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## Women in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Movement

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From the origins of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) movement in the United States, women (including transwomen) have played a part, sometimes joining and finding themselves marginalized in male-dominated organizations, sometimes forming their own organizations, and sometimes working easily alongside men in mixed-gender organizations. In this chapter, we explore the history of women's participation in the LGBT movement, from the homophile phase in the 1950s and 1960 through gay liberation, lesbian feminism, anti-AIDS activism in the 1980s and 1990s, to the increasingly fragmented contemporary LGBT movement, at once characterized by "assimilationist" goals of inclusion in societal institutions such as the military and marriage and by queer critiques of "homonormativity." The movement began as a predominantly gay movement, adding the adjectives "lesbian," "bisexual," and "transgender" over time. We point to shifts in women's forms of participation, ranging from fighting for women's issues within male-dominated organizations to creating separatist groups to collaborating with gay men in mixed-gender organizations. We also focus on changes in collective identities—the shared definitions of a group based on common interests, experiences, and solidarity (Taylor 1989)—adopted by women in the LGBT movement, sometimes emphasizing commonalities across the lines of sex and sexual identity and sometimes emphasizing difference. Our analysis makes clear the ways that social movement spillover (Meyer and Whittier 1994) from the Old Left, civil rights, women's, anti-war, New Left, and other movements had an impact on women's organizing in the LGBT movement, and, in turn, how women's contributions to the movement spilled over to new forms of activism. We draw

from historical and sociological literature on the movement in its different cycles, especially the surprisingly few studies that focus on women's participation. Building on the research on gendered processes in social movements (McCammon 2001; Robnett 1996; Taylor 1999; Taylor and Whittier 1999), we point to areas in which a gender analysis is missing.

Our survey of women's participation in the LGBT movement is informed by an awareness of the ways in which activist women made choices about how to organize in the social movement fields (Ray 1999) they confronted. In the homophile movement of the 1950s, women both joined the male-dominated Mattachine Society and ONE and also formed the first lesbian organization, Daughters of Bilitis, in 1955. Beginning in the 1970s, lesbians joined and critiqued gay liberation organizations and the feminist movement and also formed separatist groups such as the Furies and non-separatist ones such as the Combahee River Collective. In the 1980s and 1990s, women were instrumental in anti-AIDS protest organizations. In the contemporary LGBT movement, women are part of a wide range of organizations and have played a central role in the marriage equality movement. This analysis of the history of the LGBT movement points to the ways that the activism of diverse women has been crucial in shaping the goals, tactics, and outcomes of the movement.

### **The homophile movement**

The origins of the LGBT movement in the United States lie in the formation of what were known as homophile organizations in the 1950s. The only known precursor, the Society for Human Rights, was founded in 1924 in Chicago by Henry Gerber, an immigrant from Germany who was inspired by the pioneering German gay movement (Katz 1976, 1983). Gerber's organization never got off the ground as the police arrested him and the other male officers for obscenity, so it was not until the 1950s that two lasting predominantly male homophile groups, the Mattachine Society and ONE, and a women's group, the Daughters of Bilitis, emerged.

Both the Second World War and the postwar Cold War motivated relatively small groups of individuals to organize around sexual identity and to fight discrimination in the 1950s.

Wartime mobilization in the military and war industry meant that women and men moved out of their home communities and confronted new social and sexual environments. The military instituted psychological screening designed to eliminate homosexuals, but as a result of the screening process for male draftees and fears of lesbianism among the women admitted to military service for the first time, homosexuality became part of the wartime discourse (Bérubé 1990, Meyer 1996). The war called attention to discrimination against gay men and lesbians, as homosexuality could lead to court-martial or dishonorable discharge, at the same time that it created the conditions for the growth of a gay and lesbian community. Even the military's attempt to keep soldiers and sailors away from gay bars by making them off limits notified those seeking such places where to find them. In the same way, the postwar crackdown on homosexuals in government employment—the “Lavender Scare” that lasted even longer and affected more people than the “Red Scare”—served to foster resistance (Johnson 2004). It was in this context that the homophile movement emerged.

Gay liberationists in the 1970s tended to dismiss their homophile predecessors as hopelessly conservative and cautious, but historians, beginning with John D'Emilio in his pathbreaking book, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (1983), have painted a complex portrait of the homophile movement from its leftist origins (1950-1953) through a more liberal phase (1953-1961) to a more diverse and militant transition to gay liberation (1961-1969) (Gallo 2006; Hurewitz 2007; Loftin 2012; Meeker 2006; Minton 2002; Sears 2006; Stein 2000; Stein 2012; White 2009). The movement can be dated to 1950, when Communist Party member Harry Hay and a small group of friends in Los Angeles launched the Mattachine Society. Beginning with discussion groups organized in a cell-like structure, the organization expanded over time

and spawned chapters in cities across the country. Mattachine took inspiration from the civil rights movement in conceptualizing homosexuals as a minority group and, in the 1960s, adopting direct action tactics, including picketing the White House. A second homophile organization emerged in 1952, when a few male Mattachine members in Los Angeles who objected to the secrecy and contentiousness of the group formed a new organization, ONE, with the intent of publishing a homophile magazine. From its first issue in 1953 to its demise in 1965, a half million copies of the magazine *ONE* purveyed the homophile message across the United States (Loftin 2012). Although small in numbers, the homophile movement sought, through publications, conferences, participation in research, and appearances in the media, to bring about change in individuals and society at large by fighting discriminatory laws and practices, changing public perceptions of homosexuality, and providing support for those with same-sex desires. By the 1960s, local groups had organized regional and national coalitions, including the East Coast Homophile Organizations and the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations, and even earlier the U.S. groups connected with European homophile groups through a transnational organization, the International Committee for Sexual Equality (Rupp 2011, 2014).

The literature on the homophile movement acknowledges that it was a predominantly white male movement, although women, including women of color, as well as men of color did belong and sometimes play central roles. Marc Stein, in his *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, focuses on the relationship between lesbians and gay men, pointing to both the fundamental assumption within the homophile movement that women and men are different and to the collaboration between lesbians and gay men in the Philadelphia branch of Mattachine, where women took leadership roles and made up a significant portion of the membership (Stein 2000). Stein points to the fact that lesbians and gay men occupied space differently, gay men more

frequently utilizing commercial and other public places and lesbians more likely to socialize in private. In addition, print culture treated lesbians and gay men very differently, furthering the conception of lesbians as private and invisible. Despite the participation of women in both Mattachine and ONE, they remained a minority in the mixed-gender groups because recruitment took place primarily through personal connections, and lesbians and gay men were less likely to move in the same circles. In addition, lesbians and gay men did not always see the same issues as primary. The early focus in the homophile movement on police entrapment of men for cruising and engaging in public sex, for example, had less resonance for lesbians.

It was in this context that the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), the first lesbian organization, emerged. Four female couples, including longtime activists Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, started the group in 1955, not even knowing about Mattachine and ONE. Rose Bamberger, a Filipina, came up with the idea for the group as a place for lesbians to meet, although it later developed into a political organization that published a magazine, *The Ladder*, and formed chapters in cities across the country. Marcia Gallo, in her history of DOB, *Different Daughters*, emphasizes that DOB differed from the male-dominated homophile groups in asserting the importance of reaching individual lesbians and, as the statement of purpose put it, supporting “education of the variant, with particular emphasis on the psychological, physiological, and sociological aspects, to enable her to understand herself and make her adjustment to society in all its social, civic, and economic implications” (Gallo 2006, 11). It was this emphasis on making “adjustment to society,” with its implication of working to fit into heteronormativity, that led to later dismissal of the homophile movement as a whole as too accommodationist. Martin and Lyon, advocating a political as well as social purpose, became the backbone of the organization and infused it with a feminist sensibility even before the resurgence of the women’s movement in the late 1960s.

DOB worked with Mattachine and ONE but objected to the treatment of lesbians by gay men as “second-class homosexuals” (Stein 2012).

The participation of women in the Mattachine Society and ONE and the formation of DOB as a woman-only organization speak to the importance of gender as well as sexuality in shaping the lives of lesbians. The formation of the homophile movement rested on the assumption that homosexuals had something in common, but in fact women homophiles often distinguished their interests from those of men, whether it was a commitment to long-term relationships rather than multiple sexual encounters or solidarity with heterosexual women around misogyny and gender discrimination. When DOB leaders in the 1960s urged the other homophile groups to support women’s rights and do more for lesbians, to no avail, several, including Martin and Lyon, shifted their energies to the women’s movement. Barbara Gittings, who founded the New York chapter of DOB and participated in the picket of the White House over the dismissal of homosexual government employees, lost her editorship of the *Ladder* in 1966 because of her alliances with gay men and her refusal to take the publication in a more feminist direction. “Certain changes in editorial policy are anticipated,” the magazine announced. “To date emphasis has been on the Lesbian’s role in the homophile movement. Her identity as a woman in our society has not yet been explored in depth” (Stein 2000, 272). The next year, the newsletter of the Philadelphia DOB chapter asked, “Are we so concerned with being lesbians that we tend to forget the fact that we are also women, and, as such, members of a quite numerous ‘minority group’?” (Stein 2000, 259). It was a question that revealed the impact of the women’s movement on homophile organizing.

The homophile movement, throughout its history from 1950 to the early 1970s, fostered a collective identity based on same-sex desire that presumably united people across lines of race, class, gender, and other differences. Yet patterns of recruitment, organizational goals, and, in the

case of gender, the assumption that women and men are fundamentally different undermined the possibility of creating a truly diverse movement. The pattern of women working within mixed-gender organizations and also forming their own groups would continue throughout the different cycles of the LGBT movement.

### **Gay liberation and lesbian feminism**

Before the Stonewall riot that traditionally marks the turn from homophile activism to gay liberation, militant actions had already foreshadowed the future course of the LGBT movement. In addition to the adoption of direct action tactics, militant homophiles took to proclaiming gay pride (“Gay is Good,” modeled on Black Power’s “Black is Beautiful”); embracing sexual liberation; and fighting to defend commercial spaces catering to homosexual and transgender patrons, including working-class lesbians engaged in everyday forms of resistance (Kennedy and Davis 1993; Stein 2012). In 1966, activists from Vanguard, a San Francisco group of gay and trans youth, took part in a picket of Compton’s Cafeteria to protest the treatment of street queens (feminine gay men or transwomen who live on the streets), sex workers, and other gay and transgender patrons. An attempt on the part of the police to arrest a queen resulted in a riot, immortalized in Susan Stryker’s film, *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton’s Cafeteria* (Stryker and Silverman 2005). The events at the Stonewall Inn in 1969, where street queens, queers of color, and butch lesbians, among others, fought back against a routine bar raid, represent the merging of everyday resistance with organized political activism in the context of an increasingly radicalized social movement sector (Armstrong and Crago 2006).

Despite the militancy preceding Stonewall and Stonewall’s iconic status as the start of something new, the kind of organizing and efforts at reform that the homophile movement had pioneered continued alongside gay liberation. Groups emerged for different constituencies and interests, and local, regional, and national organizations worked to end discrimination in all



sectors of society and to elect lesbian and gay officials. Reformers targeted the government, business, organized religion, the mass media, and science and medicine (Stein 2012). Unlike gay liberationists, the liberal wing of the LGBT movement sought legal and social change within the structure of U.S. society that would facilitate acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. Although this kind of gay and lesbian reform-oriented activism characterized much of the LGBT movement from the 1970s on and women took part in a wide range of groups and institutions, we focus here on gay liberation and lesbian feminism because it was through lesbian feminism's emergence from gay liberation and the women's movement that women put a unique stamp on the LGBT movement.

The transition to gay liberation can be marked by the formation of the Gay Liberation Front in New York (GLF-NY) shortly after Stonewall and the spread of such groups to different cities and campuses across the country. The early gay liberation movement, made up of local and largely structureless groups and influenced by the New Left, anti-war movement, and Black Power, proclaimed itself anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and revolutionary. Gay liberation promoted coming out, sexual liberation, the creation of alternative institutions, direct action in the form of public protest as a means of transforming U.S. society. More diverse in race and class than the homophile movement, it was nevertheless still predominantly male, although women did join, form women's caucuses, and play prominent roles. The women's caucuses made space to articulate the ways the interests of lesbians differed from those of gay men and served as a transition to the emergence of separate lesbian feminist groups. As in the homophile movement, the different interests of lesbians and gay men and the sexism of some gay men limited the possibilities of a truly mixed-gender movement. Slogans such as "Suck Cock to Beat the Draft" (Kissack 1995) perpetuated the male-centeredness of the New Left. Gay liberation did make more space than had the homophile movement for transgender people, including trans

of color activists Sylvia Rivera, who was at Stonewall, and Marsha Johnson, together founders of a group known as Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries and participants in GLF-NY (Stein 2012). As had been the case in the homophile movement, bisexuals remained a relatively silent constituency. Gay liberation expanded to “gay and lesbian liberation,” but the “B” and the “T” of the LGBT movement would not be added until later.

Elizabeth Armstrong, in *Forging Gay Identities* (2002), analyzes the transition from homophile activism through gay liberation and beyond in San Francisco, focusing on the changing political logics of the movement and developing a cultural-institutional approach to social movements later elaborated with Mary Bernstein as the multi-institutional politics framework (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). She distinguishes interest group, redistributive, and identity politics, arguing that the LGBT movement tolerated internal diversity and difference, yet the grounding of identity politics in the interests of white gay men helps to explain the persistent racial and gender homogeneity of the movement. As she put it, “Understanding that the interests of gay white men were built into the core assumptions of the gay identity movement helps explain why it has been so hard to integrate the movement” (Armstrong 2002, 199).

In addition to the impact of the male-centeredness of gay identity politics, gay liberation remained predominantly male because the resurgent women’s movement attracted the participation of lesbians and bisexual women, and lesbian feminism resulted in the emergence of separatist groups organized around both gender and sexuality. The shift of the energies of some homophile women activists to the women’s movement in the 1960s set the stage for the emergence of lesbian feminism as lesbians fought for recognition of their issues within the women’s movement as well as within gay liberation. Betty Friedan’s infamous reference to the issue of lesbianism as a “lavender menace” mobilized women members of the GLF to protest the attempt to silence lesbians and dismiss issues of sexuality within the National Organization of

Women at the Second Congress to Unite Women in New York in 1970 (Echols 1989). Lesbians in radical feminist groups associated with the New Left also sometimes encountered hostility from straight women members that led them to form separate lesbian feminist groups. The result was the formation of small local groups in locations across the country, some lesbians already mobilized in gay liberation and others active in women's liberation.

Radicalesbians in New York, growing out of the lavender menace protest, the Furies in the District of Columbia, and the Combahee River Collective in Boston played especially influential roles through the publication of their ideas. Radicalesbians distributed and then published "The Woman-Identified Woman," which laid out many of the foundational ideas of lesbian feminism, including the notion that lesbianism had a political dimension through rejection of male domination and the insistence that feminism required lesbianism. Likewise, the Furies collective, whose members had experience in the civil rights, anti-war, gay liberation, and women's movements and who were inspired by the Black Panther Party and the Weathermen, hoped to serve as a vanguard to overthrow male supremacy by practicing "prefigurative politics" (Breines 1989) in their collective and by disseminating their revolutionary thinking to other women through their newsletter, *The Furies* (Valk 2008). The Combahee River Collective, splitting from the National Black Feminist Organization in 1975, was a black socialist lesbian feminist group whose widely reprinted "Combahee River Collective Statement" laid out a commitment to "struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (Springer 2005; quotation in Hull, Scott, and Smith 1982, 13).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a variety of lesbian feminist groups sprang up around the country, packaging lesbianism as an act of political resistance and celebrating what were lauded as the "female values" of egalitarianism, collectivism, caring, respect for experience-

based knowledge, pacifism, and cooperation (Rupp 1999; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Taylor and Rupp 1993). Lesbian feminists continued the radical feminist tradition of consciousness-raising and participated in protests and demonstrations, including those organized by a variety of other movements. Local groups built alternative cultural institutions, including communes, bookstores, health clinics, coffee houses, music production companies, battered women's shelters, and rape crisis centers, with the aim of changing the world through ideas and action (Enke 2007; Stein 1997).

In their influential article, Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier (1992) developed a model of collective identity based on their study of more than two dozen lesbian feminist communities across the United States. They distinguished three distinct but overlapping processes that contributed to the formation of collective identity: boundaries that mark differences between a category of persons and dominant groups; group consciousness that explains a group's structural position in the dominant order, and the politicization of a group's commonalities and differences through the negotiation and recreation of new self-affirming identities. This framework allowed scholars to understand lesbian feminist culture and tactics, often characterized as "identity politics," as political as well as cultural activism (Bernstein 2005; Staggenborg 2001).

Lesbian feminists' embrace of separatism as a mobilizing strategy, in combination with the essentialist impulse to revalue women's difference from men, did not perform the unifying work that activists hoped it would. Alice Echols, in her pioneering study of radical feminism, *Daring to be Bad* (1989), traced the emergence of lesbian feminism out of radical feminism and then its decline and depoliticization into what she denounced as an essentialized, separatist, and alternative-culture-focused cultural feminism. Separatism from men was a racially divisive issue, and it became harder to maintain a unifying collective identity based on women's presumed commonalities in light of increasing awareness of the ways that systems of oppression, such as

race, ethnicity, class, nationality, gender, and sexuality, affected women's lives differently. As the Combahee River Collective had stated early on, "Although we are feminists and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the factionalization that white women who are separatists demand" (Hull, Scott, and Smith 1982, 16). Other women of color and working-class women joined the criticism of lesbian feminism for advocating a false universalism on the basis of white middle-class women's experiences while also fighting homophobia within straight-dominated groups of people of color and working-class people.

What Arlene Stein (1997) called "border skirmishes" erupted over the question of whether bisexuals and pre- and post-operative transsexuals belonged in the lesbian feminist community. This battle played out most famously when the lesbian-feminist Michigan Womyn's Music Festival refused to admit those not "womyn-born womyn" and activists formed "Camp Trans" outside the festival in protest (Gamson 1997). Perhaps most divisive were the feminist "sex wars," pitting opponents of pornography, sadomasochism, butch-fem sexual arrangements, and other phenomena against those advocating openness to a range of sexual representations and practices (Gerhard 2001; Vance 1984).

Despite the fissures that opened over race, class, gender, and sexual practice, scholars who have studied lesbian feminism as a social movement have argued that lesbian feminist communities sustained a radical feminist tradition throughout the anti-feminist climate of the 1980s and 1990s and had significant consequences for the LGBT movement (Staggenborg 2001; Taylor and Rupp 1993; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Whittier 1995). Often criticized as anti-sexual, insensitive to class and racial/ethnic differences, and hostile to transmen and transwomen, lesbian feminism in fact encompassed a variety of positions, from complete separatism from men and heterosexual women to alliance across difference, from a denunciation of heterosexuality and focus on sexual danger to an embrace of the pleasures of sexuality, from insistence that only

“women-born women” are really women to solidarity with gender non-conformists. What lesbian feminism did for the LGBT movement was to insist on a gendered understanding of sexuality, something that was by and large missing in gay liberation. As a result, future cycles of the movement, including activism around AIDS and the marriage equality movement, could not ignore the role of gender in shaping the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.

### **Anti-AIDS activism in a climate of backlash**

From the mid-1970s through the 1980s, gay and lesbian communities, neighborhoods (Ghaziani 2014), and institutions grew and became more visible at the same time that the LGBT movement faced an increasingly conservative climate with the rise of the New Right (Fetner 2008). The formation of national advocacy organizations such as the National Gay Task Force in 1973 and the Human Rights Campaign Fund in 1980; the organization of the first National March on Washington and the National Third World Gay and Lesbian conference in 1979; and the emergence of a wide variety of groups for gay and lesbian African Americans, Latina/os, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans, represented a new phase of movement organizing (Ghaziani 2008; Stein 2012). As the LGBT movement demonstrated, lobbied, and litigated to end discrimination and change public opinion, the New Right launched new campaigns to pass anti-gay laws (Stone 2012).

Throughout this period of mobilization and backlash, lesbians continued both to work with gay men in mixed-gender organizations and to criticize gay male domination and devote their energies to separate lesbian events and projects. While organizers of the first March on Washington called for equal participation of women and men on all planning committees, during the second March on Washington in 1993 a Dyke March protested the invisibility of lesbians and people of color (Currans 2012; Brown-Saracino 2009; Ghaziani 2008). Dyke Marches spread throughout the country in the following years, serving to criticize Pride marches as affluent white

gay men's apolitical and consumerist partying. Although some Dyke Marches attracted primarily young white women, others, such as Oakland's Sistahs Steppin' in Pride: An East Bay Dyke March and Festival, served as a celebration of black lesbian community (Currans 2012).

What had the potential further to divide gay men and lesbians—the HIV/AIDS crisis—had the opposite impact (Schneider and Stoller 1995). Beginning in the early 1980s, when young gay men in major metropolitan areas such as New York City, San Francisco, and Los Angeles began to come down with rare illnesses, AIDS challenged the LGBT community to respond. The community did respond with the provision of services and care to people with AIDS (PWAs) (Brier 2009; Gould 2009). As government at all levels—local, state, and federal—failed to recognize the severity of the epidemic, activists within the LGBT community protested the government's neglect, the public's widespread fear of PWAs, the institutions that promoted legal and social discrimination against PWAs, and the alternating neglect and profiteering that PWAs faced on the part of the medical industrial complex. Beginning in the mid-1980s, lesbians and gay men began to express their anger about AIDS by taking direct action against those deemed responsible for inadequate responses to the epidemic. As they protested, many members of the direct action anti-AIDS movement also developed an expert understanding not just of the science of the AIDS virus, but also of the deep inequalities built into the health care system (Epstein 1996, 2009).

Mainstream accounts of the LGBT community's responses to AIDS have sometimes been written as if gay men's "epidemiological pre-eminence" (Altman 1994) made the illness of little interest to women, especially lesbians. Activists and scholars, however, have challenged these accounts since the 1990s (ACT UP/NY Women & AIDS Book Group 1990; Hollibaugh 1995; Patton and O'Sullivan 1990; Stoller 1995). These, along with a number of more recent works about the anti-AIDS movement, have made it clear that lesbians were early and key participants

and that the feminist women's health movement of the previous decades served as an important inspiration for those working against AIDS (Brier 2009; Carroll 2015; Gould 2009; Roth 1998, forthcoming; Shepard and Hayduk 2002; Stockdill 2003). The anti-AIDS movement was, in this sense, a spillover movement from the 1960s protest cycle influenced by the agenda and the ethos of feminist efforts to change the health care system. The feminist emphases on taking control of one's body, being skeptical of received wisdom about health care, demanding inclusion in decision-making about what happened in one's treatment, and challenging mistaken notions about one's supposed place in society were all present in the militant responses that arose by 1987, when the first ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) formed in New York City.

The ACT UPs—there were well over a hundred chapters in the U.S. and abroad at the height of the movement's mobilization in the late 1980s and early 1990s—were structured as coalitions of individuals with diverse interests in fighting AIDS. Although men always outnumbered women, the ACT UPs incorporated an understanding of fighting AIDS as tied to overturning intersecting inequalities of gender, class, race/ethnicity, and, as the disease globalized, nationality. In the United States, some of the earliest protests by ACT UP/New York focused on women's relationships to the virus. In January of 1988, members of the ACT UP/NY Women's Caucus protested *Cosmopolitan* magazine's publication of an interview with a psychiatrist who dismissed the need for straight women to ask their partners to use condoms. Three hundred protesters descended on the magazine's office building in Manhattan and orchestrated a campaign to send hundreds of condoms each day to Helen Gurley Brown, the magazine's editor. As a result, Brown recanted and published an article urging women to practice safe sex (Carroll 2015). In late 1990, ACT UP activists from around the country gathered for a "week of outrage" at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta (Brier 2009; Carroll 2015; Gould 2009; Roth, forthcoming). They demanded that the CDC change its



definition of AIDS because it overlooked infections and health issues that HIV caused in women and in other marginalized communities affected by the disease, such as IV drug users. The CDC definition mattered not just to establish a more inclusive picture of who was affected by HIV disease, but because insurance payments, Social Security disability benefits, and medical treatments depended on the government's definition. In 1993, during the March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Rights and Liberation, lesbians organized a legal picket, speak out, and sit-in/meeting with President Clinton's Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, to raise awareness about the lack of attention to lesbians' AIDS issues (Roth, forthcoming).

Although the ACT UPs had feminist sensibilities, there were tensions within the movement around priorities, since many activists did not see the point in focusing on women's AIDS needs when so many more men were dying of HIV/AIDS. One view, shared by a number of scholars, albeit with significant caveats, is that gender politics split the movement, once unified, into two broad camps that faced off against one another: a gay white male "drugs into bodies" approach that privileged working with the government and the medical establishment on fast-tracking anti-AIDS medications, and a later approach favored by women and people of color that took up a more holistic battle for universal health care delivery (Altman 1994; Corea 1992; Epstein 1996; Halcli 1999; Stockdill 2003). Yet this story neglects the way in which the ACT UPs echoed women's health movement activism and early on attracted lesbian and straight women, ignores the early criticism by the ACT UPs of profit taking by drug companies, and minimizes the support for universal health care that existed across the board in the ACT UPs (Roth, forthcoming).

As in earlier cycles of the movement, women brought a gendered and feminist perspective to the AIDS movement. Lesbians contributed analyses developed in the women's

health movement to early AIDS activism, and in turn the feminism embedded in the direct action anti-AIDS movement spilled over into the reproductive justice movement in the late 1980s and 1990s. In New York, direct action anti-AIDS protest gave birth to Women's Health Action and Mobilization (WHAM), a largely lesbian offshoot of ACT UP/New York that used ACT UP's militant tactics and theatrical protests to counter Operation Rescue's blockade of abortion clinics (Carroll 2015). ACT UP/NY and WHAM teamed up to protest the Catholic Church's anti-homosexual and anti-women policies around matters of sexuality in the controversial "Stop the Church" demonstration at New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral in December of 1989. While thousands picketed outside, several hundred demonstrators infiltrated the mass service and staged a "die-in (Roth, forthcoming). ACT UP/NY also spawned the group "Church Ladies for Choice" (Carroll 2015; Shepard and Schulman 2002), which began using street theater to counter Operation Rescue in 1991. Inspired partly by comedian Dana Carvey's "Church Lady" *Saturday Night Live* sketches, gay men from ACT UP/NY and women from WHAM used a drag aesthetic to satirize the Catholic Church's opposition to choice and to counter Operation Rescue's blockades of abortion clinics.

In terms of the development of the LGBT movement, anti-AIDS activism contributed a renewed emphasis on flamboyant and defiant direct action tactics, which became the hall mark of queer activism. Members of ACT UP/NY participated in the creation of Queer Nation in 1990, a radical direct action group devoted to visibility, sexual liberation, and gender transformation (Stein 2012). The Lesbian Avengers, formed in 1992, claimed credit for organizing the first Dyke March and gained visibility through their practice of fire-eating and self-proclamation as "loud, bold, sexy, silly, fierce, tasty and dramatic" (Taylor and Rupp 1993, 53). Utilizing similar in-your-face tactics, Transgender Nation, founded out of Queer Nation in San Francisco, took on an unapologetic celebration of gender transgression in its myriad forms.

Along with the formation of the North American Bisexual Network in 1990, these developments marked the shift of the movement from a gay and lesbian one to its contemporary LGBT—or queer—incarnation. Queer activism in the 1990s shared a radical ethos with gay liberation and lesbian feminism, but differed in its anti-identity stance that sought to destabilize collective identities. The concept of “queer” both has the potential to serve as an umbrella identity over more specific ones such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, and to represent a rejection of identity altogether (Green 2002). “Queer” has come to stand for a rejection of binaries such as man/women and heterosexual/homosexual and an openness to both gender and sexual fluidity (Miller, Taylor, and Rupp forthcoming). It is in this context that we are able to understand what seem like two opposing strands of activism in the contemporary LGBT movement, with some activists struggling for acceptance and assimilation into mainstream society and others advocating a radical rejection of homonormativity (Ward 2008).

### **The marriage equality movement**

Nothing better illustrates the tension between assimilationist and queer politics, as well as the contribution of women to the LGBT movement, than the contemporary marriage equality movement. Along with the effort to end the “don’t ask, don’t tell” military policy that kept openly gay men and lesbians from serving in the military, the fight for same-sex marriage came to symbolize, for queer critics, the mainstream movement’s desire to normalize gay and lesbian identity in order to fit into, rather than change, U.S. society (Bernstein and Taylor 2013; Moscovitz 2013). Less remarked upon in the literature is the role that women have played in advocating marriage equality. Unlike other cycles of the movement, the marriage equality phase did not marginalize women. Marriage is a gendered issue because of its meaning for women as mothers, its history as a patriarchal institution, and the prevalence of couples within lesbian communities. As early as the homophile movement, the interests of women as members of

couples and as mothers had some impact on lesbians' lack of participation in *Mattachine* and *ONE*. Lesbian feminists, along with straight radical feminists, tended to deride marriage as an oppressive institution. But the "lesbian baby boom" of the 1990s, when more couples began utilizing assisted reproductive technologies, made marriage an increasingly salient issue for women in the LGBT movement (Hull and Ortyl 2013).

Although *ONE* in 1953 featured the question "Homosexual Marriage?" (Weber 2014) on its cover, it was not until 1987 that the LGBT movement put marriage on the national agenda for the first time. At the third National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, Couples, Inc., a Los Angeles-based organization fighting for legal recognition of same-sex couples, organized "The Wedding," the most controversial event of the march, in which several thousand couples celebrated their unions and demanded the legal rights of marriage (Ghaziani 2008).

Echoing feminist critiques of marriage and foreshadowing later movement debates, opponents of the event argued that it promoted traditional monogamous relationships and patriarchal family forms inconsistent with the sexual freedom espoused by gay liberationists.

It was only when the New Right took up opposition to same-sex marriage that it moved to the top of the political agenda of mainstream national LGBT organizations (Fetner 2008). When the case of same-sex marriage first came before the courts in Hawaii, the big national LGBT movement organizations wanted nothing to do with it, thinking it had no chance of success (Andersen 2006; Bernstein and Taylor 2013). But when the New Right mobilized and successfully lobbied for passage of the federal Defense of Marriage Act in 1996 and for state-level Defense of Marriage Acts in 35 states, restricting marriage to "one man and one woman" and allowing states and the federal government to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages performed even in states that allowed them, the LGBT movement moved into action (Fetner 2008).

After Massachusetts became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage in 2004, lesbian and gay activists introduced a new direct action tactic intended to capture public attention. Inspired by the lunch-counter sit-ins of the civil rights movements, same-sex couples began showing up at licensing counters across the country demanding marriage licenses. Two women, lawyer Molly McKay and her partner Davina Kotulski, had made the trip to the marriage counter in San Francisco an annual protest for many years and founded Marriage Equality California, one of several fledgling grassroots organizations in California advocating same-sex marriage (Moscowitz 2013; Taylor et. al. 2009). It was in this context that the mayor of San Francisco, Gavin Newsome, working closely with the National Center for Lesbian Rights, the northern California chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, and Equality California, ordered the county clerk to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples in 2004. The first marriage license went to Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon of the Daughters of Bilitis, partners at that time for fifty-one years.

Media coverage of the San Francisco “Winter of Love,” when over four thousand couples obtained licenses and married before the courts put a halt to the weddings, had national impact on both the LGBT movement and public opinion (Kimport 2014; Moscowitz 2013; Richman 2014; Taylor et. al 2009). The matrimonial marathon also catapulted same-sex marriage to the top of the New Right’s agenda, and it launched a campaign to pass Proposition 8, which succeeded in banning same-sex marriage in California in 2008. The virulent and heavily funded opposition of conservatives propelled the issue onto the LGBT movement’s national political agenda (Bernstein and Taylor 2013). Initially, the majority of marriage equality activists saw marriage as a civil rights issue (Taylor et. al. 2009), similar to nondiscrimination in the workplace, the military, and equal access to health care and education (Moscowitz 2013). But the movement’s initial use of a civil rights frame failed to resonate with the public. As a result,

the movement turned to a framing that emphasized the universal right to “love,” which was more resonant with the public. Increasingly courts in states primarily in the Northeast ruled it unconstitutional to deny the right to marry. Since 2004, public opinion on the issue of same-sex marriage changed more rapidly than on any single civil rights issue in U.S. history, with over half of Americans in favor (Powell et. al. 2014). In 2013 the Supreme Court invalidated a portion of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in *United States v. Windsor*, a case brought by an elderly lesbian who would have been left essentially homeless because, unprotected by federal tax policy, she could not afford the taxes on their house after her partner died. This paved the way for legal challenges in states, and LGBT activists were successful in overturning marriage bans in 37 states. Then in 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, that states were required to license and recognize same-sex marriages, based on the Fourteenth Amendment, a decision that represented a major victory for the marriage equality movement.

There is no denying that marriage equality became the central and most controversial issue of the LGBT movement in the early years of the twenty-first century, and ironically it was not of the movement’s own making. The large national organizations increasingly devoted more resources to the issue of marriage to fight off state level anti-gay ballot initiatives and marriage bans (Stone 2012), and marriage equality organizations proliferated in states throughout the country. But the mainstream LGBT movement faced off against not only the conservative opposition but also anti-marriage queer groups such as Gay Shame, which opposes the commercialization of the annual gay pride celebrations and rejects marriage as buying into mainstream heteronormativity. Queer critics of same-sex marriage argue not only that it is assimilationist, but also that it undermines and depoliticizes distinctively queer communities and cultures, benefits primarily white, middle-class, cisgender gay couples, and diverts resources away from more important issues, especially in the lives of queer people of color, poor queers,

and transgender people who may not fit the “normative” mold in this new era of gay visibility (Bernstein and Taylor 2013; Cohen 1999; Duggan 2002; Warner 2000; Weber 2015). While queer theorists have been especially vocal in objecting to the mainstream LGBT movement’s pursuit of same-sex marriage (Duggan 2002), recent research suggests that the passage of California’s Proposition 8 sparked the formation of queer activist groups that engaged in militant forms of direct action on behalf of marriage (Weber 2015). And research by Hull and Ortyl (2013) suggests that the LGBT movement’s constituents have not been ambivalent about the campaign for marriage equality. Mary Bernstein and Verta Taylor, in *The Marrying Kind?* (2013), present empirical research that examines the queer debate over marriage and analyzes the discourse, strategies, and composition of the marriage equality movement, concluding that the impact of the movement is neither fully assimilationist nor fully oppositional, but instead complex and contradictory.

As with other cycles of the LGBT movement, relatively little research has focused on the participation of women in this phase of activism, despite the fact that lesbian individuals and lesbian organizations have played central roles in both advocating and opposing same-sex marriage. Marriage is in many ways a women’s issue with particular significance for mothers. Katrina Kimport, in *Queering Marriage: Challenging Family Formation in the United States* (2014), analyzed interviews with participants in the 2004 San Francisco weddings in order to explore the impact of same-sex marriage on the entrenched relationship between marriage and heterosexuality. She found complex motivations at work for marrying, including a challenge to heterosexual privilege as well as a desire for legal rights and social recognition. Most important for our purposes, she found that the meaning of marriage varied significantly based on gender and parenthood. Lesbians made up more than half (57 percent) of the couples who married in San Francisco and outnumbered gay male couples by nearly two to one in the states where

marriage became legal (Badgett and Herman 2011). Lesbians were also more likely than gay men to be parents, and couples with children tended to offer social recognition of their families as a reason to marry, although this was somewhat less true for people of color, for whom marriage was not as essential in defining a family. At the same time, lesbians were more likely to use feminist critiques to express ambivalence about marriage. In all these ways, marriage took on gendered meanings that suggest that the focus on same-sex marriage within the LGBT movement had particular resonance for women.

Women also brought a gendered perspective to movement tactics. Men as well as women participated in actions such as dressing as grooms and brides and strolling down city streets to protest their exclusion from marriage and to sell gay marriage to a largely unreceptive American public. But wedding dresses evoke marriage more strongly than tuxedos. When Molly McKay, who spearheaded the 2004 same-sex wedding protest in San Francisco, applied for a marriage license in San Francisco year after year, she exchanged her lawyer's suit for a wedding dress, making her intentions visible (Taylor et. al. 2009). Katrina Kimport analyzed wedding photographs from the 2004 San Francisco weddings, arguing that women's non-normative gender presentations served as a challenge to heteronormativity (Kimport 2012). The traditional association of women with love and weddings worked to give women a central role in marriage equality activism.

Whether activists supported or opposed marriage, they will move on to other issues. The LGBT movement has never been an entirely single-issue movement, and as soon as the Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, movement organizations announced new goals, including the fight for transgender rights. The Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, supporters of marriage, posted an article on its website even before the decision was announced, titled "Equality Is Not the Finish Line," and the Human Rights Campaign Fund, considered the most



conservative mainstream national organization, promised to support the inclusion of transgender in the anti-discrimination bill before Congress. What role women will play in the next phase of LGBT movement activism remains to be seen.

### **Conclusion**

Since the earliest years of organizing around same-sex sexuality, women have participated in the LGBT movement, either as members of male-dominated organizations or in separate lesbian groups. Throughout, they insisted that the lives of women, whether lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, are shaped as much by gender as by sexuality. Women of color, working-class and poor women, and disabled women added race, ethnicity, class, and disability to the forces at work in shaping sexuality. In addition to bringing a gendered lens to activism, women utilized feminist analyses and tactics in pursuit of LGBT equality and social justice. In the homophile movement, the Daughters of Bilitis criticized the lack of attention to women, bringing a feminist perspective to the movement. The lesbian feminist critique of gay liberation furthered developed a feminist analysis of sexuality. As women of color and working-class women pointed to the ways that lesbian feminism privileged the standpoint of white, middle-class women, groups such as the Combahee River Collective articulated an intersectional analysis of the ways that sexuality is raced, classed, and gendered. In the anti-AIDS movement, women with experience in the women's health movement contributed a deep critique of the way the health care system failed people with AIDS as well as to the formation of self-help programs for people suffering with AIDS. Lesbians also played a critical part in the marriage equality movement as both supporters and opponents, mobilizing a feminist critique of marriage whether arguing for the ways same-sex marriage has the potential to change the institution or for the ways marriage might change the queer community.

As our analysis suggests, the women's movement spilled over to the LGBT movement, and vice versa. The 1960s protest cycle initiated by the civil rights movement was instrumental as a model for homophile activism, gay liberation, and the marriage equality movement, but the women's movement left its imprint on each of these cycles as well, bringing about a gendered analysis of sexuality. In turn, women's contributions to LGBT activism influenced later mobilizations, including in the Occupy movements (Hurwitz and Taylor forthcoming; Weber 2015).

It is striking how little scholarly literature exists on lesbian activism in all phases of the LGBT movement. Even less research analyzes the participation of bisexual women and transwomen. As a result, there remain significant opportunities for future scholarship. First, there is need for research on women in male-dominated homophile, gay liberation, and marriage equality organizations. Only then can we understand whether and how lesbian participation influenced the collective identities, collective action frames, and tactics of LGBT movement organizations. Second, because most studies of lesbian activism have focused on lesbian separatist groups, there is little understanding of the impact of women's participation in mainstream LGBT organizations on shifts in the meaning of lesbian identity over the past three decades. For example, sexuality scholars have suggested that many women who would have defined themselves as butch lesbians during earlier periods have, instead, embraced identities as transmen (Stein 2010). Third, further research is needed on the ongoing tension between sameness and difference within lesbian social movement organizations that has led to the exclusion of transgender and bisexual activists, as well as working-class women and women of color. Future research would benefit by adopting an intersectional approach to understand better the identity disputes and difference troubles that have and continue to plague lesbian activists and social movement organizations. Finally, a great deal of the research on lesbian activism has

been undertaken without sufficient attention to the literature on social movements. Scholars might enrich their future work by paying closer attention to social movement theory and the burgeoning research on a wide variety of social movements.

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