variance out of various progressive movements started to shift. The tragic circumstances of the AIDS epidemic began to erode the exclusionary policies of gay political organizations, as leaders came to realize that self-identified transsexuals were also disproportionately impacted by the public health crisis. Additionally, as shown in the previous chapter, the growing influence of the New Right and Christian Right in politics, as well as the complete lack of a political response to AIDS by the Reagan administration, suggested that lesbian and gay politics could benefit from a united approach to demonstrate critical mass behind shared agendas.²³⁰ Although some lesbian and gay political organizations began to demonstrate consideration for self-identified transsexuals in their political agendas during the 1980s in response to the inhospitable political climate, the experience of exclusion and stigmatization endured as leaders of lesbian and gay organizations engaged in group identity construction through the marginalization of "others" and the continued allocation of resources primarily to issues seen to directly impact gay men and lesbian women. Thus, by the close of the 1980s, the explicit stigmatization of transsexual-identified people had mostly ceased, but what evolved in its place were implicit exclusions from political agendas, the allocation of resources, and absence of trans-identified people from the mission statements of lesbian

²²⁹ Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 148-159.

²³⁰ For two comprehensive accounts of the early years of the AIDS epidemic and the government response, see Cohen, *Boundaries of Blackness* and Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).

and gay political organizations. This more insidious neglect and stigmatization provoked activism from various transsexual and transgender-identified individuals who made calls for inclusion alongside lesbian and gay men, such as in Phyllis Frye's letter from the beginning of this chapter.

This section shows how this backlash, in the form of explicit exclusion of transsexual-identified individuals from the Gay Liberation and feminist movements as well as the more insidious stigmatization of gender variance, strongly influenced the importance of inclusion in the transgender political organizations and construction of transgender political identity that evolved in the 1990s.

Inclusion to Combat Stigmatization

A 1994 special Pride Celebration section of the American Educational Gender Information Service (referred to by its acronym: AEGIS) newsletter, which still circulates among a primarily transgender and transsexual-identified readership, provides a useful introduction to the exclusion of transgender-identified people from mainstream lesbian and gay political agendas:

And yet without specific trans-inclusive language in bills like ENDA (The Employment Nondiscrimination Act), transpeople can be excluded from protection. For this reason, transpeople have become politically active in past years; after centuries of marginalization, we are fighting for our rights.²³¹

This opening statement poses inclusion – and “trans-inclusion,” no less – in direct opposition to the exclusion of transgender concerns from the organizations leading the charge on ENDA. Furthermore, it highlights the need for transgender activism and political involvement as a rational and necessary response to neglect at the hands of most

²³¹ Transgender Pride Special, 1994, *AEGIS* Publication, Personal Archive of Dallas Denny.

lesbian and gay organizations. Underscoring this point about the egregiousness of these exclusions, the leaflet goes on to explain that, “Throughout history, transpeople have been on the cutting edge of queerness. The Stonewall Rebellion, the 1969 event that led to the birth of Gay Liberation movement, was all about queens and butches.” Here, the leaflet offers what would evolve into a common claim among transgender activist over time: that they were the *first* people to resist arrest and incite the protests at the Stonewall Inn, while gender-normative gay men and lesbian women duly cooperated with the police.²³² As this quote illustrates quite effectively, claiming a central role in the Stonewall Rebellion serves two important purposes. First, it clearly states the long history of transgender exclusion by gay and lesbian political organizations, exclusions that were premised on narrow boundaries of gay identity that also organized people of color, women and lesbians, people living in poverty or homelessness, and people with disabilities out of gay political organizing. The second effect of this quote is more nuanced. By claiming the role of instigators at Stonewall, the authors reframe narratives of Gay Liberation to locate transgender people as the primary mobilizing force, rather than the peripheral status afforded them by leaders of various Gay Liberation organizations. Thus, the exclusion of transgender people is not only unfair and discriminatory, it is also unjust when placed in historical context. In this case, reframing the story of transgender activism at the Stonewall Rebellion by transgender political

²³² Stonewall has been subject to considerable scholarly inquiry to determine who, exactly, started the famous week-long riots in 1969. Given the presumably generative influence of Stonewall on lesbian and gay politics, it is not surprising at all that different groups have engaged in battles to claim this history, see Shannon Minter, “Do Transsexuals Dream of Gay Rights?” in *Transgender Rights*, eds. Paisley Currah, Richard M. Juang, and Shannon Price Minter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), chap. 8 for a summary of the claims transgender people have made on Stonewall; David Carter’s 2004 *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution* for first-hand accounts of the first punch being thrown by a “large butch lesbian,” and Elizabeth Armstrong and Suzanna Crage’s 2006 article “Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth” for a comprehensive analysis of the factors that combined to contribute to Stonewall’s enduring legacy.

actors produces transgender people as natural and ready activists as well as integral members of the lesbian and gay community.

Having prescribed the political response to the history of stigmatization and backlash, the AEGIS Pride special goes on to ask and answer a telling question in the context of early transgender activism: “What is transgender?” The response illustrates the swiftness and extent to which the meaning of transgender as a broadly inclusive umbrella term had taken hold by 1994:

Transgender is a term used to describe anyone who bends or challenges “traditional” gender roles: gay crossdressers, straight crossdressers, transsexuals, drag queens and kings, transgenderists, androgynes, and gender benders of all sorts. As gay men and lesbians transgress heterosexual norms by loving members of the same sex, transpeople transgress norms by wearing clothing not generally associated with their own sex and in some cases by modifying their bodies to be more like those of the ‘other’ sex. Transpeople have always been part of the queer community – sometimes in fashion, and sometimes not, but always fabulous.²³³

Several notable aspects of the definition of transgender provided to a wide audience of self-identified transsexuals and transvestites stand out. First, the influence of Feinberg’s vision of transgender as an umbrella term to capture a wide variety of expressions and identities is conveyed in the litany of those seen to bend or challenge perceived gender norms. The definition of transgender outlined also reifies the theoretical split of biological sex from gender identity while modifying it in important ways. In the AEGIS statement, transgender identity contains within it people who explore variations of gender presentation through clothing choices as well as those who utilize options to confirm their gender identities with surgeries or hormones. Whereas these two versions of gender variance had previously been understood to correspond to discrete identity categories

²³³ Transgender Pride Special, 1994, *AEGIS*, Personal Archive of Dallas Denny.

(i.e., transvestite and transsexual), the answer of “what is transgender” provided by AEGIS expansively draws the boundary of transgender identity to include, and consequently absorb, these expressions under the heading of transgender. This continues the construction of transgender political identity put forward by Boswell and Feinberg, and the influence of such a statement in a widely-circulated leaflet to Pride attendees across the country cannot be overstated.

Also important to note in this influential definition of transgender are the ways in which sexuality is seen as both separate from transgender identity and included alongside it, a move that is achieved by repeated references to queer. In his 1993 *Fear of a Queer Planet*, Michael Warner elaborates that queer does not seek definition from contrasting itself with heterosexuality, as gay and lesbian categories do; rather, queer gains meaning and coherence by being contrasted with dominant understandings of normal.²³⁴ Mirroring Warner’s contrast with “normal,” the AEGIS definition of transgender confirms an expansive, and therefore inclusive, meaning when it suggests queer as the more appropriate signifier of sexuality alongside transgender.²³⁵ It accomplishes this by offering the analogy of lesbian and gay people, who “violate” heterosexual norms, to transgender people who similarly “violate” gender norms. Holding the purported violation of norms constant while allowing the identities to vary implicitly poses

²³⁴ Michael Warner, *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

²³⁵ Cathy Cohen’s important critique of queer politics explains that many movements on the left failed to realize this anti-normative position. Rather, many tended to assert the meaning of queer by posing it in opposition to heterosexual. This neglects to attend to the institutions that structure and maintain heterosexuality, and as a result produces the exact opposite sort of movement advocated for by queer theory: one organized around a single axis of oppression – same-sex sexuality. Cohen calls for queer movements to organize around opposition to the sources of power that privilege heterosexual sexuality, which necessarily tends towards a coalition of queer-identified people with people of color, see Cathy J. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (1997).

transgender identity as necessarily separate from lesbian and gay identities, while uniting them through their challenge to dominant norms.

Following this significant distinction with the articulation of transgender people as perpetually part of queer identity recalls Feinberg's efforts to reconceptualize the political interests of lesbian and gay organizations. For Feinberg, however, gay, lesbian, and transgender identities were like a Venn diagram, which located shared interests and politics at the places where the three categories overlap. In the AEGIS definition, the language of imbricated interests is replaced by a much more fluid conceptualization of the relationship between gender identity and sexuality under the heading of queer. Deploying "queer" here, in other words, builds the theoretical position that the rigid categories that lend meaning and coherence to identities should be rejected in favor of the contingency of experience and the contrast to dominant norms. The use of queer consequently created the possibility of more people identifying as transgender, which would help to project a useful image of critical mass behind the resulting political movement. Recalling the earlier use of spatial metaphors to lend meaning to transgender identity helps to identify the importance of this shift. Rather than viewing transgender as either a singular identity category or an all-encompassing umbrella, the reference to queer proposes the rejection of categorization entirely. Significantly, situating transgender identity within queer further opens up the possibility for expanding the inclusiveness of the transgender category moving forward, and this emphasis on the rejection of dominant norms – binary gender, in particular – would resonate in the subsequent mission statements of the organizations and publications forming to represent transgender political identities and interests.

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.²³⁶ 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

²³⁶ 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.

series began simply as that – an inventory of the variations across political organizations to better understand the landscape of emerging transgender politics – the results circulated to leaders and members through various channels. By the time the second, third, and fourth parts of the series were published, a vigorous debate over the shape and direction of the transgender movement was playing out on the pages of the AEGIS newsletter.

The most pressing issue taken up concerned membership. In the context of the survey of organizations, the focus with membership was, on the surface, a question of funding. Dallas Denny, founder of AEGIS and editor of the newsletter, explains that, “there is considerable tension among the organizations...because they all depend on the same limited financial resources.”²³⁷ On a deeper level, however, the questions about membership served as a proxy for debates over the boundaries of transgender political identity as it was mediated by these organizations. Inclusion, and the need to maintain it as a central value of transgender identity and politics, is illustrated in the discourse analysis of this four-part series. For instance, of the seven organizations surveyed in the Vision 2001 report, only one – Tri-Ess, an organization for heterosexually identified cross-dressing men, many of whom were married, white professionals with secret cross-dressing identities – was highlighted for its limited membership. The attention to their exclusive membership policies prompted a response by the chair of the Tri-Ess board of directors, Jane Ellen Fairfax, in the second part of the Vision 2001 series. Fairfax writes:

This statement does not accurately reflect that attitude of Tri-Ess. Tri-Ess appreciates its friends, who support its goals and objectives. In 1992, Tri-Ess opened the 'Friends' membership category for those outside its

²³⁷ Vision 2001, Part One, 1996, *AEGIS* 1/96 #6, 11. Personal archive of Dallas Denny. For a more comprehensive analysis of the role fundraising goals play in structuring interest group advocacy and the identities of members, see Hindman, “From the Closets to K Street.”

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

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.²³⁹

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

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

Denny recapitulates the bounded and discrete identities emanating from the 1960s to trace the changes that have taken place with the introduction of transgender as a social and political identity. However, rather than allowing for the separate organizations that catered to various groups of people as they did in the past, Denny's statement judges them as unacceptable and portrays them as products of a bygone era, which necessarily excludes Tri-Ess from modern transgender politics. Thus, according to Denny, transgender identity is synonymous with inclusion, and groups should mediate the boundaries of transgender group identity in correspondingly broad ways.

Defining Transgender Political Interests

The importance of inclusion was not confined only to questions of who could comprise transgender membership. Political agendas and the best, and most inclusive, ways to enact them were also taken up in the pages of the Vision 2001 series. Large and visible lesbian and gay political organizations, such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), as well as other powerful interest groups like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), loomed large in the imagination of activists and political leaders on the front lines of the burgeoning transgender political movement as they formulated their political agendas. For instance, Jessica Xavier, a transfeminist-identified HIV/AIDS activist, wrote an article for Vision 2001 with advice for transgender-identified people interested in learning more about politics. The first step, according to Xavier, is recognizing the need for political involvement:

Gay men and lesbians know their rights are at stake because they know they are a minority, and they share a minority consciousness. Most of us within the transgender community are still hiding our shame under a blanket of heterosexuality, refusing to admit our minority status, and thus

our vulnerability. And that is the greatest threat to the transgender political movement. Unless we can disabuse ourselves of this denial, the transgender political movement will ultimately fail.²⁴⁰

The analogy to gay men and lesbian women is used to provoke those who might identify as transgender to embrace a visible and public presence. In other words, transgender people ought to “come out.” Xavier casts the unwillingness to assert a public transgender identity as a choice made out of shame, which – as in the discourse of coming out in previous chapters – places her readers in the difficult position of choosing between two extremes: maintaining privacy or fully embracing their identity as transgender people. Indeed, posing the challenge to her readers in this way contends that transgender identification is only legible when it is made public. Xavier’s emphasis on coming out narrows the purportedly broad construction of transgender political identity in two ways. First, the elevation of a necessarily public transgender identity assumes that people are able to “come out” without consequences to their safety. This would be an especially pressing concern for transgender people who are gender nonconforming and would thus subject to more oppressive scrutiny by friends, family members, and the state. The emphasis on coming out put forth by Xavier was also premised on racialized assumptions because, as discussed in previous chapters, the political rite of coming out was often foreclosed for people of color who would be in the position of losing belonging in their racial communities. Second, the parallels drawn between transgender identity on one hand and “gay men and lesbians” who “know they are a minority” further narrows the definition of transgender as analogous and thus separate from gay and lesbian identification, effectively casting transgender strictly in relation to gender identity and *not*

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 6.

sexuality. This effort to cast transgender identity along a single axis of gender identity consequently precluded membership for people who are transgender or gender nonconforming and also lesbian or gay identified, even while it successfully posed transgender as a unique political group that is subject to discrimination (and thus meriting consideration under the law). In sum, in addition to being avowedly inclusional and an umbrella category, transgender identity, per Xavier's explication of it, is also necessarily a public, and by association political, identity that is limited in particular ways.

The need and uses for public identification becomes clear as Xavier expands upon her vision for transgender politics, which relies on the importance of lobbying, particularly given the dominance of lesbian and gay interest groups like HRC and NGLTF in Washington:

We need to be able to lobby *year-round*, not just two days *en masse* or four visits a year, to be able to push an amendment including gender identity in ENDA. We need an organization that can deal with the major gay and lesbian groups on a daily, face to face basis, rather than engage in long-distance inclusion conflicts over the Internet. We must be bale [sic] to continuously network within the Beltway to build coalitions with the gay and lesbian, women and other civil rights groups. It is critical that we coordinate our efforts with these other like-minded groups much more closely than ever before. We should strive for vertical synergy, not horizontal hostility.²⁴¹

Xavier's call for "vertical synergy, not horizontal hostility" succinctly captures the dynamics of backlash in the background of the conversations regarding inclusion. The exclusion of transgender people from the efforts to have ENDA passed, which was spearheaded in the mid-1990s by a coalition of gay and lesbian interest groups initiated by NGLTF and HRC, marks the necessity of forming an interest group dedicated to transgender political interests in order to inject awareness of transgender identity in

²⁴¹ Ibid.

Washington. Referring to these conflicts over political agendas, membership, and inclusion as a function of “horizontal hostility” implicitly locates transgender people *alongside* lesbian and gay identities. By logical extension, then, Xavier advocates for transgender people to establish their own interest group to operate in Washington, rather than engaging in protracted efforts to be included in the efforts of lesbian and gay interest groups, or seeking solidarity with them. While the formation of coalitions across interest groups is a natural and necessary aspect of politics in Washington, what is noteworthy about Xavier’s proposal here is that it is one of the first articulations of transgender interest groups working in coalition with lesbian and gay advocacy organizations – as discrete entities – to effect political change. This constructed transgender identity and political interests in two ways. First, as bounded to deprioritize lesbian and gay transgender members in favor of putting forth a cohesive transgender identity associated predominantly with gender identity, and not sexuality. Second, Xavier’s elaboration of transgender political interests demonstrates the increasingly popular shift towards interest group advocacy. The following shows that social movement activists helped to refine the goals put forth by interest groups claiming to represent transgender people in national politics.

The political agenda for this large, national interest group and the extent to which the various organizations surveyed provided representation for dimensions of identity such as disability, class, race, and ethnicity were also broached by the Vision 2001 series. Direct-action political protest groups like the Transgender Menace and Trans Nation figured into the background of this aspect of the survey of organizations, as their protests were cited to illustrate places where changes on these fronts needed to be made. Indeed,

the very impetus for the survey, according to Denny, was a protest action by the Transexual Menace in which the International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE) was targeted for its lack of attention to issues of class, race, homophobia, and transphobia.²⁴² The question of how to best represent the needs of all members – particularly those perceived to be on the margins of transgender identity – lurked just underneath the surface of the debates over membership or funding, but came to the surface in the penultimate installment of the Vision 2001 series. In her capacity as editor, Denny concludes the descriptive overview of transgender organizations:

The alliances are one of the community's greatest assets....One thing that is *not* working is the very thing that gets protested frequently: the transgender community pays little attention to its most vulnerable and most needy factions: trans youth, those forced by poverty born of discrimination into sex work, persons of color, and those who are HIV-positive. The ongoing protests about these issues provide a clear message that more needs to be done. Obviously, the national organizations could do more for the disenfranchised – and AEGIS is committed to doing more. But someone, somewhere, is going to have to start an organization which address issues of homelessness, prostitution, drug abuse, street violence, and HIV as its *major focus*. It won't be those whose dance cards are already filled.²⁴³

Using descriptors like “vulnerable” and “most needy” gestures to the urgency of these marginalizations. That Denny’s proposal is a separate organization to represent issues concerning the most vulnerable segments of the transgender community, however, is striking, especially given that it is stated in conjunction to the strength of alliances across transgender organizations and in the context of a four-part series that highlights the importance of broad inclusion for transgender organizations. Asserting that *separate* organizations ought to be developed to represent these groups reveals that the inclusion

²⁴² Vision 2001, Part One, 1996, *AEGIS* 1/96 #6, 1. Personal archive of Dallas Denny.

²⁴³ Vision 2001, Part Three, 1996, *AEGIS* 9/96 #8, 7. Personal archive of Dallas Denny (emphasis in original).

the Vision 2001 series and political actors, such as Denny, advocates is one conditioned by age, race, and HIV-status. The inclusion so advocated for by Denny, in other words, is bounded on all sides to contain white, middle-class transgender-identified individuals, with all others relegated to separate organizations.

Digging deeper, the metaphor of the “dance card” captures Denny’s sense of the limits for inclusion rather well. A dance card is a finite resource – there can only be so many dances and a limited number of partners. This is in contrast to a perspective informed by an inclusive or intersectional outlook that aims to identify all dimensions simultaneously. Rather than using the attention captured by the Vision 2001 series to provoke revisions to the mission statements of the various transgender organizations so they represent and include intersectionally-marginalized transgender-identified people and represent cross-cutting issues, Denny suggests the formation of additional organizations to work in alliance with established transgender organizations. The understated and peripheral mentions of the most marginalized members of the transgender community symbolically addresses this gap in representation, but offers no substantive solution or representation. It does, however, serve the purpose of refining boundaries of transgender political identity in narrow ways, to include white, middle-age, and likely gender normative (i.e., able to “pass” as men or women) transgender people who are not living with HIV/AIDS as members. Denny’s focus on the experiences of transgender women, in particular, also reveals the ways that these exclusions were gendered and organized transgender men *out* of transgender organizing.

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.²⁴⁴ 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.²⁴⁵ 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.²⁴⁶ 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

²⁴⁴ 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.

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

²⁴⁶ 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.²⁴⁷ 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.²⁴⁸ 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.²⁴⁹ 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

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

²⁴⁸ 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.

²⁴⁹ 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.²⁵⁰

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

²⁵⁰ 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.²⁵¹ 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.²⁵²

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

²⁵¹ Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” 437-465.

²⁵² 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.²⁵³

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

²⁵³ 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.²⁵⁴

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.

²⁵⁴ 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’”²⁵⁵ 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’”²⁵⁶ 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.²⁵⁷ 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.²⁵⁸

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

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ 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.²⁵⁹

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.²⁶⁰ 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

²⁵⁹ Dana Preisling. May 22, 1996. Report 96:09: *Romer v Evans* Decision, Internet Archive, www.web.archive.org/web/*/gpac.org.

²⁶⁰ 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.²⁶¹ 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.²⁶² By mid-May, lobbyists working on behalf of GenderPAC accepted that the inclusion of gender identity alongside

²⁶¹ Currah, “Expecting Bodies,” 332-333.

²⁶² 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.²⁶³

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

²⁶³ Dana Preisling, May 30, 1996, Report 96:11: ENDA & More, Internet Archive, 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]dmitted 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.)²⁶⁴

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

²⁶⁴ 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.²⁶⁵

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.²⁶⁶ 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.

²⁶⁵ Dana Preisling. May 6, 1996, Report 96:02, Internet Archive, www.web.archive.org/web/*/gpac.org.

²⁶⁶ 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.²⁶⁷ 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

²⁶⁷ Dana Preisling, May 14, 1996, Report 96:08: Hate Crimes, Internet Archive, 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.²⁶⁸

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.²⁶⁹

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

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ 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.”²⁷⁰ 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

²⁷⁰ “NGLTF Convenes Third National Policy Roundtable” *Oasis Magazine*, 1998. Accessed using The Internet Archive: 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 1999.²⁷¹ 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.

²⁷¹ 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.²⁷²

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

²⁷² “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.²⁷³ 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.”²⁷⁴

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

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

²⁷⁴ 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.²⁷⁵ 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.²⁷⁶

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.²⁷⁷ 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

²⁷⁵ 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).

²⁷⁶ Fetner, *The Religious Right*, 10.

²⁷⁷ *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.²⁷⁸

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.

²⁷⁸ 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.²⁷⁹

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,

²⁷⁹ “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.”²⁸⁰ 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.²⁸¹ 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.²⁸²

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

²⁸⁰ “National Policy Roundtable,” HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 12, 9.

²⁸¹ 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).

²⁸² 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."²⁸³ 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."²⁸⁴ 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.²⁸⁵ 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.

²⁸³ "National Policy Roundtable," HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 12, 9.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ 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.”²⁸⁶ 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.”²⁸⁷ 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

²⁸⁶ “National Policy Roundtable,” HSC 7301, Box 299, Folder 12, 1.

²⁸⁷ 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.²⁸⁸

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

²⁸⁸ "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.”²⁸⁹ 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.²⁹⁰

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.²⁹¹

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

²⁸⁹ Ibid., np.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ 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.²⁹² 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.

²⁹² 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.²⁹³ 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.²⁹⁴ 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

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

²⁹⁴ See also Tina Fetner, *The Christian Right*, chap. 6.

offering gay rehabilitation therapies to fill the void left by the APA's declassification.²⁹⁵ 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.²⁹⁶ 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.²⁹⁷ 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

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

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁹⁷ *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.²⁹⁸

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.”²⁹⁹ 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

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

²⁹⁹ *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.³⁰⁰

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.³⁰¹

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

³⁰⁰ 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).

³⁰¹ 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.³⁰²

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.”³⁰³

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.

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

³⁰³ *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.³⁰⁴ 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.

³⁰⁴ 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 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.”³⁰⁵

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.

³⁰⁵ 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.”³⁰⁶ 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

³⁰⁶ 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.³⁰⁷ 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

³⁰⁷ “National Policy Roundtable Minutes, September 24th and 25th, 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.”³⁰⁸

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

³⁰⁸ 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.³⁰⁹ 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.³¹⁰

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

³⁰⁹ 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.

³¹⁰ “National Policy Roundtable Minutes, September 24th and 25th, 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.³¹¹

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

³¹¹ 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.”³¹² 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

³¹² 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.³¹³ 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.”³¹⁴ 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

³¹³ Vaid, *Virtual Equality*, 297.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 302.

were quick to cite the outsize influence that funders had on deciding political priorities as a problem to address.³¹⁵ 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.”³¹⁶ 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.³¹⁷

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.

³¹⁵ 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*.

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

³¹⁷ *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.”³¹⁸ 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

³¹⁸ Ibid., np.

law enforcement and the courts.³¹⁹ 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

³¹⁹ 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.”³²⁰ 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.”³²¹ 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:

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

³²¹ 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.³²²

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.³²³

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

³²² Ibid., np.

³²³ 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.³²⁴

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

³²⁴ 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.³²⁵

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

³²⁵ 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.³²⁶

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

³²⁶ 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:³²⁷

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."³²⁸

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

³²⁷ 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.

³²⁸ "National Policy Roundtable Minutes, September 24th and 25th, 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.³²⁹

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

³²⁹ 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.³³⁰ 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

³³⁰ 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.³³¹

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.³³²

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

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

³³² Ibid., 4.

Coming Out program in election year includes voting promotion among youth. Also working with NGLTF on campuses. Important investment.”³³³ 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.³³⁴

³³³ Ibid., 9.

³³⁴ 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.³³⁵

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.³³⁶

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

³³⁵ Ibid., 16.

³³⁶ 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.³³⁷

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

³³⁷ 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.³³⁸

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

³³⁸ 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].³³⁹

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

³³⁹ 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.³⁴⁰

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

³⁴⁰ 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.³⁴¹

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.³⁴²

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 hyphenated Americans. It triggers their identity politics issue especially where transgender is concerned.³⁴³

“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.

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

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 3-4.

³⁴³ *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.³⁴⁴

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

³⁴⁴ 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?"³⁴⁵ 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?"³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 7.

³⁴⁶ 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.³⁴⁷

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.³⁴⁸

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

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 31.

³⁴⁸ 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.³⁴⁹

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.³⁵⁰

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

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ 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.³⁵¹

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

³⁵¹ 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.³⁵²

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.³⁵³

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

³⁵² 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*.

³⁵³ *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.”³⁵⁴ 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

³⁵⁴ 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.”³⁵⁵ 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.

³⁵⁵ “HRC Story,” 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.³⁵⁶

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

³⁵⁶ 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.³⁵⁷ 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.³⁵⁸ 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

³⁵⁷ 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*.

³⁵⁸ 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.

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.³⁵⁹ 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 man³⁶⁰ – 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

³⁵⁹ 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

³⁶⁰ 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.³⁶¹ 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.³⁶² 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

³⁶¹ Spade, *Normal Life*, chap. 1.

³⁶² 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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