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# The Advocate and The Making of a Gay Model Minority

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*The Advocate* and the Making of a Gay Model Minority  
1967-2007

by

Christianne Anastasia Gadd

A Dissertation

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

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Christianne Anastasia Gadd

Approved and recommended for acceptance as a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

Christianne A. Gadd

*“The Advocate and the Making of a Gay Model Minority, 1967-2007”*

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As a child, I remember reading the words of poet Charles Lamb emblazoned on a knick-knack in my parents' home: "The good things in life are not to be had singly, but come to us with a mixture." The quotation is a good metaphor for the last ten years during which time this project took shape and came to fruition. I am deeply indebted to a number of people whose support, assistance, and guidance have made this mixture mostly sweet.

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation places *The Advocate*, a leading newsmagazine for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community published in the late twentieth-century United States, in context with contemporary political and social events and explores the relationship between the magazine's content and the ascendancy of an organized American LGBT political movement. My work argues that the magazine deliberately attempted to produce a largely normative LGBT minority in the interests of achieving mainstream acceptance of homosexuals and as a means of broadening public support for their struggles for civil rights. This goal, I charge, necessitated the magazine's effacement of issues related to race and gender, generally, and of women and people of color, specifically.

This project complicates still-dominant depictions of LGBT Americans as a monolithic entity by exploring the ways in which issues of gender, race, class and sexuality created fissures within this broadly-conceived community. My study illustrates how these differences were minimized by *The Advocate*, which consistently endeavored to consolidate—and to homogenize—LGBT Americans. This tendency, I argue, was driven by the fear that a failure to do so would sap the potential power of the LGBT political bloc that emerged in the United States in the 1970s—a sentiment expressed implicitly and explicitly in the magazine's pages. I explore *The Advocate's* treatment of those who lay outside its tacitly-established borders and argue that their exclusion illustrates the limitations of identity politics. I also engage in a detailed analysis of *The Advocate's* coverage of second wave feminism, and evaluate its coverage of topics related to transgendered identities and bisexuality. Examining these issues reveals how

*The Advocate* struggled to maintain an essentialist and binary view of gender and sexuality, even at the cost of disenfranchising part of its audience. This practice, I conclude, both effected and reflected tensions with which the mainstream LGBT community and political movement continue to contend even today.

## Prologue: A Brief History of *The Advocate*

Though subcultures of same-sex-attracted individuals existed in the United States throughout its history, the 1950s were the decade in which nascent homophile organizations—most notably the lesbian group Daughters of Bilitis and the gay male-focused Mattachine Society—made a mission of combating institutional and social discrimination against gay and lesbian Americans. Their efforts made some headway, particularly in the last years of the decade, but homophobia still pervaded American culture well into the 1960s. By the late 1960s, however, the cultural moment was considerably different than the period in which the homophile groups had coalesced; struggles for civil rights for African-Americans, demands for gender equality from feminists, and fervent protests against the Vietnam war by both liberal and radical organizations contributed to an atmosphere infused with militancy, unease, and great hope. This ethos energized longtime members of the homophile movement and inspired new efforts by these veterans—as well as by the fledgling gay liberation movement—to contest the homophobic status quo and to demand equal social and legal treatment.<sup>1</sup>

The mainstream press of the time offered LGBT Americans few opportunities to see themselves reflected in an unbiased or positive light, and few ways to obtain information salient to their particular concerns. Though many homophile groups had produced internal publications in the 1950s—including ONE, Inc.'s *ONE*, the Mattachine

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<sup>1</sup> Although many of their goals were similar, homophile groups and gay liberationists differed in both their perception of homosexuality and their approach to social change with the former generally subscribing to essentialist beliefs and espousing conservative approaches and the latter entertaining notions of social construction and employing more radical tactics. Some authors, notably Martin Meeker, disagree with this assessment, however, and the perceived discontinuity between the two camps has been the subject of much debate. This contested history will be discussed at greater length within the opening chapter of the dissertation.

Society's *Mattachine Review*, and the Daughters of Bilitis' *Ladder*—they remained relatively difficult for non-group members to access through the 1960s. Further complicating the issue of availability, changes in leadership and values during the 1960s plagued many homophile groups, resulting in the discontinuation of some extant publications. Responding to the dearth of news sources for gay and lesbian readers, in September 1967, Dick Michaels and Bill Rand, both members of a small homophile group called Personal Rights in Defense and Education, began to publish a monthly newsletter named *The Los Angeles Advocate*. The humble beginnings of *The Advocate* (related at the start of this chapter) gave no indication that it would one day be regarded as “the newspaper of record for the gay community” and—in the words of scholar Edward Alwood—as “the only...continuous historical record of the emergence of the nation's gay and lesbian liberation movement.”<sup>2</sup>

*The Los Angeles Advocate* was the first gay publication to finance itself through advertising and sales revenue rather than through the membership dues of an affiliated organization. It was also the first to have a paid staff. As a result, many scholars have characterized *The Advocate* as strictly a capitalist venture rather than a politically-oriented publication. Scholar Rodger Streitmatter rejected this false dichotomy, quoting early *Advocate* writer and prolific gay activist Jim Kepner's assertion that “Dick [Michaels] definitely started the newspaper as a movement effort...He was determined to improve the gay man's status in society.”<sup>3</sup> The new publication's political potential was indicated by *The Los Angeles Advocate*'s first editorial which attempted to establish its

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Alwood, *Straight News: Gays, Lesbians, and the News Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996): xv.

<sup>3</sup> Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995): 88.

place in the firmament of the LGBT community and associated political movement. In what seems like a calculated effort to assuage fears about market cannibalization, the editors first assured readers that *The Los Angeles Advocate* “is not a magazine. It is in no way a competitor of the many fine and interesting magazines published by homosexual organizations in Los Angeles and elsewhere. We regard them as colleagues, not rivals, and urge all homosexuals to continue to buy and read those publications.” *The Los Angeles Advocate*’s main purpose, they claimed, was to

publish news that is important to the homosexual—legal steps, social news, developments in the various organizations—anything that the homosexual needs to know or wants to know. The only opinions that will appear in the news stories will be those attributed to people involved in the particular news items. All other opinion will be confined to signed columns. Furthermore, *The Advocate* welcomes all shades of opinion from all responsible individuals and groups in the homophile movement. We want this newspaper to be a forum...At the same time, *The Advocate* will present a generous portion of feature material to entertain, to inform, and perhaps to provoke. We do not intend to be deadly dull.<sup>4</sup>

Dull, it definitely wasn’t—with a mix of bold (if slightly amateurish) graphic design, idiosyncratic columns, a personals section, an activities calendar, and pun-filled headlines (like 1968’s “Broken Dykes Flood Stage and Screen,” a feature on anti-lesbian themes in mainstream films), *The Los Angeles Advocate*’s content was indeed engaging and often provocative.<sup>5</sup> That the publication was liberally strewn with photos of attractive young men also increased its appeal to some readers and ensured that it wouldn’t be confused with a typically-dry news publication. From 1967 through 1970, *The Los Angeles Advocate* was printed on 8x11.5” paper, and typically averaged about fifteen pages per month. In April 1970, the publication dropped the geographical qualifier from its title and

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<sup>4</sup>“Happy Birthday to Us.” *The Los Angeles Advocate*, September 1967: 6.

<sup>5</sup> Bart Cody and Dick Michaels, “Broken Dykes Flood Stage and Screen.” *The Los Angeles Advocate*, March 1968: 12.

became, simply, *The Advocate*. At the same time, it adopted a biweekly publication schedule (it had formerly been a monthly) and an appearance more in keeping with traditional newspaper conventions. The majority of its pages were filled with news columns and news briefs, though stories about entertainment and leisure also appeared, as did a large section, at the rear of the paper, called “Trader Dick” (a risqué riff on “Trader Vic”) full of advertising for “adult” films, bathhouses, and often-explicit personal ads.

In 1974, Dick Michaels sold *The Advocate* to investment banker David B. Goodstein, and this change in ownership resulted in a dramatic overhaul of the publication that met with resentment and resistance from within and without. The most immediately visible difference between the old *Advocate* and the new one was a new format which contravened its founders’ vision of *The Advocate* as a newspaper, “not a magazine.” Editor John Preston admitted that “[David] Goodstein and I clearly wanted it to be a magazine, but we were stuck with a newsprint format for financial reasons.” As a result, the new owners undertook to make *The Advocate* resemble a magazine as closely as possible in terms of layout and design (see fig. 1).

The change in *The Advocate*’s physical appearance was mirrored by changes in its content after Goodstein assumed control. Deciding what kinds of stories warranted inclusion in a gay-oriented publication had never been an easy task, as journalist Neil Miller, who served as the editor of Boston’s *Gay Community News* in the mid-1970s, recalled; Miller wrote that it felt as though “we were always in the thick of battle, battle that was sometimes exhilarating, more often exhausting. Should we accept an ad for a bar featuring a macho guy who asked provocatively, ‘Are you man enough?’ or was the ad sexist? Was abortion a gay and lesbian issue? Was nuclear power?...Was there enough

lesbian coverage, gay male coverage, coverage of Third World gays?”<sup>6</sup>*The Advocate*, too, struggled to reconcile its commitment to covering the whole LGBT community with the need to be mindful of tensions that existed between the various constituencies that comprised this community. Rob Cole wrote in 1973 that *The Advocate*’s coverage of various topics was dictated, in part, by “the deep-seated antagonism among several well-defined groups of Gays [including] the ‘leather set,’ the non-leather but still male-oriented homosexual males, the male-oriented lesbians, the lesbian feminists, the gay church groups, the politically leftist gay activists, the old homophile groups, and the ‘closet’ types who do not identify with any sort of ‘gay community.’”<sup>7</sup>

The decision by Goodstein to redefine *The Advocate* as a “lifestyle” publication, rather than a comprehensive news source, may have been at least partially intended to allow the publication to sidestep demands for equal coverage of all these groups. Editor John Preston charged that *The Advocate*’s reorientation was an improvement that would allow it to “speak to readers in a more complete way, [rather than being] just a source for news information.”<sup>8</sup> Many of those affiliated with *The Advocate* were apprehensive about the proposed changes, and some suggested that these would lead to the publication’s demise. Former editor Rob Cole, who was fired by Goodstein and Preston after they assumed control of the magazine, informed a colleague in 1974 that, “to my great dismay, [the new owners] plan to turn *The Advocate* into a magazine of opinion and entertainment. Serious news reporting, it seems, will ‘turn off’ the audience they plan to

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<sup>6</sup> Neil Miller, *In Search of Gay America: Women and Men in a Time of Change* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989): 4.

<sup>7</sup> Rob Cole, Letter to Bebe J. Scarpie, n.d. (ca. October 1973). The Advocate Papers, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

<sup>8</sup> John Preston, “1975: Family Matters.” In Mark Thompson, ed., *Long Road to Freedom: The Advocate History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994): 113.



try to reach.” He noted that “despite the apparent attraction of the chatty, entertainment-oriented magazine format which the new *Advocate* has adopted, the old *Advocate* prospered as a hard-news publication while gay magazines came and went.”<sup>9</sup> Former *Advocate* owner Dick Michaels was also concerned about these changes; a private memo from an *Advocate* staff member reported that Michaels, in the course of a “knock-down, drag-out session” with new editor John Preston, had warned him that an *Advocate* light on news would fail. Michaels allegedly despaired that “if the newspaper you are planning turns out to be what I suspect, I am going to have to publicly apologize to the gay community for having sold it to your crowd.”<sup>10</sup> John Preston attempted to justify *The Advocate*’s new focus by claiming that “the regular media is running more gay news, so that frees us of the responsibility,” a massive overstatement that did little to quell concerns that *The Advocate* was shirking its traditional duties.<sup>11</sup>

A 1975 memo from Preston enumerating the “new” *Advocate*’s editorial policies confirmed its former employees’ perceptions of a massive change in the publication’s aims. The five-point definition of the “new” *Advocate*’s intentions read as follows:

- a. Communicate to our readers that it is a good thing that they are gay.
- b. Give our readers the most information possible on their civil rights and the movement working for their fuller civil rights.
- c. Report news concisely and accurately to our readers.
- d. Show our readers the vast range of lifestyles which they could be leading. It is not our intent to try to force our readers out of their closets nor to make them feel badly that they are not up-front gay people. But, it is our intent to show them that they have options other than acceptance of closets imposed upon them by an oppressive society.

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<sup>9</sup> Emphasis mine. Rob Cole, Letter to Investigative Journalist, December 26, 1974. Rob Cole papers, ONE Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Memo from “Doug.” Unpublished, n.d. The Advocate Papers, ONE Archives.

<sup>11</sup> Dudley Clendenin and Adam Nagourney, *Out For Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999): 251.

- e. Help our readers get the most enjoyment from their day-to-day lives. This includes recommending good entertainment, decent restaurants where they will be welcome, and so on.<sup>12</sup>

Qualifying news coverage with the word “concisely” was a key element of this statement of purpose. As Adam Nagourney and Dudley Clendenin observed of the post 1975-*Advocate*, “News was relegated to short dispatches at the front of the newspaper,” a far cry from the old *Advocate*, which had contained far more news columns than “lifestyle” features.<sup>13</sup> This was due largely to the efforts of editor Rob Cole who explained in 1974 that “*The Advocate*...is primarily a newspaper, and only about one-third of its editorial content is in the form of non-news features.”<sup>14</sup> Noting the diminishment of news coverage in the Goodstein-led *Advocate* should not be construed as an implication that the publication became completely vapid or uninformative, however; *Advocate* writer Randy Shilts noted that, beginning in 1975, “*The Advocate* launched into a series of major investigations into issues that had long been ignored by the gay media. The problems of aging, alcoholism, sexism and sexually-related diseases in the gay community got their first airing in *Advocate* features.”<sup>15</sup> These laudable features notwithstanding, the prominent mention of “lifestyle,” “entertainment,” and “enjoyment” in Preston’s memo to correspondents indicated a clear shift in *The Advocate*’s priorities under Goodstein’s leadership, as did its advertising and promotional slogan “Touching Your Lifestyle.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John Preston, Memo to Correspondents. January 28, 1975. Rob Cole papers, ONE Archives.

<sup>13</sup> Clendenin and Nagourney: 251.

<sup>14</sup> Rob Cole, Letter to Doug Feldman, December 2, 1974. Rob Cole papers, ONE Archives.

<sup>15</sup> Randy Shilts, “*The Advocate: The Story of a Paper, The Story of a Movement*.” Unpublished manuscript (n.d.). Randy Shilts Papers, James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library.

<sup>16</sup> Of this ubiquitous slogan, which appeared on posters and t-shirts as well as *The Advocate*’s cover, John Preston later remarked, “May I burn in hell for having approved [it.]” Quoted in Mark Thompson, ed., *Long Road to Freedom*: 113.

Readers met the changes with approbation; one charged that the editors had “screwed up a lively gay paper. Now we get ‘sedate’ covers and Rex Reed-y writers. Why the hell are you doing this? Shouldn’t be called *Advocate* at all—call it *The Closets’ Town and Country*.”<sup>17</sup> In addition, virulent criticism of *The Advocate* (and of its polarizing new owner) was issued by more radical LGBT organizations and publications in 1976. Much of their heated rhetoric was prompted by the agenda Goodstein had laid out for attendees of his 1976 “Advocate Invitational Conference.” This gathering was intended to help foment a federal gay rights lobbying campaign, but only those activists who passed muster with Goodstein were invited. As though this exclusivity wasn’t sufficiently troublesome, Goodstein explicitly suggested that “gay spoilers” (by which he meant radical LGBT activists) were detrimental to LGBT rights efforts and should be forcibly prevented from interacting with media and political figures. a gathering of The Gay Liberation Alliance of San Francisco, for example, called for a boycott of *The Advocate*, while *NewsWest*, a paper founded by Rob Cole following his unceremonious dismissal from *The Advocate*, carried an impassioned editorial in 1976 decrying the “dangerously vicious proposal” of the “autocratic San Mateo millionaire” which they claimed was tantamount to trying to “silence any gay person whose ideas differ from his own” by “manipulat[ing] the media.”<sup>18</sup> New York’s Gay Activists Alliance, meanwhile, spoke more generally about the publication’s new direction under Goodstein, circulating an open letter to the publisher that decried *The Advocate*’s “evolution in a right-ward and reactionary direction” since his arrival. The GAA claimed that it could no longer claim to “speak for any but the most conservative elements within the gay community,” as its

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Mark Thompson, ed., *Long Road to Freedom*: 114.

<sup>18</sup> “Citizen Goodstein.” *NewsWest*, February 6, 1976: 38.

content was limited reports on “strictly middle-class and pro-establishment endeavors... crumbs left at his table by establishment politicians, and of course, a heavy dose of ‘gay scene’ reportage. Many of us used to read *The Advocate* to ‘find out what’s going on’ throughout the country. Today one reads it, if at all, to feel titillated by having one’s ‘lifestyle’ touched,” they concluded disparagingly.<sup>19</sup> In spite of the negative responses, *The Advocate*’s circulation increased after the redesign; the magazine cited statistics from the Audit Bureau of Circulation showing a 66% growth in circulation between 1974 and 1977.<sup>20</sup> Mainstream awareness of the publication grew alongside it, as evidenced by coverage it received in *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Newsweek* and the *New York Times* in the last half of the 1970s.<sup>21</sup>

A change was afoot at *The Advocate* as the end of the decade approached. David Goodstein, whose interest in the work of new age guru Werner Erhard and the seminars he offered in “est” had developed in the mid-1970s, subsequently devoted himself to the development of a series of similar seminars, intended for gay and lesbian participants, which he dubbed the “*Advocate Experience*.”<sup>22</sup> Randy Shilts, in a scathing expose

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<sup>19</sup> The Gay Activists Alliance, “In Defense of the Gay Liberation Movement: An Open Letter to David Goodstein and *The Advocate*.” January 24, 1976. Rob Cole Papers, ONE Gay and Lesbian Archives.

<sup>20</sup> “Advocate Circulation Growth.” Unpublished, n.d. Advocate Papers, ONE Gay and Lesbian Archives.

<sup>21</sup> David Gelman, “Gays and the Press.” *Newsweek*, October 20, 1975: 93-4; Philip H. Dougherty, “Homosexual Magazines in Bids.” *New York Times*, July 13, 1976: N.R. Kleinfeld, “Homosexual Periodicals Are Proliferating.” *New York Times*, August 1, 1978: D4; 66; Stephen J. Sansweet, “A Homosexual Paper, The Advocate, Widens Readership, Influence.” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 3, 1975; Dave Smith, “Gay Community’s Advocate: Glass Door at Maze’s End.” *Los Angeles Times*, November 11, 1976; Joan Zynda, “Magazine’s Success Tied to Gay Lib.” *Chicago Tribune*, September 19, 1979.

<sup>22</sup> Est, loosely defined, sought to help its practitioners become more satisfied with their current lives and less focused on fulfilling their desires or future goals. A key tenet of these seminars was that participants “be present,” and to this end any types of distractions were discouraged in est (and est-based) seminars; the “Physical Aliveness Agreements” that Advocate Experience attendees were required to sign mandated they would not chew gum or wear a watch (more troublingly, these also mandated that participants would applaud every time someone spoke, and would not move from their “designated space” until a facilitator granted them permission). “Physical Aliveness Agreements.” Unpublished, n.d., David B. Goodstein

entitled “The *Advocate* Experience: Enlightenment in a Plain Brown Wrapper” (referring to the plain brown wrapper in which copies of *The Advocate* were mailed to subscribers), described one of the seminars thusly:

Everyone is wallowing in their vulnerability, rolling in their Okayness, and most of all, jumping at the chance to tell everyone about it. Countless neuroses are confessed, old hurts exhumed, new comfort found. All of this was punctuated by applause which, in human potential jargon, is known as “acknowledgment.” Every “sharing” was to be “acknowledged,” as if the entire weekend were one big Art Linkletter Show with an applause track to keep the production moving. I wait for the accordion player to break in and carry us into a commercial....All day, people have contrived Experiences to create simulated feelings about which they can have synthesized interactions for which they are rewarded mechanical applause.<sup>23</sup>

*Advocate* staffers were strongly encouraged to participate in these seminars, and though many attended, some resented this encroachment into their personal lives. The *San Francisco Sentinel* published an article in 1978 reporting that both Randy Shilts and Sasha Gregory-Lewis were resigning from *The Advocate* as a result of this pressure. More damagingly, the piece reported that Goodstein had made it clear to another staff member that a participation in the Advocate Experience was a condition of his continued employment at the publication, and fired him when he refused.<sup>24</sup> Goodstein’s time and energies were entirely consumed by this new venture, and his name was replaced by that of Peter Frisch in the “publisher” spot on *The Advocate*’s masthead beginning with the

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Papers, Cornell University. For more on est, see William Warren Bartley, III, *Werner Erhard: The Transformation of a Man, The Founding of Est* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1978).

<sup>23</sup> Randy Shilts, “The *Advocate* Experience: Enlightenment in a Plain Brown Wrapper.” Unpublished, ca. 1978. Randy Shilts Papers, James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Collection, San Francisco Public Library.

<sup>24</sup> “Fired Over Refusal to Join EST.” *San Francisco Sentinel*, March 10, 1978. Though this article ran without a byline, it is likely that Shilts was either the author or the “unnamed source” quoted at length throughout the article. This suspicion was shared by some at *The Advocate*, including Brent Harris, who sent Shilts a copy of the article along with a harsh letter that accused him of “suffering from an acute case of dishonesty, disloyalty, and moral cowardice.” Randy Shilts Papers.

June 14, 1979 issue. It would seem, then, that former *Advocate* employee Dean Gengle was not far off-base when, in 1979, he dubbed it “The Thing That Ate *The Advocate*.”<sup>25</sup>

Peter Frisch’s priority as *The Advocate*’s publisher was to ensure its financial success, and under his guidance *The Advocate* won advertising dollars from mainstream sources like Absolut Vodka and Boodles Gin. Whereas Goodstein had unapologetically blurred the line between publisher and editor, using *The Advocate* as his bully pulpit, Frisch seemed less interested in publicly espousing his perspective on LGBT politics and community (allowing Goodstein to pen the magazine’s “Opening Space” columns in most issues, rather than doing so himself). Insofar as Frisch had a discernible political perspective at all, it seemed to be one in which gains for LGBT Americans would be achieved through the marketplace; speaking to the *Los Angeles Times* in 1984, Frisch noted that “In our society, it seems like two things count: votes and money. We’re learning to do with our money in the ‘80s what we did with our votes in the ‘70s.”<sup>26</sup>

As a result of Goodstein’s preoccupation with the Advocate Experience and Frisch’s hands-off approach, the staff at *The Advocate* privately claimed in 1982 that the publication effectively had “no editorial direction”<sup>27</sup> Adding to their sense of anxiety, in late 1984 Peter Frisch departed *The Advocate* to focus on a new venture, and in 1985 David Goodstein was diagnosed with the advanced colon cancer that would kill him just months later. In an effort to ensure that his vision for *The Advocate* would last even beyond his tenure, Goodstein selected 29-year old Niles A. Merton to succeed him as *The Advocate*’s publisher. In spite of this careful pre-planning, however, Goodstein’s death

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<sup>25</sup> Dean Gengle, “The Thing That Ate The Advocate.” *Alternate*, May/June 1979: 22-25.

<sup>26</sup> S. Harris, “Major Firms Are in Active Pursuit of the Gay Dollar.” *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1984: D1.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Shively, Letter to Don Carufo. August 14, 1982. Michael Shively Papers, Cornell University.

brought some tumult to the offices of *The Advocate*, as the financially precarious situation of the publication was made clear to staff members who had previously been shielded from this knowledge. Production Manager Michael Shively indicated the staff's concern over this state of affairs in a 1985 letter to friends, writing that it was "still not clear if [*The Advocate*] can make it without our "fearless" leader (the dead Goodstein) but we are giving it the good try...[Goodstein] had lots of money so there wasn't much to worry about...Now that that security (his money) is gone we have to make the right decisions because there is no one to bail us out."<sup>28</sup>

Niles Merton, who Goodstein claimed to have chosen because of his "ability and integrity," perhaps not-so-coincidentally also happened to embody the vision of professionally successful, financially-affluent and politically-moderate gay life that Goodstein himself prized. *The Advocate's* coverage of the transition emphasized these qualities, noting that Merton, a graduate of the University of California at Santa Barbara, had founded and managed a successful export trading company before becoming the executive director of Orange County's Gay and Lesbian Center and boosting its internal revenue from \$1000 to \$10,000 a month.<sup>29</sup> But while Merton's financial acumen and conformity to Goodstein's standards may have gotten him into the publisher's chair, he ultimately lacked the clarity of vision that had marked his predecessor's reign. *The Advocate's* future, already clouded by financial concerns, was further imperiled by its new leader's lack of experience and seeming ambivalence about its function in the LGBT

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Shively, Letter to Blymiller Family. November 10, 1985. Michael Shively Papers, Cornell University.

<sup>29</sup> "Merton Named *Advocate* Publisher." *The Advocate*, June 25, 1985: 9.

community. In a 1987 memo issued by Merton to the executive staff Merton fretted about his “growing concerns regarding *The Advocate*,” writing that

I'm unable to say who we are and what we are all about; what our role in history is or what or role in the gay community is. What is our mission and purpose?...Haven't you wondered where the hell we're going as a community and why? Don't you want to know just who in hell these [community] “leaders” and their organizations are?...I feel a certain drift and lack of agreed upon vision.<sup>30</sup>  
More ominous even than Merton's inability to articulate *The Advocate*'s mission

was the sense that Merton, like many other LGBT Americans, was simply burnt out, beaten down both by the astounding numbers of deaths wrought by AIDS in the LGBT community and by the homophobic responses of the American mainstream to the disease. The fatigue was understandable: how could one expect to maintain a positive attitude and forward-looking perspective in an era when suggestions of mandatory AIDS testing for gay men (and their possible quarantine and/or forcible tattooing with their positive status) evoked little response in the mainstream media? Merton admitted in his memo that “there have been times when I have simply stopped reading the magazine because of the profound sense of hopelessness that comes from reading about one awful event after another.” But he also laid some of the blame for his weariness at the feet of LGBT activists, proclaiming himself “damned sick and tired of being dragged into one useless, poorly planned event-lawsuit-march-act of civil disobedience-after another by any number of unqualified ‘activists.’” The publisher's frustration with homophobia in mainstream American culture could potentially be channeled into making *The Advocate* even more assertive, investigative, and opinionated, but Merton's expression of exhaustion with the very community his publication was intended to serve boded less well for the magazine's future.

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<sup>30</sup> Niles Merton, Memo to Executive Staff, July 9, 1987. Michael Shively Papers, Cornell University.



Nonetheless, *The Advocate* soldiered on through the end of the decade, though its internal organization was far from stable. From 1985 through 1992, *The Advocate* employed no fewer than three different editors in chief. The arrival of Richard Rouillard in July 1990 promised to rejuvenate a publication which one newspaper described as “a sluggish pulp-paper magazine...badly in need of pep pills.”<sup>31</sup> Somewhat ironically, Rouillard’s plans to accomplish this involved returning *The Advocate* to being a news-oriented magazine, as it had in its earlier incarnations. Rouillard expanded the magazine’s staff and opened bureaus in Washington, D.C. and Chicago and, in the hopes of bolstering the magazine’s credibility as a news source, he regularly sent copies of the magazine to journalists across the country and established a public relations representative to alert mainstream media to the important topics being covered in *The Advocate*. Under his leadership, *The Advocate* garnered nominations for mainstream journalism awards (and was named “Best Alternative Magazine” by Magazine Week in 1992). The *Los Angeles Times* reported that Rouillard also made significant efforts to increase *The Advocate*’s appeal to a broader range of readers (including young adults and women); he spearheaded a bold redesign of the magazine and put an emphasis on running attention-getting profiles of celebrities (of all sexual orientations) to raise its profile. As a cumulative result of these changes, the *Times* reported, *The Advocate*’s circulation jumped from 60,000 in 1990 to 150,000 in 1992, and its ad sales increased by nearly 30%. David Mixner, a prominent gay political activist, credited Rouillard in 1992 with having made *The Advocate* “the authoritative publication nationally in the gay and

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<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Venant, “Richard Rouillard is Proud, Outrageous, and In Your Face.” *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1992.

lesbian community...He's taken that magazine from a good paper representing our community to a product of excellence."<sup>32</sup>

But this promising upward trend did not last long: Rouillard abruptly resigned from the magazine in July 1992, citing disagreements between himself and management over *The Advocate's* future. Niles Merton, still serving as *The Advocate's* publisher, claimed to have been "stunned" by his resignation, but within a short period of time, the details of Rouillard's departure emerged, and with it, a picture of a magazine in turmoil. The *New York Times* suggested that the acrimony resulted from a "clash of egos over who should get credit for the magazine's improved fortunes" and threatened to "[tarnish] *The Advocate's* hard-won image as a serious magazine."<sup>33</sup> The magazine's reputation was further imperiled in 1993 by its drastic cutbacks in staff, and by its role as defendant in two well-publicized lawsuits brought by former employees alleging sexual harassment and discrimination against women. *The Advocate* certainly didn't help matters when it chose to challenge the sexual harassment lawsuit, which involved two male employees, on the grounds that California's laws did not cover same-sex sexual harassment, a tactic for which it was harshly criticized.<sup>34</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* observed, "If trouble comes in threes, *The Advocate* has met its quota for a while," and its newly appointed editor in chief, Jeff Yarbrough, conceded that the magazine was on the brink of a "major public relations disaster."<sup>35</sup> The lawsuits were settled out of court, which suggests that *The*

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<sup>32</sup> Garry Abrams, "Rouillard Resigns as Advocate Editor." *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1992.

<sup>33</sup> Deirdre Carmody, "Editor's Departure Clouds Gains By Gay Magazine." *New York Times*, August 10, 1992.

<sup>34</sup> E. Gary Spitko, "He Said, He Said: Same-Sex Sexual Harassment Under Title VII and the 'Reasonably Heterosexist' Standard." *Berkeley Journal of Employment and Labor Law*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1997): 83.

<sup>35</sup> Garry Abrams, "Rough Water Ahead for The Advocate?" *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 1993.

*Advocate*'s management wanted to head off any further damage to the magazine's reputation, even if it came at a price it could ill afford at the time.

In addition to steering the magazine through the perils of its *annus horribilus*, the leadership of Jeff Yarbrough seemed poised to keep *The Advocate* moving in a positive direction. Yarbrough had a strong journalistic background and had written for national publications like *People*, *Interview*, and *Premiere*. In 1996, however, the magazine again saw its editor in chief depart in a haze of uncertainty and veiled accusations. While Yarbrough claimed to have resigned, rumors circulated that he had been fired for misrepresenting a story that the magazine ran in May of that year. The editor's byline had appeared on a piece that appeared to be an interview with Bill Clinton, then the President of the United States. The *New York Times* explained that though the piece had been "promoted as an exclusive sit-down discussion with the President," it had "actually involved written responses to written questions by fax machine."<sup>36</sup> Yarbrough was replaced by Judy Wieder, marking the first time a woman had been *The Advocate*'s editor in chief.

Wieder's first editorial illustrated her view of *The Advocate*'s mission: she spoke proudly of its ability to deliver "hard-hitting investigative reporting; comprehensive coverage of gay and lesbian political, medical, and financial news; no-nonsense in-depth interviews; incisive commentary from colorful columnists; and informative stories about the arts."<sup>37</sup> In keeping with this, under Wieder *The Advocate* published numerous groundbreaking stories (on breast cancer in the lesbian community, sex addiction, scientific

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<sup>36</sup> Robin Pogrebin, "Advocate Editor Departs After 4 Years at the Helm." *New York Times*, August 19, 1996.

<sup>37</sup> Judy Wieder, "News and History." *The Advocate*, January 21, 1997: 6.

advances in AIDS research, and the search for a “gay gene,” among others). Wieder’s time as editor in chief, however, has been largely characterized by critics as the period during which *The Advocate* put a new emphasis on celebrity coverage (which is not surprising, given that Wieder had previously served as the magazine’s entertainment editor). *Press Pass Q*, a publication for LGBT media professionals, noted in 2001 that “*The Advocate*, billed as a newsmagazine, has been panned for being too soft and too entertainment-oriented,” and Wieder herself went on the defensive about the topic in 2008, arguing that her use of celebrities was a strategic decision motivated by more than a simple desire to increase issue sales. “I did it,” she claimed, “because celebrities drew reader/browsers into the bigger issues you’re trying to explore in the publication. Nine out of ten times, if we did it well, we’d have a much bigger audience for difficult subjects people otherwise resisted.” Wieder also argued that the appearance of mainstream celebrities in *The Advocate* materially improved the lives of its readers:

In the early ’90s, the use of straight pro-gay celebrities (Madonna, Roseanne) gave great comfort to a readership choking on the self-hate most straight institutions were spewing at them about AIDS. In the mid-’90s closeted celebrities suddenly began to come out. To everything a season: you can never underestimate the good Chastity Bono and Cher did at that time for young kids struggling with their mothers. At the turn of the century (2000), using even news celebrities such as Sharon Smith—whose lover was mauled to death in San Francisco by a neighbor’s dogs—to discuss the rights we don’t have as domestic partners, became a regular practice at the magazine.<sup>38</sup>

Wieder stepped down from her position at *The Advocate* in 2003 to become the editorial director of the magazine’s parent company, LPI Media, handing the reins over to Bruce Steele. The magazine’s content remained static, with celebrity interviews and

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<sup>38</sup> Judy Wieder, “The Not-So-Sudden Death of *The Advocate*.” HuffingtonPost.com, November 4, 2009. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/judy-wieder/the-not-so-sudden-death-o\\_b\\_342725.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/judy-wieder/the-not-so-sudden-death-o_b_342725.html). Accessed 6 May 2012.

investigative reports predominating. Blazing new ground, however, in 2006 Steele introduced a ground-breaking series of articles entitled “Transgender 101” by author Joanne Herman, which substantially increased the amount of trans representation in *The Advocate*’s pages. But following Steele’s resignation, a period of rapid editorial change occurred at *The Advocate*, which—in conjunction with another significant development—portended its death.

It seems improbable that *The Advocate*, which was forged in the fire of an American culture shot through with hostility toward LGBT people, would face its most severe challenges in the significantly-more LGBT-friendly new millennium. But in 2009, *The Advocate*’s parent company, Here Media, announced that the venerable magazine, which had been published bi-weekly for the last forty years, would now produce only one issue a month. Adding insult to injury, this new, monthly, *The Advocate* would no longer appear in a stand-alone edition, and would only be accessible as an insert tucked inside the parent company’s new flagship publication (and former rival), *Out*. Reflecting on the “not-so-sudden death of *The Advocate*” Judy Wieder observed bitterly that the magazine had died at the hands of acquisitive new owners who had little interest in, or understanding of, *The Advocate*’s purpose; whereas “the original owners, publishers, and editors of *Advocate* ran it because they cherished it...in recent years the owners have purchased it because they wanted to say they “‘had it,’ like a feather in their caps or a notch on their belts, they owned *The Advocate*. Some even bragged that their mission was

to ‘save it,’ that is until they understood what that really entailed. You can't save it if you don't know what it is.”<sup>39</sup>

Although Wieder attributed *The Advocate*'s shuttering to its new owners' failure to understand the publication, her perspective neglected to address the extent to which *The Advocate*'s demise had been caused by its own loss of identity over the last two decades of its lifespan. Certainly at the time of its founding, and in fact for the majority of its run, no one would have contested *The Advocate*'s claim to be the premier source of news and information for and about LGBT life in the United States. But as homosexuality became a topic discussed more frequently (and more factually) by the mainstream media in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, some critics muttered that LGBT-specific magazines and newspapers had been rendered obsolete; when LGBT Americans could see themselves reflected (in a relatively positive light) on broadcast television and in popular films and mainstream publications, what function, then, did titles like *The Advocate* serve?<sup>40</sup> To justify their continued existence, LGBT publications would have needed to differentiate themselves significantly from the other options available on the American media buffet. Unfortunately, as in the case of *The Advocate*, many titles failed to do so and consequently ceased production.<sup>41</sup> While the economic recession was cited as the primary reason that these publications shut down, the ready availability of LGBT news and representation from more mainstream sources

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<sup>39</sup> Judy Wieder, “The Not-So-Sudden Death of *The Advocate*.” HuffingtonPost.com, November 4, 2009. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/judy-wieder/the-not-so-sudden-death-o\\_b\\_342725.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/judy-wieder/the-not-so-sudden-death-o_b_342725.html). Accessed 12 February 2012.

<sup>40</sup> See Michael Lavers, “Gay Print Media on the Wane.” *Village Voice*, June 22 2010. <http://www.villagevoice.com/2010-06-22/news/gay-print-media-on-the-wane>. Accessed 6 June 2012.

<sup>41</sup>In the three years preceding Here Media's decision to demote *The Advocate* to an insert, a number of other LGBT publications shuttered, including national magazines *XY* and *Genre*, and influential regional newspapers such as the *Washington Blade* and the *Southern Voice*.

cannot be discounted as contributing to the titles' financial troubles. For an illustration of the growth of mainstream press coverage of homosexuality and related topics in the early 2000s, one could look at the *New York Times*, where the terms “gay,” “homosexual,” or “lesbian” appeared nearly 14,000 times between 2000 and 2010 (making four thousand additional appearances than they had during the previous 10-year period), or at mainstream television (the Network Responsibility Index published by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation reported in 2010 that for the first time since 2006, all major television networks posted an increase in their representation of LGBT people from the preceding years.)<sup>42</sup>

In light of these statistics, it would seem that *The Advocate* became a victim of its own success. By the early 2000s, the cultural climate in the United States allowed for the free and frequent discussion of the formerly-verboten topic of homosexuality by mainstream media organs. This trend was certainly a far cry from the days when *The Advocate* defined its mission as providing (necessary) correctives to the negative depictions of LGBT people that were common currency, and inarguably an improvement over the past. At the same time, this cultural shift seriously impinged on the magazine's self-understanding, effectively denying its identity as the primary source of news on LGBT topics or even as the locus of most positive depictions of LGBT people. If it had been able to maintain its historic commitment to the third pillar of its mission—to serve as an advocate for LGBT rights—it might still have survived in the crowded journalistic field. But over the last decades of its existence, political content was generally given short shrift relative to more “appealing” (read: celebrity-centered or entertainment-

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<sup>42</sup> Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, 2010 Network Responsibility Index. <http://www.glaad.org/2010/nri>. Accessed 12 March 2012.

driven) content—the very change for which Wieder herself took credit. While 2009 may have been the year of *The Advocate*'s official death, the slow erosion of its mission had begun long before.





FIG 1. *The Advocate*'s design changed significantly over time. On the far left, a front page from 1967; in the middle, a front page from 1973; and on the right, a cover from 1976.

## Introduction

***Los Angeles, 1967:* It was lunchtime at the American Broadcasting Studios in Los Angeles, California, and in the office that was home to its radio continuity department, David Gaard checked his watch impatiently. The others should have been there by now—it was already 12:30 and there was only so much time before the rest of the staff returned from lunch. Just then, Bill Rau and Walter Serrick burst into the room, clutching their lunch bags and greeting Gaard apologetically. Gaard poked his head out into the corridor and, seeing no one there, locked the door. Setting their lunches at one end of the long conference table that dominated the small office, the men turned their attention to the box that contained that morning’s delivery from ABC’s script department. Dividing the tall block of papers inside it into separate piles, they ringed the table with the smaller stacks. The sounds of *Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* emerged, tinnily, from the room’s hi-fi system after Gaard fiddled with it. Serrick, meanwhile, stationed himself at one end of the table in front of an industrial stapler, and Rau began to circle the table, picking up one page from each pile before handing the sheaf to Serrick, who stapled it with a satisfying *thwack*. Rau paused to take a bite of his sandwich before resuming his stroll around the table. Gaard followed his lead, and soon the office was suffused with a mixture of ‘60s rock, the sounds of chewing, and the regular *thwack* of the stapler. Within an hour, the small stacks of paper around the table had diminished, then disappeared, and a precarious stack of stapled sheaves had emerged in the box on the floor next to Serrick. “That’s a wrap,” Rau cheerfully announced, balling up the wax paper and brown paper bag which had contained his sandwich, and the men exchanged a pleased look. For another month, PRIDE’s newsletter had been produced and assembled within the confines of the ABC Studios, and no one but these men, and a select group of allies, were any the wiser. When Rau headed home for the day, he took with him the bulky stack of collated paper. Dick Michaels looked up eagerly as Rau walked through the door of their Los Feliz home. The smile on Rau’s face said it all: they were ready to go. Michaels grabbed his coat, Rau dropped his briefcase, and the two men headed out to the gay bars where they would, once again, divest themselves of this month’s edition of *The Advocate*.<sup>43</sup>**

The preceding description of the birth of *The Advocate*, based on the recollections of its founders, serves as the opening scene for a complex saga weaving together threads from the worlds of publishing, politics, commerce, and sexuality in American culture during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. What follows is an analysis of

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<sup>43</sup> This description is based on the personal recollections of David Gaard in “Me and the Pride Newsletter.” Unpublished, n.d. Advocate Papers, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archive, Los Angeles, CA.

*The Advocate*'s efforts to construct the image of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community as a "model minority" over the course of its existence.<sup>44</sup> This project argues that by depicting the LGBT community as largely comprised of affluent, educated, white gay men, and by minimizing discussions of racial, gender, and sexual inequality within the LGBT community, *The Advocate* consistently offered implicit support to the notion that the conformity of LGBT people to mainstream standards of appearance and behavior (and their aspiration to conventional standards of "success") is a prerequisite for their achievement of legal and social equality in the United States.

From a journalistic standpoint, *The Advocate*'s failure to acknowledge the LGBT community's diversity severely limited its ability to provide information relevant to many constituencies within this group, thereby challenging its identity as an unbiased and accurate news source. While some readers may be surprised by my claim that *The Advocate*, whose very title indicated its identity as a proponent of a particular worldview, could be characterized as "unbiased," I believe that the publication's insistence on upholding mainstream journalistic standards practically mandates that it should be held to the same standards of inclusivity as would the mainstream news magazines *The Advocate* saw as its colleagues. It seems entirely plausible that *Time* and *Newsweek*, for instance, would be prone to accusations of bias if their coverage failed to acknowledge racial, gender, or sexual diversity, so why not measure *The Advocate* by the same stick?

Particularly in the 1990s and 2000s, the inability of *The Advocate* to offer a substantive

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<sup>44</sup> Throughout this project, I will use the acronym LGBT to refer to this group. This may seem to be somewhat anachronistic, for this term was not commonly employed either by *The Advocate* or by the community itself until recently, but for reasons of inclusivity and conciseness, it is nonetheless appropriate within the context of my study. In cases where a particular portion of this group is referred to specifically—as in discussions of tensions between lesbians and gay men, for example—I will use the appropriate terms rather than the collective shorthand.

critique of the social status quo amounted to a veritable existential crisis. No longer the only source of LGBT news or positive representation, *The Advocate*'s purpose became increasingly unclear, a fact which likely contributed to the decision of its parent company, Here Media, to end its publication in 2009.

### Overview and Outline

In terms of its relation to work which has been done on gay and lesbian life in the United States, my dissertation will build on some of the core arguments posited by scholars such as John D'Emilio and Allan Berube, namely that LGBT culture in the United States flourished in the post-war period because of the disruption of gender roles necessitated by war efforts and because of the large-scale migration of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people to urban centers after the war ended. While many of the existing studies of the American LGBT experience—including those of D'Emilio, Berube, Martin Duberman, and Lillian Faderman—interpret the development of a community-specific press as a benchmark of progress, none specifically focus on the content of the media in relation to the internal and external pressures affecting the LGBT community; my work will address this oversight and demonstrate how *The Advocate* not only reflected how general social and political conflicts affected the lives of LGBT Americans, but additionally illustrated internecine struggles within the community over race, gender, and class.

My first chapter addresses the formation of homosexual minority identity in the United State as a necessary pre-condition of *The Advocate*'s founding. I evaluate the sometimes contentious debates between social constructionist and essentialist

perspectives, and those between historians who downplay or over-privilege the formative influence of the psycho-medical establishment on homosexual self-identification. This chapter details the development of the psycho-medical perspective on same-sex attraction from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century, and provides examples of how this discourse influenced both homosexuals' self-perceptions and mainstream social attitudes towards same-sex attraction.

The second chapter examines *The Advocate's* treatment of gender issues in general, and of women more specifically. I explore how the publication downplayed issues of sexism and gender-based discrimination, cast the feminist movement as a competitor to the gay rights movement (particularly in the 1970s) and repeatedly used gendered stereotypes in its presentation of women. In addition to teasing out historical trends in the publication's depiction of women, I argue that *The Advocate* existed as a contested site where gay men and lesbians frequently tangled over the under-representation of women in its pages, and further consider the extent to which the publication has served to equalize or exacerbate gender inequality in the LGBT community at large.

The LGBT community has regularly been derided as being overwhelmingly white, and my third chapter explores *The Advocate's* role in perpetuating this perception. I explore the historical changes in its coverage of African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian people, and identify instances where it engaged in racist or xenophobic discourses. I suggest that desire to make the LGBT community appear to possess "desirable" social characteristics—namely whiteness—drove this trend.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the two more marginalized constituencies within the LGBT community: bisexual and transgender people. Conceptually grounded in the framework provided by legal scholar Kenji Yoshino, these chapters argue that *The Advocate*'s representation of bisexual and transgender people fulfilled an "epistemic contract of erasure," and more insidiously suggested that members of these groups—through their existential challenges to notions of "fixed" gender and sexual identity—posed a threat to the unity of the LGBT community.

In my conclusion, I reckon with *The Advocate*'s recent demise and speculate on the future of the LGBT press in the age of digital media. Challenging narratives that claim that recent increases in social acceptance and mainstream media representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people has rendered titles like *The Advocate* unnecessary, I identify several vital roles that the LGBT press is still needed to fulfill.

### Historiography and Scholarship

This study draws on a body of work produced by political theorists, scholars of the media, and historians of United States culture. The section that follows identifies the foundations on which this work is constructed, along with some of the key debates into which it intervenes.

#### **Scholarship on Late Twentieth Century American Political Culture**

Developing an understanding of the methods and motivations behind *The Advocate*'s attempts to facilitate the progress of the LGBT rights movement by presenting LGBT people as a "model minority" becomes easier when the publication is regarded in the context of late-twentieth century political culture in the United States. As

this study will demonstrate, the content and aims of *The Advocate* were shaped, in part, by the emergence of the “New Left” in American politics during the 1960s.<sup>45</sup> While forms of political liberalism vary in emphasis and nuance, the definition that seems most appropriate for this discussion is the one offered by John Rawles in his 1971 book *A Theory of Justice*. Building on the widely-accepted belief that political liberalism is defined by its support for the rights of individuals in a pluralistic society to live and work as they see fit, Rawles argued that the twentieth century saw the development of a new tenet of political liberalism, which was the obligation of government to remediate social inequality. This remediation could take the form, for instance, of legal interventions (laws opposing racial or gender discrimination in employment, for example) or of supplying resources for the disadvantaged (like welfare or government subsidies for the poor). The “egalitarian liberalism” espoused by the New Left attempted to effect the greatest benefit to those who are most socio-economically disadvantaged in the hopes of achieving what Rawls called a “just basic social structure” wherein resources (including wealth, property, and employment) were equally attainable to all members of a society.<sup>46</sup> *The Advocate* was created by members of the homophile movement, which itself subscribed to these beliefs; because homosexuals were disadvantaged due to discrimination in housing and employment, homophiles argued, they needed protections attainable only through the

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<sup>45</sup> While this perspective shared with some historians of the LGBT U.S., it differs significantly from those of others who, like Elizabeth Armstrong, claim that the New Left directly contributed to the emergence of “new and potentially paralyzing internal conflict” in the LGBT community. This claim, I believe, runs the risk of imbuing with too much power the traditional political structure and disregards the tendency of many members of the LGBT community during the late 1960s to profess little interest in mainstream politics. *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950-1994* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002): 26.

<sup>46</sup> John Rawles, *A Theory of Justice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971). See also Christopher W. Blackwell, Janice L. Ricks, and Sophia F. Dziegielewski, “Discrimination of Gays and Lesbians: A Social Justice Perspective.” *Journal of Health and Social Policy* (Vol. 19, No. 4, 2004):27-43.

legislative and judicial systems. By embracing the liberal perspective, the publication distanced itself from the more radical tenets of the gay liberation movement that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In addition to making clear its preference for working within, rather than against, existing power structures, *The Advocate* was also often openly hostile towards those who preferred to take the latter route. As a 1970 *Advocate* editorial fumed, in the aftermath of a homophile conference that had been “crashed” by radical gay liberationists, “[The] so-called gay militants are not so much pro-gay as they are anti-Establishment, anticapitalist, antisociety. They lash out in all directions, destroying everything in sight—gay or straight...If a handful of psychotics are allowed to murder this one hope [the conference] when will we find another?”<sup>47</sup>

*The Advocate* was not alone in casting radical activism as a threat to the success of the LGBT rights movement. Legal scholar James Darsey noted that much of the rhetoric contained in magazines like *The Advocate* reflected a belief that “law [is] the source of rights” and that “solutions to homophobic injustice can only be reached by working within the legal structure.”<sup>48</sup> Liberal gay publications also emphasized the importance of appropriate behavior to the achievement of social gains for LGBT people, to the chagrin of more radical gay liberationists. A letter to the editor published in a 1970 issue of *Vector* magazine reminded readers in 1970 that while gains were being made in the social acceptance of LGBT people, they came “not through militancy” but by “education and propaganda. Continued progress will be made only when the heterosexual

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<sup>47</sup>“Editorial.” *The Advocate*, September 20, 1970: 18.

<sup>48</sup> James Darsey, “Die Non: Gay Liberation and the Rhetoric of Pure Tolerance.” In R. Jeffrey Ringer, ed., *Queer Words, Queer Images: Communication and the Construction of Homosexuality* (New York: New York University Press, 1994):55



community is convinced that we are not a threat...not when it learns that we are a threat.”<sup>49</sup>

Sociologist Laud Humphries, who in 1971 published one of the earliest scholarly works on the gay liberation movement, described the “social oppression...against those who reveal a preference for their own sex” as taking one of three forms: “legal-physical, in which certain behavior common to the stigmatized group is proscribed under threat of physical abuse or containment; occupational-financial, limiting the options for employment and financial gain for those stigmatized; and ego-destructive, by which the individual is made to feel morally inferior, self-hatred is encouraged, and a sense of valid identity is inhibited.”<sup>50</sup> While *The Advocate* frequently supported efforts that would provide legal and legislative protections for LGBT people against the first two types of punitive measures, it more subtly tried to remediate the third type of damage identified by Humphries in its constant focus on LGBT people who were leading conventionally “successful” lives (that is, chock full of material, social, and sexual fulfillment). This effort, while well-intentioned, resulted in the publication frequently downplaying the existence of LGBT people whose identities or behavior were not in line with these conventional barometers of success.

What were the perceived benefits of conforming to mainstream standards for “appropriate” behavior? James Darsey darkly noted that LGBT activists’ turn toward

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<sup>49</sup> Letter to the Editor, *Vector*, November 1970: 9. Interestingly, *Vector* was a radical gay publication produced by the Society for Individual Rights (SIR), which had begun as a homophile organization but in the mid-1960s distanced itself from the more conservative approach of organizations like the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis to become more similar to “gay lib” groups like the Gay Liberation Front. See Edward Alwood, *Straight News: Gays, Lesbians, and the News Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996): 40 and Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995): 99-100.

<sup>50</sup> Laud Humphries, *Out of the Closets: The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972): 9.

moderation in the late twentieth century “stems from [their] fear of losing the rewards of good behavior...For [their] complicity with the rules...gays have been given the benediction of the liberal press.”<sup>51</sup> Darsey offered as an example of this “approval” an excerpt from a 1976 *Newsweek* article on the gay rights movement:

At the outset of their drive for equal treatment, militant homosexuals alienated many people with their tactics of vivid confrontation. They mounted elaborate and boisterous demonstrations...sometimes featuring obscene banners and deliberately provocative displays...Eventually, the militant homosexuals learned the merits of lobbying and legal stratagems...On balance, the prospect is that the activists will continue to win more and more of the civil rights that have been denied to homosexuals in the past, and with these gains perhaps an increasing degree of public tolerance.<sup>52</sup>

In this construction, Darsey noted, “‘Bargaining’ is praised as a sophisticated stratagem; the legislature and courts are touted as the proper locus of appeal; alienation and confrontation are dismissed as puerile.” But, he cautioned, the “tolerance” promised in exchange for the good behavior of LGBT people is a “specious attainment; it has nothing to pose against the declaratory stance of the opposition. It is always supplicant, consisting as it does of the good will of the powerful.” *The Advocate*, the following study will argue, seemed to agree that “alienation and confrontation” were of little strategic use to the LGBT rights movement, and instead encouraged efforts that were bound by the conventions of politics.

### **Scholarship on Journalism, Press, and Mass Media**

This study claims that *The Advocate*’s content was reflective of the political and social sympathies of its staff. In this way, the publication was very similar to other

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<sup>51</sup>Darsey: 66.

<sup>52</sup>Jerold K. Footlick and Susan Agrest, “Gays and the Law.”*Newsweek*, October 25, 1976: 101-103. Quoted in Darsey: 66-7.

“alternative” media ventures which, as Bob Ostertag has demonstrated, largely eschewed the notion of “objectivity” as a necessary precondition to credibility or effectiveness. In order to analyze *The Advocate* vis-à-vis the mainstream press, then, we must first address how the latter has been understood to function in the late twentieth century United States, both in relation to the mainstream culture and to minority groups.

Richard Ohmann, in *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century*, has persuasively argued that quantitative and qualitative evolutions in mass-circulation magazines of the early twentieth century decisively shaped American culture.<sup>53</sup> Circulation statistics for these publications jumped significantly from the end of the nineteenth century to the first decade of the twentieth, and at the same time, they demonstrated an unprecedented reliance on advertising dollars, rather than on revenue from newsstand sales or subscriptions, for their existence. In an effort to court advertisers, early twentieth century magazines like *McClures* and *Good Housekeeping* began to promote their ability to serve up a ready-made audience whose characteristics were considered desirable to these advertisers. In doing so, they shaped both the consumer behavior and self-perception of the white middle-class women who read these magazines. My study endorses Ohmann’s belief in the transformative power of print media on the self-perception of its readers and claims that *The Advocate* created a new model for gay citizenship in the late twentieth century United States.

Though targeted to a much different constituency than the “housewifely” titles Ohmann studies, mid-twentieth century men’s magazines such as *Esquire* and *Playboy*

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<sup>53</sup>Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996).

also played a formative role in creating new models for masculinity and male consumption. Barbara Ehrenreich and Beth Bailey have both discussed *Playboy's* attempts to resolve what they perceive as a post-war crisis of masculinity in the 1950s through the presentation of a new model of manhood which had, at its core, both hedonistic and consumerist impulses.<sup>54</sup> But, as Kenon Breazeale demonstrated in her work on *Esquire* magazine, *Playboy* did not create this model, and had simply taken a page, so to speak, from one of its predecessors. Breazeale charged that the content of *Esquire* magazine from the 1930s to the mid-1940s reflected a vision of masculinity that was consumerist in orientation and privileged men's prerogative to engage in "leisure" pursuits (in a classic case of making lemons into lemonade, the "free time" that *Esquire* vaunted as a valuable part of its male readers lives was largely enabled by the high unemployment rates resulting from the economic depression of the 1930s).<sup>55</sup> Like *Playboy* and *Esquire*, *The Advocate*, particularly in its later years, attempted to shape a new social role for its readers, one strongly linked not only to consumption but to sexual freedom as well.

Changes were afoot for American mass media in the 1960s and 1970s: legal expansions of press freedom in these decades enlarged the scope of what issues it could and should address, as James Brian McPherson argued in his incisive study of American journalism. The 1964 case of the *New York Times v. Sullivan* made it extremely difficult for public figures to bring charges of libel against the media, which enabled the growth of

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<sup>54</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight From Commitment* (New York: Anchor Books, 1983); Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Backseat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). See also Carrie Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies: The Sexual Politics of Playboy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Kenon Breazeale, "In Spite of Women: *Esquire* Magazine and the Construction of the Male Consumer." *Signs*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Autumn 1994): 1-22.

“investigative journalism,” and the 1966 passage of the Freedom of Information Act, signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, gave reporters unprecedented access to previously classified information. In 1971, the Supreme Court decided in the matter of the *New York Times Co. v. The United States* that the journalists could not be forbidden from revealing information even if this information was perceived as threatening to national security, a decision which enabled the *Washington Post* (and other publications) to “break” the story of the Watergate conspiracy in 1972.<sup>56</sup> Later legal decisions (1974’s *Miami Herald Publishing Co. v. Tornillo* and 1975’s *Cox Broadcasting Corp. v. Cohn*) also expanded journalistic freedom, contributing to McPherson’s assessment of the 1970s as the “glory years” of the American press.<sup>57</sup> *The Advocate* benefitted from these incremental legal victories and as a result began to publish original investigative journalism to an extent which it previously had not; news editor Rob Cole’s 1972 series of exposes on California’s Atascadero State Hospital, infamous for its mistreatment of homosexual inmates, was an early example of this development.<sup>58</sup>

Larry Gross has written extensively about the relationship between the media, majorities, and minorities. Observing that “the experience of minorities in mass society will always include a diet of images created for the majorities whose experiences and interests they reflect,” Gross persuasively argued that LGBT media consumers employ

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<sup>56</sup> The case involved the U.S. Department of Justice, which sought legal intercession to halt the *New York Times*’ publication of the *Pentagon Papers*, a Defense Department report on the Vietnam War which suggested that the American public had been deliberately misled by about the war by the government. The *Times* was initially forbidden to publish the report, marking the first time since World War Two had a court decided to limit the freedom of the press in favor of “national interest.” When the newspaper (along with others that had obtained and begun to publish excerpts of the report) appealed to the Supreme Court, it emerged victorious.

<sup>57</sup> James Brian McPherson, *Journalism at the End of the American Century, 1965-Present* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006).

<sup>58</sup> See Rob Cole’s series of reports entitled “Inside Atascadero,” which were published in *The Advocate* throughout 1972, and John LaStala, “Atascadero: Dachau for Queers?” *The Advocate*, April 26, 1972:11.

various strategies—“reading against the grain” of seemingly-heterosexual texts, engaging in “para-social interaction” with fictional LGBT characters (poignantly illustrated by the example of a young closeted gay man who wrote a confessional coming-out letter to straight actor Ryan Phillippe following the latter’s portrayal of a gay character on popular soap opera *One Life to Live* in the early 1990s), and, if they are in positions of power, by subtly “seeding” mainstream-targeted media creations with ideas favorable to the LGBT community.<sup>59</sup> Where Gross’ analysis falls short, in light of this study, is in its assumptions of correspondence between media producers and their intended audiences (Fig. 2).

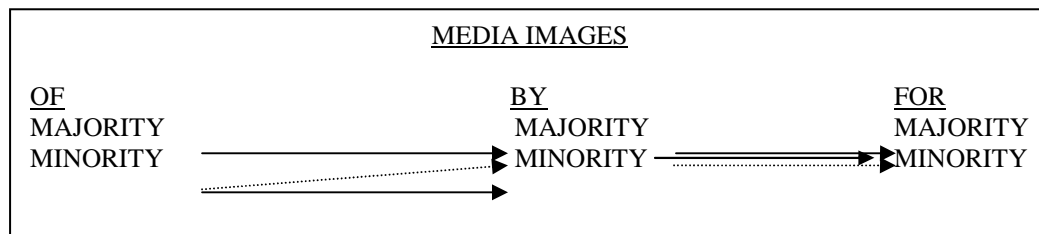


Fig. 2, Larry Gross, “Majorities, Minorities, and the Media”

Gross posited that media images produced of the majority, by the majority, are intended for consumption by the majority—with this, I agree. He also argues that images produced of the minority, by the majority, are intended for the majority. This, too, seems a reasonable statement. His claim, however, that media images of the minority, by the minority, are always and exclusively intended for the consumption of the minority, is less persuasive. As this study will argue, images of the minority produced by the minority can be, and in the case of *The Advocate*, are intended to be, consumed not strictly by the minority, but by the majority as well. It is important to note here that media

<sup>59</sup>Larry Gross, “Majorities, Minorities, and the Media.” In Tamar Liebes and James Curran, eds., *Media, Ritual and Identity* (New York: Routledge Press, 1998): 93.

“consumption” can take “active” and “passive” forms, although the definitions of each of these can vary widely among communications theorists. For the purposes of my argument, and in the context of print media, examples of the former would be actively seeking out, purchasing, and reading the publication, while the latter might be constituted by “secondhand” exposure to a publication’s content (by seeing it on a newsstand, or reading its original content in republished form, as in quotes and citations in other publications). While it would be difficult to claim that the number of heterosexuals who were regular *Advocate* readers was significant, relative to the size of its LGBT audience, non-LGBT people were nonetheless exposed to the ideas and images it promulgated, a fact of which *The Advocate* was aware and which, I argue, shaped its content. Publisher David Goodstein’s decision, in 1975, to corral the sexually-explicit classified ads that had long been a popular feature of the magazine into a discrete (and discreet) pull-out section is suggestive of this fact, as is *The Advocate*’s tradition of sending “gift subscriptions” to politicians and journalists.<sup>60</sup> It was this desire to present a positive image of the LGBT community to its potential allies in the struggle for LGBT civil rights, I argue, that in part circumscribed *The Advocate*’s content.

This project also contributes to a growing body of scholarship on non-mainstream journalistic endeavors in the twentieth-century United States. Whether described as

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<sup>60</sup> Of the newly removable classified section, Goodstein trumpeted that “this new format allows you to keep all or part of the ADVOCATE on your coffee table and the Trader Dick & Friends section elsewhere.” David Goodstein, “Opening Space.” *The Advocate*, May 7, 1975: 3. This statement hints that Goodstein was aware that the magazine might be encountered by non-LGBT people (who might pick it up off a friend’s “coffee table”). It also subtly encouraged readers to pull out the section in order not to offend these non-LGBT readers and thus to bolster the magazine’s reputation as “respectable” rather than tawdry. It is also important to note, however, the salience of feminist criticisms of *The Advocate* in this redesign; the Women’s Caucus of the National Gay Task Force had complained that the sex ads were offensive to female readers and tarnished the magazine’s credibility and Goodstein’s decision regarding “Trader Dick” was, in some measure, intended to appease them. See Dudley Clendenin and Adam Nagourney, *Out For Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999): 264-66.

“alternative,” “underground,” “counterculture,” or “dissident,” these non-mainstream publications are considered to exhibit significant differences in their goals, design, content, means of production and distribution, or other characteristics, from mainstream titles. The difficulty of characterizing *The Advocate* as wholly part of either “alternative” or “mainstream” culture is indicated by the frequent tendency of these historians to focus instead on other titles which fit more neatly into these categories. The trouble seems primarily due to the notion that *The Advocate*’s embrace of capitalism disqualifies it from consideration as part of “alternative” culture. It is true that *The Advocate*’s has endorsed the idea that LGBT people are more likely to achieve political and social gains when their collective economic power is recognized; to this end, *The Advocate* has actively pursued major corporate advertisers (and encouraged its readers to buy their products), promoted an “affluent” LGBT image, and tried to motivate its audience to financially support the individuals and organizations working for LGBT rights. While this tactic is far from radical, it is nonetheless intended to enable social change that will benefit LGBT people (in general, although some will benefit more than others). The brief discussion that follows seeks to settle the question of where *The Advocate* fits in the “mainstream/alternative” taxonomy, contending that *The Advocate* should be regarded as part of the alternative journalistic tradition because it has consistently and openly advocated for social change by encouraging readers’ social and political activism, by bolstering their self-esteem, and by creating a public space in which an invisible minority became visible.

John Downing’s 1984 work *Radical Media: The Political Experience of Alternative Communication* is considered a foundational text by many scholars of non-



mainstream media. Downing argued that “radical” publications were valuable agents for social and political change because they arose from collective efforts (social movements), and explicitly attempted to shape the political consciousness of their readers.<sup>61</sup> *The Advocate* fits both of these criteria, although to call it “radical” might be erroneous. Where it most clearly diverges from Downing’s definition of “radical media” is in its failure to reconfigure relationships between audience and producer, a tendency which became more pronounced in *The Advocate* from the mid-1970s onward. Prior to this time, *Advocate* readers could and did submit press clippings on LGBT issues in their cities and states, which were reprinted by *The Advocate* in an effort to expand its scope of coverage outside Los Angeles. In spite of the fact that these clippings were taken from other media organs, and were not usually first-person reports submitted by *Advocate* readers, I would argue that this practice did constitute a breaking-down of traditional divisions between media producers (editors and writers) and audience members. As a result, then, *The Advocate* might be best understood as having exhibited more characteristics of Dowling’s “radical media” during its early years than later on.

In the 2008 book *Alternative Journalism*, Chris Atton and James F. Hamilton attempted to define some key elements of the media outlets that comprise this “infuriatingly vague” category. *The Advocate* exhibits many of these: it “proceeds from dissatisfaction...with the mainstream coverage of certain issues and topics,” it is “concerned with representing the interests, views, and needs of under-represented groups in society,” and it “seeks to redress what [it] consider[s] an imbalance of media power in mainstream media, which results in the marginalization (at worst, the demonization) of

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<sup>61</sup> John Downing, *Radical Media: The Political Experience of Alternative Communication* (Boston: South End Press, 1984).

certain social and cultural groups and movements.”<sup>62</sup>*The Advocate* does, however, contravene other of the authors’ claims about the nature of alternative journalism, most notably in its commercial orientation, which may be the reason that it is not considered at all in the authors’ study. Atton and Hamilton appear to share the opinion of many other scholars that a commercial publication cannot truly be alternative, writing that “though commercial-alternative journalism can and does exist in capitalist societies, it never competes on a level playing field; the need to compete compromises, marginalizes and depoliticizes its oppositional stance.”<sup>63</sup>

Atton and Hamilton point to *Ms.* magazine as an example of this “depoliticized opposition,” and in fact, *Ms.* had much in common with *The Advocate* in terms of its content and approach to the market. Patricia Bradley’s 2003 study *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism: 1963-1975* explained that the magazine promoted its readers as a desirable “niche market” to draw in advertisers, used professionally-trained staff and management in order to bolster its credibility, and presented controversial issues in a manner “consonant with the strains of American liberalism that believed that fairness was accomplished primarily by overcoming prejudicial thinking.”<sup>64</sup> Following David Goodstein’s 1974 purchase of *The Advocate*, it too engaged in these rhetorical, material, and commercial practices. But to claim, as Atton and Hamilton do, that *Ms.* failed to offer a substantive challenge to sexism and misogyny in American culture because of its

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<sup>62</sup> Chris Atton and James F. Hamilton, *Alternative Journalism* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008): 1-2.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*: 33

<sup>64</sup> Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism: 1963-1975* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2003): 177.

(admittedly conflicted and limited) acquiescence to commercial imperatives is too extreme.

John McMillian's *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* provides an illuminating context for the emergence of *The Advocate*. McMillian attributed the explosion of "underground" publications in the 1960s to what he calls the "Offset Revolution" (due to which older, more labor-intensive and expensive forms of printing newspapers were jettisoned in favor of photo-offset printing that allowed "cheap and easy" production of publications by non-professionals) and the continuing inability of mainstream publications to adequately address the concerns of 1960s youth culture. While McMillian's study primarily focused on publications that were self-consciously part of the New Left, the "amplitude and conviction" that McMillian described as "hallmarks of the underground press" were very much a part of *The Advocate* during its early years. Similarly, McMillian's claims that "underground newspapers educated, politicized, and built communities among disaffected youths in every region of the country" can be applied to *The Advocate* of the 1960s and early 1970s with the substitution of "LGBTs" for "youth."<sup>65</sup> "New Leftists imbued their newspapers with an ethos that socialized people into the Movement, fostered a spirit of mutuality among them, and raised their democratic expectations," McMillian explained, and this ethos was evident in *The Advocate* as well.

It is necessary to note, however, that *The Advocate*, even during the early years when it evinced some radical sympathies, was far from being a "radical" publication when compared to publications like *Come Out!*, *Gay Sunshine*, *Gay Power*, and *Gay*. In

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<sup>65</sup>John McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): 4-6.

*Uncovering the Sixties*, Abe Peck attributed the birth of these titles to the failure of “alternative” or New Left-oriented media to address issues of homophobia or LGBT concerns, noting that the *Village Voice* (which would later become notable for its frequent coverage of LGBT issues) reported on the 1969 Stonewall riots in a tone less sympathetic to the protestors than to the police who instigated the incident, while *Rat* titled its story on the raid “Queen Power: Fags Against Pigs in Stonewall Bust.” While Peck describes *The Advocate* as “lack[ing] radical fervor,” it is nonetheless true that it shared with these more radical titles the achievement of “foster[ing] personal legitimacy, community spirit, and political activism”<sup>66</sup>

Bob Ostertag, in *People’s Movements, People’s Press: The Journalism of Social Justice Movements*, stepped away from the terms “underground” or “alternative” to describe the press tradition of which *The Advocate* was a part, instead dubbing it “social movement journalism.” Ostertag contended that the publications produced by social movements can only be understood in relation to its “internal dynamics and strategies, its relation with its immediate adversary, its relation with the state, and its location in the broader culture.” Ostertag’s claim that “there is no substitute for a nuanced and detailed historical analysis of the social movement press in the context of the movement of which it is a part” reflects my own rationale for undertaking this project.<sup>67</sup>

Ostertag articulated several important ways in which non-mainstream publications differ from their corporate counterparts, arguing that the two types of publications hold different beliefs on the desirability of five objectives: geographic distribution, circulation,

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<sup>66</sup> Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985): 219-220.

<sup>67</sup> Bob Ostertag, *People’s Movements, People’s Press: The Journalism of Social Justice Movements* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006): 1-2.

advertising revenue, longevity, and objectivity (briefly put, the latter type of publication privilege these, whereas social movement journalism generally does not). In light of this taxonomy, then, it becomes difficult to classify *The Advocate* as either “corporate” or part of Ostertag’s “social movement journalism.” Noting this point, Ostertag used *The Advocate* to illustrate how publications based in social movements often strayed from their original objectives under the influence of capitalist imperatives. In relation to the value of “longevity,” Ostertag asserted that the continued existence of social movement publications depended on their ability to “outlive the upsurge that created them...and remain at the ready so that when the next upsurge comes, the movement will have seasoned organizations ready to roll.” Ostertag observed that though *The Advocate* “managed to survive the decline of gay radicalism [and] attained a commercial success unparalleled in the history of social movement journalism, with major advertising accounts, Wall Street investors, and substantial profits...in terms of social-justice advocacy, the latter-day *Advocate* has been simply awful. The quality of its content traces a trajectory almost the exact inverse to its profitability.”<sup>68</sup>

Ostertag’s otherwise persuasive study hits a snag with this excessively harsh assessment of *The Advocate*.<sup>69</sup> First, attributing qualitative changes in the publication’s content purely to “profitability” is, as I have previously argued, overly reductive and

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.: 6-7.

<sup>69</sup> Ostertag’s periodization of the “gay and lesbian movement” is also problematic; he describes it as having “accumulat[ed] momentum very gradually in the 1950s and early 1960s” before “suddenly explod[ing] into a mass movement when its trickle of activists flowed into the mighty river of 1960s radicalism. This momentum lasted well into the 1970s, creating a golden age of ‘gay liberation’ when breathtaking victories were won in a stunningly short period of time.” As other scholars have shown, “gay liberation” was actually a relatively short-lived phenomenon, and many of the “breathtaking victories” won in the 1970s resulted from more conventional forms of activism. The achievements of homophiles in the 1950s and 1960s are, I believe unfairly diminished by this periodization (on this, see Martin Meeker, “Behind the Mask of Respectability: Reconsidering the Mattachine Society and Male Homophile Practice.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Jan., 2001): 78-116). Ibid.: 11.

ignores the influence of other circumstances surrounding its production (including, but not limited to, the political sympathies of its editorial staff and strategic reorientations of LGBT activism from the late 1960s to the present day). Secondly, Ostertag's flat assessment of *The Advocate* as "simply awful" in terms of "social justice advocacy" demands an examination of whether his definition of the latter term is altogether too limited. Certainly no one would deny that *The Advocate* increasingly focused on lifestyle and culture from the mid-1970s onward. I would argue, however, that it is possible to read this focus as a type of "social justice advocacy" in and of itself. Bearing in mind that until the relatively recent past, media images of LGBT people were largely negative, *The Advocate*'s depiction of LGBT (albeit mostly "LG") Americans as conventionally successful, well-adjusted, intelligent, cultured, and attractive could be interpreted as a much-needed corrective that was intended to "rehabilitate" LGBT people in the minds of the majority and thus to improve their treatment—and their chances of attaining equal civil and legal rights in the United States. In light of Ostertag's later claim that the post-1974 *Advocate* had been "stripped of meaningful political content," it is especially important to bear in mind that definitions of "meaningful" and "political" are by no means universal.<sup>70</sup>

The work of media historian Rodger Streitmatter provides much contextual basis for this study; his 1995 book *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press* in America is generally considered the most comprehensive work on the subject to date. Among the most important contributions contained therein is Streitmatter's articulation of six key elements of the modern LGBT press which differentiated them from other

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.: 94.

alternative journalistic endeavors: an emphasis on design and visual imagery; an emphasis on discord (both within the LGBT community and from external sources); a “blurring of the ‘church/state’ line” which was intended to ensure that advertisers did not influence the content of the publications; an emphasis on humorous or entertaining features; and the establishment of a “gay lexicon” which employed words and phrases that were not part of common parlance.<sup>71</sup> Though Streitmatter discusses a wide range of homophile, gay liberation, lesbian/feminist, and “queer” titles (most of which were far less commercial, long-lived, or widely accessible than *The Advocate*), that publication clearly displayed these traits and can thus be categorized with—rather than set apart from, as Ostertag argued—its more radical counterparts.

Streitmatter’s later work, *Voices of Revolution: The Dissident Press in America*, defined the subject of his study as publications that “offered views different from those served up in the conventional press” and “set out—intentionally and without apology—to champion a particular cause.”<sup>72</sup> Streitmatter’s privileging of “dissident” publications’ intentions to effect social change allowed him to differentiate between these and the “alternative” press described in other scholars’ works. According to Streitmatter, while “all dissident publications are alternative publications...many of those alternative publications are not dissident” (he points to New York City’s *Village Voice* and Washington, D.C.’s *City Paper* as examples of non-dissident “alternative” publications). *The Advocate* would surely seem to fit this definition of “dissident,” but Streitmatter fails

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<sup>71</sup>Streitmatter: 112-114.

<sup>72</sup> Rodger Streitmatter, *Voices of Revolution: The Dissident Press in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): xi.

to even mention the publication in his chapter on the gay and lesbian press, focusing — like many other scholars—instead on titles like *GAY*, *Gay Sunshine*, and *Come Out!*

Given the extensive coverage of *The Advocate* in Streitmatter’s earlier book, the omission is troubling, but not entirely surprising given Streitmatter’s unarticulated and problematic conflation of “dissident” with “revolutionary” or “radical.” The unfortunate omission of any acknowledgement of *The Advocate* in this work leads Streitmatter to characterize the “dissident” gay and lesbian press (wholly represented by the “radical gay publications” he focuses on) as “short-lived” and to make the questionable claim that “the single publication that survived the aftershocks of Stonewall was the only one with a combination of relatively calm voices and stable finances: *GAY*.” According to Streitmatter, “The stances of the editorially moderate publication generally carried the day in the debates, and it was this commercial enterprise that possessed the fiscal stamina that would allow it to influence the next phase of gay and lesbian liberation.”<sup>73</sup> Because *GAY*’s editorial moderation and capitalist orientation did not disqualify it from membership in Streitmatter’s “dissident press,” his failure to acknowledge *The Advocate* is all the more puzzling. Although constraints of time and space prevent me from exploring this topic in as much detail as it merits, it remains an ancillary objective of this project to reestablish *The Advocate*’s place in the firmament of the dissident press (while acknowledging that the degree to which it demonstrated this dissidence waxed and waned over time).

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<sup>73</sup>Streitmatter, *Voices*: 255.



## Scholarship on LGBT History and Culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century United States

In terms of its relation to work which has been done on LGBT life in the United States, my dissertation will build on some of the foundational arguments posited by scholars such as John D’Emilio and Allan Berube, namely that LGBT culture in the United States flourished in the post-war period because of the disruption of gender roles necessitated by war efforts and because of the large-scale gay and lesbian migration to urban centers after the war ended, and additionally that the advancement of gay and lesbian rights in the post-war United States has proceeded in a cyclical pattern of gains and losses. While many of the existing studies of the American gay and lesbian experience—including those of D’Emilio, Berube, Martin Duberman, and Lillian Faderman—interpret the development of a community-specific press as a benchmark of progress, none specifically focus on the content of the media in relation to the internal and external pressures affecting the LGBT community; my work will address this oversight and demonstrate how *The Advocate* not only reflected how general social and political conflicts impacted the lives of gay and lesbian Americans, but additionally illustrated internecine struggles within the community over race, gender, and class.

John D’Emilio has persuasively argued that a national LGBT community in the United States began to coalesce in the 1950s due in large part to the social displacement caused by World War Two: “Individual decisions not to return home, to settle in large cities where anonymity permitted gay socializing more easily, and to maintain the friendships of the war years helped forge a group existence.”<sup>74</sup> The homophobic culture

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<sup>74</sup> 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): 39.

of the post-war era also served as a powerful impetus for the establishment of LGBT communities; as D’Emilio explained, “The attacks on gay men and women hastened the articulation of a homosexual identity and spread the knowledge that they existed in large numbers.”<sup>75</sup> The 1947 publication of lesbian newsletter *Vice Versa* and the early-1950s emergence of homophile organizations offer support to this thesis.

Elizabeth Armstrong’s study of gay organizing in San Francisco demonstrated how that city’s LGBT activist community gradually shifted from holding the perspective of an “interest group” to that of an “identity group” over the course of the late twentieth century.<sup>76</sup> In differentiating between the two, Amy Guttman’s concise explanation is useful: “Whereas the defining feature of an identity group is the mutual identification of individuals with one another around shared social markers, the defining feature of an interest group is the coalescing of individuals around a shared instrumental goal that preceded the group’s formation.”<sup>77</sup> I believe this claim can be applied to the national LGBT activist movement as well; the homophiles of the 1950s and early 1960s organized around a common *cause* while later LGBT activist organizations established themselves around a common *identity*.<sup>78</sup> Armstrong is careful to note the brief appearance of a “redistributive” perspective among radical LGBT activists in San Francisco during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a trend that was, again, mirrored nationally by the emergence

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid: 52.

<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth Armstrong, *Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950-1994* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>77</sup> Amy Guttman, *Identity in Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 2003): 13.

<sup>78</sup> A useful illustration of the difference between the types of groups is provided by John D’Emilio, whose discussion of how San Francisco’s Society for Individual Rights (SIR), though nominally a homophile group, differed from earlier homophile organizations: “In the 1950s, Mattachine had vigorously denied that it was a social organization, a place where male homosexuals could meet...SIR, in contrast, opened its doors to anything that members had the energy to organize [and its] willingness to cater to the need for fellowship among gay men seemed to provide a winning formula” and by 1967 SIR was the largest “homophile” organization in the country. D’Emilio: 190-1.

of “gay liberation” groups like the Gay Liberation Front in New York City. This project argues that *The Advocate* subscribed to the “identity group” perspective and also attempted to downplay other “identities” that posed a threat to the cohesion of the LGBT community, as evidenced by its treatment of gender, race, bisexuality and transgender identity.

The writing of David Bell and John Binnie on “sexual citizenship” has illuminated the potential problems of a gay-rights discourse that implicitly accepts the “twinning of rights with responsibilities,” noting that the “responsibilities” LGBT people are expected to bear in exchange for obtaining civil rights are often onerous. They write

In our reading of sexual politics, rights claims articulated through appeals to citizenship carry the burden of compromise in particular ways: this demands the “circumscription” of acceptable modes of being a sexual citizen. This is, of course, an age-old compromise that sexual dissidents have long had to negotiate; the current problem is its cementing into rights-based political strategies, which forecloses or denies aspects of sexuality written off as “unacceptable.” In particular...this tends to demand a modality of sexual citizenship that is privatized, deradicalized, deeroticized, and *confined* in all senses of the word: kept in place, policed, limited.<sup>79</sup>

As this study will demonstrate, some of the “unacceptable” aspects of sexuality within the rhetoric of gay rights include bisexuality and transgender/transsexual identities (Chapters 4 and 5), which have been subordinated to lesbian and gay identities both discursively (in the frequent substitution of “gay/lesbian” or “gay” in place of the more-inclusive term “LGBT”) and materially (as my discussion of 2007’s Employment Non-Discrimination Act will illustrate). Brett Beemyn’s work has noted bisexuality’s ability to be “both everywhere and nowhere in popular culture” and Elizabeth Armstrong has explored how sexist attitudes and a phallogentric conception of sexuality have

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<sup>79</sup> David Bell and Jon Binnie, *The Sexual Citizen: Queer Politics and Beyond* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Press, 2000): 3.

exacerbated tensions between bisexuals and gay or lesbian individuals.<sup>80</sup> Other scholars such as Susan Stryker, Shannon Price Minter, and Jasbir Puar have shown the challenges that transgender identity and experience pose to gay-rights discourses predicated on the immutability of gender and sexual orientation.<sup>81</sup> My study of *The Advocate* affirms the findings of these scholars, and in Chapter 5 provides an illustration of how dialogue between the magazine's readers and editorial staff had a formative effect on its content, particularly in the case of transgender issues during the early 2000s.

When this project began, *The Advocate* was still being published, and even now it seems strange to think that this pillar of the American LGBT experience is now gone; in much the same way that desperate LGBT people of the 1950s who rifled through clinical works looking for information on themselves, LGBT Americans who came of age after *The Advocate* had established itself as a respected (and relatively accessible) publication often relied on it for news and information difficult to find elsewhere. But the importance of this study has not been curtailed by the magazine's recent demise. Understanding the formative effect that *The Advocate* had on its readers' understanding of LGBT subjectivity, and how it shaped the LGBT community in the United States is imperative if the long-fought battles for civil rights that raged throughout the magazine's lifespan are to be won. To move forward effectively, we must first look back.

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<sup>80</sup>Erich W. Steinman and Brett Beemyn, eds., *Bisexual Men in Culture and Society* (Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press, 2002); Elizabeth Armstrong, "Traitors to the Cause? Understanding the Lesbian/Gay Bisexuality Debates." In Naomi Tucker, ed., *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries, and Visions* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 1995).

<sup>81</sup>Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008); Shannon Price Minter, "Do Transsexuals Dream of Gay Rights? Getting Real About Transgender Inclusion in the Gay Rights Movement." In Paisley Currah, Richard Juang, and Shannon Price Minter, eds., *Transgender Rights* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

## Chapter 1: Society, Sexology, and Gay Identity in the Twentieth Century United States

In history, as in many other disciplines, context is everything. Without an understanding of the cultural mores, social customs, and political ethos prevailing when a given event takes place, it is difficult to determine its true meaning--both to its contemporaries and to those who inherit the world it shaped. *The Advocate*, though officially a creation of the late 1960s, was arguably the ineluctable product of a century's worth of Western formulations in psychology and sexology, changing conceptions of the rights of American citizens, increasing flexibility of gender roles, not to mention the effects on American social and familial structures wrought by industrial capitalism and two World Wars. Several scholars of gay and lesbian history have argued that all of these factors, individually and collectively, made possible the emergence of "the homosexual" as a figure distinct from heterosexuals.<sup>82</sup> Without this typology, of course, there would have been no need for the development of a distinctive gay and lesbian press. But as individuals were increasingly exposed to, and adopted, the discourse that suggested homosexual and heterosexuals were essentially different from each other, the seeds of an American subculture took root. Historians such as George Chauncey, Nan Alamilla Boyd, Mark Stein, Karen Krauhlik and Gary Atkins have detailed the developments of queer communities from Seattle to Provincetown in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; similarly, anthropologist Esther Newton has argued that the "migration" of Manhattan-based "theater people" (a great many of them homosexual) to

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<sup>82</sup> See Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995); 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); Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Lesbians in World War Two* (New York: The Free Press, 1990) ; Joyce Murdoch and Deb Price, *Courting Justice: Gay Men and Lesbians v. The Supreme Court* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

Cherry Grove, New York, in the 1930s is “one of the clearest proofs we have that sexual preference was becoming the basis for a complete social identity.”<sup>83</sup> This chapter will focus on the intellectual developments, specifically in the field of sexology, which enabled this new identity to emerge, and will explore the social conditions which eventually necessitated the creation of a national gay and lesbian publication in the United States. In order to set the scene for my subsequent discussion of *The Advocate*, I will focus here on the years leading up to the establishment of the publication, leaving later developments to be discussed through the lens of the magazine itself.

#### Born or Made? (or, Essentialism v. Social Constructivism)

Discussion of the so-called “invention of homosexuality” (to paraphrase historian Jonathan Ned Katz) brings with it one of the most impassioned debates among scholars of the history of sexuality. In its most basic terms, the conflict arises between two groups of people, who in the interest of simplicity can be called essentialists and social constructionists.<sup>84</sup> The first group avers that there have always been, in every culture and during every time period, people with distinctive identities based on their same-sex

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<sup>83</sup> Esther Newton, *Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America's First Gay and Lesbian Town* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993): 21. See also George Chauncey, Jr., *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Gay San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Mark Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); Karen Krauhlik, *Provincetown: From Pilgrim Landing to Gay Resort*. (New York: New York University Press, 2007), and Gary Atkins, *Gay Seattle: Stories of Exile and Belonging* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).

<sup>84</sup> It is not my intention to suggest that there no differences within each group, but as this debate is not the focus of my work and is only being used to provide context for the history that follows, I will efface those distinctions for the present moment. For a more nuanced discussion, see Edward Stein, ed., *Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy* (New York: Garland, 1990) and Evelyn Blackwood, "Reading Sexualities across Cultures: Anthropology and Theories of Sexuality." In Ellen Lewin and William L. Leap, eds., *Out in Theory: The Emergence of Lesbian and Gay Anthropology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002). The social constructionist position is usually traced back to Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

sexual orientation, and that it is therefore possible to trace a continuous lineage of homosexuality over time and throughout the world. Social constructionists, on the other hand, accept that same-sex sexuality is timeless and universal but argue that sexual *acts* are not necessarily related to sexual *identities* and trying to divine the latter from the former is anachronistic at best, culturally imperialistic at worst. They claim that as modern the concept of sexual orientation as an innate characteristic, an ineluctable element of one's identity and a marker of essential difference from others with different sexual orientations.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, they insist, the notions which gave rise to the idea of "the homosexual" were firmly rooted in Western traditions and should not be applied to non-Western cultures for fear of misreading or masking culturally-specific aspects of same-sex sexuality, or ignoring inflections of race, class, and gender. The best-known proponent of this concept was French theorist Michel Foucault, whose multi-volume *The History of Sexuality* (1976) has been hugely influential among many scholars who study the history of sexuality; emblematic of his influence is the claim of one social constructionist historian that "[nineteenth-century] same-sex 'passionate friendships' involv[ing] physical and verbal expressions of deep affection... cannot be characterized as 'homosexual' in the modern sense because they lacked any sense of a homosexual identity."<sup>86</sup> Speaking more generally, Robert Padgug, an early proponent of social construction, cautioned that, "In any approach that takes as predetermined and universal

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<sup>85</sup> Thomas A. Foster wisely cautions against some historians' oversimplification of the contrast between the pre-modern and modern eras as one of (same-sex) "acts" versus (homosexual) "identities," noting that this view places disproportionate importance on psychological and medical pronouncements; he argues that "[l]ong before Stonewall, the history of same-sex sexuality took root and began establishing cultural precedents that later medical models drew upon. "Introduction," Thomas A. Foster, ed., *Long Before Stonewall: Histories of Same-Sex Sexuality in Early America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007): 8.

<sup>86</sup> Harry L. Minton, *Departing From Deviance: A History of Homosexual Rights and Emancipatory Science in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

the categories of sexuality, real history disappears. Sexual practice becomes a more or less sophisticated selection of curiosities whose meaning and validity can be gauged by that truth...which we, in our enlightened age, have discovered.”<sup>87</sup> Wary of the temporal and cultural chauvinism which essentialist interpretations of history seem to invite, social constructionists demand that sexual categories always be viewed as historically and culturally contingent .

Essentialist scholars enumerate several criticisms of this position. First, they argue that it is often hard to discern to what extent people in the past considered their same-sex eroticism a part of their identity, particularly in light of the fact that few, if any, would have felt compelled or secure enough to document such sentiments. Essentialist historian Wayne Dines argued that many individuals created for themselves identities based on their same-sex sexual attractions *prior* to the wide dissemination of writings on homosexuality in the late nineteenth century, as evidenced by their confessions to psychiatrists and psychologists eager to treat those they took to be sufferers of the new pathology, which, he claims, would be impossible if social construction theory were true.<sup>88</sup> Social constructivist classicist David Halperin, however, suggests that this is not exactly the case, and asserted that the Foucauldian theories undergirding social constructivism do *not* reject the proposition that individuals themselves integrated their propensity towards certain sexual acts into their own identities.<sup>89</sup> Second, essentialists suggest that a social constructionist viewpoint discounts any biological basis for same-

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<sup>87</sup> Robert Padgug, “Sexual Matters: On Conceptualizing Sexuality in History.” *Radical History Review*, No. 20 (Spring/Summer 1979): 3-23.

<sup>88</sup> Wayne R. Dines, quoted in Rictor Norton, *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual: Queer History and the Search for Cultural Unity* (London: Cassell, 1997): 7.

<sup>89</sup> David Halperin, “Forgetting Foucault: Acts, Identities, and The History of Sexuality.” *Representations*, No. 63 (Summer 1998): 93-120.



sex eroticism and claims that sexuality is driven only by external stimuli. Only a deliberate misreading of social constructivism could support this claim, as the theory does not deny that biology may drive same-sex attraction; rather, this criticism wrongly conflates the constructivism/essentialism debate with two similar debates identified by legal scholar Daniel Ortiz as “nature/nurture” and “determinism/voluntarism.” Ortiz, correctly insisting on the “independence of etiology and identity,” argues that adherence to either a constructivist or essentialist perspective does not necessarily mandate a co-extant belief in any particular etiology of same-sex desire.<sup>90</sup>

Third, essentialists argue that identifiable subcultures oriented around same-sex desire existed before the late nineteenth century, prior to the coining of the term “homosexual.” Rictor Norton himself argues that the rise of moralistic surveillance and persecution of non-normative sexual behaviors in late seventeenth-century England brought to the public’s attention an existing subculture of same-sex attracted men.<sup>91</sup>

Randolph Trumbach, while agreeing with Norton’s argument that a distinctive homosexual identity emerged before the nineteenth century, has suggested that Norton wrongly elided a social stratum of adult men who enjoyed sexually dominating male adolescents (in addition to being sexually active with women) with a later group of effeminate Englishmen who exclusively sought same-sex sexual partners.<sup>92</sup> Further

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<sup>90</sup> Daniel R. Ortiz, “Creating Controversy: Essentialism and Constructivism and the Politics of Gay Identity.” *Virginia Law Review*, Vol. 79, No. 7 (October 1993): 1833-1857.

<sup>91</sup> Rictor Norton, “The Gay Subculture in Early Eighteenth-Century London”, *The Gay Subculture in Georgian England*. <http://rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/molly2.htm>. Accessed 20 September 2010.

<sup>92</sup> Trumbach argues that the latter group was culturally- and self-identified as “sodomites” and further posits that their emergence marked, in English society, a move from “one to the other of the two worldwide systems for organizing homosexual behavior: from a system in which subordination was achieved by differences in age to one whose focus was a third-gender role for a minority of men.” Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution, Volume One: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998): 6; Trumbach, “Review: *Mother Clap’s Molly*

complicating this criticism of the social constructionist perspective is that scholars have not achieved consensus about the date which marks the “invention” of homosexuality; though many point to the mid-nineteenth century, others believe an earlier era saw the emergence of the “modern homosexual.”<sup>93</sup> This difference in opinion challenges Norton’s assertion that social constructionists rely only on the effects of the Industrial Revolution to explain the emergence of homosexual identity, and is simply not convincing enough to invalidate the theory.

Additionally, some essentialist historians assert that the entire project of social construction is driven by its practitioners’ political radicalism; Rictor Norton, for instance, observed suspiciously that social constructionists’ “‘history’ invariably focuses upon the nineteenth century, the era of bourgeois capitalism capable of being subjected to Marxist/Maoist economic analysis...When these theorists talk about ‘social constructs’ they are referring specifically to ideologies created by bourgeois society in order to control the working classes.”<sup>94</sup> While the political ramifications of the social constructionist position cannot be ignored, neither should they be used alone as a means to discredit the enterprise entirely. Moreover, the essentialist camp suffers from having its perspective styled as the “everyman” alternative to the allegedly “elitist” analyses

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*House: The Gay Subculture in England, 1700-1830* by Rictor Norton.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (April, 1995): 637-640.

<sup>93</sup>For examples of work positing a pre-industrial date for the “invention” of homosexuality, see: Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (New York: Gay Men’s Press, 1982); James Saslow “Homosexuality in the Renaissance: Behavior, Identity, and Artistic Expression.” In Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, eds., *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Penguin, 1989): 90-105; Laurence Senelick, “Mollies or Men of Mode? Sodomy and the Eighteenth-Century London Stage.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, No. 1(1990) 33-67; Randolph Trumbach, “The Birth of the Queen: Sodomy and the Emergence of Gender Equality in Modern Culture, 1660-1750” (in Duberman et al., eds., *Hidden from History*: 129-140) and “London’s Sapphists: From Three Sexes to Four Genders in the Making of Modern Culture.” In Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, eds., *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 112-141.

<sup>94</sup> Norton, *Myth of the Modern Homosexual*: 6.

provided by social constructionists, which is somewhat ironic in light of Norton's suggestion that class concerns ought not to enter into queer history. Norton's derisive description of social constructivism as "over-intellectual analysis" was echoed by the remarks of well-known gay author and provocateur Larry Kramer, who has condemned queer theory and gender studies (the home disciplines of many social constructionists) as "prissy incomprehensible imprecise, fuzzy gobbledygook."<sup>95</sup> Failing to articulate a cogent refutation of social construction theory, essentialism has generally ceded ground to social constructivism, at least in the academy; most disciplines generally acknowledge the cultural specificity of identity markers such as gender, class, race, and sexuality.<sup>96</sup>

While I find persuasive the timeframe widely accepted by social constructivists as marking the widespread emergence of the modern homosexual identity, I hasten to add that I take to heart the words of George Chauncey, Jr. who insisted that medical discourse about homosexuality was neither the only, nor even the most influential, ideology circulating at the turn of the twentieth century and reminded readers that the sexual categories *named* by sexologists were in play prior to their official designations by the elite.<sup>97</sup> Philosopher Richard Mohr has criticized social constructionists as "confusing"

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.: 8. "Abraham Lincoln would not understand that kind of stuff. I do not understand that kind of stuff," Kramer writes, casting himself as an "everyman," which seems somewhat at odds with his identity as a wealthy, white, Ivy-educated New Yorker who has enjoyed a long and successful career in the arts. Larry Kramer, *The Tragedy of Today's Gays* (New York: Penguin, 2005): 81.

<sup>96</sup> Intriguingly, essentialism may be most useful as a political tool, as it provides a common ground for political coalition-building between queer people and other minority groups, all of whom can commiserate over being "born that way" and may point with pride to the great achievements of ancient members of their "tribe," insisting on those grounds that they deserve the same rights enjoyed by non-minority groups. Even to this end, however, there is a potential downside, albeit one that seems to be drawn from a particularly dark view of both science and human nature: if homosexual people are, in fact, innately different from heterosexual people, the hand of science might soon be able to pinpoint the roots of this "essence" and potentially remove or modify it in the interests of eradicating same-sex desire.

<sup>97</sup> George Chauncey, Jr. "Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War I Era." In Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and

“the term ‘homosexual’ with the concept ‘homosexual,’” arguing that “the absence of a specific word does not mean that a society fails to have the corresponding concept.”<sup>98</sup>

While it is possible that men who sexually desired other men recognized themselves as distinct from heterosexual men prior to the creation of the term “invert,” the issue of whether this distinctiveness was, to their minds, an issue of conduct (“we do different things”) rather than identity (“we are fundamentally different”) is open to debate and difficult to generalize about. I strongly disagree with Mohr’s dismissal of the importance of terminology, for knowing one is in some way different from others is worlds apart from knowing *how* one is different from others, and remain convinced that the official creation of this new taxonomy of human sexuality provided the most fundamental building block necessary for the development of gay communities and, later, political movements by establishing that homosexuals were essentially different from heterosexuals—they didn’t just *do* different things, they *were* themselves (for reasons biological, neurological, or psychological, not to mention moral) different. Furthermore, for numerous homosexuals living in isolation from the subcultures that were scattered around the country, this “elite” discourse oftentimes provided them with their first inkling that they were not alone in their difference—that they were part of a larger group, albeit only virtually. Psychologist Vivienne Cass’ influential model of gay and lesbian identity formation suggests that this realization marks a crucial stage of development of one’s

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George Chauncey, Jr., eds., *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989): 294-317.

<sup>98</sup> As an example, Mohr suggests that society’s lack of a term that adequately and fully describes his lover’s relation to him (“partner” and “lover” ostensibly falling short) does not mean that the relationship does not exist. I would argue that though the lack of this term might not internally, consciously trouble the participants, it nonetheless leads to social ignorance and devaluation of this relationship. Ongoing debates over the necessity of same-sex “marriage” versus other legal facsimiles underscore the importance of terminology. Richard D. Mohr, *Gay Ideas: Outing and Other Controversies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992): 232-3.

identity as homosexual, and is essential for the establishment of homosexual social networks (without which political movements could not arise).<sup>99</sup> With this in mind, I will discuss the development of this schema and its subsequent reception by same-sex attracted individuals themselves. Heeding Chauncey's caution, I will also acknowledge other influences on the formation of homosexual communities in the United States by sketching the general contours of American culture during the eras under consideration.

### Sexual Science and the Homosexual Subject, 1880-1960

The relationship between queer subjects and the psycho-medical establishment dates back to the late nineteenth century when sexuality, in general, became a topic of concern for researchers observing the dramatic social changes wrought by industrialization and urbanization. Concomitant with these social changes was the ascendancy of the psychiatric establishment in the West. Biology, long considered the primary dictator of a person's behavior, ceded ground to other explanations. Over the nineteenth century, Arnold I. Davidson argues, sexual "perversity" was in turn considered the result of diseased sexual anatomy, faulty neurological wiring, and finally, in the late nineteenth century, as "pure functional deviations of the sexual instinct, not reducible to cerebral pathology. Perversions were to be viewed and treated at the level of psychology, not at the grander level of pathological anatomy." Davidson identifies this most recent stage as the birthplace of "psychiatric reasoning," a development which he argues enabled modern understanding of sexual impulses existing independently of biological

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<sup>99</sup> Vivienne Cass, "Homosexual Identity Development: A Theoretical Model." *Journal of Homosexuality*. Vol. 4, No. 3 (1979): 219-235.

facts.<sup>100</sup> Over the next century, psychologists and medical doctors would grapple over the etiology of sexual desire (and homosexuality in particular), which same-sex attracted people accepted and refuted to varying degrees. These theories, nonetheless, played a role in the emergence of a homosexual subculture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century United States. By tracing the general contours of the most significant of these, I hope to illustrate their influence on the development of a distinctive homosexual social identity in the twentieth-century United States.

Many late nineteenth century psychologists felt compelled to try to understand and control sexual impulses in light of the alarming trends wrought by industrialization and urbanization. Historian Chris Waters, noting that the psychiatric establishment's new infatuation with sexuality was due in part to its members' own professional ambitions, observed that "curing, rather than punishing, those who suffered from perversions of the sexual instinct, became particularly important for many of those psychiatrists eager to enhance their own professional standing in society, leading to an array of new therapies, from hypnotism in the 1890s to psychoanalysis in the new century."<sup>101</sup> Psychologist Henry Minton stated, in his history of sexology in America, that discourse surrounding these changes "increasingly turned human sexuality into a problem, as exemplified by the eugenic concerns about reproduction and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases associated with prostitution."<sup>102</sup> The close connection between sexology and social

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<sup>100</sup> Davidson is careful to note that the three models sometimes overlapped "to such an extent that many of the psychiatrists who are most responsible for our current conception of the perversions were also strongly wedded to the dominance of brain pathology." Arnold I. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001): 3.

<sup>101</sup> Chris Waters, "Sexology." In H.G. Cocks and Matt Holbrook, eds., *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 45.

<sup>102</sup> Henry L. Minton, *Departing From Deviance: A History of Homosexual Rights and Emancipatory Science in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002): 11.

reform originated in Germany, where Karl Heinrich Ulrichs elaborated a theory of congenital homosexuality and used it to argue for the legal and social equality of homosexuals although the researchers who subsequently picked up Ulrich's biological model of homosexuality were less concerned with lobbying for social change than with documenting, categorizing, and labeling the varieties of non-normative sexual experience.

The labels themselves made clear the researchers' simultaneous project of pathologizing these behaviors. The 1869 publication of a report on "contrary sexual feeling" by German neurologist and psychiatrist Karl Friedrich Otto Westphal suggested that same-sex sexual feeling indicated psychological disturbance; the term "contrary sexual feeling" became, in English translation, "inverted sexual feeling" or simply "sexual inversion." As historian Jonathan Katz noted, the terms "contrary" and "inverted" sexual feeling presupposed the existence of a "normal" non-contrary or non-inverted sexual feeling, and the widespread adoption of these terms in the psycho-medical establishment "inaugurated a hundred-year tradition in which the abnormal and the homosexual were posed as riddle, the normal and heterosexual were assumed."<sup>103</sup>

In case it is not completely obvious from the terminology alone, the concept of "contrary" or "inverted" sexual feeling oftentimes also involved the inversion of normative gender attributes in men and women; female "inverts" were often described as "masculine," eschewing traditionally feminine pursuits, and comporting themselves in stark contrast with feminine norms; inverted men, on the other hand, were alleged to be effeminate. Opinions about what drove this gender non-normative behavior varied

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<sup>103</sup> Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995): 55.

among sexologists. German doctor Karl Westphal was the first to argue that sexual inversion was rooted in the psyche. According to him, “congenital perversion of the sexual instinct” affected the psychology of those who experienced it, meaning that an inverted male would be “physically a man and psychologically a woman,” while a female invert was “physically a woman and psychologically a man.”<sup>104</sup> With this pronouncement, Arnold Davidson argues, Westphal effected “the psychiatric transformation of a previous, although nonmedical, understanding of this disorder.”<sup>105</sup>

Though his conclusion was novel, Westphal was certainly not the first person to try to define the origins of same-sex desire. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, the early gay-rights advocate, had suggested that same-sex desire was the result of a man’s soul residing in a woman’s body (or vice-versa). Others, like Dr. James G. Kiernan, were more interested in corporeality and posited that it was the outcome of a mismatch between a person’s brain and their physical sex. Writing in *The Medical Standard* of November 1888, that he would prefer to leave the “question of the soul” to “the domain of theology,” Kiernan suggested instead that same-sex desire was the attendant condition of a “femininely functioning [*sic*] brain...occupy[ing] a male body and vice versa.”<sup>106</sup> Westphal’s psychiatric theory eventually overshadowed its competitors, abetted by the work of Richard von Krafft-Ebing, who used it to undergird his 1886 work *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Within this vast collection of case studies of people he considered sexually aberrant, Krafft-Ebing insisted that “the essential feature” of “homo-sexual feeling” was the presence of “sexual impulse and inclination toward the same sex” in spite of a person

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<sup>104</sup> Davidson, 16.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* 17.

<sup>106</sup> James G. Ballard, “Sexual Perversion and the Whitechapel Murders.” *The Medical Standard*, Vol. 4, No. 5 (1888): 130.



being “completely differentiated” with “normally developed” and functioning genitals and sexual glands. Krafft-Ebing believed that among same-sex attracted people, “feeling, thought, will, and the whole character, in cases of the complete development of the anomaly, correspond with the peculiar sexual instinct, but not with the sex the individual represents anatomically and physiologically.” Though it may have been the result of seeing only what he expected to see, rather than unbiased observation, Krafft-Ebing’s case studies of inverted men and women almost all emphasized their subjects’ divergence from gender normative behavior.

Not all sexologists were convinced that same-sex desire was completely inextricable from gender non-conformity, however. Havelock Ellis, a turn-of-the-century British sexologist, argued that the inversion of the “sexual impulse” was not necessarily tied to the inversion of what he called the “aesthetic impulse,” writing in a 1913 paper that

By “sexual inversion,” we mean exclusively such a change in a person’s sexual impulses, the result of inborn constitution, that the impulse is turned towards individuals of the same sex, while all the other impulses and tastes may remain those of the sex to which the person by anatomical configuration belongs. There is, however, a wider kind of inversion, which not only covers much more than the direction of the sexual impulses, but may not, and indeed frequently does not, include the sexual impulse at all.<sup>107</sup>

For example, Ellis explained, while transvestites might choose to wear the apparel of the opposite sex, they might be—and frequently were, at least by their own admissions to psychiatrists—heterosexually-oriented in terms of sexual preference. This was no late-stage development in the sexologist’s work; he had espoused this viewpoint five years

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<sup>107</sup> Havelock Ellis, “Sexo-Aesthetic Inversion.” *Alienist and Neurologist*, No. 34 (1913): 156. Quoted in Arnold I. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001): 34-5.

earlier in the second volume of his most influential work, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. This text, though modeled on Krafft-Ebing's magnum opus with a heavy focus on case studies, represented several breaks with the earlier sexologist's opinions. In addition to differing with his predecessor on the topic of gender non-conformity and its relationship to sexual inversion, the etiology of homosexuality Ellis believed in differed significantly from Krafft-Ebing's. While the latter had argued that sexual inversion, and sexual pathology in general, was the result of hereditary degeneration (a view he would change in later editions of his work), Ellis simply found same-sex attraction to be an organic variation on opposite-sex attraction.

The two men had very different aims for their projects, which doubtless shaped their interpretation of same-sex desire. Krafft-Ebing was, like many of his contemporaries, influenced by the degeneracy theory developed in the 1850s by French physician Bénédict Morel; briefly, this theory suggested that it was possible for people to devolve, rather than evolve, by passing down undesirable mental and physical traits through generations of their family.<sup>108</sup> Preventing the unfit from reproducing, then, was in the best interests of the human race—a thought the eugenics movement would run with in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—and the careful attention which Krafft-Ebing paid to the peculiarities and peccadilloes of his subjects' ancestors and family members provided powerful evidence for those looking to illustrate the suffering that could result from unchecked reproduction among the mentally (or morally) infirm.

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<sup>108</sup> Eventually, the theory gloomily predicted, societies would fall as they became overrun by these tainted individuals. Historian Neil Miller noted the utility of the theory, observing that in the nineteenth century, "progressive degeneracy was offered as an explanation for poverty, insanity, and alcoholism, as well as for political and military failures." Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995): 15. The work in which Morel most fully explained his degeneracy theory is *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine et des causes qui produisent ces variétés maladives* (Paris : J.B. Baillière, 1857).

Ellis, on the other hand, argued that homosexuality was a benign anomaly—“abnormal, but natural”—and that homosexuals should not be regarded as ill, degenerate, or otherwise inferior to heterosexuals.<sup>109</sup>

Historian Neil Miller has asserted that “perhaps the most important aspect of Ellis’ research” was his “discovery that male ‘inverts’ did not necessarily conform to stereotypes [and] by and large... appeared and acted like most other men.”<sup>110</sup> It is true that Ellis asserted that same-sex attracted men who “feel as men, not as women, toward the objects of their affections” constituted “an important group... which has sometimes been ignored” by those who have insisted on the feminine characteristics of inverts generally.” But the extent to which this claim was truly groundbreaking—as Miller claims it was—is, I believe, significantly limited by the hasty qualification with which Ellis follows his observation: “Even the members of this group show, for the most part” he admitted, “some slight trace of what might fairly be called feminine characteristics.”<sup>111</sup> These characteristics included “remarkable sensitiveness and delicacy of sentiment, sympathy, and an intuitive habit of mind.”<sup>112</sup> Though the degree to which an inverted man embodied these traits varied widely, Ellis suggested that in almost all cases, some tell-tale trace of gender inversion was present in the person’s makeup.<sup>113</sup> Ellis’ treatment

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<sup>109</sup> Havelock Ellis. *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Vol. II: Sexual Inversion* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis and Company, 1908): 227.

<sup>110</sup> Miller, *Out of the Past*: 19.

<sup>111</sup> Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*: 102.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*: 168.

<sup>113</sup> Ellis posited a binary model for the etiology of same-sex desire, which consisted of “acquired” and “congenital” homosexuality. Like the “nature/nurture” debate in which gay rights activists and their foes engage today, Ellis believed that in some (exceedingly rare) cases, environmental factors could cause sexual inversion, though he strongly favored the “congenital” explanation which suggested inverts were simply “born that way.” For Ellis, the congenital invert would be more likely to evince gender inversion than a person who had simply “acquired” it. Similarly, Ellis differentiated between male inverts who assumed the active, versus the passive, sexual role, suggesting that the former would likely be less obviously feminine than the latter.

of gender inversion and sexual inversion as *potentially* separable was novel, certainly, but throughout the majority of *Sexual Inversion*, the sexologist, like his predecessors, draws the reader's attention to concomitant instances of the two phenomena.

In spite of his perhaps over-laudatory reading of Ellis' comments on male inversion, Miller—along with other historians—forthrightly acknowledges that Ellis' depiction of female inverts was far more traditional, and fully in keeping with both existing sexological studies and with Victorian notions of gender. Heike Bauer has argued that for Ellis and his contemporaries, “the discourse of male inversion was tied to the emergence of sexual identity, coined to describe male same-sex practices and overtly politicized in discourses of the emerging modern state” while “female inversion was largely tied to issues of social rather than sexual difference...and to the mapping of distinctly configured roles for men and women.”<sup>114</sup> Though the rise of the middle class in the late nineteenth century may have expanded definitions of appropriate masculine behavior, and although standards of femininity were being challenged by upper-class coeds and urban-dwelling factory girls, there were still certain qualities which were resolutely “masculine” or “feminine.”<sup>115</sup> One of the most deeply gendered traits was

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<sup>114</sup> Heike Bauer, “Theorizing Female Inversion: Sexology, Discipline, and Gender at the Fin de Siècle.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*. Vol. 18, No. 1 (January 2009):

<sup>115</sup> For more on the rise of the professional-managerial class, see Richard M. Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996). Michael Zakim explores the redefinition of masculinity entailed by the nineteenth-century rise of the white-collar workforce in “The Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary; or, a Labor History of the Nonproducing Classes.” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Winter 2006): 563-603. Margaret Lowe's *Looking Good: College Women and Body Image* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) details the different strategies employed by co-eds to counter the stereotype of college women as masculine, and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz's *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 1984) provides a broad view of turn-of-the-century attitudes towards women's higher education. One of the most influential works on working-class women's redefinition of feminine propriety remains Kathy Peiss' *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn of the Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982). Heeding George Chauncey's cautionary statement that “no single norm governing ‘feminine’ (or

passivity, seen as quintessentially feminine. Ellis emphasized in his case studies of female inverts their lack of passivity and other female qualities, observing

When they retain female garments, these usually show some traits of masculine simplicity, and there is nearly always a disdain for the petty feminine artifices of the toilet...[T]here are all sorts of instinctive gestures and habits which may suggest to female acquaintances the remark that such a person “ought to have been a man.” The brusque, energetic movements, the attitude of the arms, the direct speech, the inflexions of the voice, the masculine straightforwardness and sense of honor, and especially the attitude towards men, free from any suggestion either of either shyness or audacity, will often suggest the underlying psychic abnormality to a keen observer.<sup>116</sup>

In addition to providing an early example of the kinds of behaviors which rendered women subject to charges of inversion, this remark is noteworthy because it hints at what was a sharp contrast between Ellis’ understanding of gender transgression in male inverts and in female inverts. While Ellis repeatedly asserted that femininity was likely to be found, albeit oftentimes only in the most minute traces, in the male invert, these comments were far less emphatic than his categorical statement that “[t]he *chief characteristic* of the sexually inverted woman is a certain degree of masculinity (italics mine).”<sup>117</sup> This is far from the only difference between Ellis’ understanding of inversion in men and inversion in women; in fact, the chasm separating Ellis’ relatively benign depiction of male same-sex desire and his altogether more conflicted presentation of female inversion merits discussion because it provides a glimpse of the importance of contemporary social trends on sexologists’ interpretations of sexual behavior. The differences between Ellis’ understanding of female and male inversion are related to his

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‘masculine’) behavior existed at the turn of the century,” as these varied among class and ethnicity, I want to specify that I speak here of middle-class standards, those with which Ellis himself would have been most familiar. Chauncey, *Gay New York*: 61.

<sup>116</sup> Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*: 143.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.:140. Italics mine.

pre-existing assumptions about the nature of female sexuality, the behavioral significance of biology, and the etiology of female same-sex desires.<sup>118</sup>

Ellis believed, along with many of his contemporaries, that “normal” women did not have strong sexual impulses, were generally sexually passive and responsive, and experienced “sexual emotion [that was] but faintly tinged by esthetic feeling.”<sup>119</sup> A congenitally inverted woman, on the other hand, was an “enthusiastic admirer of feminine beauty,” who usually instigated sexual activity because of the strong sexual impulses she possessed. For Ellis, these deviations from the feminine norm underscored the assumption that the female congenital invert was simply unnatural, because as a biological determinist, he believed that a female body normally dictated “feminine” behavior. Male inverts, on the other hand, did not disrupt Ellis’ biological determinist worldview to the same extent as female inverts; even the most effeminate male inverts appeared to hew more closely to the masculine norms of sexuality demanded by their corporeal makeup, simply by virtue of affirming that they had strong sexual impulses (notwithstanding the fact that these sexual impulses often led them to pursue sexual roles stereotypically associated with passivity and femininity).

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<sup>118</sup> Recent scholarship by queer and feminist theorists has argued that the many of the “inverted” women depicted in sexological records cannot rightly be read as “lesbian” and rather bear a closer resemblance to “transgender” women. See Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998) and Jay Prosser, “Transsexuals and the Transsexologists: Inversion and the Emergence of Transsexual Subjectivity,” in Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, eds., *Sexology in Culture: Labeling Bodies and Desires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Problematically, these works argue against the privileging of sexual identity over gender identity by making the same move in an oppositional direction. Claudia Breger suggests a middle path, interpreting accounts of female inversion as reflective of “feminine masculinities”—a more hybridized configuration than Halberstam’s “female masculinities”—rather than of a strictly transgendered or homosexual identity. Breger, “Feminine Masculinities: Scientific and Literary Representations of ‘Female Inversion’ at the Turn of the Twentieth Century.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 14, Nos. 1/2 (Jan. 2005/Apr. 2005): 76-106.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*: 146.

Ellis' own unease with the changes in women's social roles taking place at the time he was writing also influenced his conflicted depiction of homosexuality among women. Agreeing with the observations of contemporary sexologists who posited an increasing incidence of homosexual behavior among women, Ellis suggested that "the modern movement of emancipation" was largely to blame.<sup>120</sup> Ellis was not the first sexologist to connect female homosexuality to women's efforts to gain social equality with men; historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg wryly observed that, in the works of Krafft-Ebing, "lesbians seem[ed] to desire male privileges and power as ardently as, or perhaps more ardently than, they sexually desired women."<sup>121</sup> Smith-Rosenberg has also suggested that the primary motivation for Ellis' differential treatment of male and female homosexuality was his firm belief in biological determinism and "the ambivalent attitude toward the New Women which followed from that commitment."<sup>122</sup> Although (in theory) a believer in the equality of the sexes, Ellis was even more heavily invested in the idea that the sexes were complementary counterparts; this notion, coupled with his interest in eugenics, shaped his opinion that women who failed to fulfill the marital or maternal obligations necessary for the continuance of the race posed a particular threat to mankind. Though they possessed the female anatomy which, from a biological-deterministic viewpoint, should have made them "modest, sexually passive and responsive, sensitive, and emotional," they appeared not to embody these "natural" qualities at all, and hence were literally *unnatural*.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.: 147.

<sup>121</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985): 271.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.: 277.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.: 278.

Still worse, in the eyes of eugenicists like Ellis, was that these unnatural creatures threatened to destabilize the foundations of civilization by preying on other women, whose susceptibility to their advances was more circumstantial than innately-ordained. Whereas Ellis had suggested that “situational” homosexuality among young men, which took place most often during their days at single-sex boarding schools, rarely had any lasting repercussions on the adult sexual development of “normal” men, Ellis cautioned that female congenital inverts could easily persuade otherwise “normal” women into homosexual relations, potentially distracting them from their adult obligation to wed and bear children. In his discussions of his congenitally-inverted female subjects’ romantic pursuits, Ellis emphasized their willingness to pursue and court their love interests, and asserted that these “masculine” women preferred “clinging, feminine persons” (read: “normal” women) as partners.<sup>124</sup> Though he noted that any woman who was susceptible to the advances of a “true invert” must have already possessed a germ of same-sex attraction, Ellis intimated that, but for the guidance of her seducer, she might have remained ever ignorant of it. Once, however, she was accustomed to sex which was purely for sensual or emotional gratification, rather than for procreative purposes, she might never accept male attentions again.<sup>125</sup> The congenitally inverted woman was potentially a far more threatening figure to social stability than the inverted man.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.: 167.

<sup>125</sup> Ellis felt similarly about other non-procreative sexual acts, worrying, for instance, that “excessive masturbation in youth might leave a person incapable of associating sexuality with love.” He offered only conditional acceptance of other non-procreative sex acts, insisting that they were only useful as counterparts to heterosexual intercourse and otherwise could be a dangerous distraction from the “real” purpose of sex. Jeffrey Weeks, “Havelock Ellis and the Politics of Sex Reform.” In Weeks, *Making Sexual History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000): 37.

<sup>126</sup> From another perspective, however, the “situational” female homosexual might appear more threatening to social order than her congenital counterpart. Lacking the tell-tale signifiers of masculinity which Ellis claimed were an integral characteristic of the true invert, this woman, whose latent predilection for same-



Implicit in this notion is the idea that there were two classes of same-sex attracted people: those who were “true” invert—those women who had the masculine qualities Ellis enumerated earlier—and those who effectively fell into same-sex relationships due to extenuating circumstances. These could include disappointments in heterosexual relationships, extended separation from the opposite sex, or simply because they enjoyed the attentions of the women who courted them. Naïveté was even used as an excuse by some women who had engaged in sexual relationships with “true” invert.<sup>127</sup> In *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis differentiated between the two “types” of people who engaged in same-sex eroticism: the congenital “invert” and the practicing “homosexual.” As historian Jeffrey Weeks has noted, this fine distinction “opened up moral chasms and confusions” for future sexologists, proponents of homosexual rights, and the subjects themselves because “the distinction relied on purely arbitrary judgments as to whether the homosexuality was inherent or acquired. And of course it implied that homosexual behavior was only acceptable if it was involuntary and could not be suppressed.”<sup>128</sup> Ellis, too, was conflicted—he firmly believed that those for whom same-sex attraction was innate should live as freely as their opposite-sex oriented peers, but as a eugenicist, would

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sex eroticism had only been forced into full flower by her seductress, might appear “normal” and harmless, but was in fact not. Sherrie Innis ably interrogated the suspect figure of the feminine-appearing invert or homosexual in “Who’s Afraid of Stephen Gordon? The Lesbian in the Popular Imagination of the United States.” *Perversions*, No. 4 (1995): 81-111.

<sup>127</sup> Sexologist W.F. Robie wrote in 1916 of a twenty-two year old woman who had moved in with an inverted woman several years her senior; of the fact that her roommate regularly initiated sex when the two shared a bed, the younger woman claimed that she had “thought it natural enough and what women usually did when they slept together.” In fact, not until “the significance of this was made plain to her” did she “shun sleeping with this woman.” Interestingly, in spite of her regular sexual engagement with her roommate, the young woman married and enjoyed, with her husband, “a remarkably successful sex life.” While this individual avoided the long-term ill effects which Ellis fretted would come from homosexual relationships between women, she was nonetheless depicted in sexological literature as the hapless victim of a predatory lesbian. W.F. Robie, *Rational Sex Ethics* (Boston: Richard, G. Badger, 1916): 53-4. Quoted in Angus McLaren, *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: A History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999): 102.

<sup>128</sup> Weeks: 32.

have been opposed to sexual activities which threatened the future of the human race. While “congenital” inversion was confined to a small proportion of the population and therefore would have had little immediate impact on the general trend of reproduction, “acquired” homosexuality could spread among women with startling ease (due in part, Ellis explained, to social conventions that proscribed heterosocial intercourse between young people) which could lead to significantly reduced rates of childbearing.<sup>129</sup> He went so far as to suggest that congenitally inverted women abstain altogether from pursuing their love interests lest their “indulgence may be doing injury to others.”<sup>130</sup> Ellis’ notion that homosexual activity was acceptable so long as it was only practiced by those who truly “couldn’t help” it both echoed the thinking of early gay rights advocates like Karl Maria Kertbeny and Karl Ulrichs and prefigured the rationale some gay activists would later use to argue for gay social and legal equality.

While Ellis continued to assert an immutable connection between biology and behavior, another European doctor with quite different ideas was gaining prominence in the United States. Sigmund Freud posited that same-sex attraction was evidence that an individual’s journey to psycho-sexual maturity had stalled. Carefully differentiating between sexual aims and sexual objects, he challenged biological explanations for sexual “perversion” and insisted that environmental factors strongly influenced sexual desire. He broke with Ellis by positing that humans are essentially bisexual and only develop heterosexual desire after successfully traversing a veritable minefield of psychic dangers,

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<sup>129</sup> Ellis’ concern about this development is made clear in his 1912 book *The Task of Social Hygiene*, in which he wrote “Reproduction is the end and aim of all life everywhere, and in order to live a humanly complete life, every woman should have, not sexual relationships only, but the exercise at least once in her life of the supreme function of maternity, and the possession of those experiences which only maternity can give.” Havelock Ellis, *The Task of Social Hygiene* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1912): 65

<sup>130</sup> Havelock Ellis, “Sexual Inversion in Women.” *Alienist and Neurologist*, No. 16 (1895): 141-58.

a thought anathema to eugenicists horrified by the idea that sexuality wasn't "naturally" confined to procreative purposes. Freud's work was more widely read in the United States than Ellis not least because his work, unlike his predecessors', explicitly focused on "normal" (that is, heterosexual) sexuality rather than on deviations from that norm. Though Freud was fully committed to the idea that the desirable norm of human sexual desire was opposite-sex oriented, his theories also troubled the notion that same-sex-attracted people were categorically different from others and rather placed same-sex desire on the same path as opposite-sex desire (albeit only as a way station which "healthy" adults traveled quickly through). Thus, Freud implicitly argued, any influences which could delay, temporarily or permanently, a person's achievement of mature sexual desire had to be combated. It is no coincidence that Freud's work gained currency in the United States in the same period when many women were challenging social strictures which prevented them from self-expression and self-fulfillment, when social reformers were emphasizing the need for companionate marriages, and when single-sex institutions (and unmarried women) were treated with increasing suspicion. Concomitantly, Mari Jo Buhle observes, the term "feminism" took on an "unusually pronounced association with the rights, privileges, and roles enjoyed by men" and soon was shorthand for women's perceived usurpation of masculinity.<sup>131</sup> In short, the time was right for the popularization of ideas which posited that women were, by nature, jealous of men's privileges, that same-sex desires were reflective of psychic immaturity, and that a corrupt environment or poor companions could alter a person's psycho-sexual development for the worse.

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<sup>131</sup> Mari Jo Buhle, *Feminism and Its Discontents: A Century of Struggle with Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998):13.

That Freud's ideas spread rapidly throughout the English-speaking world is clear from the publication statistics for his works in the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to a 2010 search of WorldCat—an electronic database referencing 71,000 libraries worldwide—approximately ten English-language translations of his works were published between 1900 and 1909. In the ten years that followed, the number of editions had jumped dramatically to 52, and in the decade after that, 99 English translations of his work appeared on the market.<sup>132</sup> Assuming that supply follows demand, one could extrapolate from these statistics that Freud's theories found an eager audience in the United States. Both bourgeois and bohemian cultures embraced his ideas; it seemed everyone could find something in Freud's works to lend intellectual credibility to their arguments. Feminists such as Emma Goldman embraced Freud (and psychoanalysis more generally), viewing them, in the words of Mari Jo Buhle, as “historically paired and standing together on the brink of modernity” with feminism, while the general public eagerly read bowdlerized versions of Freud's theories in popular publications such as *McClure's Magazine* and *Cosmopolitan*. By the early 1920s, Buhle writes, a ragtag coterie of medical professionals, psychologists, and self-proclaimed intellectuals had embraced psychoanalytic theories as explanations for human behavior, sexual and otherwise; theories “attributed to Freud inspired playwrights, novelists, and the personnel of the movie industry; filled the pages of women's magazines and middle-brow journals such as the *New Yorker* and the *Atlantic Monthly*; and dictated the perspectives of untold

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<sup>132</sup> Although WorldCat does not include the holdings of archives and private collections, the scope of its coverage would suggest that the editions of Freud's work that it enumerates is at least a reasonably accurate reflection of the actual number of editions published during these years.

numbers of marriage manuals, self-help volumes, and childrearing advice books."<sup>133</sup>

Having permeated American culture, Freud's ideas were subject to often gross reinterpretations by people eager to pick out the concepts most coherent and useful to their own lives while writing off some of the murkier or troubling aspects of his arguments. One historian's suggestion that psychoanalysis was embraced by Americans, particularly, because of its promise to help individuals reconcile the seemingly oppositional demands of "instinct" and "culture" seems particularly apropos in light of its incorporation *into* culture—by pointing out how social mores demanded individual repression, psychoanalytic ideas slyly troubled the idea that cultural standards were meant for the greater good (how could they be, when they necessitated individual self-harm?) and may have provided a greater measure of freedom to individuals looking to stray from the path of social propriety. How could one fault the behavior of others, if they were simply acting on their natural instincts rather than abiding by the unnaturally confining restrictions of "civilization?"<sup>134</sup>

Most significant to the historian of sexuality is Freud's 1905 work, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in which he introduced the core concepts of infantile sexuality, penis envy, and the Oedipal complex. In this book, Freud radically challenged the idea of sexuality as biologically-dictated, insisting instead that all humans are born with sexual desires which they fulfill in a manner of different ways throughout their lifespan. For children, Freud wrote, "sexual activity attaches itself to one of the functions serving the purpose of self-preservation and does not become independent until later

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<sup>133</sup> Buhle:2-7.

<sup>134</sup> Angus McLaren, *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: A History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999): 122.

on.”<sup>135</sup> Lynne Segal explains that Freud was less concerned with discovering the origins of the sexual drive than with exploring how individuals’ life experiences (particularly as children) shaped its manifestations; he insisted that “adult sexuality [was] always the result of the repression of the earlier ‘polymorphous perversity’ of infancy, and only ever comes under the sway of the reproductive function, if it does, by ‘a series of developments, combinations, divisions and suppressions which are scarcely ever achieved with ideal perfection.’”<sup>136</sup> On the surface, this understanding of human sexual development might seem to be a channel through which homosexuals could assert their similarities to heterosexuals and advocate for power on this basis. Freud’s consistent privileging of “mature” heterosexuality over homosexuality, however, precluded this possibility.

In spite of placing homosexual desire several rungs lower than heterosexuality on the ladder of sexual development, Freud advocated for the acceptance of the homosexual into society.<sup>137</sup> He steadfastly maintained that homosexuality was not a bar to a happy or full life, advising one anxious American mother that her son’s homosexuality was “assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice or degradation [and] cannot be classified as an illness.” While he cautiously suggested that in some rare instances, psychoanalysis could cultivate the “blighted germs of heterosexual tendencies”

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<sup>135</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*.

<sup>136</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (1915) in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984). Quoted in Lynne Segal, *Straight Sex: Rethinking the Politics of Pleasure* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 120.

<sup>137</sup> Even lower than the homosexual fell the bisexual—that is, the person who had not even begun to progress towards “adult” (hetero)sexuality. While Freud paid slightly more attention to this figure than Ellis had, both men were primarily interested in studying what Freud’s pupil Wilhelm Stekel called “monosexuals.” Stekel audaciously turned his mentor’s formulation on its head, contending that “the healthy person must act as a bisexual being... Monosexuality... involves a predisposition to neurosis.” This theory was, not surprisingly, less popular with the general public than Freud’s. Wilhelm Stekel, “Extracts from *Bi-Sexual Love* (1920).” In Merl Storr, ed., *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999): 28-30.

in some practicing homosexuals, he refused to treat patients whose only “problem” was that they were attracted to members of the same sex, and forcefully disagreed with those of his peers who wanted to ban homosexuals from becoming psychoanalysts or joining their professional organizations.<sup>138</sup> Henry Abelove notes, however, that Freud was quite at odds with the gay rights movement taking place in Germany during his lifetime; its leaders’ constant recourse to the “third sex”/“intermediate sex” model promoted by Karl Ulrichs (and later Magnus Hirschfeld) demonstrated their failure to “[learn] anything from the established findings of psychoanalysis” and that, to Freud, rendered them unworthy of his support.<sup>139</sup> In light of his general acceptance of the homosexual individual, it is safe to say that Freud might have objected to the ways in which his words were manipulated by virulently anti-homosexual psycho-medical practitioners in the decades following his death in 1939.

Before these neo-Freudians could seize the mantle of sexual authority, however, an unassuming American entomologist moved his area of focus away from insects and onto the human species, in the process developing a picture of American sexual practices which fascinated, horrified, and titillated the country. Unlike Freud and Ellis, Alfred Kinsey was not concerned with discovering the impetus behind people’s sexual urges; rather, he intended to disabuse his readers of their belief that the sexual “norm” was eternal and unchanging by demonstrating that individuals could—and did—engage in a variety of sexual relationships throughout their lives rather than sticking only to one sex or one type of act. Kinsey’s first book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, was

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<sup>138</sup> Sigmund Freud, “A Letter from Freud.” *American Journal of Psychiatry* (April 1951): 786. Quoted in Henry Abelove, “Freud, Male Homosexuality, and the Americans.” In Abelove, David Halperin, Michele Barale, eds., *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 381-393.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*: 389.

published in January 1948 to an eager audience, selling 40,000 copies in its first two weeks of publication and quickly ascending the best-seller lists in the United States. It contained data compiled from 5300 face-to-face interviews with white men, most of whom were young and college-educated. Though its author claimed that his goal was observation, not advocacy, many Americans were unhappy with some of the findings he presented and accused him of trying to undermine American society (unsurprisingly, Kinsey was frequently accused of being a Communist).<sup>140</sup>

Particularly shocking to the American public were Kinsey's statistics on homosexuality; the statistics showed that approximately forty-five percent of adult males had a homosexual experience at some time in their lives. Like Freud, Kinsey chastised sexologists like Ellis who had tried to advance the idea that exclusively homosexual people were innately different from exclusive heterosexuals, preferring to believe instead that all sex acts simply expressed "capacities that are basic in the human animal."<sup>141</sup> To illustrate his view of human sexuality as a continuum rather than two or three discrete states (depending on if one considered "bisexuality" a genuine sexual orientation), Kinsey developed a seven-point scale on which people could place themselves at any given time. With the zero point standing for someone who was (and always had been) exclusively heterosexual in his or her actions and feelings, and six for someone who had only had sexual interest or experience with the same sex, Kinsey suggested that the intermediate points (for instance, 1—"predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally

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<sup>140</sup> Jonathan Gathorn-Hardy, *Kinsey: Sex The Measure of All Things* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2000): 270.

<sup>141</sup> Angus McLaren points out Kinsey's use of the concept of basic human bisexuality to assert that "if society ceased to ostracize and persecute the sexually experimental, the number driven to homosexual exclusivity might be lessened." McLaren, *Twentieth-Century Sexuality*: 146. Alfred C. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1948): 663.



homosexual”—or 4—“predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual”) were where the vast majority of Americans would find themselves. In keeping with this model, Ellis was exasperated by his predecessors’ stereotyping of homosexuals as gender-nonconformists; if anybody could (potentially) do anything with anyone, how could it be possible to predicate an individual’s level of gender conformity based on their sexual experiences? In addition to challenging the idea that sexual desire was fixed or bore any relation to gender conformity, Kinsey also made the radical suggestion that men’s and women’s sexual impulses were not categorically different. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, published in 1953, cataloged the sexual experiences of nearly 6000 white American women and implicitly called into question the model of female sexuality—a “germ” or “seed” needing to be awakened through male intervention—popular throughout the century. Female subjects admitted to desiring (and, of course, having) premarital sex, homosexual affairs, abortions—all of which horrified many readers. The Reverend Billy Graham sputtered in a 1953 radio address that Kinsey clearly had not included in his sample “any of the millions of born-again Christian women in this country who put the highest price on virtue, decency, and modesty.”<sup>142</sup>

Another reason that Kinsey’s work may have been particularly troubling to some Americans is because it not only showed Americans “the enemy” (that is, sexual “deviants”) but further suggested that the enemy—to paraphrase Walt Kelly’s famous quote—was “us.” Freud had prevented Kinsey from capitalizing on the shock value of his claim that human sexuality was a continuum rather than a fixed point, but Kinsey’s suggestion that the upstanding civic leader or the smiling homemaker next door might

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<sup>142</sup> Reproduced in Elam J. Daniels and William Franklin Graham, *I Accuse Kinsey* (Orlando: Christ For the World Publishing, 1954).

have engaged in homosexual behavior at some point in their lives (or still might!) picked up on one of the key themes of Cold War-era American society, which was that one always had to be on guard against evil in disguise. As Robert Corber persuasively argues in his reading of Mankiewicz's *All About Eve* (1950) as a film shot through with Cold War sexual concerns, the malevolence of the title character is underscored by her "impersonation of normative femininity." Corber explains that "[o]ne way that the discourses of national security contained opposition to postwar norms of masculinity and femininity was to exploit the fear that there was no way to tell homosexuals from heterosexuals. In emphasizing the invisibility of gays and lesbians, these discourses linked them to the communists and fellow travelers who had supposedly escaped detection and were conspiring to overthrow the nation."<sup>143</sup>

Psychology in this period contributed to the depiction of homosexuals as smiling subverters of democracy or sinister seducers preying on the weak and impressionable. Freudian theories that read adult sexual "perversion" as rooted in childhood psychic trauma continued to be popular. For good measure, doctors laced their screeds with virulently misogynistic rhetoric, eager to make the point that any type of sexuality other than the white male heterosexual norm (which Kinsey had tried so valiantly to deconstruct) was deficient, degraded, and potentially dangerous. Elaine Tyler May's study of gender in 1950s American culture argues that heterosexual women were also considered threats to social stability during the post-war era, often appearing "[a]s

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<sup>143</sup> Robert J. Corber, "Cold War Femme: Lesbian Visibility in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *All About Eve*." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2005): 1-22. See also Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); K. A. Cuordileon, "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960." *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (September 2000): 515-545.

temptresses who seduced men into evil or as overprotective mothers guilty of 'Momism'.<sup>144</sup> The overbearing mother vilified in Philip Wylie's best-seller *Generation of Vipers* was a particularly threatening figure because of her ability to undermine democratic society through the "creation" of anti-social—or, more specifically, homosexual—sons. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. alerted the public to the danger homosexual men posed to democracy in his 1949 anti-Communist polemic *The Vital Center*, positioning the sexually-perverted male as the antithesis of the virile and "vital" man who embodied American ideals, as evidenced by his eager submission to the "thrust" and "penetration" of "totalitarian indoctrination."<sup>145</sup> Like Schlesinger, many other liberals of the time engaged in homophobic rhetoric to discredit their enemies; Andrea Friedman has pointed to the "smearing" of Senator Joseph McCarthy by his liberal opponents in the late 1950s as the quintessential example of what K.A. Courdelione dubbed "gay-baiting to fight against red-baiting."<sup>146</sup> The architects behind the federal government's large-scale expulsion of its homosexual employees in the 1950s agreed that homosexuals were unfit for government work because of their likely alliances with Communist groups and also because of their particular vulnerability to blackmail; David Johnson has written extensively about this purge, suggesting that it resulted from the confluence of anti-Communism, resentment of F.D.R. and New Deal policies, and the increasing visibility of Washington, D.C.'s homosexual subculture.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1990): 84.

<sup>145</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. *The Vital Center* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949).

<sup>146</sup> Andrea Friedman, "The Smearing of Joe McCarthy: The Lavender Scare, Gossip, and Cold War Politics." *American Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (2005): 1105-1129.

<sup>147</sup> David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

The nation's capital was not alone in having a visible gay community during the post-war era, of course; as John D'Emilio and Allan Berube have famously argued, the effect of wartime mobilization on young men and women across the country enabled the formation of homosexual networks among military and government personnel, and in removing these individuals from their cities of origin, had provided them with a measure of anonymity useful in seeking out homosexual subcultures in their stations.<sup>148</sup> After the war ended, many of these young people remained away from home, increasing the size of the gay and lesbian population in many cities. The growth of these communities was unsettling to many heterosexuals

Contributing to the pervasively negative attitude towards homosexuality during this era was a cultural preoccupation with sex crimes, "psychos," and "perverts," which Chris Waters has argued opened a space in which the "expert in sexual matters [could] become extremely influential, advising governments and spearheading state-sponsored projects of sexual normalization."<sup>149</sup> Psychologists and psychiatrists lobbied courts and communities to persuade citizens that sex crimes were the outcome of psychological illness and that offenders should be incarcerated indefinitely (until they were adjudged to no longer pose a threat to society) in mental hospitals rather than in prisons; a more extreme version of this proposal suggested that anyone a psychologist deemed to be a "sex deviate" should be subject to the same treatment, regardless of what kind of "crime" he or she had committed *or even if had no crime had been committed at all*. By this

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<sup>148</sup> 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); Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

<sup>149</sup> Chris Waters, "Sexology." In H.G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook, eds., *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 49.

measure, consensual same-sex sex was tantamount to child rape or murder, an elision facilitated, as George Chauncey and Estelle Freedman have observed, by the blanket use of the terms “sex deviant” and “psychopath” to describe anyone whose sexual practices fell outside the socially-accepted heterosexual norm.<sup>150</sup> Psychiatrists supported this notion, arguing that the more heinous crimes were the inevitable outcome of a perverted sexual instinct, and claiming that only by identifying and “treating” sexual non-conformists—conveniently, something only they were equipped to do—might the worst be avoided.

Though sex-crime laws varied between states, openly homosexual individuals throughout the country had cause to worry lest the furor spread to their environs. Fred Fejes offers one example of this in his study of Miami, Florida, where the 1954 rape and murder of a young girl set off a media campaign of persecution against that city’s homosexual community; as a result, the “benign neglect” that had previously characterized the city’s attitude towards gays was replaced by a “stigmatized tolerance” and increased police harassment of homosexuals.<sup>151</sup> More dramatically, in Sioux City, Iowa, the county attorney used the state’s sex-crime laws to have 20 men committed indefinitely to mental asylums without trial or conviction in 1955.<sup>152</sup> The connection between homosexuality and criminality was far from novel—nineteenth-century

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<sup>150</sup> See George Chauncey, Jr., “The Postwar Sex Crime Panic.” In Altina L. Waller and William Graebner, eds., *True Stories From the American Past* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993): 160-178 and Estelle B. Freedman, “‘Uncontrolled Desires’ The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960. *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (June 1987): 83-106. Freedman specifies that “psychopath” and “homosexual” were virtually interchangeable terms during the sex-crime panic of the 1950s.

<sup>151</sup> Fred Fejes, “Murder, Perversion, and Moral Panic: The 1954 Media Campaign against Miami’s Homosexuals and the Discourse of Civic Betterment.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol 9, No. 3 (July 2000): 305-347.

<sup>152</sup> Neil Miller, *Sex-Crime Panic: A Journey To the Paranoid Heart of the 1950s* (Los Angeles: Alyson, 2002).

degeneracy theory had inaugurated that—but Cold War anxieties about gender roles and sexuality reinvigorated the complex. Coupled with the seeming parallels between the shadowy world of Communist Europe and the (necessarily) secretive homosexual demimonde in the United States, anti-homosexual crusaders found ample fuel for their fires during the 1950s.

### The Subjects Speak: Homosexuals Respond to Sexology

Interpreting the effect of sexologists' theories about homosexuality on the people they described is a notoriously difficult task, given the relative paucity of first-person narratives on the topic. The pieces of evidence that do survive, however, have been used (with caution) by some historians to extrapolate about widespread reception of these ideas by the people they purported to describe. Lillian Faderman, for example, has suggested that many same-sex attracted women, upon reading the sexologists' works in the early twentieth century, set out to differentiate their own experiences from the "base" and lustful practices of the homosexual women the doctors described; for instance, though author Mary Casal frankly admitted that sex played a role in her love affair with another woman, she insisted that it was "never the thought uppermost in our minds" and therefore their relationship had existed "on a much higher plane than those of the real inverts."<sup>153</sup> Women who were not conscious of and did not evidence any signs of gender inversion—that is, normatively feminine women—would have found it particularly easy to disqualify themselves from the category of "true invert" (because this was considered the *sine qua non* of congenital homosexual desire). This may explain why so many

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<sup>153</sup> Mary Casal, *The Stone Wall: An Autobiography* (Chicago: Eyncourt Press, 1930): 165, 185. Quoted in Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991): 54.

(largely white and privileged) women continued to openly live in same-sex partnerships in spite of the growing furor surrounding homosexuality—at worst, Faderman observes, they would have been considered “anachronisms left over from purer times.”<sup>154</sup>

There were, however, many same-sex attracted individuals accepting of the theories espoused by sexologists who saw homosexuality as a natural variation. Motivations for doing so varied widely. By embracing the idea of the “congenital invert,” women were freed from the obligation to feign heterosexuality with male suitors, to conform to feminine standards of dress and comportment, and perhaps most significantly—as Esther Newton persuasively argued—explicitly assert their own sexual desires, using their essential masculinity as justification.<sup>155</sup> Same-sex attracted men, on the other hand stood to lose, rather than gain, privilege by identifying as congenital inverts; as George Chauncey, Jr., has demonstrated, the predominant image of homosexual men insisted that the true invert was essentially feminine (“fairies,” in the parlance of the New York culture Chauncey studies). In order to avoid the diminution of power that this conferred, Chauncey argues, many middle-class men sought instead to construct identities as “queers” rather than as “fairies,” which “revealed only their ‘sexuality’ (their ‘homosexuality’), a distinct domain of personality independent of gender. Their homosexuality, they argued, revealed nothing abnormal in their gender persona.”<sup>156</sup> These individuals notwithstanding, there were numerous same-sex attracted men who felt that the “inversion” model adequately described them, and while some of

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Esther Newton, “The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman.” In Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr., eds., *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989): 281-293.

<sup>156</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York*: 100.

these men likely felt somewhat relieved of social pressure to act in a normatively masculine way, to others, the inversion model may have presented the only option by which their same-sex sexual desire was intelligible—after all, sexual desire for men was understood to be feminine in nature; ergo, it must originate from a feminine psyche. Despite their different perspectives on the appropriateness of the inversion model to their personal experiences, it is clear that individuals from both groups acted in response to the sexologists' claims, which speaks to their significance.

To expand on a point I alluded to earlier in this chapter, I agree with George Chauncey, Jr. that the psycho-medical establishment was not alone in its promotion of a particular sexual ideology, but I question his assertion that most individuals were not affected by its discourse. The importance of psychological or medical texts on an individual's self-identification as homosexual is suggested by its near-ubiquity in LGBT fiction and countless personal recollections of LGBT people.<sup>157</sup> Further, he argues that doctors merely recorded what they saw, rather than “creating” a new paradigm; I believe that his categorization of the doctors' work as merely observatory rather than constitutive may understate the effect that their reports had on same-sex attracted individuals who were unable to observe first-hand the vibrant urban gay culture Chauncey describes. It seems plausible—even likely—that many people may have only been able to conceptualize of homosexual life through the intervention of these works. Although his study suggests a gay world in full flower before the advent of sexology, it is important to remember that Chauncey's work focuses specifically on one particularly artistic, intellectual, and cosmopolitan city and that the patterns of homosexual culture he detailed

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<sup>157</sup> See the personal recollections contained in Eric Marcus, *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).



might not be neatly superimposed on smaller locales; in fact, the tendency of historical and anthropological scholarship on gay life to focus on urban centers to the exclusion of other locales is a problem with which the field continues to grapple. I believe that, for many individuals, the medical discourse surrounding homosexuality was hugely influential, performing an act of Althusserian interpellation by which many same-sex attracted people recognized themselves—or, rather, elements of their own experience—in the works of sexologists and assumed, as the French philosopher would say, the “subject position” of the “pervert,” “invert,” or “homosexual.”<sup>158</sup> In Eric Marcus’ *Making History*, numerous individuals describe seeking out medical and psychological literature that described homosexuality in order to learn more about, as gay rights leader Barbara Gittings recalled, “what my life [as a homosexual] was going to be like.” The influence of these works is clear from her admission that because “everything I read said that we were deviants...that’s what I thought about myself.” Havelock Ellis’ *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* offered Gittings some relief, providing her with a view of “gay people with personalities and real lives” with whom she could identify.<sup>159</sup> The experience Gittings describes—of seeking and finding out more about herself not through introspection but by reference to the works of experts—is a common feature in both factual and fictional narratives of homosexual self-identification, underscoring the importance of sexological works to the identity formation of many gay and lesbian people.

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<sup>158</sup> As previously noted, not all same-sex attracted individuals identified with these terms, but even in vigorously rejecting them, they acknowledged that they had been “hailed” by the medical texts. Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

<sup>159</sup> Eric Marcus, *Making History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002): 17.

Another reason some historians have downplayed the role of the sexologists' works in constituting a homosexual social world seems to derive from their status as medical works, not necessarily "easy reads" for the layperson. While Krafft-Ebing frustrated thrill-seeking readers by describing the sex acts of his subjects in Latin, his case studies were written in a relatively straightforward narrative style; Havelock Ellis and Freud's works were, perhaps, drier, but their ideas (particularly Freud's) were widely transmitted in what might impolitely be termed "dumbed-down" versions through various media outlets, including a mass-market magazine entitled *Sexology* which was sold at drugstores and newsstands beginning in 1933.<sup>160</sup> Their saturation of American culture was such that one '20s-era Greenwich Villager dryly observed that a person "could not go out to buy a bun without hearing of someone's complexes."<sup>161</sup> The publicity sexological works received in the early decades of the twentieth century, combined with their relative accessibility via libraries and bookstores, suggests that they might be considered a more *universal* (which is not to say "more important") influence than the elements of urban popular culture Chauncey credits with shaping the identity of "fairies" or "queers."<sup>162</sup> Even before magazines and newspapers reached the heights of cultural influence that Richard Ohmann has argued emerged around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reports of early sexologists' work appeared in newspapers from cities as far removed as New Orleans, Atchison, Kansas, and Portland, Oregon, all of which contained mentions of Richard von

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<sup>160</sup> See Craig Yoe, ed., *The Best of Sexology: Kinky and Kooky Excerpts from America's First Sex Magazine* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2008).

<sup>161</sup> Susan Glaspell, quoted in Albert Parry, *Garrets and Pretenders: A History of Bohemianism in America* (New York: Dover, 1960): 278.

<sup>162</sup> Margot Canaday argues cogently in *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) that the state was itself was a formative influence on gay culture because of its "identification of certain sexual behaviors, gender traits, and emotional ties as grounds for exclusion (from entering the country, serving in the military, or collecting benefits)." Canaday: 4.

Krafft-Ebing's work prior to 1895; many referred to the doctor with little or explanation of his credentials, suggesting that most readers were already aware of his work.<sup>163</sup> Those that specifically referred to *Psychopathia Sexualis* generally regarded it as abhorrent; the newspaper of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, helmed by none other than Frances E. Willard herself, opined in 1897 that the "terrible book...show[ed] the intimate relation between cruelty and other vile passions of mankind," while Ralph Elmergreen of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, charged in an agitated letter to the editor of *The Milwaukee Sentinel* in 1899 that Krafft-Ebing was a "psychopathist, and not a fit author to quote outside a purely scientific circle...his disgusting and prurient work sold to us under the cloak of science is not fit to be read by anybody." Elmergreen bewailed the work's popularity, noting that the volumes that "formerly displaced dust on the shelves of the physicians' libraries now show the ear-marks of usage and disgraces the libraries of the laity."<sup>164</sup> Clearly some people were reading the eminent doctor's work, and to hear Elmergreen tell it, they weren't the intended audience.

That the works of the sexologists were not only read by a large and diverse audience but, further, became something of a cultural touchstone is suggested by a humorous vignette which appeared in a 1921 issue of *Life* magazine, a magazine boasting a quarter of a million mostly middle-class readers.<sup>165</sup> This Christmas parody, entitled "Holiday Neuroses," expertly duplicated the tone and form of the doctor's case studies. It presented the sad case of career criminal "J." whose troubles could be laid at the feet of a

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<sup>163</sup> See, for instance, "**Freaks of the Insane:** Some of the Ludicrous Expressions of the Demented." *Atchison Daily Champion* (Atchison, KS) May 19, 1887; "**End of a Mad Career:** The Strange Case of the Eccentric Countess Sarolta Vay." *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA) September 8, 1890; "Mobs Are Hypnotized," *The Evening Post*, (Denver, CO) April 11, 1895.

<sup>164</sup> "Humane Education." *The Union Signal: A Journal of Social Welfare*, September 9, 1897; Ralph Elmergreen, Letter to the Editor. *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 26, 1899: 4.

<sup>165</sup> Kathleen Morgan Drowne and Patrick Huber, *The 1920s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004): 176.

nursemaid who was in the habit of telling J. that “Santa Claus *non erat* and that *Carthago delenda est*. At the age of 14, J. experienced his first desire to steal. Was in the house of an aunt at the time and *vir sapit qui pauca loquitur*.”<sup>166</sup> Without previous knowledge of Krafft-Ebing’s work—and specifically, of the format in which *Psychopathia Sexualis* was written—this parody would have fallen flat. The author’s implicit trust that his audience was in on the joke indicates that the book’s influence had reached (as Elmergreen feared) far beyond the psycho-medical field.

Though critics of Krafft-Ebing’s work, and sexological writing in general, feared that they would become popular among “lay readers” looking for a thrill, another body of less prurient readers may have been perusing them for information pertinent to their own lives. The most canonical work of early twentieth-century Western literature about lesbianism, Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) demonstrates the heroine’s awakening to her true nature when she peruses copies of sexological works (by Ulrichs and Ellis) in which she finds her father has jotted her name. This is perhaps the ultimate act of interpellation—she is doubly hailed, first by her given name and secondly by the description of female inverts which she strongly resembles. Although she has always known herself to be different from other women, only when she reads their words does she understand precisely *what* she is. It bears noting that the trope of young gays and lesbians “researching” their sexuality in books has been repeated in numerous memoirs and oral histories, as well as reproduced countless times in works of gay-themed fiction and film. The degree to which these written exegeses *described*, rather than *constituted*, the same-sex attracted individuals who read them is difficult to gauge. In some cases,

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<sup>166</sup> Marc Connelly, “Variations on an Old Air.” *Life*, December 1, 1921: 78. It bears noting that *Life* enjoyed a circulation of 250,000 in 1920. “Press: *Life*: Dead & Alive.” *Time*, October 19, 1936.

individuals attempted to mimic the descriptions they read or despaired over the disconnect between themselves and the sexologists' version of homosexuality—one woman recalled her perplexity at being able to whistle after reading that homosexuals were unable to do so.<sup>167</sup> That they played a formative role in the identity construction of many gays and lesbians is undeniable, which necessarily implicates them as important factors in the eventual development of homosexual communities in the Western world during the twentieth century.<sup>168</sup>

As suggested by the experience of Barbara Gittings, who tried futilely to “mold myself according to what I thought was the role,” the psycho-medical accounts of same-sex attracted subjects constructed a model of homosexual normativity which could be used as a guideline for one's behavior, dress, and appearance. Jim Kepner, who would become a staff writer for *The Advocate* in the 1970s, suggested that even definitions originating from specious authorities could influence behavior, and nearly, in his case, his vocation; as a teen, his friends presented him with a graphic (and largely untrue) definition of homosexuality as what happened “when sailors are out at sea and there aren't any broads around.” Kepner recalled that “I knew instinctively that their definition was right...even if that wasn't what I had any desire to do. By the next day I was investigating the possibility of joining the navy or the merchant marine.”<sup>169</sup> In addition to influencing an individual's sense of self, the professionals' depictions of homosexuals provided a guideline for behavior in which gay men and lesbians might engage to make their presence known to each other. George Chauncey, Jr., and Lillian Faderman have

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<sup>167</sup> Eric Marcus, *Making History*: 106.

<sup>168</sup> See as an example of their importance to individual identity formation, Ruth F. Claus, “Confronting Homosexuality: A Letter from Frances Wilder.” *Signs*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Summer 1977): 928-933.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*: 44.

written extensively about homosexuals' use of language, mannerisms, and costume, observations validated by the reminiscences of gay men and lesbians (particularly those who came of age in the first half of the twentieth century). One San Franciscan described interactions among gay men in the 1950s as being elaborate and sometimes arbitrary:

If you had a suspicion that somebody that you were thrown into proximity with was gay, you would start this whole ritualistic, coded kind of communication. If they picked up on it, you knew they were gay, and pretty soon you had this little secret society kind of conversation going. I had a friend who had a whole series of what he considered visual indexes of a gay person. For instance, if they wore a pinky ring; if they wore penny loafers—especially with a penny in them; if they drove convertibles with the top down. I mean, it was just absolutely absurd.<sup>170</sup>

It may have seemed contrived to Kepner, but throughout the twentieth century, same-sex attracted individuals formed networks through these coded interactions, and these codes were often based on the observations of the sexologists. The color green, for instance, was alleged by Havelock Ellis to be favored by inverts, and George Chauncey's depiction of the busy gay subculture of New York City confirms that many same-sex attracted men wore this color as a symbol of their sexuality (woe be to the unwitting heterosexual who simply preferred the verdant hue—he ran the risk not only of unwanted solicitations but personal violence!). It is important to note that, at least in this case, and likely many others, the association between homosexuality and this particular trait existed before Ellis or other researchers noted it. It may therefore seem that I am giving too much credit to the sexologists, for they were merely reporting on what they observed rather than wholly fabricating a new stereotype. One must bear in mind, however, that for many same-sex attracted individuals, the works of the sexologists were the only sources in which they

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<sup>170</sup> Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003): 102.

could read about people like themselves, so the sexologists were, at least to some readers, the ultimate authority on what homosexuals felt, wore, thought, and did. In other words, it matters little that Ellis did not know—or at least did not include in his book—the origin of this association (briefly, it derived from the term ancient Romans used to describe men who were effeminate, which is not to say homosexual: *galbinati*, meaning “green” or “greenish-yellow”); what is significant is that he explicitly stated that a preference for green was a common feature of homosexuals, thus acting as the virtual creator of the association in the eyes of his readers. Similarly, although some same-sex-attracted individuals may have considered themselves to be gender-inverted prior to the concept’s popularization in the works of the sexologists, others who first encountered this idea in sexological works may have considered the doctors to have been the point of origin of this trend. The widespread use of gender-deviant modes of appearance by homosexuals seeking to identify themselves to others therefore demonstrates that, at least in some cases, the “norms” instituted by psycho-medical practitioners were adopted by the subjects they putatively described.

In addition to shaping some of the fixtures of gay and lesbian life in the twentieth century United States, psycho-medical opinions also firmly inscribed the boundaries which contained that world. Speaking about the secrecy which veiled the majority of gay culture during the 1950s, one of Eric Marcus’ interviewees opined that psychiatric attitudes were to blame because they influenced not only society’s treatment of homosexuals, but homosexuals themselves, admitting that they “affected the way you thought and lived, what you felt, and how you thought of yourself.”<sup>171</sup> Subjects in

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<sup>171</sup> Marcus, *Making History*: 198.

Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis' well-known ethnography of a working-class lesbian community in Buffalo, New York, also demonstrate their internalization of this discourse in their discussion of the circumspection with which many same-sex attracted women in their community grudgingly (but necessarily) conducted their lives.<sup>172</sup> Inhabitants of the "twilight world" were effectively denied access to a more open way of life by professional opinions which convinced the general public, not to mention the subjects of debate themselves, that they were unnatural or potentially dangerous beings.

In recognition of this, one of the main goals of early homosexual rights organizations, including the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, was to change these views by initiating dialogue between gay and lesbian Americans and the "experts" who aspersed them. Even prior to the formation of these groups, some individuals bravely challenged these perspectives. The work of Jan Gay and the Sex Variants Committee in the late 1930s was among the earliest to grant homosexual subjects an active, rather than passive, role in their depiction, although its liberating potential was compromised by the conflicts inherent between the psychological professionals whose credentials gave the committee's findings a veneer of authority and the homosexual participants who viewed the project as emancipatory.<sup>173</sup> A decade later, Edward Sagarin (pseudonymously known as Donald Webster Cory), author of *The Homosexual in America* (1951), dared to challenge the notion that psychoanalysis and therapy could be used to diminish or eradicate same-sex desires, arguing instead that

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<sup>172</sup> Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge): 1993.

<sup>173</sup> See Harry Minton, *Departing From Deviance*, particularly Ch. 3.



these tools were more properly applied to create individuals who were well-adjusted and comfortable with their same-sex desires. Sagarin, a polarizing and eccentric figure, also advocated a view of homosexuals as a minority group, which was a structuring principle of early homophile groups (and would continue to play a foundational role in subsequent gay-rights organizations).<sup>174</sup> Drawing parallels between sexual minorities and racial or ethnic minorities would become a useful legal tactic in the 1960s, as gay activists like Franklin Kameny challenged the federal government's tendency to fire homosexual employees. Kameny, an astronomer who had been fired by the Civil Service Commission after failing to disclose an arrest for solicitation, brought before the Supreme Court a brief which one legal scholar called a "revolutionary and important" document, arguing that "homosexuality was a benign variation [and] that 'homosexuals' were a minority group like Jews and African Americans."<sup>175</sup>

In subsequent legal battles, decisions from court cases brought by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) against racial discrimination were used as precedent for protecting homosexuals from certain forms of discrimination.<sup>176</sup> Though the psycho-medical establishment had long suggested that

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<sup>174</sup> Donald Webster Cory (pseud. Edward Sagarin), *The Homosexual in America* (New York: Greenberg Press, 1951). For a fuller picture of Sagarin, see Martin Duberman, "The 'Father' of the Homophile Movement," in *Left Out: The Politics of Exclusion* (New York: Basic Books, 1999): 69-94. Although Steven Epstein correctly identifies the tension between what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has called "minoritizing" ("we are essentially different from the majority") and "universalizing" ("we are essentially the same as the majority") discourses as one of the three key debates within modern American gay and lesbian political activism, homophile groups of the 1950s variously employed both viewpoints. Epstein, "Gay and Lesbian Movements in the United States: Dilemmas of Identity, Diversity, and Political Strategy." In Barry Adam, Jan Duyvendak, and Andre Krouwel, eds., *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999): 30-90.

<sup>175</sup> William N. Eskridge, Jr., "Some Effects of Identity-Based Social Movements on Constitutional Law in the Twentieth Century." *Michigan Law Review*, Vol. 100, No. 8 (August 2002): 2062-2407.

<sup>176</sup> For an overview of this parallel, see Craig J. Konnoth, "Created In Its Image: The Race Analogy, Gay Identity, and Gay Litigation in the 1950s-1970s." *Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 119, No. 2 (November 2009): 316-372.

homosexuals and heterosexuals were discrete, the assertion that this group had its own culture and existed on the same plane as other identity-based minority groups was radical, particularly as it occurred at the same time that some of these other groups—most notably African-Americans—were demanding public and legal acknowledgement of their civic equality with white citizens. William Eskridge, Jr., noting this trend in identity-based social movements of the late twentieth century United States, has suggested that groups such as homosexuals, African-Americans, women’s liberationists and disabled people have practiced a “politics of recognition,” in contrast to earlier social movements—for instance, abolitionists or labor activists—which practiced a “politics of morality” or a “politics of economic redistribution,” respectively; he argues that the legally-stigmatized status of many minority groups, along with the legal apparatuses which were the only venues through which these penalized groups could seek recourse and the critical moments at which legal hostility fomented the mass mobilization of their targets were, if not the only, then certainly among the most important, factors in drawing groups together and providing them with a common cause around which to rally. Though Erskine’s goal of illuminating the formative effect of law and legal structures on the formation and practices of these identity-based social movements is somewhat removed from my own, his perspective is nonetheless useful in providing another demonstration of the influence of macro-level structures (such as the psycho-medical establishment) on the formation of minority identity.<sup>177</sup>

Absent the impetus to protect oneself from legal, medical, and social abuse, would LGBT Americans have cohered into as large and cohesive a group as they did in

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<sup>177</sup> William N. Eskridge, Jr., “Channeling Identity-Based Social Movements and Public Law.” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, Vol. 150, No. 1 (November 2001): 419-525.

the 1950s and 1960s? Given the overt “self-defense” agenda of the early homophile organizations, it seems doubtful. Without the need to spread essential information to a group made up of individuals who were deliberately circumspect about their membership, would the gay press have ever developed? Certainly Lisa Ben’s *Vice Versa* attempted to create a virtual community of same-sex attracted women, but its limited run and circumscribed circulation, and possibly its focus on “light” topics rather than “hard news,” necessarily dampened its effectiveness. Not until the publication of the Mattachine Society’s *ONE* and the Daughters of Bilitis’ *The Ladder*, both of which carried factual information designed to empower their respective readerships, could it be argued that the fourth estate assumed its elevated place in the structures shaping—and, as I will later argue, sometime constraining—the development of a homosexual minority in the United States. Lacking the sense of group identity fomented by the psycho-medical (and subsequently social) stigmatization of homosexuality, gay men and lesbians may never have experienced the relief and joy which came as they furtively unfolded a thin piece of newsprint to discover a world where they finally belonged.

## Chapter 2: "The Ugly American:" Race, Xenophobia, and *The Advocate*

This chapter will explore how *The Advocate's* treatment of race and racism changed over time and in response to changes within the gay and lesbian community. I am particularly interested in demonstrating that the longstanding political disenfranchisement of Black gays and lesbians from the mainstream homosexual rights movement was reflected in *The Advocate's* pages, which largely failed to depict LGBT people of color, and that coverage increased in the 1980s and 1990s as African-American LGBT people began to form their own political and social organizations in response to the racial myopia of the mainstream movement. I will suggest some reasons that Black gays and lesbians were reluctant to join the predominantly-white gay rights movement, and further challenge the popular idea that the African-American community is uniquely and significantly homophobic compared to other racial or ethnic groups by looking at the quantity and tone of coverage that homosexuality and related topics received in the pages of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, which I believe to be reflective of late-20<sup>th</sup> century middle-class Black American values.

While I will focus primarily on the experiences and depictions of African-Americans, I do not mean to leave unexamined other types of racism in *The Advocate*. While the omission of non-white people was a common feature of *The Advocate*, more overt forms of racism were typically directed towards Asians/Asian-Americans and Latinos rather than to people of African, Caribbean, or African-American descent. The fact that this racism was often found in the magazine's travel features makes it possible to see how these articles dabbled not only in paternalistic and avaricious attitudes, but in

xenophobia as well. I theorize that the difference in the treatment of these groups by *The Advocate* was related to the political and social clout enjoyed by the Black civil rights (and to a lesser extent the Black Nationalist) movement, which was not shared by Asian-American or Latino groups. It would have been extremely ill-advised for the publication, which purported to represent mainstream American gay and lesbian values, to engage in anti-Black racism, for this would have alienated a great number of people whose sympathy for the gay rights movement was borne out of their involvement with the Black civil rights movement, in addition to putting it at odds with the liberal political establishment--including the Democratic party, among others groups whose support was critical to the achievement of gay and lesbian rights.

#### Historical Disenfranchisement of Blacks from LGBT Political Movement

In discussing the historical disenfranchisement of people of color from the LGBT rights movement, it is important first to recognize that this disenfranchisement in no way means that people of color have not been involved in LGBT consciousness and experience though as Keith Boykin observed, "much of this involvement seems to have taken place outside the boundaries of the gay rights movement itself."<sup>178</sup> Historian Eric Garber's exploration of the gay and lesbian subcultures in 1920s Harlem, along with recent work on the life of openly gay Black civil rights leader Bayard Rustin, and numerous historical accounts of the roles played by people of color in the 1969 "Stonewall Rebellion" are but a few examples of the various ways that African-

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<sup>178</sup> Keith Boykin, "Where Rhetoric Meets Reality." In Craig A. Zimmerman, Kenneth D. Walk, and Clyde Wilson, eds., *The Politics of Gay Rights* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000): 80.

Americans engaged with American LGBT culture.<sup>179</sup> More recently, Black pundit Keith Boykin reminds us not to forget the "black lesbians and gay men involved in multiracial organizations [who] helped to educate white gays and lesbians about the black experience" and black men and women who "mobilized their communities" in response to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s" as active, influential, but "largely unacknowledged by the mainstream, white-centered gay and lesbian political movement."<sup>180</sup>

The forces conspiring to prevent or, at the very least, to dissuade people of color from participating wholly in the mainstream, predominantly-white gay and lesbian rights movement are roughly divisible into three categories. One involves the social and economic position of African-Americans in the twentieth century United States; a second draws on the cultural values shared by much of the Black community; and a third results from racist attitudes among white gays and lesbians. Before delving into a brief overview of each type of deterrent, however, I must acknowledge the work of Black lesbian feminist writer Cheryl Clarke, whose 1982 essay "A Failure to Transform: Homophobia in the Black Community" both criticized Black "macho intellectuals and politicians" for embracing the same heteronormative standards with which whites had long oppressed

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<sup>179</sup> For further studies of gay and lesbian life in Harlem during the 1920s, see Eric Garber, "A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem." In Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, eds., *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Meridian, 1990) and Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African American Culture 1920-1930* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996), esp. pp. 124-44. Bayard Rustin's life is insightfully narrated by John D'Emilio in *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), and Rustin's own first-hand recollections are available in Devon W. Carbado and Donald Pease, eds., *Time On Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* (New York: Cleis Press, 2003). The majority of accounts of the Stonewall Riots acknowledge that Rey "Sylvia Lee" Rivera, a Puerto Rican-Venezuelan drag queen, played a key role in instigating the battle which many historians have heralded as a watershed moment in the American gay and lesbian rights movement. Rivera's own account is included in Eric Marcus' *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992): 187-196.

<sup>180</sup> Keith Boykin, "Where Rhetoric Meets Reality": 82.

African-Americans and cautioned against perceptions of American society which posit that the African-American community is significantly more homophobic than any other ethnic or racial group.<sup>181</sup> This charge is often leveled at African-Americans by whites unwilling to acknowledge their own homophobic heritage, as well as by members of the LGBT community whose antagonistic attitude towards the Black community has resulted from the perceived scarcity of social and political capital. It is nonetheless important to consider how some facets of African-American life may have contributed to Black gays' and lesbians' disenfranchisement from the mainstream LGBT rights movement. In other words, I do not believe that homophobia itself is unique to the Black community, only that some of the social conditions and ideologies which create and sustain it are. I will discuss later how the coverage of homosexuality in *Ebony* and *Jet*, insofar as they reflect Black bourgeois values, demonstrates the extent to which African-American homophobia has been exaggerated.<sup>182</sup>

#### Socio-Economic Considerations

In the first decades of the twentieth century, African-Americans found themselves legally free, but still constrained by "Jim Crow" laws and by the social customs and economic forces of a white supremacist country. Poverty among African-Americans was widespread, due to the effects of pestilence on cotton crops and by a glut of available

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<sup>181</sup> Cheryl Clarke, "The Failure to Transform: Homophobia in the Black Community" (1982). In Barbara Smith, ed., *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983): 198. See also Cathy J. Cohen and Tamara Jones, "Fighting Homophobia versus Challenging Heterosexism: 'The Failure to Transform' Revisited." In Eric Brandt, ed., *Dangerous Liaisons: Blacks, Gays, and the Struggle for Equality* (New York: The New Press, 1999): 95.

<sup>182</sup> Some public opinion research has demonstrated varying levels of homophobia between black and white Americans, but there has been no holistic study of American culture which supports the contention that Blacks are more homophobic than every other statistically-significant racial or ethnic minority in the U.S. For a recent comparison of blacks and whites, see Gregory B. Lewis, "Black-White Differences in Attitudes towards Homosexuality and Gay Rights." *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Spring 2003): 59-78.

labor which dropped wages to under-subsistence levels; further, floods in 1915 wrought havoc in the South, leaving many African-Americans "destitute and homeless and ready to accept almost anything in preference to the uncertainty of life in the South." Even more troubling were the "lack of privileges, disenfranchisement, segregation and lynching" African-Americans had to immerse themselves to.<sup>183</sup> These conditions, coupled with the promise of industrial employment in urban areas, resulted in what is generally referred to as the "Great Migration." This phenomenon brought large numbers of African-Americans into northern cities such as New York, Detroit, and Chicago, where the Black population grew by a million people between 1900 and 1920.<sup>184</sup>

Another major population shift in the Black community, sometimes called the "Second Great Migration," occurred around 1940, drawing not only Southern Blacks Northward, but sending scores of already-urbanized African-Americans from the North into the Western states, particularly California, where defense-related industry and nascent centers of industrial production awaited.<sup>185</sup> The effect of wartime mobilization on the formation of LGBT communities in the United States was posited by historian John

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<sup>183</sup> John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 8th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000): 375-76.

<sup>184</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990." See also James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991) and Alferdteen Harrison and Blyden Jackson, *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1991) for a detailed study of this phenomenon. A more general overview of the Great Migration can be found in Nicholas Lemann's *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Vintage Press, 1991).

<sup>185</sup> Marilyn S. Johnson explores the impact of defense-related industry on the population of San Francisco and environs in *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). The Second Great Migration is also discussed in several essays contained in Lawrence B. De Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor, eds., *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).



D'Emilio in his landmark essay "Capitalism and Gay Identity" (1983).<sup>186</sup> Although the impetus for this movement into urban settings during the 1940s may have been similar, the outcomes, inflected by race, were quite different. While the Second Great Migration of African-Americans has been depicted by some historians as having had less positive outcomes and contributing to public discourse which bewailed the "rise of the ghetto" and "urban disorder" (but failing to address the restrictive lending policies of the Federal Housing Authority which created these conditions), the 1950s through the 1970s saw the building of vibrant metropolitan LGBT communities.<sup>187</sup> Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, poverty still plagued the Black community both within these overcrowded urban centers and outside; the 1959 U.S. Census showed that 55.1 percent of Black Americans were living below the poverty line, and by 1966, the percentage still remained high at 41.8 percent.<sup>188</sup> Thus, the imperative to work may have left little time for voluntary participation in any type of political movement. In addition, the difficulty many African-Americans already faced when looking for employment may have made them hesitant to do anything that might further impair their employability. Even as late as the 1980s,

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<sup>186</sup> In making his case that a capitalist economy created the conditions necessary for the formation of gay and lesbian identity and communities in the United States, D'Emilio also argued that "the war...temporarily created a new erotic situation conducive to homosexual expression" by taking "millions of young men and women, whose sexual identities were just forming...out of the heterosexual environment of the family, and dropped them into sex-segregated situations--as GIs, as WACs and WAVEs." After the war, many of these young people remained in the areas where they had been stationed and formed gay and lesbian communities. John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity." In Donald Morton, ed., *The Material Queer: A LesBiGay Cultural Studies Reader* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996): 263-271. See also Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: The Free Press, 1990) and Charles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis: 1940-1996* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), particularly the first two chapters.

<sup>187</sup> As early as 1948, scholars were writing about the problem of the ghetto, including one man who would become the first Black member of the presidential cabinet and head of the newly-created Department of Housing and Urban Development in the 1960s. Robert C. Weaver, *The Negro Ghetto* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1948).

<sup>188</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Historical Poverty Tables 1959-2006." <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/histpov/histpovtb.html>. Accessed 12 June 2010.

Black gay activist Billy Jones noted that the economic conditions in the Black community were such that " it was still risky in terms of one's employment...to be 'out' and 'vocal' about gay rights," and thus it was hard for nascent Black gay and lesbian organizations to find willing spokespeople.<sup>189</sup> It may also be argued that, in their efforts to attain civil rights by displaying mainstream American virtues like industry, thrift, and patriotism, Black Americans may have been inclined to shun anything which was associated with anti-Americanism, as homosexuality had been with Communism amidst the early Cold War era.

### Cultural Values and Ideologies of Race

Even as employment, education, and income levels among Black Americans rose in the last half of the twentieth century, cultural values within the African-American community may have also deterred Black gays and lesbians from becoming involved in the LGBT rights movement. The emphasis on traditional gender roles for Black men and women was part of the legacy of a slave system which had deliberately denied enslaved African-Americans the ability to conform to white bourgeois standards of masculinity and femininity. Abiding by these norms was a key feature of the ideology of "racial uplift" espoused by some African-American intellectuals; historian Kevin K. Gaines has suggested that these intellectuals' frequent refrain of rhetoric praising normative gender standards was practically mandated by white Americans' vicious argument that Blacks' "nonconformity to patriarchal gender norms" proved that the race was hopelessly and

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<sup>189</sup> Billy Jones was also one of the founders of the National Coalition of Black Gays. Sidney Brinkley, "The National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays." *Blacklight*, 1999. [http://www.blacklightonline.com/ncblg\\_1.html#](http://www.blacklightonline.com/ncblg_1.html#). Accessed June 13, 2010.

irredeemably uncivilized.<sup>190</sup> Many Black women felt oppressed by racial uplift's emphasis on male authority and female submissiveness; Gaines observed that even such "leading black women intellectuals as Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells found themselves marginalized within black bourgeois...ideologies that equated race progress with male dominance and Victorian ideals of sexual difference in both political and domestic life."<sup>191</sup> Racial uplift's emphasis on the patriarchal family unit--particularly on childbearing and -rearing--also placed it in an antagonistic position vis-à-vis LGBT African-Americans.<sup>192</sup> The Black Nationalist ideologies which existed alongside the discourse of racial uplift during the 1920s, and later gained more prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, likewise promoted conformity to traditional gender roles and, further, explicitly emphasized the responsibility of Black men and women to reproduce, mandating paternity as a prerequisite for authentic Black manhood.<sup>193</sup> From an extremist perspective, failure to live up to this standard was sabotaged the forward progress of the African-American community. Concomitantly, some Black nationalists suggested that homosexuality (particularly male) was a "white man's disease," forced by colonizers and slave owners onto Blacks in order to humiliate and emasculate them, and to limit the

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<sup>190</sup> Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996): 67.

<sup>191</sup> Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*: xviii.

<sup>192</sup> Thaddeus Russell has argued that the ascendancy of the 1950s civil rights movement deliberately challenged the longstanding openness about homosexuality within the Black working class community and that "black homosexuals came to represent all the elements of African American working-class culture that civil rights leaders identified as obstacles to the attainment of citizenship." "The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality." *American Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (March 2008): 101-128.

<sup>193</sup> On Black feminist challenges to sexism both in Black nationalist and "uplift" ideologies, see Pauli Murray, "The Liberation of Black Women" (1970), the Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement" (1977) and Linda LaRue, "The Black Movement and Women's Liberation" (1970). In Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed., *Words on Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought* (New York: The New Press, 1995) and Frances Beale, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" (1969). In Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation* (New York: Random House, 1970).

growth potential of the Black population. Same-gender-loving Blacks, by this logic, were still abiding by the directives of their oppressors, betraying their race in the process. This attitude may explain why some Black lesbians and gays would hesitate to publicly affiliate themselves with gay and lesbian organizations.

Finally, the institutional significance of the church in Black American communities must also be acknowledged. A 2008 study by the Pew Foundation discovered that "of all the major racial and ethnic groups in the United States, black Americans are the most likely to report a formal religious affiliation. Even among those blacks who are unaffiliated, three-in-four belong to the 'religious unaffiliated' category (that is, they say that religion is either somewhat or very important in their lives), compared with slightly more than one-third of the unaffiliated population overall."<sup>194</sup> Ninety-two percent of African-American Protestants reported belonging to a historically Black church such as the African Methodist Episcopal church, which had also worked as a Black mutual aid society. During the nineteenth (and into the early twentieth) century, mutual aid and fraternal societies established by and for African-Americans were influential and essential components of the Black social landscape; while some were explicitly non-denominational, most drew on Biblical imagery and rhetoric for their names, slogans, and rituals, and all emphasized traditional moral values. Scholar David Beito argues that a statement written by a member of one group was generally applicable to all mutual aid and fraternal societies; his organization existed, the member professed, to "promote the brotherhood of man, teach fidelity to home and loved ones, loyalty to country and respect of law, to establish a system for the care of the widows and orphans,

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<sup>194</sup> Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey." February 2008: 8. <http://pewforum.org/A-Religious-Portrait-of-African-Americans.aspx>. Accessed 12 June 2010.

the aged and disabled, and enable every worthy member to protect himself from the ills of life and make substantial provision through co-operation with our members, for those who are nearest and dearest."<sup>195</sup> Black Americans' embrace of mutual aid and fraternal societies, alongside Protestant churches and affiliated groups, accounts for the longstanding centrality of traditional moral values within the African-American community, and thus explains, in part, resistance to identities and behaviors which flout them.

### Racism in the LGBT Community

Following the example of Cheryl Clarke, who cautioned against painting the entire Black community as hopelessly homophobic, it is necessary to would like to acknowledge that not all white gays and lesbians were racist or unsympathetic to issues of racial discrimination. The best proof of this, I believe, is offered by the number of white activists who came to the gay and lesbian rights movement specifically because of their previous (or concurrent) involvement with the Black civil rights movement. Keith Boykin elegantly summarized the effect of the civil rights era on the LGBT political movement of the 1960s as having two distinct components: first, civil rights activists “creat[ed] a climate that enabled the gay rights movement [to emerge]” and secondly, it “produc[ed] black lesbian and gay heroes who took center stage in America's racial morality play.”<sup>196</sup> Boykin’s analysis unfortunately failed to address, however, another important way in which the civil rights movement influenced the nascent LGBT rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s, and that is by causing many activists—particularly

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<sup>195</sup> David Beito, *From Mutual Aid to Welfare State: How Fraternal Societies Fought Poverty and Taught Character* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000):28.

<sup>196</sup> Keith Boykin. "Where Rhetoric Meets Reality." In *The Politics of Gay Rights*, eds. Craig A. Rimmerman, Kenneth D. Walk, and Clyde Wilson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000): 81.

white heterosexuals—to see parallels between injustices based on race and sexual orientation.

Many supporters of the LGBT rights movement had previously been involved in civil rights activism and directly credited this experience for their eventual involvement in LGBT rights. Former Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong, for example, admitted that "My homophobia was at one time as deep as anybody else's," he admitted, but "[t]he civil rights movement radicalized me in a real way. It forced me to raise issues of justice...it was also clear to me that the gay rights movement was overwhelmingly a justice issue."<sup>197</sup> Similarly, gay activist Morty Manford explained that his parents had become involved in the LGBT rights movement of the 1970s because of their past experiences with African-American civil rights activism; he recalled that they had "learned a great lesson from the black civil rights movement of the early sixties [and] agreed that demands for civil rights for blacks and women were just. This was simply bringing a new civil rights perspective into the discussion."<sup>198</sup> Even deeply closeted gay people were inspired to participate in the LGBT rights movement because of their involvement in Black civil rights work; one gay priest explained that "a lot of gay people who could not come out for their own liberation could invest the same energies in the liberation of black people."<sup>199</sup>

By and large, though, the mainstream LGBT rights movement was only marginally concerned, at best, with issues of racial discrimination, and oftentimes seemed pathetically blind to its own ingrained racism. Deborah Johnson, an African-American

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<sup>197</sup> "The Bishop: John Shelby Spong." In Marcus, *Making History*: 491-502.

<sup>198</sup> "Mother and Child: Jeanne Manford and Morty Manford." In Marcus, *Making History*: 237-49.

<sup>199</sup> Grant Gallup, quoted in Charles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis: 1940-1996* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996): 136.

lesbian who had been involved with LGBT activism during the 1980s, recalled later that "racism displayed itself...in the lack of cultural sensitivities. If you want a certain kind of people to attend meetings or events, then you have to recruit...But what I kept getting over and over again was that people of color didn't matter and that we were somehow ancillary." When Black gays and lesbians did show up to events, Johnson recalled that they would "get the cold shoulder. Nobody would ever talk to them...And there were racial comments all the time."<sup>200</sup> This squares with Keith Boykin's argument that the "predominantly white gay and lesbian community" has "tokenized, ignored, or simply patronized" Black gays and lesbians, and, worse, "has defined values, issues, agendas, and symbols without meaningful black contribution."<sup>201</sup>

LGBT intellectuals have been guilty of racism, sometimes through omitting discussions of race from their arguments, sometimes by explicitly demeaning people of color. To use just one example, before Daniel Harris' 1997 book *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture* delves into its study of a "gay culture" defined almost without any reference to race and premised on white gay culture, its author spends its introduction criticizing the "sludgelike stew of racial and national differences" that he believes the United States has become (due in part to popular acceptance by minorities of the "melting pot" metaphor) and ruing the "grey, flavorless gruel" minority groups become as they conform to mainstream cultural mores and are "accepted by society at large." It is hard to imagine that most African-Americans, Jews, Asian-Americans or Latinos, to name a few of the

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<sup>200</sup> Deborah Johnson and her partner were famous for bringing a discrimination lawsuit, in 1983, against a California restaurant which refused to serve same-sex couples; the case went to the state level and was eventually decided in their favor (*Rolon v. Kulwitzky*, 153 Cal.App.3d 289, March 20, 1984). "The Mixed Couple: Deborah L. Johnson and Dr. Zandra Z. Rolon." In Eric Marcus. *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992): 438-53.

<sup>201</sup> Keith Boykin. "Where Rhetoric Meets Reality." In Craig A. Rimmerman, Kenneth D. Walk, and Clyde Wilson, eds., *The Politics of Gay Rights* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000: 83).

minority groups in question, would argue that their gradual acceptance into American society had essentially been a negative phenomenon.<sup>202</sup>

#### Coverage of Race in *The Advocate*

Laretta Henderson, in her study of *Ebony's* youth-oriented spin-off *Ebony Jr.*, asserts that the black press traditionally served five purposes. In addition to reporting on current events from a Black viewpoint and drawing attention to "Black achievements ignored by the mainstream press," it allowed Black readers to "define their own identity, create a sense of unity by establishing a communication network among literate African Americans and sympathetic Whites, and work for African American equality."<sup>203</sup>

Substitute "LGBT" for "Black" and "African American" in the above phrase, and it becomes a descriptor of the main functions of *The Advocate* for its own target group.

*The Advocate* was the first major publication targeted at the gay and lesbian community, a group disenfranchised from mainstream politics at the time when the magazine went national in the early 1970s. Its efforts to shape an American minority group into "model" citizens and promote their engagement in the political realm were not, by any means, unprecedented in the world of publishing. As communication scholar Larry Gross observed, "Minority media have historically played essential roles in the formation of politically conscious minority communities, alerted and informed their readers on matters routinely ignored or misrepresented by mainstream media, and spearheaded campaigns for civil rights and other issues."<sup>204</sup> Foremost among its kin is

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<sup>202</sup> Daniel Harris, *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture* (New York: Hyperion Press, 1997): 4.

<sup>203</sup> Laretta Henderson, *Ebony Jr.: The Rise, Fall, and Return of a Black Children's Magazine* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008): 34.

<sup>204</sup> Larry Gross, "Commentary." *Press Pass Q*, October 2004.

<http://www.presspassq.com/detail.cfm?id=41#Commentary> Accessed 10 July 2010.



*Ebony* magazine, introduced by publisher John H. Johnson in 1945 as a "Black counterpart" to magazines like *Life*.<sup>205</sup> *Ebony*, along with Johnson's other publications, was suffused by the ideology of "Racial Uplift," which historian Kevin Gaines defines as "[emphasizing] self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and the accumulation of wealth."<sup>206</sup> Furthermore, Racial Uplift is marked by "the absence of an activist component, little to no critique of White supremacist behavior, further social stratification of the African American community, and a search for 'authentic' middle-class African American values."<sup>207</sup>

Undergirding the philosophy of Racial Uplift was the belief that, through cultivating self-respect and bourgeois values, the African American community would gain social equality because their "respectability" would compel *whites* to grant them entree to mainstream society. In this way, Racial Uplift tacitly accepted dominant cultural values, rather than contesting them, and instead of seeking to destroy the halls of power, sought only to make them accessible to African-Americans. Similarly, for the bulk of its lifespan, *The Advocate* has advocated working within existing political structures as opposed to attempting to destroy them.

Historian James C. Hall has also observed *Ebony's* efforts to "mobilize and maximize class desire, to satisfy aspiration toward, and admiration of, officially designated signs of American 'success'...By displaying or 'covering' prominence in entertainment or athletics, acts of conspicuous consumption, achievement in business, the

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<sup>205</sup> John H. Johnson and Lerone Bennett, *Succeeding Against the Odds* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing, 1989): 215.

<sup>206</sup> Kevin K. Gaines. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996): 1.

<sup>207</sup> Laretta Henderson, *Ebony Jr.!: The Rise, Fall, and Return of a Black Children's Magazine* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008): 72.

attainment of substitute aristocracy," John Johnson established a successful formula for a Black general-interest magazine.<sup>208</sup> *The Advocate* has likewise chosen to valorize LGBT Americans who attain the symbols of mainstream American success: a family, a lucrative career, and enough extra income to furnish the trappings of upper-middle-class status (including frequent vacations, luxury cars, designer clothing, and engagement with the fine arts).

The congruence between *Ebony* and *The Advocate* is not exact, though; for instance, *Ebony* was always published in magazine format, while *The Advocate* took the form of a newspaper until the mid-1970s, and while *Ebony's* first issue explained its mission as trying to "mirror the happier side of Negro life--the positive, everyday achievements from Harlem to Hollywood," *The Advocate's* mission was different, particularly in its early years.<sup>209</sup> One reason for this is that it was addressing a demographic that was largely invisible, lacking the conspicuous marker of skin color, and comprised of many closeted individuals, so profiling the "positive, everyday achievements" of gay and lesbian Americans was more difficult; another is that the impetus for *The Advocate's* founding was to provide LGBT Americans with the information they needed to protect themselves from police harassment and entrapment--remember that the publication was initially the newsletter of Personal Rights in Defense and Education (PRIDE)--which necessitated a less rosy, more practical, viewpoint.

Related to this divergence between the two publications is the fact that *The Advocate* has always styled itself as a "newsmagazine," whereas *Ebony* was, in the words

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<sup>208</sup> James C. Hall, "On Sale at Your Favorite Newsstand: *Negro Digest/Black World* and the 1960s." In Todd Vogel, ed., *The New Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001): 194.

<sup>209</sup> "Backstage." *Ebony*, November 1945: 1.

of one historian, a "heavily illustrated 'consumer' magazine with feature stories in photo-essay format as well as other modes of photojournalistic display."<sup>210</sup> However, Johnson Publishing Corporation began to print, in 1951, a small-format magazine called *Jet* which did focus on news and current events relevant to Black Americans. Conceived of as a "weekly news magazine in handy, pocket-sized form," *Jet* was described by publisher John H. Johnson as a "magazine for all people from the lowest levels to the highest."<sup>211</sup> Its first issue stated that its mission was to bring readers "complete news coverage on happenings among Negroes all over the United States—in entertainment, politics, sports, social events as well as features on unusual personalities, places, and events."<sup>212</sup> Because both *Ebony* and *Jet* share key characteristics of *The Advocate* while not being perfect analogs, and because both of those magazines were under the leadership of John H. Johnson, I will use both these publications as reference points rather than focusing exclusively on one or the other.

John H. Johnson frequently spoke of his publishing empire as born out of a simple premise: to remedy the virtual erasure of Black Americans from national print media. While this mission was undeniably justified during the 1940s and 1950s, by the 1960s African-Americans were increasingly present in the pages of mainstream publications like *Life* and *Time*, though they were by no means granted the frequency or depth of coverage white Americans received. *The Advocate*, too, primarily focused on white gay and lesbian people, with issues of race generally discussed only periodically and

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<sup>210</sup> Maren Stange, "Photographs Taken in Everyday Life: *Ebony's* Photojournalistic Discourse." In Todd Vogel, ed., *The New Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001): 207.

<sup>211</sup> John H. Johnson and Lerone Bennett, *Succeeding Against the Odds*: 213.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*: 207.

oftentimes in issues dedicated to the topic. On one hand, it seems progressive that *The Advocate* would devote an issue or cover story to race-related topics, but on the other, the fact that it needed to do so indicates that race was largely excised from the magazine's content the rest of the year. This approach had not abated by the early 2000s, when the media industry newsletter *Press Pass Q* reported that the number of publications targeted at non-white LGBT readers increased exponentially, with the debut of nationally-distributed magazines directed towards South Asians, Latinos, and Asian-Americans. Marketing scholar Katherine Sender argues that the proliferation of racially-specific publications was the result of "GLBT people of color...responding to a need for media that addresses not only their sexual but their racial and ethnic identities, too."<sup>213</sup>

One reason for the relative invisibility of race in the pages of *The Advocate* is, I believe, closely related to the three-part process Sender describes as essential to the formation of a "niche market," in this case, LGBT Americans. The three components of the process—homogeneity, separation, and essence—perform distinct and important functions. The first component posits that the common shared characteristic of group members supersedes all other differences within the group, creating homogeneity. The second component, essence, argues that LGBT people are marked by an innate and immutable difference *from heterosexuals*. Finally, the third component argues that there is a "stable, identifiable, and discrete characteristic that identifies" members of the target market to those outside the group, allowing for their effective *separation* from others.<sup>214</sup> Although a case could be made for all three parts of this process being components of the

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<sup>213</sup> Katherine Sender, *Business, Not Politics: The Making of the Gay Market* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): 57.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*: 163.

assumptions under which *The Advocate* operates, it is the first of these processes, which downplays differences between members of the niche market, which seems most relevant to a discussion of race. "The idea of the gay market as a white market may have in part arisen from a history of white-dominated portrayals of gays in advertising," Sender suggests, but I believe that the white-dominated portrayal of gays in advertising itself arose from the white-dominated content of national newsmagazines like *The Advocate*. The content analysis of *The Advocate* which follows illustrates this racial myopia, and further provides some insight into the conditions under which race was addressed by the magazine.

Related to the latter goal, and more generally related to the magazine's reluctance to deal with racial issues, is the casual racism which ran through many of the earliest issues of *The Advocate*. Many comments, illustrations, and even articles betrayed a lack of racial sensitivity, or worse, indicated an unwitting acceptance of white supremacy. Even bearing in mind that these elements might not have seemed as offensive in the (arguably less culturally-sensitive) culture of the 1960s and 1970s as they do to modern eyes, I argue that they nonetheless functioned as a deterrent to people of color who hoped to see themselves as part of the LGBT community as depicted by its "newspaper of record." The travel columns which were published through the 1970s are, I believe, most demonstrative of this trend, and will be the focal point of this portion of my argument.

#### Racial Invisibility and Racism in *The Advocate*

In 1975, the year that David Goodstein assumed control of *The Advocate*, the publication had its first black cover model. Prior to this, due to formatting differences, there had been no "cover" to speak of, and only a few African-Americans had merited

photographs on the then-newspaper's front page. But in an issue from May 7, 1975, two angry letters to the editor chastised the publication for its erasure of African-Americans. One writer alleged, "Your publication spurns blacks as though they were the plague, except when they can be used to further sales...Gay people will never unite, for there is no unity in color separation," while another accused *The Advocate* of failing to

open itself to its black supporters. There is nothing within the *Advocate*, even with its new look, that I as a young Black gay can fully relate to. From just looking at the *Advocate*, you wouldn't know if Black gays existed! As the *Advocate* is the only major publication for and by gay people, you have a duty to insure that the *Advocate* does not center solely on one group within the gay community. Let's see more articles by and about outspoken Black gays. We do exist, and we refuse to be treated as though we were invisible, within the gay community as without.<sup>215</sup>

The editors politely replied, "We rely on our readers to supply us with information and leads for stories...our ignorance is no excuse, but please do send us your ideas."

This response is interesting in that it superficially reads as an apology and indicates that the magazine would be happy to devote more space to people of color, but it also puts the onus of responsibility on readers to provide *The Advocate* with journalistic leads and story ideas. It seems poor practice for any reputable publication to charge its readers with this duty, especially in regard to the sensitive topic of race and in light of the fact that one of the first changes David Goodstein made, upon arriving at *The Advocate*, was to expand the magazine's permanent staff specifically in order to diminish its past reliance on locally-based "stringers."<sup>216</sup> The sense that people of color were directly

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<sup>215</sup> Larry V. Matthews, Letter to the Editor; Wesley H. Smith, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, May 7, 1975: 30.

<sup>216</sup> Edward Alwood, *Straight News: Gays, Lesbians, and the News Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996): 136.

responsible for their marginalization in the pages of *The Advocate*, and in the community more generally, would be expressed again a different context in the 1980s.

For all the progress *The Advocate* made during David Goodstein's tenure, the attitudes of the man himself were often frustratingly myopic and blithely equated "gay" with "white." Goodstein's "Opening Space" of January 14, 1976, betrayed this assumption, as he wrote, in one of his characteristic screeds against radical or militant groups, that most gays were "enraged by gay contingent in leftist and 'Third World' demonstrations."<sup>217</sup> While it is possible, because of the implied connection between radical politics and "Third World" identification, to read this comment as simply criticizing those who espoused left-wing ideology, it is nonetheless clear that Goodstein failed to consider that some gays themselves identified as "Third World" and that "Third World" identification did not always indicate a person's political views (though, to be sure, many individuals who identified as "Third World" were sympathetic to radical politics). Interestingly, in 1984, the magazine ran a four-page article entitled "Gay Voices from The Third World," which was rich with information about various organizations serving the needs of non-white gay and lesbian people, so the stigma of "Third World" clearly had diminished by this time. Ironically, though, the title of the 1984 article--"Gay Voices from The Third World: Are We Listening?"--betrayed the assumption that *The Advocate's* audience (the titular "we") was still assumed to be white.<sup>218</sup>

The uncritical elision of "white" and "gay" persisted until the end of Goodstein's time at *The Advocate*; in February 1985, members of Black and White Men Together--

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<sup>217</sup> David B. Goodstein. "Opening Space." *The Advocate*, January 14, 1976: 5

<sup>218</sup> One might assume, from the title of the article, that the "gay voices" referred to are coming from abroad, making it possible to read "we" as referring to Americans, but this is not the case--all the organizations discussed are based in the U.S.

San Francisco wrote to the editor to chastise Goodstein for an "Opening Space" commentary in which he referred to people of color and women as natural allies of the gay community instead of acknowledging that some of the members of the LGBT community were themselves women or non-white. The authors took Goodstein to task for publishing a magazine "which continually reinforces the 'Gay is White and Rich' myth" and for failing, more generally, to call out racist attitudes within the gay community.<sup>219</sup> It is curious that Goodstein, a vociferous critic of the gay community, would not speak out more forcefully against this, for racism was clearly evident even in some readers' letters to the editor. Just one example was inspired by a lengthy and thoughtful article, published in 1982, entitled "From A Black Perspective: Racism."<sup>220</sup> Incensed by the piece, reader William Miller argued that "[any] gay black who finds himself continually rejected by the white gay community is...either...going to the wrong places or he is so wrapped up in his own prejudices that he cannot accept, recognize, or appreciate receptive white gays...any gay black who wants to reach out to white gays can, and with a much greater degree of acceptance than white gays attempting the reverse."<sup>221</sup> It is possible that the uncharacteristic reluctance of David Goodstein to criticize gay racism stemmed from his own privilege; as a wealthy male Caucasian, he may simply have found racism a less-than-compelling topic. However, it is not unreasonable to infer that Goodstein, well aware that *The Advocate's* audience was largely comprised of white gays and lesbians, was simply reluctant to harp too much on a topic which would have put white readers on the defensive and may have subsequently led them to stop reading the magazine.

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<sup>219</sup> G. Stuart Gillespie and Thomas D. Horan, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, February 5, 1985: 7.

<sup>220</sup> Thom Beame, "From a Black Perspective: Racism." *The Advocate*, April 1, 1982: 23-5

<sup>221</sup> William Miller, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, August 5, 1982: 7.



In fact, there were occasional efforts to make the case that racism in the gay and lesbian community was not a one-way street. For instance, one feature story from 1982 was printed with a pull quote which seemed deliberately chosen to alleviate white readers' guilt. The quote, spoken by an African-American man, read, "A lot of us don't want to be bothered with whites, period. Just like most of them would rather not be bothered with us." The editors' decision to highlight this particular comment seems to uphold the same sentiment expressed in the 1975 advice to readers of color to provide their own story leads to the magazine, which is that Black people were themselves to blame for their lack of coverage in *The Advocate*, and were also largely responsible for their lack of inclusion in the mainstream (white) gay community. It is possible to read both of these comments as subtle but preemptive defenses against charges of editorial racism at *The Advocate*, and further, as challenges to the argument that racial tensions in the gay and lesbian community were predominantly the fault of racist whites.

Goodstein's views on racism seemed to have become more dismissive by 1983, when he penned a self-help book entitled *Superliving*. Presaging the best-sellers of later decades that trumpeted the "power of positive thinking" and the "laws of attraction," Goodstein's book, suggested that racism--and for that matter, all oppression--was all in the mind of the beholder. As the excerpt published in *The Advocate* read, "'Because I'm black,' many people tell themselves, 'I can't have the job I want.'...Or, 'Because I'm a woman...,' 'Because I'm disabled...,' There is one thing I can absolutely guarantee you: If you tell yourself these things--or anything similar--it will come to pass."<sup>222</sup> Addressing systemic oppression, it seemed, was far less important or effective than simply changing

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<sup>222</sup> David B. Goodstein, "Working: Agony or Ecstasy? You Get to Choose!" *The Advocate*, June 9, 1982: 25-30.

one's own perspective, and in light of this viewpoint, *The Advocate's* reluctance to criticizing large-scale social inequalities only seems natural.

There is little question that *The Advocate* was, at least during the first half of the Goodstein era, more willing to focus on racism in the gay community than it had been prior to 1975. Part of this was due to the publication's format change from a newspaper, which was primarily comprised of articles and brief columns, to a magazine which necessitated the creation of "feature articles" and cover stories. In spite of this increased coverage, though, racism and racial minorities were often treated as "special issues," both figuratively and literally. Between 1975 and 1979, there were three separate "special reports" which focused on racial minorities within the LGBT community. This can be viewed as both positive--for drawing attention to a little-addressed topic--and negative, as it confined the discussion of racism and racial minorities in the LGBT community to sporadic appearances rather than incorporating it into the magazine's content on an ongoing basis. Intuiting this, one skeptical Latino reader wrote to the editors in response to one of these "special reports" that "[it] remains to be seen whether *The Advocate* continues coverage of minorities or whether the article was a token effort."<sup>223</sup>

The magazine did continue to write features about racial minorities and racism in the gay community, but these articles appeared only infrequently and then were treated discretely, rather than on an integrated basis. For example, features on LGBT parents, handicapped LGBT people, and other groups within the LGBT community rarely incorporated the views of people of color, regarding the views of white LGBT people as representative of the whole. One example of this propensity is the article on "Gay

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<sup>223</sup> Rodrigo Reyes, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, May 17, 1979: 23.

Coupled" which ran in the November 25, 1982 issue of *The Advocate*. The author interviewed ten same-sex couples about their opinions on monogamy, commitment, and marriage, but not a single one of the interviewees was (to judge by the physical descriptions provided by the author and the article's accompanying photographs) a person of color. Likewise, another six-page feature on gay partnerships in April 1983 focused solely on interviewing white gay male couples. Observing this trend, one reader wrote in irritation, "The...couples interviewed in your 'Domestic Partners' feature were about as representative of gay couples as the characters in the movie *Making Love*. What about the blue-collar, rural, [or] minority gays...?"<sup>224</sup> Because the significance of marriage, commitment, and parenthood vary among racial and ethnic communities, the value of these articles was greatly diminished by presenting only Caucasians. However, as white middle-class mores were what I argue *The Advocate* sought to promote among its readers, the choice was not altogether surprising.<sup>225</sup>

The news content of the pre-1975 *Advocate* was largely comprised of "news briefs" rather than feature articles. One egregious example of *The Advocate* promoting racist attitudes occurred on the newspaper's front page in 1972, in a story about two Hispanic men accused of mass-murdering twenty-five Caucasian men after having sex with them. *The Advocate* reported that the defense intended to argue that it was "'not uncommon'...for a *pasivo* (passive) Mexican homosexual to 'harbor an inner rage' and attack his seducer." While this inarguably creative line of defense (which would later

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<sup>224</sup> Dennis Beauchamp, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, June 9, 1982: 7.

<sup>225</sup> For discussions of how race has inflected the meaning of marriage in America, see Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) and Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Backseat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

become known as the "cultural defense") would seem deserving of further exploration, *The Advocate* tacitly accepted it by titling the article's continuation on the second page "Rage of Lost Machismo: The 'Pasivo': Mexican Time Bomb." Also without comment passed the defense attorney's comment that "there is nothing to compare with the ultimate act of humiliation and degradation to a Mexican man--the ultimate act of losing his *machismo*--as to play the role of a female in a sexual encounter." Further, the newspaper observed, "the contention [of the defense] is that underneath the machismo of the *pasivo* is a 'broiling, bellowing race, and that it is not uncommon at all as soon as the act of intercourse is over, before the man even gets his pants back on, for the *pasivo* homosexual to suddenly turn into a homicidal race and destroy or mutilate the man that he has just had intercourse with."<sup>226</sup> Certainly this sweeping generalization about the sexual (and homicidal) proclivities of these men would have been offensive to Latino readers of the magazine, but at no point did the article's author offer any type of rebuttal, seeming to accept this line of reasoning as credible.

*The Advocate* wasn't above making jokes at the expense of non-white readers, either; a cartoon published in the May 27, 1970 issue of the magazine showed two young Caucasian men eyeing up a well-dressed Asian man as the three stood together on a street corner in Chinatown. Turning to his friend, one Caucasian says to the other, nodding at the Asian, "I hear they're great, but in an hour you're horny again." (fig 4) This joke played off of the well-known comment that eating Chinese food often left one hungry again after only a short time and implied that being unsatisfying on a long-term basis was an essential racial trait. A few years later, an article about gay life in Texas used

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<sup>226</sup> George Mendenhall, "Homosexual Maniac?" *The Advocate*, November 8, 1972: 1-2.

potentially-offensive racial imagery, starting with its title: "Nudity in Dallas? Not on Your Bustle, Suh!" Describing modern Texan society, the author wrote, "The woeful songs of the darkies are no longer heard in Dallas, Tex., and cotton is seen only in the dry goods stores."<sup>227</sup>

A 1972 editorial cartoon depicted a group of people, indicated by a picket sign to be the "responsible gay voting power," lined up at the polls to vote (Fig. 3). Near the head of the line (behind a white man) stood a Black man with an Afro, attired in "hippie"-style clothing. A white woman stood next to him. The caption urged people not to "forget *this* demonstration," alluding to the political protests and pickets which were commonplace in the early 1970s. One possible reading of this cartoon is that voting was a far superior way than protests to try to implement social change, and that the Black man and white woman would be well-served to spend more time working within the system (as embodied by the act of voting) than publically agitating for their rights. The cartoon's message failed to acknowledge that suffrage had not always been accessible to female Americans or Black citizens, and had actually been gained, in part, by the same public demonstrations *The Advocate* now suggested were ineffective. Therefore, the audience members who would likely be most sympathetic to this cartoon were white men, whose ease of access to voting rights seemingly rendered them unable to understand why anyone else would choose to participate in alternative forms of "demonstration." It seems a logical, if infuriating, outcome of this attitude that by 2000 Black gay writer Keith O.

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<sup>227</sup> Herb Croner, "Nudity in Dallas? Not On Your Bustle, Suh!" *The Advocate*, June 7, 1972: 25

Boykin could assert flatly, "[B]lack lesbians and gays play no meaningful role in the lesbian and gay political movement."<sup>228</sup>

### Racism in Travel Features

Travel features had been a part of *The Advocate* since 1970. These types of features also appeared in mainstream publications, particularly as airline travel became increasingly standardized and affordable over the course of the late twentieth century.<sup>229</sup> However, some aspects of *The Advocate*'s travelogues differed significantly from those which might be found in more mainstream magazines. Foremost among these differences was the emphasis on visiting another country with the objective of bedding as many of the natives as possible.<sup>230</sup> The magazine's need to "sell" the natives to the reader by making them sound desirable and accessible resulted in acceptance and promotion of racist stereotypes. Further, an imperialistic perspective was palpable in many of these articles, with native inhabitants of the lands in question depicted as underdeveloped and childlike at best, and untrustworthy and mercenary at worst. The writers treated American culture as the *de facto* apex of civilization, and non-Americans were often depicted as idolizing American tourists as representatives of a "better life" they could not achieve in their own lands. *The Advocate* suggested that its readers visit other countries not necessarily for their cultural riches, but for the seeming endless supply of obsequious natives who would treat them, as it were, like kings.

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<sup>228</sup> Keith O. Boykin, "Where Rhetoric Meets Reality: The Role of Black Lesbians and Gays in 'Queer' Politics." In Rimmerman, Wald, and Wilcox, eds., *The Politics of Gay Rights*: 80.

<sup>229</sup> See chapter 3 of Marc Dierikx, *Clipping the Clouds: How Air Travel Changed the World* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2008).

<sup>230</sup> This differs significantly from current conceptions of "sexual tourism," a term used to describe tourism to locales known to have little or no proscriptions against prostitution. Travel features in *The Advocate* did not trumpet the availability of sex workers as a reason for visiting a particular country.

Mexico was a popular subject for these articles, making it the subject of ten different travel essays between 1970 and 1982, as its proximity to the California base of *The Advocate* cast it as an easy and inexpensive getaway. In October 1970, Douglas Dean began his article, "Attitude Makes the Difference In Paradise," by observing that "[t]he passion, permissiveness, and sexual abandon of Mexican boys have made them famous throughout the world. Is there any truth to the stories one hears about their ready availability as bed partners, or is the whole idea just myth?" His article argued that the myth was, in fact, based in reality; although not every Mexican man would "pop into bed at the mere suggestion of [homosexual sex]...if the time and place are right, almost any of them can be had." Further, if someone failed to "make out" on his visit to Mexico, the author opined, he must be "inordinately unattractive or too timid for his own good."

The terminology Dean used to describe the Mexican men he encountered—"boys," "darkly exotic"—both infantilized and fetishized them, casting them less as full-fledged human beings than as breathing souvenirs to be scooped up by the handful.<sup>231</sup> Problematically, Dean accepted the Mexican men's naïve idolatry of the United States without question, explaining simply that "the *norteamericano* is a glamorous figure to the Mexican youth, symbolizing to him a rich and deeply satisfying existence which is beyond his own reach." This comment was particularly ironic given its placement in a magazine which devoted the bulk of its content to detailing the wrongs and injustices inflicted on gay men in (and by) the United States. The author also demonstrated the collapsing of environment into national character in his comment that "the climate in

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<sup>231</sup> It is important to note that the emphasis on the Mexican men's youth was in keeping with the premium gay male American culture put on this trait, and did not necessarily imply that the subjects were minors. Douglas Dean, "Gay Mexico Part I: Attitude Makes the Difference in Paradise." *The Advocate*, October 14, 1970: 24.

Mexico...is warm and sensuous. It acts as a constant aphrodisiac, and once the Mexican boy or man is properly stimulated he makes a thrilling lover." <sup>232</sup>

The second installment of this article discussed the "Mexican male who is hot-blooded and passionate by nature," accepting at the outset stereotypes about Latino character. The author also observed that [i]t is the virile butch boy who has learned to be 'cooperative' in gay sex who offers the most delight to *los* [sic] *turistas*," giving future visitors to Mexico a clear guidepost as to which natives might afford them the most pleasure. Most interestingly, however, was this article's follow-up on the attractive Mexican "boy" with whom the author had enjoyed intimacy on his initial trip to the country. "Andres" was described as "the direct descendant of an Aztec prince," as though the affiliation with royalty would excuse his presence in the life of an affluent white American man, and was also "brooding," "sensuous," and "thoroughly masculine." Andres and Dean had an affair in which the Mexican man was "thoughtful," "gallant," and "eager to please," and at the end of this, he "confessed that he wanted desperately to come to the United States." Dean considered "keeping" him, but ultimately decided against this--the prerogative of a privileged suitor.

When Dean returned to Mexico, he found a much-changed Andres, one who "had become sloppy about his dress. His body, formerly so trim and muscular, was getting flabby. His hair was uncombed, and he needed a good bath." Without the influence of the civilized *norteamericano*, Andres had reverted to his "natural" state of unkemptness. At this juncture, Andres also wheedled the author out of "a few pesos to buy cigarettes or a beer or some medicine for his baby." Though the author obliged, he observed that Andres

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid.



was "typical...of the Mexican boy, caught in the net of poverty and poor education, who uses his charm and good looks in an attempt to escape the social and economic ties which bind him." But the author moved on from the now-unappealing Andres to "Luis," and promised the third installment in his article would provide more information about "how the moral and economic problems in Mexico affect a young man's behavior and why he is easily available for homosexual contacts." With this statement, Dean acknowledged that Mexican men's decision to serve as escorts for American male tourists was a function of economics, rather than of sexual identity (or even pleasure), but failed to interrogate this problematic situation further.

Five years later, *The Advocate* ran another feature on tourism in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. In it, author George DeWoody exposed his cultural chauvinism and upheld numerous stereotypes about "the unbearably oppressive mentality permeating Mexican and most other Latin cultures." He implied that the country was backwards and unenlightened in terms of gay liberation, calling one man a "gay liberationist of the type Mexico sadly lacks," and observed that "gay awareness as a social movement and psychological resource is nonexistent." The thought that Latino cultural values may have influenced the shape and visibility of gay liberation in Mexico seems not to have occurred to DeWoody, who believed his failure to find a direct analog to American-style gay liberation means that it must be absent. Writing about types of Mexican men American tourists might encounter, DeWoody described "Mr. Macho," who might engage in same-sex sex in order to "maintain the morality of a Catholic culture, i.e. keeping the señoritas virgin;" the "*mayate*" (a hustler), and "*las reinas*" (the queens, or effeminate gay men) who DeWoody simultaneously praised and derided for being "the

most liberated gay people in the culture [though] they emulate a stereotype that we are largely discarding." "Sadly," he wrote, "it is a rare phenomenon to find a Mexican man who is accepting of his homosexuality and capable of defining his own identity without succumbing to the lures of peer group acceptance in the world of hustlers and queens." Setting aside for the moment the divine irony of this proclamation coming from a writer for *The Advocate*, which relentlessly promoted the "clone" look near-ubiquitous in the white gay male community the 1970s, his descriptions imply that Mexican men are weak-willed, mercenary, selfish, or immature. He half-heartedly admits that "not all of the Mexicans you meet are on the hustle, but the phenomenon is widespread enough to warrant observation."<sup>233</sup> This qualification did little, however, to counter the portrait of Mexican manhood he had provided.

In a companion piece focused on Mexico City, writer Bill Rushton makes the sweeping generalization that "[because] of Macho, Mexican women never go out alone-- and if you see a rare group of women out together in public, they could easily be gay." Rushton's portrait of Mexico paints Americans as adored benefactors of the impoverished Mexicans; he observes of one cruising spot that "North American visitors are welcomed, which is almost to say doggedly chased," and reminds readers not to express displeasure about the inflated price of cocktails at another location, chiding them, "You *are* an American and you *can* afford it." While he subsequently advises that visitors "remember the Ugly American" and not behave "like the moneyed *yanqui* many Mexicans will expect you to be" lest they be hustled, Rushton's description of the hustling scene in Mexico ultimately absolves the tourist of any responsibility for being harassed and lays

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<sup>233</sup> George DeWoody, "South of the Border." *The Advocate*, January 14, 1976: 8.

the blame on natives, writing, "When it comes to your body or your money, Mexican men have a hard time understanding the word 'no.'"<sup>234</sup>

### Anti-Racism and Positive Coverage of People of Color

In spite of the casual racism of some of its features, *The Advocate* did occasionally provide adequate, even commendable, coverage of LGBT people of color. In the issue following the one that carried the problematic Mexican travelogues, *The Advocate* featured a two-page article celebrating the birth of GAI (Gay American Indians), an organization for gay and lesbian Native Americans. The comments of the group's founders highlight the disconnect between white Americans and people of color, both within the LGBT community and at large. Forthrightly acknowledging the ingrained racist assumptions of many whites, the founders explained that a major part of the group's mission is to "break down the image of the Indian as a macho militant that gay white people have," and offers harsh criticism of the American Bicentennial celebrations held in 1976. "What should Indians celebrate? Two hundred years of broken promises, land theft, genocide and rape?"<sup>235</sup>

Likewise, the bifurcated mission facing many gay and lesbian minority organizations was mirrored in a news blurb from 1972 which described the newly founded "Gay Latinos" group as "directed towards straights to teach them about Gays," and compared it to a preexisting group, Unidos, whose mission was, in the words of one of its founders, "to help get gay Chicanos' heads together."<sup>236</sup> Interestingly, the reason Unidos was founded in 1970 was due to the racism within white gay groups; its founder

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<sup>234</sup> Bill Rushton, "Down Mexico (City) Way." *The Advocate*, January 14, 1976: 10-11.

<sup>235</sup> Dean Gengle, "Reclaiming the Old New World." *The Advocate*, January 28, 1976: 40-1.

<sup>236</sup> "Gay Latin Group Forms." *The Advocate*, August 2, 1972: 4.

explained in the brief announcement that ran in *The Advocate* that Latinos were reluctant to join existing, predominantly-white gay and lesbian groups because of "discrimination. They're afraid people will make fun of them because they can't speak good English."<sup>237</sup> The tension which is evident in these racially-specific groups, between serving their members' needs and reaching out to or combating the ignorance of outsiders, is not dissimilar to the challenge faced by *The Advocate* itself, which sought to satisfy the desires of gay readers while offering mainstream Americans a vision of bourgeois gay life that they could--if not relate to--at least respect.

In March, 1976, *The Advocate* ran a column entitled "Black D.C." which focused exclusively on the Black gay and lesbian scene in the nation's capitol. This column addressed the segregation common within gay and lesbian nightlife and the erasure of Black people from the broad picture of gay and lesbian social life. "Look in most gay bar guides, and the visitor to this city would have little reason to suspect that Washington is more than 70 per cent black," the author observed, before listing a number of venues that catered to African-American gays and lesbians. Calling these places "a vital part of the gay scene here," he advises that they would be hospitable to "white people who have left racial hangups behind," but it seems clear that the main audience for whom the piece was intended was African-American readers.<sup>238</sup> Likewise, as early as 1970, the magazine ran a brief article asking for Black gay and lesbian people to participate in an updated version of Alfred Kinsey's research.<sup>239</sup> This type of content implies that *The Advocate* was aware that part of its readership was comprised of people of color, a view validated by a letter

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<sup>237</sup> "Mexican-American Gays To Have Own Organization." *The Advocate*, August 19, 1970: 3.

<sup>238</sup> "Black D.C." *The Advocate*, March 10, 1976: 27.

<sup>239</sup> "Black Gays Needed." *The Advocate*, April 29, 1970: 25.

from a reader in 1976. "I must really stop to congratulate you on the success of your (our) paper...You deserve a hardy 'right on.' How about a little more 'black'? By the way, this is not a complaint. A lot of blacks read your paper and think it is great."<sup>240</sup>

The reader got his wish later in 1976, when *The Advocate* ran its first major feature story to focus on race and racism. In "Black and Gay: Problems and Possibilities," author John Victor Soares adroitly noted the distinctive features of Black gay culture, including an emphasis on home entertainment (resulting from rampant race-based discrimination in public venues) and a widespread tolerance among working-class black families toward their members' same-sex relationships. The article aimed also to disrupt many white Americans' notions of a monolithic Black gay culture, asserting the presence of "a complex of value and behavioral differences that separates middle-class black people from working-class black people...The black community is no more classless or less diverse...than any other community of its size in the modern, industrialized world. This is a fact of which the average white person seems insufficiently aware."

Soares also discussed the significance of particular sexual roles within the African-American community, which white readers were unlikely to have known about. In light of the obviously educational bent in Soares' article, it is telling that he suggested that gay and lesbian Blacks move, if possible, to one of the "supercenters" of gay Black community, reasoning that "it's always terribly convenient to have an active black, gay community as a back-up when you tire of bridging a culture gap, constantly dealing with racism or an absence of variety."<sup>241</sup> Clearly Soares had little hope that, even with

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<sup>240</sup> Tom, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, May 5, 1976: 17.

<sup>241</sup> John Victor Soares, "Black and Gay: Problems and Possibilities." *The Advocate*, November 17, 1976: 13

education, white gays and lesbians could truly understand or support their friends and lovers of color. On the same page appeared a cartoon where two Black men conversing on the street gaze at three white “clones,” as one remarks, “Frankly, they all look alike to me.” Perhaps the illustration was intended to point out to white readers exactly how offensive and frankly ridiculous this assertion--usually uttered by Caucasians about people of other races--was, or maybe it was intended to provide Black readers with a smug laugh, but regardless of the editors' intent, it undeniably signaled a willingness to address racism within the gay and lesbian community.

Readers appreciated this effort; one wrote to “congratulate Mr. John Soares on his excellent article...and *The Advocate* for publishing it. I feel that Mr. Soares has spoken well for those of us who are both black and gay and must often deal with double discrimination.”<sup>242</sup> However the next letter, from a white writer, confirmed Soares' poor prognosis for the enlightenment of white gays; the author criticized Soares' article as a “putdown of black people by a black writer” and insisted, “I like black men. They are more open and aggressive, and less inhibited about their sex life. Most of all, they enjoy being *top men* and are less likely to turn over on me. As far as I'm concerned: Black is beautiful.”<sup>243</sup> DeBruyn's comments indicate that he tuned out a substantial portion of the article which dealt with the fetishization of black men's sexuality by white men and walked away with his own stereotypical notions about monolithic Black culture and Black sexuality blithely untroubled.

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<sup>242</sup> Name Withheld, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, December 15, 1976: 14.

<sup>243</sup> Such fetishists were known as “chocolate queens.” Rudolf DeBruyn, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, December 15, 1976: 14.

*The Advocate's* self-conscious outreach to Black readers continued into the early 1980s; this may have been attributable to what the 1980s-era Black LGBT magazine *Blacklight* called "the birth of the Black Gay political movement."<sup>244</sup> This was no overstatement; in addition to the 1979 founding of *Blacklight*, the National Coalition of Black Gays had been founded in 1978, and Black and White Men Together, a group that promoted interracial relationships was founded in 1980. Deborah Johnson boasted that in the 1980s, she started a "big social-club network for black lesbians" and later "political...rap groups" for women of color as a result of the ostracism and racism she encountered in predominantly white gay and lesbian groups.<sup>245</sup> The needs addressed by specifically-Black gay and lesbian groups were elucidated by Carolyn Mobley, who helped to found Atlanta's African-American Lesbian/Gay Alliance in the mid-1980s; she explained that the group sought to start dialogue between Black gay men and Black lesbians and to deal with the "very basic issue of gay identity" which, though "well-formed in the white gay and lesbian community" is not so in African-American culture. The trend didn't escape the notice of readers, one of whom noted in 1982 the "'open attitude' *The Advocate* has taken recently by being upfront on the topic of racism."<sup>246</sup> A "Blacksmith" cartoon from 1981 (Fig. 5) cuttingly addressed the racist attitudes many Black gay men often encountered at predominantly-white gay nightlife venues and likely would have appealed to African-American readers. Two men sit next to each other at a bar, with the Caucasian man chatting up his African-American neighbor. The caption

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<sup>244</sup> "About Us." *Blacklight*. [http://www.blacklightonline.com/about\\_new.html](http://www.blacklightonline.com/about_new.html). Accessed June 13, 2010.

<sup>245</sup> Marcus, *Making History*: 443.

<sup>246</sup> Steve Hawk, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, May 13, 1982: 7.

reads, "Say, you're really good-looking for a black man! I'd let someone like *you* go home with me..."<sup>247</sup> The Black man is, unsurprisingly, nonplussed.

The presence in *The Advocate* of a cartoon criticizing the culture which was its bread and butter demonstrates both a desire to appeal to Black readers and an increased willingness to address some of the more unpleasant aspects of the gay and lesbian community. It is possible, however, that raising such a contentious issue in the form of a cartoon diminished the potentially offensive nature of the message; white readers could laugh at the absurdity of the man's condescending come-on without feeling like they were personally implicated. More optimistically, they could also reflect on the degree to which it was reflective of their own attitudes or experiences. A few pages after the cartoon appeared a three-page article on discrimination (based on age, gender, and attractiveness as well as race) in the gay community, so the cartoon seemed designed to serve as an easy point of readers' entry into an uncomfortable topic. But in spite of the increased frequency with which people of color appeared in *The Advocate*, many readers were unhappy and insisted on differentiating mere visibility with true acceptance. One Black male reader paid the magazine a back-handed compliment following a 1982 feature on racism, writing, "May I commend *The Advocate* for your article...It was a pleasant, though rare digression from your usual portrayal of gay black men as drag queens and flaming faggots."<sup>248</sup>

In addition to Black-focused content, *The Advocate* took steps towards breaking its traditional silence on other racial minorities. In September 1981, a thoughtful two-page feature on gay and lesbian Asian-American artists explored the particular trappings

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<sup>247</sup> "Blacksmith." *The Advocate*, February 19, 1981: 10.

<sup>248</sup> Michael W. Dingle, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, May 13, 1982: 7.



and values of Asian culture that complicated gay and lesbian Asian-Americans relationship with the mainstream gay and lesbian movement, as well as with their communities and families.<sup>249</sup> A few issues later appeared a brief but detailed description of the first national meeting of the Latino International Coalition of Lesbians and Gay Men.<sup>250</sup> Several circumstances conspired to affect the quantity and quality of the magazine's racial content in the last half of the 1980s. First, of course, was the breadth of the AIDS crisis, which virtually necessitated that news and stories about AIDS research and activism make up an increasing amount of content over the course of the 1980s. But also significant was the death of David Goodstein, which jeopardized *The Advocate's* survival; as editor Michael Shively observed in a personal letter written to friends in late 1985, "Its (sic) still not clear if we can make it without our 'fearless leader' but we are giving it the good try. As I am sure I must have told you [Goodstein]...had lots of money so there wasn't much to worry about...Now that the security (his money) is gone we have to make the right decisions since there is no one to bail us out."<sup>251</sup> Goodstein's successor, a young man named Niles Merton, was (necessarily) concerned with *The Advocate's* sustainability and profitability, and brought in new editors and consultants to help make over *The Advocate*.<sup>252</sup>

Mark Thompson, who worked at *The Advocate* from 1975 until 1994, implied that the change in the publication's tone in the late 1980s signaled the new editors' less-attentive attitude towards contentious issues like racism and decreased emphasis on being

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<sup>249</sup> Felix Racelis, "Gay Asians: Visible, Vocal at Last." *The Advocate*, September 17, 1981: 42-3.

<sup>250</sup> Andrew Wesley, "Gay, Lesbian Latinos Hold First Meeting." *The Advocate*, October 15, 1981: 9.

<sup>251</sup> Michael Shively, Letter to Bill, Harriet, Claire and Michael Blymiller. November 10, 1985. Michael Shively Papers, Cornell University.

<sup>252</sup> Mark Thompson, *Advocate Days and Other Stories* (Hulls Cove, ME: Rebel Satori Press, 2009): 54-57.

racially-inclusive. He recalls that in 1988, a managing editor (pseudonymously referred to as "Barry" in Thompson's memoir *Advocate Days*) insisted that a "long-planned profile on black AIDS activists in South Africa [be replaced] with a vapid feature about cartoon characters who 'might be gay.'"<sup>253</sup> Of course, this single example does not mean that gay and lesbian people of color had completely vanished from the magazine; for instance, in September 1988, an article on a newly-founded organization for South Asian gays and lesbians appeared and several profiles of Black writers appeared over the next two years, though these appeared in the magazine's Arts section rather than in the Features.<sup>254</sup>

It is illustrative, however, of the decline in coverage of people of color that a new feature introduced by *The Advocate* in 1989 was wholly white. This "occasional series" called "Meet John Gay" which purported to "profile everyday gay men and women--farmers, physicians, schoolteachers, secretaries, accountants, students--in other words, people who would probably never be in the spotlight...but nevertheless have interesting stories to tell that strike a responsive, common chord."<sup>255</sup> It suggested that readers send in recommendations for future installments of the series, though this was evidently met with little enthusiasm as only three profiles ever ran--of two white men and one white woman. In October 1989, the magazine did run a one-page profile of a gay policeman, but if it weren't for the full-page photo of the smiling subject adjacent to it, readers would have had no idea at all that he was Black.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> The article Thompson refers to can be found in the October 24, 1988 issue of *The Advocate*. Thompson, *Advocate Days*: 55.

<sup>254</sup> Gerard Koskovich, "Hands Across the Water." *The Advocate*, September 27, 1988: 63-4; Jim Marks, "Other Visions, Other Countries." *The Advocate*, February 14, 1989: 51-54; Stuart Timmons, "Coming Out, Friendship, and Romance." *The Advocate*, September 12, 1989: 62-3; Eric Latzky, "Saint Misbehavin'." *The Advocate*, February 13, 1990: 62-3.

<sup>255</sup> James Merrett, "Self Reliance in the 'Faggot Suite.'" *The Advocate*, January 31, 1989: 37.

<sup>256</sup> Mark C. Canterbury, "Making the Uniform Fit." *The Advocate*, October 10, 1989: 41.

A lessened emphasis on racial inclusion in other types of features in the late 1980s was also evidenced by the list of 21 "unsung heroes" of the gay and lesbian community which appeared in *The Advocate* in 1988. All were white, leading one reader to inform the editors that he was "appalled that in *The Advocate's* estimation, an unsung hero isn't a black, Hispanic, and/or Asian gay male." He continued to accuse the magazine of "perpetuat[ing] white supremacy and racism...by eliminating choice people of color in a publication like *The Advocate*."<sup>257</sup> The editors' response echoed the replies made to similar criticisms in the past, assigning the blame to readers. "The idea of the article was for readers to nominate those 'heroes' who had touched their lives. We were limited to the nominations we received." Logically, this seems sensible, but to claim that editors had no input into the final lineup of heroes is disingenuous--surely the editors would have stepped in to round out the pool if, for example, there hadn't been enough nominees? The editors' response also suggested, as had previous responses to similar complaints, that people of color were in part responsible for their own marginalization; they offered, "In at least one case, a finalist who was a man of color asked, for personal reasons, *not* to be included in the article." The "blame the victim" attitude which had been an undercurrent during David Goodstein's tenure at *The Advocate* seemed to have persisted intact well after his departure.

It is also possible to understand the change in *The Advocate's* coverage of race and racism between the mid-1970s and the years following the magazine's change in management in 1985 is as emblematic of the magazine hewing closer the attitudes of mainstream media towards these topics. In a study of racial representation in the mass

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<sup>257</sup> Philip Robinson, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, December 5, 1988: 7.

media, communications scholar Stephanie Greco Larson wrote that "messages in the coverage defend and support the status quo and the structures of power that maintain it by focusing on individuals rather than on the system. The news praises minority individuals who assimilate and succeed and blames those who do not."<sup>258</sup> Similarly, *The Advocate* was willing to focus occasionally on individuals of color, but hesitant to address issues of systemic racial bias within the gay community and in American society at large.

Even the few features to focus on Black gays and lesbians in the 1990s were not unproblematic, and seemed written and edited to assuage white guilt about racism. A 1990 interview with a Black gay male writer named Assotto Saint highlighted his attitude towards racism, which, coincidentally or not, did not diverge much from the stance *The Advocate* had taken in the past. Though the artist's work addressed racism in the gay community, the article observed that Saint "believes it's vital to explore the solutions and not just reiterate what's wrong. 'It's not enough to show a bleeding wound, to continually state problems without offering any answers.'" The interviewer noted approvingly that Saint also had "some solid suggestions to offer about black empowerment. 'Economic power is the key. It's time for us to open our own [black gay] publishing houses, our own theaters, dance companies. I publish my own books, and I produce my own operas.'" If it is not clear from the content of this quote, Saint descended from wealth and therefore may have had a skewed perspective on the ease with which one might independently produce and distribute their artistic works (and, for that matter, make a living out of doing so). The article let this remark pass as a credible--or "solid"--remedy to institutionalized racism in the worlds of publishing and the arts.

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<sup>258</sup> Stephanie Greco Larson, *Media and Minorities: The Politics of Race in News and Entertainment* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008): 93.

Additionally, the feature contained an excerpt of a poem Saint had written about finding the work of Black writers shelved together in the back of a bookstore, rather than intermingled with others--"i asked the clerk/if he had kept you tied down/or does he use your books/as dartboards/he smirked/then shouted 'she's in the black section/to the back'/even literature has its ghettos." While the message of the poem is explicitly about Black writers being excluded from the canon of literature, and therefore about entrenched racism, the writer of this feature ignored all of these cues and chose to conclude, "Saint is not a believer in separatism."<sup>259</sup> The selective quoting and editorial framing of Saint's comments seen in this article are common techniques used by journalists to shape readers' reception of the news, and in this particular case it would appear that the journalist in question was hoping to make the piece more appealing to white readers, or at least lessen any defensiveness they might feel upon reading about racism.<sup>260</sup>

Further context for the trends in *The Advocate's* depiction of people of color comes from a 1990 event that highlighted the tensions between African-American and gay and lesbian communities. David Dinkins, who had just been elected as New York City's first African-American mayor, was presented with a nominee for Health Commissioner, Dr. Woodrow Myers, whose good reputation amongst his peers as a public health expert was somewhat clouded by his past recommendations that doctors record the names of people with AIDS, as well as his support for quarantining AIDS carriers who might spread the disease. These little-known opinions of Myers were

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<sup>259</sup> Eric Latzky, "Saint Misbehavin'." *The Advocate*, February 13, 1990: 62-3.

<sup>260</sup> For extensive discussions of journalistic techniques which shape the news, see Stephanie Greco Larson, *Media and Minorities: The Politics of Race in News and Entertainment* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008); Benjamin Page, *Who Deliberates? Mass Media in Modern Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 2002).

brought to light by New York-based gay and lesbian newsmagazine *Outweek*, and once they became known, many members of ACT UP, along with numerous gay men and women in general, objected to Myers' nomination. Myers had one other important characteristic, however, which many believed virtually mandated he take the position. In an editorial supporting Myers' appointment, *New York Times* noted that "Besides his professional qualifications, Dr. Myers is black. Given the health problems affecting black New Yorkers, that's another asset. AIDS is not the only problem a city health commissioner must face, and gay men are not its only victims."<sup>261</sup>

The conflict between Black New Yorkers, Black LGBT people, and Black people with AIDS (to the extent that the three were discrete groups) was noted by the *Times*, whose editors observed, "The African-American members of Mayor Dinkins' search panel continue to favor him while the gay members have turned against him. The dispute thus threatens to pit blacks against gay men." Dinkins did eventually appoint Myers, in the end, angering many AIDS activists, but he also appointed a Black gay man as the city's Mental Health Commissioner, perhaps in an effort to placate his critics.<sup>262</sup> The disagreement over Myers' appointment dragged on through the entire month of January, 1990, but was not reported at all by *The Advocate*, which would seem to have been uniquely able to offer an LGBT perspective on the furor. By comparison, it was covered

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<sup>261</sup> "The Case for Dr. Myers." *New York Times* (January 19, 1990: A34). For mainstream press coverage of the Myers appointment, see also: Bruce Lambert, "Contender for Health Chief Attacked on AIDS" (January 11, 1990: B3); Bruce Lambert, "Backers Defend Top Contender for Health Post" (January 12, 1990: B4); Todd S. Purdum, "Dinkins Searches for a Health Chief, but Finds a Dilemma" (January 18, 1990: B1); Todd S. Purdum, "Leading Backers Turn From Applicant for Health Post" (January 19, 1990: B1); Todd S. Purdum, "Dinkins Appoints Health Chief Over Objections of Gay Groups" (January 20, 1990: A1).

<sup>262</sup> Don Terry. "Advocate for The Suffering Takes Over as Head of Mental Health." *New York Times* (March 3, 2009: 27).

in publications as diverse as the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Washington Times*, and the *Washington Post*.<sup>263</sup>

The issue from February 27, 1990, was the first to feature a Black gay man on it (the dancer and choreographer Bill T. Jones) since 1975. The headline read "The Turning Point," which--though obviously referring to Jones' career--also indicated a change in the magazine's relationship to Black readers. Inside, there was an article by gay historian Jonathan Ned Katz on Mabel Hampton, "our Black lesbian foremother." Although they did not make up the majority of this issue's content, these two features were nonetheless more substantial representations of African-Americans than had appeared in any other issue for the last five years. The reason for this increase might be discerned from one of the news articles also featured (and promoted on the cover): "Andy, We Hardly Knew Ye." This three-page story focused on some incendiary remarks the television commentator had recently made on "60 Minutes" regarding the inherent "danger" of homosexuality. In an interview with *The Advocate*, which called Rooney to inform him of the gay and lesbian community's displeasure, Rooney also made several racist comments about African-Americans. By drawing attention to Rooney's racist, as well as homophobic, statements, the magazine seemed to be appealing to Black readers, hoping perhaps that they might help to raise awareness, in the general public, of Rooney's gaffe. In these efforts, the magazine was wholly successful; following the publication of the Rooney piece, written by journalist Chris Bull, the CBS network publicly censured

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<sup>263</sup> "Indiana Health Commissioner Named to New York City Post." *Chicago Tribune*, January 1, 1990; "New Yorkers Riled Over Health Chief." *Washington Times*, January 26, 1990; "Up Against the AIDS Establishment." *Washington Post*, February 1, 1990.

Rooney's remarks and forced him to take a leave of absence from "60 Minutes," in addition to issuing a public apology to African-Americans.<sup>264</sup>

This incident provided a space for the Black community and the gay and lesbian community to stand together against bigotry, which was embodied by the remarks of New York City mayor David Dinkins. Dinkins, perhaps eager to improve his standing with New York City's gay community after the Myers flap, took Rooney to task for only apologizing for his racist, and not his homophobic, comments. "In my mind," he said, "Mr. Rooney's unwillingness to disavow his anti-gay remarks taints the credibility of his denial of racist comments about African-Americans. I find it difficult to believe that an individual who is apparently willing to embrace prejudice toward one group would not be capable of making prejudicial comments about another."<sup>265</sup> A slightly more antagonistic relationship between the gay and Black communities was suggested in a statement by Karin Schwartz, the assistant director of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD): "We're pleased that CBS has taken the allegations of Rooney's bigotry seriously. However, we wonder why CBS didn't act definitively when the issue was only homophobia. I don't believe it's a coincidence that they day after allegations of racism appeared in the press, CBS acts definitively. We are not in the business of trying

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<sup>264</sup> Chris Bull, "Andy, We Hardly Knew Ye." *The Advocate*, February 27, 1990: 10-13. Rooney steadfastly denied that he made the remarks, and *The Advocate's* failure to mandate that its reporters tape-record their interviews meant there was no concrete proof that he had. A string of stories from the *New York Times* provides insight into mainstream press coverage of the incident as well as its eventual denouement: Jeremy Gerard, "CBS and Rooney to Discuss Statements" (February 8, 1990: C22); Jeremy Gerard, "CBS Gives Rooney a Three-Month Suspension for Remarks" (February 9, 1990: C30); Jeremy Gerard, "Callers Besiege CBS Over Rooney" (February 10, 1990: 48), Jeremy Gerard, "Rooney May Return in Two Weeks" (February 24, 1990: 48); James Barron, "Andy Rooney Returns to '60 Minutes'" (March 5, 1990: C14).

<sup>265</sup> Jeremy Gerard, "CBS Gives Rooney a Three-Month Suspension for Remarks." *New York Times*, February 9, 1990: C30.



to evaluate different kinds of bigotry. It's all bad."<sup>266</sup> And Andy Rooney himself referred obliquely to this tension, in alleging that the comments had been falsely attributed to him, that they were the work of an "angry gay organization which had decided that, while the media might be relatively indifferent to the complaint of gays that they had been wronged, it is difficult for a news organization to stand up to the charge of racism."<sup>267</sup> *Advocate* readers agreed, writing in response to Bull's story that they were aggrieved by CBS decision to act not only the charges of homophobia, but on racism.<sup>268</sup>

The conflict between the Black and GLBT communities also came through in an article carried the week after Rooney's suspension: "Black Leader's Letter Shocks Gays." It described the objections of an NAACP official in Pomona, California, to her city's recognition of Gay Human Rights Week, and for many readers may have upheld some of the assumptions they had regarding the heterosexual African-American community's attitudes towards homosexuality: "Not being able to drink at a water fountain or ride on a bus, that is a violation of civil rights...If [gay people] choose to stay in the closet, they are never exposed to that kind of discrimination."<sup>269</sup> The article noted in its closing paragraphs that the NAACP's regional director had met with a Pomona-based gay and lesbian rights group and repudiated the comments on behalf of both local and national leadership, but the choice to run the brief article under a huge headline which took up nearly half of the page seems sensationalistic, as though it were trying to feed on the flames of discontent many white gay and lesbian Americans were feeling after the fallout of the Rooney saga. Underlying this seemed to be a sense of betrayal, traceable to an

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Jeremy Gerard, "Callers Besiege CBS Over Rooney." *New York Times*, February 10, 1990: 48.

<sup>268</sup> Lee Heller, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, March 13, 1990: 5.

<sup>269</sup> Robert W. Peterson, "Black Leader's Letter Shocks Gays." *The Advocate*, March 13, 1990: 19.

unspoken expectation of "blacks to support gay rights, because they, of all people, should know the importance of equality and the pain of discrimination."<sup>270</sup>

In the mid-1990s, one *Advocate* cover story, in particular, stands out as an illustration of the disconnect which existed between *The Advocate* (as representatives of the predominantly-white gay and lesbian movement) and Black gays and lesbians. The May 2, 1995 issue of the magazine featured a pensive-looking David Duke, an avowed white supremacist, who was at the time running for public office. The description read, "This gubernatorial candidate (and former KKK leader) has a new target. You." Clearly the "you" in this construction is white and Protestant, for any person of color or non-Christian would have been well-aware that Duke had been targeting them for decades. Moreover, the decision to run a four-page interview with a person whose views were so tainted by racism was in questionable taste; it is hard to imagine that people of color would find any appeal at all in reading the opinions of a person who believed them to be virtually subhuman, and giving Duke a forum in which to air his racist views could also be said, politely, to have been insensitive and ill-advised. Particularly troubling were some of the leading questions the interviewer put to Duke, inviting him to spew his racist invective: "What is your take on the violence in our cities, particularly about black-on-black crime?" "[D]o you believe some races are more intelligent than others?"<sup>271</sup> One can only imagine that the interviewer was meeting Duke for the first time and completely unaware of his well-publicized perspectives on these topics.

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<sup>270</sup> Keith Boykin, *One More River to Cross: Black and Gay in America* (New York: Doubleday, 1996: 209).

<sup>271</sup> Garry Boulard, "The Man Behind the Mask." *The Advocate*, May 2, 1995: 29-35.

In response to the Duke interview, one reader wrote that "It's enough to be constantly battling...hatemongering in the world. The last thing I want in the sanctuary of my home is to have the evil face of David Duke glaring at me from my coffee table or nightstand."<sup>272</sup> But more problematic for other readers was the insensitivity of *The Advocate* in interviewing Duke at all; two readers of color chorused, "Your choice of David Duke as a cover boy not only was tasteless and scary, but it was also an insult to all of us who are on his hitlist." They also suggested that the decision to place Duke on the cover was pandering to gay male tastes: "Yoko Ono [also featured in the Duke issue] deserved your cover [but] a middle-aged Japanese woman wouldn't sell issues the way a 'pretty boy' Aryan Nazi would, huh?"<sup>273</sup> That these were the only two reader complaints in response to the interview may suggest that readers of color had already been driven away from *The Advocate* by its longstanding disregard of racial issues, or simply opted instead for one of the increasing number of publications addressed specifically to LGBT people of color.

#### Coverage of Homosexuality in *Ebony* and *Jet*

As I suggested in my introduction, a comparative look at how leading Black publications of the late 20th century handled the topic of homosexuality is suggestive in gauging whether *The Advocate's* coverage of race was typical of how magazines targeted towards a specific identity group dealt with other identity groups outside their stated purview. Content analysis of *Ebony*, *Negro Digest* (later *Black World*) and *Jet* magazines, all products of the Johnson Publishing Company dating back to the 1940s and 1950s,

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<sup>272</sup> Miriam Imblum, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, June 13, 1995: 6

<sup>273</sup> Joan Jett Blakk and Tommi Avicelli Mecca, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, June 13, 1995: 6

respectively, complicates both the claims some scholars have previously made regarding homosexual content in the mainstream Black press and the longstanding perception, by the gay and lesbian mainstream, of the African-American community as exceptionally homophobic. While historians Thaddeus Russell and Gregory Conerly have both suggested that *Ebony* and *Jet* stopped carrying feature stories related to homosexuality in the late 1950s, my research shows that this is not entirely true. Additionally, I suggest that references to homosexuality that appeared in these magazines from the 1960s onward were not as overwhelmingly negative as both scholars suggest and actually contest longstanding misperceptions of African-Americans as more hostile than whites towards homosexuality.

Attempts to gauge the level of homophobia within the Black community have been repeatedly carried out in the last half of the twentieth century. Gregory B. Lewis, in the introduction to his 2003 study of Black and white attitudes towards homosexuality, explained that their findings were, taken in sum, more confusing than conclusive; while research from 1974 showed Blacks to be less homophobic than whites, two other studies from the early and mid-1980s found the reverse to be true. One examination of homophobic attitudes among Blacks from 1993 revealed the complexity of the community's feelings about same-sex sexuality; it found that Blacks were more likely than whites to say that homosexual behavior was "always wrong" but also more likely than whites to view homosexuality as an "acceptable alternative lifestyle."<sup>274</sup> Lewis' own findings, taken from 31 national surveys conducted between 1973 and 2000, suggested that "despite their greater disapproval of homosexuality, blacks' opinions on sodomy

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<sup>274</sup> Gregory B. Lewis. "Black-White Difference in Attitudes Toward Homosexuality and Gay Rights." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* (Spring, 2003): 59-78.

laws, gay civil liberties, and employment discrimination are quite similar to whites' opinions, and African Americans are more likely to support laws prohibiting antigay discrimination.”

The content of *Ebony* and *Jet* provide some illustration of these beliefs, though the magazines' attitudes towards homosexuality, and later AIDS, were arguably much more affirming than the beliefs of the community at large.<sup>275</sup> In response to suggestions that the difference here may have arisen from the fact that publications were staffed by young people who had greater educational and economic status than the majority of the Black community, Lewis' study found that income, education, age, and even religious affiliation had less impact on Blacks' level of homophobia than they did on white Americans'. In much the same way that Johnson Publications had made it the company's mission to mold the African-American community into a vision of bourgeois respectability since the 1950s, it is possible that their efforts to combat homophobia in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s were at least partially intended to remediate the perception of the Black community as bigoted, a reputation which would have made it difficult for Black groups to build political alliances with the typically liberal-leaning organizations supportive of legislation which would have benefited the economically-depressed sectors of the Black community; this would have been a particularly pressing matter in the 1980s when the Republican-led war on welfare made particular scapegoats out of Black women through the image of the “Welfare Queen.”<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Lewis found that “[even] in the most recent survey years, nearly three-quarters of blacks say that homosexual relations are always wrong, and over one-third say that AIDS might be God's punishment for immoral sexual behavior.” Lewis: 75.

<sup>276</sup> For a thorough discussion of American anti-welfare rhetoric from the late twentieth century, see Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

But while the uptick in *Ebony*'s and *Jet*'s coverage of homosexuality within the Black community at this time may be related to this political phenomenon, it is also necessary to acknowledge the contemporaneous effect of a different, even more devastating attack on African-Americans in the form of the AIDS epidemic. More open discussions of homosexuality may have been undertaken to combat the code of silence about same-sex sexuality in the Black community, particularly as this silence was blamed for the rapid spread of AIDS between heterosexual women and men who were publically "heterosexual" but also (quietly) pursued same-sex sexual encounters. While some 1980s-era articles in *Ebony* and *Jet* painted bisexual men in a very negative light, casting them as "double-dipping" deceivers, on the whole, the magazines' efforts to bring same-sex sexuality out in the open and promote its acceptance in the Black community may have been designed to lessen the fears of social and familiar rejection that many same-sex-loving men cited as the main reason for keeping their activities on the "down low."<sup>277</sup>

That Black magazines predicated on the promotion of middle-class values and conformity to the "nuclear family" model would address homosexuality at all may seem surprising, particularly in light of the Black community's reputation for homophobia.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> A note about terminology: For numerous reasons, including the racism of much of the gay and lesbian mainstream and a desire to forge a distinctly Black identity, many African-Americans refer to themselves as "same-sex loving" rather than gay, lesbian, bisexual, or homosexual. Similarly, the term "MSM" (men who have sex with men) is frequently used within the African-American community to describe men who engage in same-sex sex. This is by no means universal, however, with many Blacks embracing the terms "gay," "lesbian," and "bisexual." In this chapter I use all three terms, confining MSM and "same-sex loving" to the description of individuals who do not indicate they identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or homosexual. For a detailed look at MSM in the Black community, see J. L. King, *On the Down Low: A Journey into the Lives of "Straight" Black Men Who Sleep With Men* (New York: Random House, 2004); Keith Boykin, *Beyond the Down Low: Sex, Lies, and Denial in Black America* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2005); and Benoit Denizet-Lewis, "Double Lives on the Down Low." *The New York Times Magazine*, August 3, 2003: 28-37.

<sup>278</sup> See Cheryl Clarke, "The Failure to Transform: Homophobia in the Black Community" (1982), in Barbara Smith,

However, this trend began early on in *Ebony's* pages. Thaddeus Russell observed in his study of twentieth-century Black working-class attitudes towards non-heteronormative sexuality and gender expression that *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines "gave regular, prominent, and positive coverage of the drag balls in Chicago, New York, and Detroit, and through the early 1950s regularly featured articles on homosexuality."<sup>279</sup> Not all of these articles were positive in tone; Russell points to a 1951 *Ebony* article by pastor Adam Clayton Powell Jr., who had spearheaded an anti-"vice" campaign in 1920s Harlem, as indicative of the negative tone conservative Black civil rights activists were taking towards homosexuality. Powell criticized the "trend of parading homosexuals" he observed in public and Blacks who had allowed their "strange sex leanings" to "overtake their duty to God and the community."<sup>280</sup> Another article with a similar tone appeared the same year, but this one seemed designed to appeal to same-sex loving African Americans who might be struggling with their sexual orientation. It recounted renowned male impersonator

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ed., *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Women of Color Press, 1983): 198. See also Cathy J. Cohen and Tamara Jones, "Fighting Homophobia versus Challenging Heterosexism: 'The Failure to Transform' Revisited," in Eric Brandt, ed., *Dangerous Liaisons: Blacks, Gays, and the Struggle for Equality* (New York: The New Press, 1999): 95.

<sup>279</sup> Russell, 107. Russell provides extensive citations for the articles dealing with female impersonators, drag balls, and homosexuality, which include "The Man Who Lived 30 Years as a Woman," *Ebony*, October 1951: 23–26; "Gay Affair Names 'Queen,'" *Jet*, November 15, 1951: 63–64; "Male or Female?" *Jet*, December 13, 1951: 35; "Female Impersonators Hold Costume Balls," *Ebony*, March 1952: 62–67; "The Truth About . . . Female Impersonators," *Jet*, October 2, 1952: 26–31; "Female Impersonators," *Ebony*, March 1953: 64–68; "Women Who Act like Men," *Jet*, April 2, 1953: 26–29; "Female Impersonators Cavort at Chicago Halloween Hijinks," *Jet*, November 13, 1952: 26–27; "Kiss for 'Loveliest Female' Male," *Jet*, December 11, 1952: 26–27; "2,500 Impersonators Frolic at Annual Ball in New York," *Jet*, December 10, 1953: 16–17; "Women Who Pass for Men," *Jet*, January 28, 1954: 22–24; "'Drag' Ball Attracts 3,600," *Jet*, November 11, 1954: 15; and "The Woman Who Lived as a Man for 15 Years," *Ebony*, November 1954: 93–98.

<sup>280</sup> Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., "Sex in the Church." *Ebony*, August 1952: 92–98. Quoted in Russell, 113. Powell was also the man who effectively forced Bayard Rustin to end his public role as an advisor to Martin Luther King, Jr., by threatening not only to publicize Rustin's homosexuality (in order to malign King's morality), but to accuse the two men of having a sexual affair if their organization, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, did not cease challenging the authority of Powell's National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: The Free Press, 2003): 280–301. (NAACP), of which Powell was a leader.

Gladys Bentley's "return" to heterosexuality after years as an openly same-sex loving woman.<sup>281</sup> In spite of these exceptions, discussions of homosexuality and non-normative gender expression refrained from open homophobia.

Russell argues that this trend changed in the middle of the 1950s, and ties the rise of the civil rights movement to a decline in the quantity and tone of articles about homosexuality in *Ebony*, observing that "in the same year the Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Brown*, *Ebony* stopped publishing articles about homosexuality," and asserting again, later, that "after 1954, *Ebony* replaced its articles on homosexuality with sections titled 'Family,' 'Marriage,' 'Children,' 'Military,' and 'Work.'"<sup>282</sup> He posits that the change in *Ebony*'s tone towards homosexuality was reflective of Black leaders' shared belief that "the attainment of full citizenship for African Americans required the creation of a heteronormative black culture."<sup>283</sup> Russell's argument complicates claims by earlier scholars, including Gregory Conerly, that conservatism in *Ebony* and *Jet* grew in the last half of the 1950s because of a severe economic recession in 1954.

Aside from this point of departure, Conerly's 2001 study of homosexual content in 1950s-era Black publications agreed with Russell's findings, deftly demonstrating that *Ebony* and *Jet* contained numerous references to same-sex sexuality during this 1950s. He noted that the magazines usually associated homosexuality with gender nonconformity, and suggested that "gender conformists who engaged in same-sex sexual

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<sup>281</sup> Gladys Bentley, "I Am a Woman Again." *Ebony*, August 1952: 92–98.

<sup>282</sup> Russell notes that *Jet* continued to cover the drag balls, suggesting that this is because it was targeted to a working-class, rather than bourgeois, Black audience and was therefore less concerned with "respectability" than *Ebony*. Russell: 114, 121.

<sup>283</sup> Russell: 116.



behavior were either hiding their 'deviant' gender characteristics or were 'bisexual.'"<sup>284</sup>

Conerly, like Russell, suggests that most of the stories about same-sex sexuality in these two magazines were negative in tone, save for those which dealt with professional female impersonators, though Conerly also incisively observes that the double-standard apparent here was similar to the ways in which mainstream white culture found blacks more acceptable as entertainers than as social equals. In general, *Ebony* and *Jet* were "[ambivalent] about male homosexuality and [intolerant] of lesbianism," Conerly concludes, citing several feature stories which support this assertion.

An exploration of the content of Johnson Publishing's three most well-known and widely-circulated publications—*Jet*, *Negro Digest/Black World*, and *Ebony*--since the 1950s, however, contests some of these scholars' claims. Articles on the "sexual revolution" began to appear in *Ebony*'s pages in the 1960s, books, films, and theater productions with gay themes or subplots were often reviewed in *Negro Digest/Black World*, and news items about homosexuality ran frequently in *Jet*. As I suggested earlier, the twin effects of AIDS and conservative political policies on the Black community also contributed to the increased number of articles about homosexuality, and sexuality more generally, which appeared in the magazines from 1980 through the end of the millennium.

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<sup>284</sup> Gregory Conerly, "Swishing and Swaggering: Homosexuality in Black Magazines During the 1950s." In Delroy Constantine-Simms and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds., *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities* (New York: Alyson Books, 2001): 387.

## The Civil Rights Movement, Black Nationalism, and Homophobia

While the mainstream civil rights movement dominated media coverage of the American Black community in the first half of the 1960s, after 1966, the “Black Power” movement offered a competing set of values. Whereas the civil rights movement spearheaded by leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and Medgar Evers, championed and strove to publically portray bourgeois values, some factions within the Black Power movement criticized these very values, framing Black oppression as rooted in class inequalities rather than simply attributable to racial discrimination. Moreover, many adherents of the Black Power philosophy embraced Black Nationalism and advocated separatism as the only means by which Black Americans could escape racial oppression. While I do not wish to suggest that the Black Power movement was monolithic or that its proponents all subscribed to the same values, the differences *among* proponents of Black Power were less great than the differences *between* them and the established Black civil rights movement.<sup>285</sup>

The differentiation between Black Power ideologies and those espoused by proponents of the civil rights movement is germane to this discussion particularly in relation to each movement’s attitude towards homosexuality. While several historians have argued, persuasively, that the magnitude of Bayard Rustin’s influence on the Black civil rights movement was deliberately obscured by the movement’s leaders because of Rustin’s reputation as a homosexual, the fact remains that the civil rights movement was, on the whole, somewhat more tolerant—which is not to say accepting—of homosexuality

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<sup>285</sup> For nuanced discussion of the complex Black Power movement, see Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African-American Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), and John T. McCartney, *Black Power Ideologies: An Essay in African-American Political Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

than the Black Power movement. In part, this may be attributed to the civil rights movement's belief in coalition politics, which would—and oftentimes did—necessitate a willingness to overlook points of divergence with white liberal organizations in favor of building a broader base of support for Black civil rights. Proponents of Black Power were often skeptical of this tactic; Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, in *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, devote a chapter to debunking the “myths of coalition” and cautioning subaltern groups against being too “sanguine” about the benefit they can expect to receive from coalitions which, Carmichael believes, would not hesitate to betray them in favor their own self-interests.<sup>286</sup>

Beyond this procedural point of departure, the relative silence of the civil rights movement on the topic of homosexuality stood in stark contrast to the Black Power movement's frequent disparaging comments. Though the extent to which the civil rights movement offered, at best, a limited tolerance of homosexuality, there is no analogue in the movement to Eldridge Cleaver's infamous comment that “Homosexuality is a sickness, just as are baby-rape or wanting to become the head of General Motors.”<sup>287</sup> Likewise, Huey Newton remarked that homosexuality was a “perverted...pseudosexuality” which existed in opposition to “normal yearnings for

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<sup>286</sup> Stokely Carmichael and Charles P. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967): 80.

<sup>287</sup> Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968): 110. Biographies of Bayard Rustin have observed that the prevailing attitude towards homosexuality in the pacifist and civil rights organizations of which Rustin was a member was tolerant so long as it did not bring negative publicity to their groups. Needless to say, Eldridge's 1953 arrest for “lewd conduct” with two men in Pasadena, California, was exactly the type of incident which the groups feared. See Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: The Troubles I've Seen* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997): 153-65; John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: The Free Press, 2003): 184-205.

dignity and freedom.”<sup>288</sup> And the Black cultural nationalist movement headed by Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones) virtually mandated a “cruel hostility toward homosexuals” by virtue of its unceasing insistence on Black reproduction. Baraka penned an open letter, never published, to Bayard Rustin, which addressed him as a “nigger traitor” who had, “through your sickness, alienated the Black community” and promised that “one day, you will even be eliminated.”<sup>289</sup> This homophobic attitude was illustrated within the pages of *Black World* by a contributor, who insisted that that “[to] see the white man, the European, as the incarnation of ultimate evil is...our only salvation,” and denounced “Women’s Lib, Gay Lib [and] Sado-masochist Lib” as “social and intellectual forces...presently assailing this country.”<sup>290</sup> As late as the 1990s, Black Nationalists such as Amiri Baraka and Dr. Frances Cress Welsing blamed “Black male passivity, effeminization, bisexuality and Homosexuality” (the latter conditions allegedly resulting from habits learned during incarceration) for the Black community’s economic and social woes.<sup>291</sup>

While it might be expected that John Johnson's stated intention to publicize Blacks who had achieved success, as measured by a decidedly middle-class barometer, would preclude his publications' incorporation of Black nationalism, in fact, *Ebony* and

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<sup>288</sup> Huey Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1973): 251. Quoted in Ogbar, *Black Power*: 101. Ogbar is careful to note, however, that Newton’s attitude towards homosexuality became more accepting around 1970, when Newton publically advocated for an alliance between the black and gay liberation movements.

<sup>289</sup> Imamu Amiri Baraka, “An Open Letter to Bayard Rustin,” February 11, 1971, Bayard Rustin Folder, box 36, Amiri Baraka Papers (Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.). Quoted in Daniel Matlin, “‘Lift Up Yr Self!’ Reinterpreting Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Black Power, and the Uplift Tradition.” *The Journal of American History* (June, 2006): 91-116

<sup>290</sup> Alonzo 4X (Canaday), *Black World*, August 1974: 77-79.

<sup>291</sup> Molefi Asante, *Afrocentricity* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1992): 57; Frances Cress Welsing, *The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colors* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1991): 81. Quoted in Amy Abugo Ongiri, “We Are Family: Black Masculinity and the Black Gay Cultural Imagination.” *College Literature* (February, 1997): 280-294.

some of the other Johnson publications did interweave these values into their content through the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s. Sociologists J. Spencer Condie and James W. Christiansen, in an attempt to gauge the extent to which the Black Power movement had affected African-Americans' self-perception, studied the ads in *Ebony* to see if Afrocentric imagery had increased in the magazine after 1967. They found that advertisements for hair straightening and skin-bleaching products had declined sharply after this time, and that images of Black models with "Afro" hairstyles increased.<sup>292</sup>

While it is important not to overstate the extent to which content analysis of a publication's advertising content would be reflective of the its editorial content, Condie and Christiansen's study nonetheless suggests that the impact of Afrocentric rhetoric on the Black mainstream was, by the 1970s, not inconsiderable. It is outside the scope of my current project to fully assess the extent to which this trend was mirrored in *Ebony's* editorial content but this subject undeniably bears more investigation by other researchers. My own research suggests that, while Afrocentric imagery may have been featured in the pages of *Ebony* and *Jet*, one specific value espoused by Black Nationalists—namely a negative interpretation of homosexuality— were not similarly represented in editorial content. Therefore, it seems a conscious decision was made by the Johnson Publishing Company to reject homophobic Black Nationalist rhetoric, and instead embrace a more tolerant, coalitionist approach to the subject. In general, however, it appears that the Johnson publications were more willing to confront the topic of homosexuality than *The Advocate* was to deal with issues of race and racism.

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<sup>292</sup> J. Spencer Condie and James W. Christiansen, "An Indirect Technique for the Measurement of Changes in Black Identity." *Phylon* (1st Qtr., 1977): 46-54.

## The Black Press: Challenging Homophobic Stereotypes and Discrimination

The fact that books and theater productions with homosexual content were reviewed in *Negro Digest* speaks to the willingness of the magazine and its publisher to broach the subject. A 1963 review of *The Wolfenden Report* took a measured, even sympathetic tone towards homosexuality, observing that "statutes to penalize those engaging in homosexual relationships...were drawn up in other eras and by men with more outrage than understanding of the problem with which we are dealing. In England, recent movements have sought to deal more humanely and realistically with persons accused of committing homosexual acts." According to the reviewer, *The Wolfenden Report* showed "how homosexuals were subjected to extortion and frequently ruin from fear of exposure" and exposed the fact that "often, homosexuals are victims of young 'hustlers' rather than defilers of youth." In spite of referring to homosexuality as a "problem" and a "tragedy," the review's very presence in the pages of *Negro Digest* suggests that the Black press was willing to address this controversial issue.<sup>293</sup>

The same year, the magazine reviewed John Rechy's *City of Night*. This book, described as being set in an "exotic world, peopled by what ordinary society would consider the outcasts, the depraved, perhaps even the criminal. The inhabitants of this world are homosexuals and Lesbians, the 'hustlers' who prey on the homosexuals, the dope pushers of prey on them all, and the 'tourists' from the more acceptable worlds who periodically make excursions of pleasure among the doomed."<sup>294</sup> Contrast this perspective, which sees the exploitation of homosexuals as the novel's true tragedy, with the review published in the *New York Times* that described the novel as being about

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<sup>293</sup> "Books Noted." *Negro Digest*, October 1963: 52.

<sup>294</sup> "Books Noted." *Negro Digest*, August 1963: 97.

“hustlers, queens, and other deviates” who peopled a “country in which the dream of liberty has dissolved into anarchy, happiness has dissolved into hedonism, and normalcy twisted into perversity.” In addition to illustrating the “awful compulsiveness of the homosexual act,” *City of Night* also hinted that “the excitement of this ‘gay’ world...consists so much in its illegality, in its furtive, on-the-lam quality.” As a result, the reviewer reasoned, American society should seek to quash the growth of this homosexual subculture by addressing the “social problem” openly.<sup>295</sup> The *New York Times* review criticized homosexual individuals, whereas the *Negro Digest* review took American society, at large, to task for fostering a climate in which homosexuals were forced to live in a “subterranean” world where they were easy prey for those who would exploit them. This difference in perspective is not altogether surprising, given *Negro Digest*’s position outside of the mainstream American culture represented by the *New York Times*.

Sometimes these reviews treated homosexuality as a non-issue, or at least as less problematic than interracial relationships, betraying a Black nationalist perspective. One example is *Black World*’s 1975 review of the novel *Loving Her* by Ann Allan Shockley, which focused on a Black woman who left her Black male lover for a white woman.

While the review was negative, the fact that the plot focused on a lesbian relationship was not criticized, with more derision reserved for the author's unrealistically rosy depiction of the lesbian lovers and ham-handed characterization of the main male character as a sexist brute. The bulk of the reviewer’s vitriol, however, was directed at the novel’s racial politics: “What bothers me most about *Loving Her* is its racial angle. Has anyone besides

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<sup>295</sup> Peter Buitenhuis, “Nightmares in the Mirror.” *New York Times*, June 30, 1963: 168.

this reviewer noticed how many white lovers populate the Black imagination? This bullshit should not be encouraged."<sup>296</sup> This comment illustrated the widespread aversion, among many Black nationalist groups, to interracial relationships but notably did not suggest that the Black woman was wrong to pursue a same-sex relationship—only wrong to pursue one with a non-Black partner.

News items related to homosexuality appeared regularly in the pages of *Jet*; some dealt with attempts to blackmail homosexuals, some were about sexual predation in prisons, and still others provided updates on the doings of the gay rights movement. An article from 1963 demonstrated *Jet's* openness toward the topic, as it focused on a recently televised roundtable about homosexuality, which had featured doctors, psychologists, and homosexuals themselves. Interestingly, the article directly compared the "hush-hush" status of homosexuality in American culture to the same attitude towards the "race problem."<sup>297</sup> And in 1966, the magazine reported on a "big protest movement launched by the Janus Society of America, a homosexual group, against exclusion from the armed forces."<sup>298</sup> That this protest garnered *Jet's* attention presaged the magazine's longstanding trend of highlighting battles in the public sphere over homophobic discrimination, possibly because discrimination in employment and housing were conditions with which many Black Americans were intimately acquainted and could thus relate to.

When homosexuality was used as grounds for discrimination in housing or employment, the Johnson publications were sympathetic. Comparisons between the

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<sup>296</sup> "Books Noted." *Black World*, September 1975: 89-90.

<sup>297</sup> "Experts Air Views on Lesbians, Homosexuals, in TV Discussion." *Jet*, May 2, 1963: 28-9.

<sup>298</sup> "People Are Talking About." *Jet*, June 16, 1966: 42.



plight of homosexual Americans and Black Americans (to the extent the two were discrete groups) were also common, suggesting that the magazines' editors saw the two groups as somewhat similar in terms of their minority status. This acceptance, however, came over time and not without some resistance from readers. In 1951 a brief announcement about Donald Webster Cory's new book, *The Homosexual in America*, revealed the publication's "surprise twist: Cory insists that he and others of his breed should be considered a minority similar to Negroes in America and the rights of homosexuals should be defended by the American Civil Liberties Union."<sup>299</sup> That this assertion was characterized as a "surprise twist" by *Jet's* reviewer indicates that it was considered a sensational claim to be treated with skepticism. By 1963, however, the magazine reported without skepticism the efforts of the Homosexual League of New York for the "public acceptance of homosexuals as a legitimate minority" and noted that the group's public relations director had "compared the organization's recruiting problems to those of organizations representing minority racial groups."<sup>300</sup>

One *Jet* article from 1975, entitled "Homosexual Regains Top Secret Security Status" acknowledged the struggle of a man who had worked for the government for 18 years but been stripped of his security clearances after his homosexuality became known. The magazine pointedly observed that the man had "[for] ten of those years...expressed privately his sexual preference for men, which did not affect his on-the-job performance of trustworthiness."<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> "Homosexuals and Negroes." *Jet*, November 1, 1951: 57.

<sup>300</sup> "Homosexuals Ask Understanding From Public." *Jet*, November 7, 1963: 19.

<sup>301</sup> "Homosexual Regains Top Secret Security Status." *Jet*, May 29, 1975: 29.

In May, 1974, *Jet* noted in a news briefs that "[a] nationwide movement to enact equal rights for homosexuals has met moderate success," pointing to a "massive bill" passed by Washington, D.C. to ban "discrimination against homosexuals in public and private employment, public accommodations and education." The mention of these specific protections may have been an effort to get readers to see the homosexual rights movement as similar to the Black civil rights movement, since they were the same ones Blacks had fought for throughout the twentieth century.<sup>302</sup> And a somewhat sympathetic tone was taken in a 1976 news brief which reported that [the] homosexuals of the nation were dealt a severe setback when the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling which makes it unlawful for two consenting adults to engage in homosexual acts, even in private."<sup>303</sup>

Even more powerful was the challenge *Jet* issued to the bias against homosexuals holding teaching jobs (a hot-button issue at this time, as Anita Bryant and the Briggs Initiative were still much on the minds of the American public) in January 1979. This challenge was, however, issued in a news brief which otherwise upheld other notions about the "causes" of homosexuality. Entitled "Parents Make Students Gay, Not Homosexual Teachers," the article quoted a psychiatrist who argued that "[The] change of creating a homosexual out of a child not already predisposed are absolutely nil."<sup>304</sup> A

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<sup>302</sup> "Homosexual Rights Show Progress in Some Cities." *Jet*, May 30, 1974: 22.

<sup>303</sup> "Supreme Court Upholds State Homosexual Law." *Jet*, April 15, 1976: 26.

<sup>304</sup> This bold challenge was somewhat compromised by the doctor's suggestion that the "predisposition" he referred to was not innate or biological, and was instead caused by " factors [that] are probably set for the vast majority of homosexuals in the first six years of their lives." He cautioned that family attitudes about sex as a "nasty taboo thing unconsciously support same-sex relations" because they encourage young children to spend time with same-gender friends. "As sexuality develops...from 3 to 6 it is forced in a homosexual direction," he explained. On balance, however, the article ably defended against the charges of Bryant, Briggs, and their supporters. "Parents Make Students Gay, Not Homosexual Teachers." *Jet*, January 4, 1979: 45.

similar challenge had appeared five years earlier in the magazine's "Law and Justice" section of the March 14, 1974 issue of *Jet* appeared a brief article about a Wisconsin man who had been fired from his position as "house parent" at a boarding school due to his homosexuality. The article noted that the man had been fired from his job in spite of having fulfilled all his duties and never having violated any of the institution's rules, and observed that the case could have "enormous implications" and could "hurt homosexuals holding similar jobs throughout the country."<sup>305</sup> Employment discrimination was still a problem of paramount importance to many Black Americans, and presenting these stories as cases of unjust discrimination may have been intended to highlight the similarities between homophobia and racism.

*Jet* and *Ebony* also frequently carried content which challenged perceptions of homosexuals, and homosexual relationships, as unhealthy or dangerous to others. As early as 1967, *Jet* contained a brief blurb in its "Religion" section entitled "Homosexual Acts May Be Beneficial, Priests Agree." "A large majority...agreed that all homosexual acts should not be condemned 'per se' but each instance should be judged individually" and "by the same criteria as a heterosexual marriage."<sup>306</sup> That this news was considered worthy of inclusion in *Jet's* pages is suggestive of the magazine's willingness to acknowledge the homophobic discrimination which pervaded mainstream American culture (Black and white alike) and contradicts any efforts to suggest that the publication was homophobic or indifferent to homosexuals.

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<sup>305</sup> "Wisconsin Man Loses Job Because He Is Homosexual." *Jet*, March 14, 1974: 20.

<sup>306</sup> A more pessimistic view of this article could argue that, because the church being reported on was Episcopal, (and predominantly white), this report was intended to highlight the liberality of the white community. "Homosexual Acts May Be Beneficial, Priests Agree." *Jet*, December 28, 1967: 26.

In a summary of the Kinsey Report from 1978, *Jet* observed that its findings "[contradicted] widely held assumptions that homosexuals are misfits obsessed by sex and ridden by guilt."<sup>307</sup> Similarly, stereotypes of gay men as pedophiles was combated by a brief report in 1979, entitled "Gays Are Not Primarily Quickie, Bathroom Lovers." The article promoted a recently-produced pamphlet from a nonprofit agency which reported that "homosexual men still mostly have long-term relationships" rather than anonymous sexual encounters and reminded readers that "only about 10 percent of reported child molesters are...homosexuals who prey on boys."<sup>308</sup>

In spite of its sensationalistic title, a 1979 article in *Ebony* not only combated homophobia, but additionally challenged prejudice against interracial relationships. "A Visit with World's Most Unusual Family" focused on an "unusual but loving family" headed by an interracial lesbian couple who just had a child via artificial insemination. The couple already had two children from one woman's previous heterosexual relationship, and the numerous photographs accompanying the text depicted the family as happy, loving, and stable; one caption described them as the women as appearing to "be like any other couple." Notably, one photo depicted the two women being physically affectionate with each other; although they were only embracing, this photo might have been met with disgust or anger from homophobic readers. It is clear, however, that *Jet's* editors must have determined that the risk of offending readers with such an image was outweighed by its potentially positive effect. The article was exceedingly positive, explaining the women's coming-out fears, their process of having a baby, and

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<sup>307</sup> "No Such Things As 'Gay Type' Says Kinsey Report." *Jet*, August 31, 1978: 26.

<sup>308</sup> "Gays Are Not Primarily Quickie, Bathroom Lovers." *Jet*, March 15, 1979: 23.

highlighting the normality of their life together.<sup>309</sup> It is hard to image a more salutary feature in a magazine from this era.

### Audience Response

Parallels between racist and homophobic discrimination appeared in the pages of *Ebony* and *Jet* throughout the 1960s and 1970s. These, along with comparisons of gay liberation to the Black civil rights movement, irked some readers, including one woman who wrote in 1978 that

to accept the argument that the two efforts are the same would be to admit to a gross inaccuracy...The anomalous condition of the homosexual is his or her own choice. The condition of race is neither anomalous nor is it a matter of choice. To be Black is not a perversion. To be Black is not an abnormal practice. To be Black is not a religious abomination. To be Black is not a distortion of natural processes. Homosexuality is all of these."<sup>310</sup>

Responses like these were rare and were, moreover, outnumbered by letters to the magazines' editors of *Ebony* and *Jet* that suggested readers accepted the parallels between homophobia and racism. *Ebony* reader Lauren Simone wrote in October, 1971, to object to a homophobic joke carried in a previous issue of the magazine and directly correlated homophobic and racist discrimination, explaining

We consider a 'straight'...person using the term 'fag' or 'faggot' derogatory; just as Blacks consider the word 'nigger' derogatory when used by a white person...We Black homosexuals will be silent no longer. Whether you straights wish to admit it or not, we are the most oppressed group in America. The whites reject us because we are Black and the Blacks reject us because we are a threat to their 'new-found' manhood. I don't think the Black revolution can afford to alienate 3,000,000 potential revolutionaries, so I would advise all of you straights to get your heads together, and get rid of *your* hangups.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Bob Lucas, "A Visit with World's Most Unusual Family." *Jet*, April 5, 1979: 46-49, 56.

<sup>310</sup> Eve Clyburn, Letter to the Editor. *Ebony*, November 1977: 20.

<sup>311</sup> Lauren Simone, Letter to the Editor. *Ebony*, October 1971:4.

Letters in response to *Ebony's* August 1972 "special issue" focusing on the Black male criticized an article by Dr. Alvin Poussaint for promoting homophobia and failing to recognize the interconnectedness of racism, sexism, and heterosexist oppression. Jon L. Clayborn, the chairperson of Rutgers University's Student Homophile League charged that the magazine "depreciated" its "effort[s] to correct [the] image [of black men] by publishing anti-gay statements," and explained that he could "understand Dr. Poussaint's ignorance about gays. As a 'straight male,' he has been conditioned into thinking that homosexuality is unbecoming a man. As a black male, he disparages anything that might threaten the black man's image. As a psychiatrist, he is a member of a profession which has traditionally concocted lies about gays and endeavored to inflict gays with self-hatred...[In] light of that ignorance, Dr. Poussaint should confine his comments to subjects on which he is knowledgeable."<sup>312</sup> Claude Wynne, a "black homosexual and gay activist" wrote to challenge Pouissant's assumption of privilege, which he characterized as a desire to "change places with the white man." Wynne added, "If women and gay men are still going to be oppressed by black heterosexual men after a 'black revolution,' then we will fight that revolution!" and suggested that *Ebony* "publish both an apology for the anti-gay statements and an article favorable to the struggle of gays and women."<sup>313</sup>

Although *Ebony* and *Jet* refrained from issuing apologies of the type that Wynne demanded, positive coverage of homosexuality remained in the magazines through the 1970s, '80s and 1990s. In April 1981, *Ebony* published a long article penned by Dr. June Dobbs Butts entitled "Is Homosexuality a Threat to the Black Family?" This feature debunked numerous myths and concluded that homophobia, not homosexuality, was far

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<sup>312</sup> Jon L. Clayborne, Letter to the Editor. *Ebony*, November 1972: 18.

<sup>313</sup> Claude Wynne, Letter to the Editor. *Ebony*, November 1972: 19.

more likely to destroy the Black community; tellingly, all published reader responses to the article were positive.<sup>314</sup> And a 1982 article on the "new sexual revolution" credited (positively) the "gay and women's movements" for social changes that allowed Black women to assert their sexual needs and preferences, including same-sex desires and relationships."<sup>315</sup>

The advice column published in *Ebony* starting in the 1980s also provided positive, if sometimes pragmatically conservative, advice to readers who wrote to ask questions about same-sex relationships. To the nineteen-year old woman whose mother walked away every time her daughter broached the subject of her homosexuality, the Advisor said sympathetically that she should "leave the subject alone as long as you live at home," quickly adding, "This is not to say that you should hide in the 'closet' or live a lie." The response also implied an acceptance of homosexuality as a basic biological trait in commenting that the mother's reluctance to accept her daughter might be based on the "simplistic and mistaken notion that all it takes to make a lesbian go 'straight' is a date with a savvy male."<sup>316</sup> In 1993, the Advisor spoke sharply to a 21-year old writer who suspected that the 26-year relationship between her mother and her "aunt" was less sororal than romantic ("They sleep in the same bed [and] a few times I have caught them embracing each other in a way that I would only embrace my boyfriend," she fretted). Although the writer said she loved both women, and appreciated their support through her recent pregnancy, she was nonetheless troubled by the thought of their being gay. "Frankly, my dear, the sexual orientation of your adult mother and adult 'aunt' is none of

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<sup>314</sup> Dr. June Dobbs Butts, "Is Homosexuality a Threat to the Black Family?" *Ebony*, April 1981: 138-44.

<sup>315</sup> Bebe Moore Campbell, "Sexual Freedom and the 'Now' Woman." *Ebony*, August 1982: 58-62.

<sup>316</sup> "The *Ebony* Advisor." *Ebony*, October 1988: 98.

your business...Even if your suspicion is justified, your coming unglued about it is not." The Advisor added pointedly, "There may be more important things for you to worry about than what gets your mother and 'aunt' through the night."<sup>317</sup> The live-and-let-live attitude espoused in this response was a far cry from depictions of the Black community as rampantly homophobic.

In general, then, the coverage of homosexuality and same-sex desire in the mainstream Black press was more frequently featured than coverage of racial issues was in the LGBT press, as represented by *The Advocate*. While *Ebony* and *Jet* did contain some homophobic content during the 1950s through the 1970s (the same period during which *The Advocate* carried its most explicitly racist content), after the midpoint of the 1970s homosexuality was generally treated in a respectful way. Furthermore, parallels between the struggle for LGBT rights and the civil rights movement were frequently presented in the editorial content of *Ebony* and *Jet* (and reader responses to it), whereas in *The Advocate*, the congruence of these two movements was commented on infrequently, if at all. In light of the Black press' willingness to cover issues that weren't confined to the topic of race, the failure of the LGBT press to adequately address racial issues is all the more troubling. Unable to be explained away as simply falling outside the scope of the LGBT press, the omission of race-related content in *The Advocate* suggests a deliberate editorial strategy designed to further the magazine's efforts to make the LGBT community appear in that most-commercially-desirable, non-threatening, and privileged of colors: white.

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<sup>317</sup> "The *Ebony* Advisor." *Ebony*, October 1993: 76.



## Conclusion

A survey of the covers of *The Advocate* between January 1994 and July 2006 exposes the continued invisibility of LGBT people of color in the magazine's pages. Just twenty-nine of the issues published during this period featured non-whites, and many of these non-whites were straight (Salma Hayek, Jennifer Beals, Ice-T, Antonio Banderas, Yoko Ono). Considering that *The Advocate* prints 24 issues annually (two of which are "double issues"), this means that just over ten percent of the covers showcased people of color.<sup>318</sup> It is hard, in light of this evidence, to argue with Keith Boykin's assertion that the gay media tokenizes people of color--he refers specifically to Blacks--and that this trend is visible through the "once-a-year effort to 'cover' Black History Month in February" and by the inclusion of only a "select few blacks" in lists such as the "'100 most influential' or '50 most important' or '25 most historically significant' lesbians and gays."<sup>319</sup> *The Advocate* became more inclusive of non-white gays and lesbians over time, but still left them mostly on the sidelines. As LGBT people of color have gained social and political power within the United States, and in their respective communities of origin, they have created institutions and publications to fill the void present in the magazine's pages. While this is an overwhelmingly positive development, it also enables the racial myopia of *The Advocate* by providing it with little reason to change and further cements the belief that "LGBT" and "white" are synonymous.

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<sup>318</sup> The total number of covers for this period was 276.

<sup>319</sup> Boykin, 86.



FIG 3: Cartoon (1970)

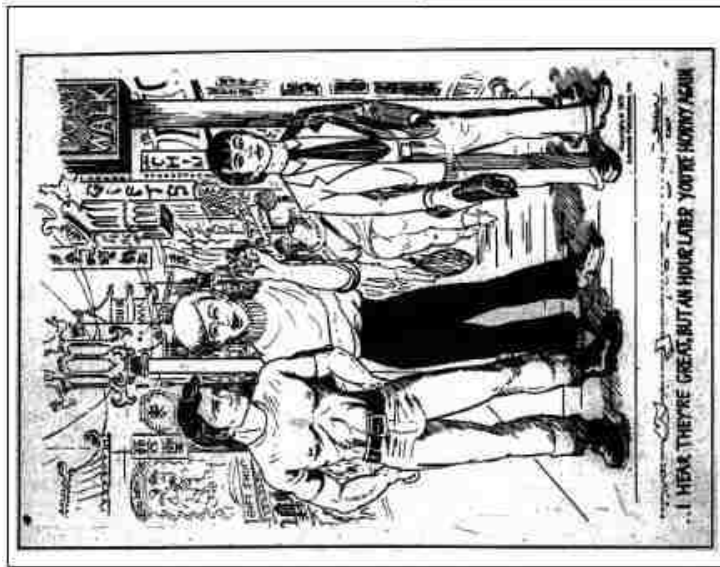


FIG 4: Cartoon (1972)

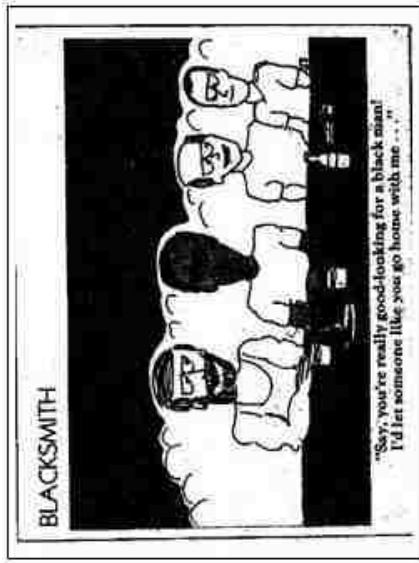


FIG 5: Cartoon (1983)

Could a leopard change its spots? This may have been what *Advocate* readers were thinking in mid-1996, when they read that the magazine had hired the first female editor-in-chief in its thirty-year history. Judy Wieder noted the historical significance of her position in two of her early columns as editor in chief, admitting that “When this magazine first fought its way into existence, it had no lesbian writers, editors, or, most probably, readers” and acknowledging that “when the magazine appointed me as its first female editor in chief, *The Advocate*...made both news and history at the same time.”<sup>320</sup> By now accustomed to the magazine’s predominantly male-centered content, readers likely wondered how the leadership of a woman would affect the gender balance of *The Advocate*; the expectation might have been that Wieder would bring increased attention to issues related to LBQ women.<sup>321</sup> But to make this assumption would have been to wrongly overlook the other factors that informed the magazine’s content, including ongoing gender-based tensions within the LGBT community and concerns about *The Advocate*’s commercial viability. The magazine’s tradition of catering to its male readers, too, could not be lightly cast aside by a new editor, lest *The Advocate* seem to stray too far from its history. The precarious balancing act demanded of Wieder, who had to satisfy these demands at the same time that she tried to expand *The Advocate*’s appeal to LBQ women and maintain its financial well-being, was almost certainly bound to fail—

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<sup>320</sup> Judy Wieder, “From The Editor in Chief.” *The Advocate*, May 13, 1997: 9; Judy Wieder, “From The Editor in Chief.” *The Advocate*, January 19, 1997:6

<sup>321</sup> I will use the abbreviation LBQ—lesbian, bisexual, queer—to qualify my use of the word “women;” while straight women, particularly female entertainers, were featured with some regularity in *The Advocate*’s pages, my concern in this chapter is the marginalization of LBQ women who were, at least presumptively, part of *The Advocate*’s audience. Transgender women were treated differently, as I will discuss in Chapter 5.

or at least to disappoint some readers. Wieder did make some substantive changes to the magazine's content, hiring *The Advocate's* first regular female columnist and devoting coverage to topics of particular concern to LBQ women, but these changes were simultaneously "too much" and "not enough" for some *Advocate* readers who griped that women continued to be marginalized, or complained that women now received too much attention from the historically-male publication.

A more comprehensive understanding of these factors, and of *The Advocate's* history, might have led readers to hold more realistic expectations of the magazine under Wieder's leadership. Trends in *The Advocate's* coverage of women are more correctly understood as resulting from a confluence of internal and external circumstances; among these influential factors are the magazine's own policies, the prejudices and alliances of its staff and ownership, and cultural and political struggles within the LGBT community and American society at large. These have historically skewed the magazine's coverage to reflect the concerns of its male readers and to treat women's issues and LBQ women as marginal. In its efforts to promote the image of a model gay citizen (who was explicitly gendered male), LBQ women have more often been subsumed under the universal "gay" within *The Advocate's* pages than addressed or represented explicitly.

Events and trends within American culture and LGBT culture affected the frequency with which LBQ women were featured within the magazine. The early *Advocate* (1967-1969) from its incarnation as the newsletter of Personal Rights in Defense and Education (P.R.I.D.E.), sought to provide its readers with information and advice about legal issues relating to bar raids, police entrapment, or sodomy laws, which typically affected LBQ women to a lesser extent than gay men. While women's bars were

subject to police raids, and their patrons could be arrested for “solicitation,” gay men were more often the victims of this legal persecution. Additionally, sodomy laws generally ignored women and thus many of the legal issues that *The Advocate* focused on simply had little relevance to its female readers. Accordingly, a major component of *The Advocate*’s news reporting—stories about legal issues—was male-centered. This trend was most prevalent in the magazine’s first two decades, but as sodomy laws vanished from the legal code in many states and as more men sought to adopt children or be custodial parents, the coverage of legal issues expanded to focus on topics that affected both gay men and LBQ women.

In the early 1970s, radical feminism’s pointed critiques of gay male culture as vain, misogynistic, and preoccupied with sexual conquest may have challenged the magazine’s editorial objectivity, making it unlikely that space would be devoted to concerns or events specific to LBQ women, such as pay inequity or sexual harassment. An additional bone of contention was the opposition of many lesbian feminists toward drag queens and female impersonators, both cherished longtime fixtures of gay male culture, which raised questions about the limits of community between the two groups.

Paradoxically, this decade would also see a period when the magazine made deliberate efforts toward gender parity on its staff as well as in its content and readership. It appears that this era of unprecedented (and unsurpassed) coverage of lesbian and feminist concerns at *The Advocate* was due to several factors that dovetailed to make LBQ women, at least temporarily, a desirable part of *The Advocate*’s readership. These included a new attitude towards women on the part of the magazine’s publisher, the nationwide battle for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, and the ascendancy of

liberal feminism in American political culture. Interestingly, however, this period culminated in an editorial column that stated categorically that *The Advocate* was, always had been, and always would be a “gay men’s magazine.” Notably, however, this column also stated that the magazine would continue to publish items of interest to gay male *and* lesbian readers, which implies that editors envisioned LBQ women as simply being a subset of the gay male community. In so doing, *The Advocate* was able to continue promoting an explicitly male subject as the model gay citizen while still purporting to serve as the premier news source for the entire gay community.

In addition to the magazine’s internal politics, three cultural cataclysms shaped *The Advocate*’s coverage of LBQ women in the 1980s. Halfway through the decade, the AIDS epidemic began its decade-long domination of the magazine’s content, and the widespread conception of the disease as a gay male issue contributed to the marginalization of LBQ women in *The Advocate*. Secondly, a battle within the lesbian community over pornography and sexual role-playing brought about the so-called “sex wars” of the 1980s, which similarly influenced *The Advocate*’s inclusion of women during this decade. The magazine demonstrated its approval of LBQ women who criticized the anti-pornography movement and praised modes of sexual expression—casual sex, public sex, BDSM—popular in the gay male community, while their opponents were largely invisible.<sup>322</sup> The “sex positive” LBQ women’s open admiration of, and desire to emulate, gay male culture was implicitly approved of by *The Advocate*, as it brought LBQ women into closer alignment with the gay male culture that the

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<sup>322</sup> BDSM is the widely-used abbreviation for a variety of sexual practices—bondage, domination, sadism, and masochism. While practitioners of BDSM fall all along the spectrum of sexual orientation, LBQ women’s embrace of BDSM was a politically charged issue in the 1980s because of the power inequalities inherent in these practices.

magazine was positing as universal. Thirdly, the 1980s saw a seemingly-sudden emergence of a sub-set of the lesbian community which was self-consciously fashionable, upwardly-mobile, and consumption-oriented, creating tension within the lesbian community at the same time as it provided fodder for magazine features covering this rift. Also significant during this period was the rise of the New Right, which necessitated that the gay and lesbian communities mobilize en masse to ward off its attacks. In order to gather together as large a force as possible to follow its political guidance, *The Advocate* was compelled to include material likely to appeal to lesbian readers in the hopes of winning their political allegiance.

While coverage of AIDS continued into the 1990s, *The Advocate's* content was shaped by the influence of the newly-emergent rhetoric of queer nationalism. Emerging in the early 1990s, queer nationalism suggested that gay men and LBQ women had more in common with each other than with non-queer people. While this notion had been espoused before by LGBT activists—most notably during the pre-Women's Liberation era—it had been increasingly regarded with skepticism by both gay men and lesbian women whose collaborations had been stymied by what seemed like unbreachable differences in political and personal priorities and lifestyles; during the 1990s, groups like Queer Nation resurrected this old idea in an impassioned and very public manner.<sup>323</sup> During the early years of the 1990s, the presence of women in the magazine's pages jumped significantly, which suggests that its then-editor in chief, Richard Rouillard, was

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<sup>323</sup> On queer nationalism, see Brian Walker, "Social Movements as Nationalisms or, On the Very Idea of a Queer Nation." In Jocelyne Couture, Kai Nielsen, and Michel Seymour, eds., *Rethinking Nationalism* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1998): 505-547; Esther Kaplan, "A Queer Manifesto." *Village Voice*, August 14, 1990: 36; E.J. Rand, "A Disunited Nation and a Legacy of Contradiction: Queer Nation's Construction of Identity." *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (October 2004): 288-306.



supportive of the idea of queer nationalism. The mid-1990s also saw *The Advocate* appoint its first female editor-in-chief, which indicated some progress in terms of gender equality on the magazine's staff, and also seemed to bode well in terms of similar parity in content. But this decade also saw the founding of several well-funded gay male-oriented lifestyle magazines, such as *Out* and *Genre*, and in order to boost its sales over its competitors', *The Advocate* trained its focus, under the leadership of Judy Wieder, on scoring exclusive interviews with celebrities and public officials eager to reach the LGBT community. Through the end of the decade, gender equality in the pages of *The Advocate* remained but an elusive dream for frustrated female readers.

In 2004, *The Advocate* was again helmed by a female editor in chief, Anne Stockwell, but her tenure, like Wieder's, resulted in no appreciable increase in terms of the magazine's attention to women's or lesbian issues, an observation borne out by a content analysis of *The Advocate* conducted in 2009.<sup>324</sup> Without dismissing the economic arguments that have commonly been used to justify and account for the absence of women in the pages and the audience of *The Advocate*, this chapter will focus on teasing out other factors, including editorial biases and cultural shifts, that influenced the degree to which the magazine attempted to integrate LBQ women (and to a lesser extent bisexual women) into the model gay minority it attempted to construct.

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<sup>324</sup> Dan Michel, *Measuring Perspective: How Gender, Sexuality, and Rapid Changes in Leadership Affected Editorial Decision-Making at The Advocate Newsmagazine*. M.A. thesis, University of Missouri, 2009: 112.

### A Man's World: The Early Years of *The Advocate*

In 1996, Judy Wieder remarked on the groundbreaking nature of her appointment to *The Advocate*'s chief editorial position, marveling that she was now in charge of a magazine that, at the time of its creation, had no female staff members, writers, or (she imagined) readers.<sup>325</sup> While her observations about the magazine's staff were accurate, women were never *completely* absent from *The Advocate*, although their inclusion was marginal at best. They were mentioned fleetingly, sometimes sarcastically, but nonetheless enjoyed at least a passing acknowledgement from *The Advocate*. Although it may seem an odd way to prove this point, a quantitative analysis of lesbian representation in *The Advocate* demonstrated that the number of news articles in which LBQ women were mentioned *declined* between 1970 and 1974, indicating that there were semi-regular references to women by the start of the decade. While the researcher suggested that this decline was caused by "sexist assumptions" on the part of the magazine's leadership, it would be historically inaccurate to ignore the influence of external forces on *The Advocate*.<sup>326</sup>

Any examination of the lesbian and gay community during the late 1960s and early 1970s has to acknowledge the growing conflict between male and female homophile groups in this era. While the two major organizations, the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, maintained a polite, if distant, relationship during the late 1950s and early 1960s, by the last years of the 1960s they were at odds with each other. Gay men's sexist attitudes towards women, and LBQ women's attitude of moral

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<sup>325</sup> Judy Wieder, "From The Editor in Chief." *The Advocate*, May 13, 1997: 9;

<sup>326</sup> Ronald Joseph Nerio, *Lesbian Representation in the Gay Press: A Content Analysis of The Advocate, 1970-1992*. Master's thesis, Michigan State University, Department of Sociology and Urban Studies Program, 1994. Unpub.

superiority toward men were a large part of the problem. More serious was the question of a common cause—gay men’s groups tended to focus on repealing the sex laws that were frequently used against them, while LBQ women were less affected by police raids and entrapment and focused on lobbying against the divorce and child custody laws that victimized them. Both LBQ women and gay men evinced some displeasure in having to focus on issues that they felt did not concern them, making cooperative efforts difficult.<sup>327</sup>

By 1970, the Daughters of Bilitis had openly broken with the homophile movement and aligned themselves with lesbian feminism. Del Martin, founder of the DOB, published an incendiary essay in *The Advocate* that October, leaving little question about lesbian feminist attitudes towards the gay liberation movement. The reign of radical feminism as the “dominant tendency within the movement” also affected *The Advocate*’s coverage of lesbian concerns.<sup>328</sup> Radical feminism disparaged men, both gay and straight, found transvestitism and transsexuals appalling “parodies” of female oppression, and promoted an anti-capitalist, anti-materialist message that was a difficult fit with the consumption-happy theme of *The Advocate*.

The internal biases of the *Advocate* staff, as well as its gendered composition, played a role in determining the quantity of coverage LBQ women would receive in the magazine’s pages. There were few female writers, and those that appeared most regularly were advice columnists, shoring up the impression that women were most useful when they were assisting men. Additionally, the men at the helm of *The Advocate* evidenced

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<sup>327</sup> See Chapter 6 of Adam Nagourney and Dudley Clendenin, *Out For Good: The Struggle to build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999) for an extended discussion of the tensions complicating gay male and lesbian political cooperation in the 1970s.

<sup>328</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*: 5.

some sexist attitudes, as demonstrated by an editorial from 1973 that mocked the efforts of the feminist movement to encourage gender-neutral language.

Also important to remember is that in the early 1970s, most of the public figures associated with the gay liberation and gay rights movements were men, a situation that not only reflected the general status of women in American society at the time, but also confirmed an existing tendency for “the media or government (institutions both dominated by men) to seek out representatives of the homosexual rights movement, they gravitated toward the men.”<sup>329</sup> Ironically, this period was also the height of the women’s liberation movement in the United States, but the attempts of LBQ women to assume leadership positions in many gay organizations were arguably less successful than the women’s movement at large. It must be noted, however, that many LBQ women and bisexual women were beginning, at this time, to devote their energies towards the women’s movement, and may have simply opted against attempts to lead or change irredeemably sexist institutions and organizations. Whether LBQ women’s exclusion from leadership roles was due to sexism among gay men or was the result of their own choices, this absence accounts for the relative paucity of lesbian representation in most of the magazine’s reports on events and personalities in the gay liberation or gay rights movements during this era.

#### Gender Conflict in the Homophile and Gay Liberation Movements, 1955-1970

Historian Rodger Streitmatter has characterized the relationship between women’s liberation and gay liberation as “murky,” explaining that “because of the commonality of

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<sup>329</sup> Dudley Clendenin and Adam Nagourney, *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999): 169.

LBQ women, the two movements were destined to remain married, but that marriage would be a rocky one.”<sup>330</sup> The foundation of this rocky marriage was to be found in the years preceding women’s and gay lib’s entry into the national consciousness. Forging alliances with gay male organizations was a strategy that the leading lesbian organization of the 1950s had warily accepted for the sake of political expediency. They generally expected little support from gay men about lesbian or women’s issues. The Daughters of Bilitis, founded in 1955, has even had its autonomy denied by historians who characterize it as “nothing more than an assimilationist little ‘ladies’ auxiliary’ of the mostly male Mattachine Society.”<sup>331</sup> Given that one of its missions was to “keep young people out of the bars, to give them an alternative place to socialize with other women,” the DOB already conflicted with the standards of gay male culture, in which bar life (in spite of police raids and harassment) played a major role.<sup>332</sup> Additionally, as one early DOB member put it, “there was...a lot of animosity and resentment [between gay men and lesbians] over the fact it was the gay guys who were creating such havoc with the police—the raids, the indiscriminate sex, their bathroom habits, and everything else.”<sup>333</sup>

Within the pages of the DOB publication *The Ladder*, there were hints that, in some

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<sup>330</sup> Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995): 152.

<sup>331</sup> This mischaracterization originated with the “erroneous description” of the DOB by the Federal Bureau of Investigations in 1956, and has persisted into the new millennium, although many notable scholars have been careful to differentiate between the two groups. Marcia Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*. New York: Carroll and Graf, 2006: xxi, 238. Some early members of the DOB dispute that, claiming that the group had “been in existence for several months before anyone knew that the Mattachine Society existed.” Billie Tallmij (pseud.). “The Teacher.” In Eric Marcus, *Making History*, New York: HarperCollins, 1992: 77. This claim, however, is disputed by an account of the first meeting of the Daughters of Bilitis in October 1955. At this event, the eight cofounders made plans to contact Mattachine and subscribe to its newsletter. Marcia Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*. New York: Carroll and Graf, 2006: 5.

<sup>332</sup> Billie Tallmij (pseud.), “The Teacher.” In Eric Marcus, *Making History*, New York: HarperCollins, 1992: 77.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

respects, LBQ women felt morally superior to gay men; for instance, an article from 1961 drew attention to the high rates of sexually transmitted diseases (“VD”) among gay men as compared to LBQ women.<sup>334</sup>

Additionally, some LBQ women worried that, in regards to women’s rights, gay men were disinterested at best and antagonistic at worst. In 1966, Shirley Willer—who would later serve as the national president of the Daughters of Bilitis—wrote in the DOB newsletter *The Ladder* that

Lesbians have agreed (with reservations) to join in common cause with the male homosexual—her role in society has been one of mediator between the male homosexual and society...there has been little evidence, however, that the male homosexual has any intention of making common cause with us. We suspect that should the male homosexual achieve his particular objectives in regard to his homosexuality he might possibly become a more adamant foe of women’s rights than the heterosexual male has ever been.”<sup>335</sup>

There was a factual basis to Willer’s conjecture, and similar suspicion on the part of some gay men. While LBQ women experienced myriad sexist slights when working with gay men in the homophile movement, male homophile leaders worried that perhaps “[Lesbians] had been so brain-washed by their own favored social and legal status that that they would resist to the hilt their brother-homosexuals’ efforts for betterment.”<sup>336</sup> The ability of male homophiles to refer, straight-faced, to Lesbians’ social status as “privileged” bears out LBQ women’s characterization of gay men as out-of-touch with the social and economic disadvantages women faced and, further, serves as evidence of

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<sup>334</sup> “Current Research Trends.” *The Ladder*, November 1961: 6-9.

<sup>335</sup> Shirley Willer, “What Concrete Steps Can Be Taken to Further the Homophile Movement.” *The Ladder*, 1966. See the interview with Willer in Eric Marcus’ *Making History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992: 127-35) for more discussion of DOB’s attitudes towards alliances with male-centered gay rights groups.

<sup>336</sup> Dorr Legg, “Masculine Viewpoint.” *The Ladder*, May 1961: 25-6.

why many LBQ women may have felt more at home in the women's movement than in homophile or gay liberation groups.

Following the advent of women's liberation, many gay men and LBQ women publicly questioned whether they had the common cause needed for their cooperation in gay rights/gay liberation groups. In the October 1971 newsletter of New York's men-only gay liberation group, *Homosexuals Intransigent!*, one man argued against joint efforts, using rhetoric that confirmed LBQ women's worst suspicions of gay men's misogyny. According to the author, the only "common ground" between male and female homosexuals was heterosexual oppression, and though he half-heartedly suggested that men and women would "perhaps each work on similar problems and projects...for instance, both attack simultaneously the sodomy and solicitation laws... we need not do so together."<sup>337</sup> The reason that gay men and LBQ women should work separately, the author suggested, was that "hetero forms of organization"—that is, co-gender groups—would force gay men and women "to think and act as hets." He observed that lesbian groups were quite comfortable excluding men, "yet men have, curiously, permitted, even encouraged LBQ women to participate in men's functions." Why did these men tolerate "this violation of the integrity of their environment, this interruption of their natural behavior?" The author claimed that it was the result of internalized homophobia—" [gay men] feel they *should* relate to women in preference to men"—and also because

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<sup>337</sup> HI!'s founder, self-proclaimed "intellectual elitist" Craig Schoonmaker, made no bones about his contempt for women, as demonstrated by numerous essays in the HI! Newsletters, including one in that he proudly recounted how he had greeted one female patron of a gay bar as a "stupid cunt." Craig Schoonmaker. "Homosexuality and Lesbianism: Parallel But Not The Same." *Ideas from Homosexuals Intransigent!/New York*, October 1971.

“homosexuals...have taken it upon themselves to redress the indignities done to women by men in the past.” This guilt was “unearned,” the author asserted, further claiming that

*homosexual* men are not responsible for abuse of women in the past or present. It is hets who reduce women to wives instead of persons; to baby factories; to cheap household labor; to sex objects... *We* have nothing to do with any of this... It's time for us to say 'Don't blame me for troubling your life. Right now, you are interfering with mine. I want to live my life among men and manly things. You don't belong. So get the hell out of my bar, my dance, my party, my life.'

Lesbian separatists and radical feminists could not have asked for any clearer validation of their suspicions about gay men's misogyny.

Although it is difficult to separate the two completely, by the mid-1960s concerns based on gender, rather than sexual orientation, were increasingly the focus of the Daughters of Bilitis. Historian Marcia Gallo observed that “[while] the organization had always addressed itself to the concerns of LBQ women as women in a sexist society, by 1966 the greater militancy that was being embraced by the homophile groups in tactics was also being expressed by DOB in ideology.”<sup>338</sup> As feminism became ever more central to the DOB's platform, some members acknowledged that male homophiles' failure to address gender inequality might make it difficult for women's and men's groups (like the Mattachine Society) to work together. DOB president Shirley Willer's 1966 speech at the National Planning Conference of Homophile Organizations suggested that homophile organizations would be more successful if they attempted to recruit more female members and treat “women's civil rights” as an issue of equal importance to homophile groups as “male homosexuals' civil liberties.”<sup>339</sup> She reminded the audience that

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<sup>338</sup> Marcia Gallo, *Different Daughters*: 130.

<sup>339</sup> Shirley Willer, “What Concrete Steps Can Be Taken to Further the Homophile Movement?” *The Ladder*, November 1966: 17-18.



“[although] the Lesbian occupies a ‘privileged’ place among homosexuals, she occupies an under-privileged place in the world.”<sup>340</sup> In spite of Willer’s pleas, the inability or unwillingness of many gay men to acknowledge women’s underprivileged social status, or to treat it as relevant to the homophile cause, eventually led the DOB to break away from the homophile and gay liberation movements. It would cast its lot instead with the feminist movement.<sup>341</sup>

The Daughters of Bilitis decided at their national convention in July, 1970, to allow men to become associate members of the organization, a move meant to “promote cooperation within the homophile community.”<sup>342</sup> This effort met with little success, and late in the year, *The Advocate* reprinted an inflammatory essay by DOB founder Del Martin that bitterly decried the sexist attitudes she felt pervaded the homophile movement. This piece was remarkable not only for its vitriol but, as historians Adam Nagourney and Dudley Clendenin have observed, because it came from “a loyal soldier of the homophile movement, who had once gladly stood with men under the supposedly unifying banner of gay liberation.”<sup>343</sup> Martin announced, “I have been forced to the realization that I have no brothers in the homophile movement,” and took to task male

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid. It is interesting that Willer mentioned—and seemed to accept—the perception of LBQ women as a “privileged” class among homosexuals; this claim, made by male homophiles, was based, in part, on the fact that LBQ women were not as subject to police persecution as male homosexuals. But this fact itself was based on social and economic discrimination against women—entrepreneurs simply did not create as many public spaces (like nightclubs and bars) for female homosexuals as they did for gay men, so it stands to reason that women would suffer less from police entrapment. Had there been as many public spaces for LBQ women to congregate as there were for gay men, the image of LBQ women as “privileged” might quickly have dissipated. On lesbian social life in the 1950s and 1960s, see Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993) and Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Penguin, 1991).

<sup>341</sup> For a thorough discussion of the relationship between lesbian and male homophile groups, see Kristin Esterberg, “From Accommodation to Liberation: A Social Movement Analysis of LBQ women in the Homophile Movement.” *Gender and Society*, September 1994: 424-443.

<sup>342</sup> “DOB Convention Votes Loose Federation.” *The Advocate*, August 5, 1970: 5.

<sup>343</sup> Dudley Clendenin and Adam Nagourney, *Out for Good*: 95.

homophile organizations, the LBQ women who “demean themselves by accepting ‘women’s status’ in these groups,” and gay bars that provided “no time or place for forming friendships, for exchanging ideas, for camaraderie—only for the dispensing of drinks and sex partners.” She even included *The Advocate* in her list of offenders, bidding farewell to “all the ‘representative’ homophile publications that look more like magazines for male nudist colonies. Goodbye to the biased male point of view. The editors say they have encouraged women to contribute, but that they don’t. Nor will they until the format is changed, policy broadened, and their material taken seriously.” Martin addressed the male homophile community in general—“We joined with you in what we mistakenly thought was a common cause. A few of you tried...but you are still too few, and even you fall short of the mark” –and male homosexuals as individuals, who she called “helpless beings who are compelled to grope for their very existence... You too are victims of our culture... programmed by society for your role of supremacy.” She concluded

I must go where...there is still hope, where there is possibility for personal and collective growth. It is a revelation to find acceptance, equality, love and friendship—everything we sought in the homophile community—not there but in the women’s movement. I will not be your ‘nigger’ any longer.<sup>344</sup>

*The Advocate*’s editors noted in a sidebar to the essay that Martin’s “free-swinging candid remarks...will anger and dismay many male homosexuals...There is much to think about in what she says.” One historian wryly noted, however, that the essay ran “deep in the paper...after the standard diet of stories about men fighting for the right to

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<sup>344</sup> Del Martin, “Female Gay Blasts Men, Leaves Movement.” *The Advocate*, October 28, 1970: 21-22.

dance, or men wanting to hold hands in bars, or men being arrested for cruising, or men battling restrictions on pornography.”<sup>345</sup>

Like Martin, other LBQ women had reached the limits of tolerance when it came to their second-class status in the homophile movement and gay liberation. Gene Damon, editor of DOB’s magazine *The Ladder* wrote in to *The Advocate* two issues after Martin’s essay was published, commending the author and agreeing that “all over the country, lesbians are recognizing that the first and primary battle for lesbians’ rights is the obtaining of women’s rights,” and also attempting to smooth the waters by reminding readers that “[t]his does not mean that the lesbians...wish the male homosexual movement ill, simply that the goals of the lesbian and the goals of the male homosexual are far, far apart.”<sup>346</sup> Also in this issue was an essay entitled “Males vs. Females: A Two-Way Problem,” that was written in response to Martin’s remarks. In an article riddled with generalizations and bereft of empirical evidence, author Ann Paylor wrote that “hostility...from the female to the male” was found “in equal, if not greater strength” than misogyny in the gay community, implying that lesbian oppression was the result of their own anti-male attitudes. Additionally, she suggested, the antipathy resulted from insecurity: “When we’ve succeeded in developing our own sexual image to the point where what is different from ourselves does not produce anxiety...the antagonism between male and female homosexuals will no longer exist.”<sup>347</sup> Paylor’s conclusions may

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<sup>345</sup> Dudley Clendenin and Adam Nagourney, *Out for Good*: 97.

<sup>346</sup> Gene Damon, “Del’s Goodbye.” *The Advocate*, November 25, 1970: 22.

<sup>347</sup> Paylor’s penchant for generalizations also manifested itself in her blithe comment, “It is generally accepted that the majority of the gay population come from homes in which the relationship between their parents was less than ideal.” Ann Paylor, “Males vs. Females: A Two-Way Problem.” *The Advocate*, November 25, 1970: 26-7.

have been based on speculation, but her essay likely appealed to gay male readers feeling defensive after Martin's attacks.

The December, 1970 issues of *The Advocate* upheld Martin's charges, reflecting sexism both among the magazine's staff and its readership. A letter from the December 9, 1970 issue illustrated perfectly Martin's charges. The male writer reacted sarcastically to Martin's revelations—"After 15 years (15!!!!), she discovered gay guys don't much care for dykes. Does she lack smarts!" The author's animosity extended to all women, however; he wrote, "I have little use for females since they make inferior co-workers (despite what Lib has to say, my own 25-plus years working with and around the stupid things makes me wonder how the hell most of them find their way to work every day, if they show up that often)."<sup>348</sup> In the same issue, veteran activist Jim Kepner's regular column "Angles on the News" addressed the question, "When Did Gay Militancy Begin?" Though the essay took up the better part of two full pages in *The Advocate*, not once did Kepner mention the contributions of lesbian groups like the Daughters of Bilitis, the influence of the feminist movement on the radicalization of the homophile movement, or even once deign to use the word "woman." In *The Advocate* version of the struggle for gay rights, women were clearly, as Del Martin had suggested in her letter, "an afterthought that never happened."<sup>349</sup>

Martin herself was published again in *The Advocate* only a few weeks after her initial charges. Following up on her last essay, Martin clarified her intention. Her purpose, she said, had simply been to get gay men to realize that "the reason that there

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<sup>348</sup> Don Manning, "Bitchy Issue." *The Advocate*, December 9, 1970: 23.

<sup>349</sup> Jim Kepner, "Angles on the News." *The Advocate*, December 23, 1970: 2, 10; Del Martin, "Female Gay Blasts Men, Leaves Movement." *The Advocate*, October 28, 1970: 22.

are so few women up front is that homosexual men have been just as oppressive to lesbians as heterosexual men have been to women in general...In both societies, women are inferior, subservient—or invisible.” She reported that “[with] few exceptions, lesbians have reacted promptly and simply with, ‘Right on, Sister!’ Many male homosexuals have either been surprised, puzzled, angered or hurt...But others have said, ‘Tell us, what can we do?’” But, Martin said, the protests had come “too late. Lesbians are becoming more and more committed to the women’s movement. That must be their primary concern. They have little or no time or energy left over for a male-dominated homophile community where they must scream to be heard.” If there was any hope to win back the loyalty of LBQ women, gay men would have to interrogate their own internal sexism, “change [their] reading, speech, and thought patterns,” and prepare to shoulder the burden LBQ women had carried for so long in their work with the homophile movement (“being transitional, exercising patience and understanding, mediating disputes, reinforcing crushed egos”). The question, Martin wrote, “is not ‘What can we do?’ It is, ‘What are you willing to do?’”<sup>350</sup>

In spite of Martin’s claim that LBQ women generally supported her stance, one female reader wrote to criticize Martin’s actions as a “cop-out,” insinuating that though “we cannot judge one another’s motives...everyone knows that it is more acceptable to be a member of Women’s Lib than any gay organization.” Further, this writer observed, the women’s movement already enjoyed a “well-filled and free-flowing river of effort,” and while “Women’s Lib has *all* women to draw from in its just and necessary

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<sup>350</sup> Del Martin, “Message to Males: ‘Find Out Where Your Heads are Really At.’” *The Advocate*, December 23, 1970: 14.

battles...Gay groups have only themselves to turn to.”<sup>351</sup> If the gay movement foundered and failed, the writer implied, the defection of LBQ women to Women’s Liberation would be largely to blame. This sentiment was dominant in the lesbian community, as evidenced by a variety of articles published in *The Ladder* between 1967 and 1972; one writer, theorizing on the source of the antagonism some LBQ women held for the women’s movement, recollected, “When I suggested consciousness raising to the women in GLF, they were suspicious. They thought I was a Pied Piper wooing them into Women’s Liberation instead of fighting homosexual oppression by working through GLF.”<sup>352</sup>

### Lesbian Feminism and Gay Liberation

In an *Advocate* article from 1970 documenting a meeting between gay liberationists and women’s liberationists, the author reported, “It was generally agreed that Gay Lib requires cooperation between oppressed groups. Most males felt there was a special intimate connection with Women’s Lib—though the women seemed less sure what it was. They agreed that there was in common a deep-seated grievance against hetero males and against society’s role requirements.”<sup>353</sup> The uncertainty about how much gay lib and women’s lib had in common made cooperation between the two challenging. Del Martin’s letter perfectly illustrated the rocky relationship between lesbian feminism and gay liberation in the early years of the 1970s. The conditions that had spurred her to renounce her devotion to the homophile movement were well-known to both gay men

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<sup>351</sup> Rob Willis, “Defecting Women.” *The Advocate*, December 23, 1970: 25.

<sup>352</sup> Kane Kelley, “Conflict of Identity.” In Barbara Grier and Coletta Reid, eds., *The Lavender Herring: Lesbian Essays from The Ladder* (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1976): 132.

<sup>353</sup> “Women’s Lib Meets Gay Lib at Berkeley.” *The Advocate*, March 1970: 7.

and LBQ women. Many chapters of the two most influential “gay lib” groups—the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists Alliance—were rent by tension between male and female members, a situation that was reflected in smaller organizations throughout the country. Generally, membership was largely male, and gay male culture shaped not only its concerns but also its social events —parties that were heavy on cruising, light on audible conversation, leaving many women feeling alienated. As a result, lesbian members often opted to break with the organizations in order to form new ones that would focus on lesbian and feminist issues. The separatist impulse impeded cooperation with male-dominated groups like the GLF and the GAA, meaning that when these groups’ events were covered in the media, LBQ women were unlikely to be part of the story.

In addition to this purely material explanation of why gay women were absent from the pages of *The Advocate*, lesbian feminists had serious ideological conflicts with gay liberation and with gay male culture in general, that likely influenced the extent to which a publication focused on gay lib and gay male culture would promote them. Though there were theoretical variations within lesbian feminism, its advocates shared a commitment to eradicating traditional gender roles, eschewed association with men, and insisted that “male culture,” with its emphasis on genital sexuality, materialism, and power needed to be dismantled so that a new, non-patriarchal order could be born. The manifesto of the Radicalesbians, a group founded by female former members of New York’s chapter of the Gay Liberation Front, also challenged the essentialist view of sexuality that *The Advocate* embraced. “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...In a society in which men do not oppress women, and sexual expression is allowed to follow feelings, the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality would disappear.”<sup>354</sup> While more radical theories of gay liberation supported this belief, *The Advocate* was more moderate, and its argument for gay civil rights (based on the idea of homosexuals as a discrete and oppressed “class” of people) necessitated an essentialist view of homosexuality.<sup>355</sup> There would have been little incentive, therefore, for *The Advocate* to promote or publicize a movement whose beliefs effectively contradicted its party line. As cultural feminism, with its emphasis on women’s innate and immutable characteristics, gained popularity within the broader women’s movement, *The Advocate* tended to devote more coverage to feminist projects (like the Equal Rights Amendment) and women’s issues than during the period when radical and lesbian feminism were more visible.

Finally, the significance of gender roles for lesbian feminists and gay men differed vastly, that likely made the latter group less than sympathetic to the former’s arguments. Historian Joanne Meyerowitz has observed that gay male culture of the 1970s distanced itself from its countercultural origins and gravitated towards more liberal or normative standards of appearance and behavior, embracing some parts of normative gender roles and prizing a “macho” and virile look for men.<sup>356</sup> One of the key tenets of feminism, on the other hand, was that gender roles were limiting and oppressive for both men and women and ought to be eradicated. This subject was the source of conflict in

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<sup>354</sup> Radicalesbians, “The Woman-Identified Woman.” (1970) Reprinted in Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, eds., *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women’s Liberation Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 2000): 107-9.

<sup>355</sup> For an excellent illustration of the essentialist perspective promoted in the magazine, see Jim Kepner, “Community: Growth of the Concept for Gays,” *The Advocate*, July 18, 1973: 37-8.

<sup>356</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002): 258.



itself, but also contributed directly to another point of departure that would challenge the relationship between gay male culture and lesbian feminism: the issues of transvestitism, drag, and transsexuality.

### The Transsexual Issue

For a variety of reasons, many lesbian feminists and radical feminists had a deep antipathy toward drag queens, female impersonators, and transsexual women. One highly-publicized expression of this sentiment occurred at the West Coast Lesbian Conference held at UCLA in April, 1973. A preoperative transsexual woman named Beth Elliott had been invited to perform her folksongs in front of an audience of nearly 1300 women, but when she took the stage a furor erupted in the audience. Elliott was well-known to radical feminists and LBQ women in San Francisco, many of whom were in attendance at the conference, and the reputation that preceded her wasn't working in her favor that evening. Elliott had earlier attempted to join the San Francisco chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis which, according to a report by *The Advocate*, spent eighteen months debating whether or not a transsexual woman should be admitted to the group.<sup>357</sup> Founder Del Martin's opinion—"DOB has always been set up as a women's organization"—was shared by the majority of the group, and the chapter decided, in January 1973, against allowing Elliott to join.<sup>358</sup> As a result, the twenty-eight members who had voted for admission walked out of the meeting, effecting a split that caused the chapter's demise. Accordingly, Elliott was blamed for the group's disintegration. However, given the ideological differences amongst DOB members demonstrated by the 28-to-35 vote tally

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<sup>357</sup> "Transsexual Ban Splits DOB Unit." *The Advocate*, January 3, 1973: 14.

<sup>358</sup> "Editorial." *Lesbian Tide*, December 1972: 21.

on Elliott's case, it is likely that the group was struggling for cohesion long before the transsexual issue arose. Compounding Elliott's problems was the accusation of one conference attendee who claimed that Elliott had attempted to rape her. A melee was narrowly averted when one of the organizers, Jeanne Cordova, requested that the audience vote on allowing Elliott to perform. The "pros" eked out a majority over the "cons," but bad feelings persisted.

The keynote speaker, Robin Morgan, was livid over what she interpreted as yet another attack by patriarchy (embodied by Elliott) against women, and revised her intended speech to focus on the Elliott debacle and more broadly on the issue of transsexuality (and by association, female impersonation and cross-dressing). She angrily criticized the conference organizers, who had, she claimed, "in one stroke, [by] inviting this man, directly insulted their San Francisco sisters...and indirectly insulted every woman here," before lighting into Elliott, who she derided as "an infiltrator" who had "the mentality of a rapist."<sup>359</sup>,<sup>360</sup> Continuing, she fumed that female impersonators, cross-dressers, and transsexuals "parod[ied] female oppression and suffering as 'camp'" and likened them to white performers who used blackface for humorous purposes. She concluded, "In our mothers' names and in our own, we must not call him sister."<sup>361</sup>

While many members of the crowd may have vehemently disagreed with Morgan's remarks, the published account of the conference in *The Advocate* was entitled "Transsexual Issue Plagues Lesbians," so anyone who did not take the time to read the

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<sup>359</sup> Robin Morgan, *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977): 171; Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002): 260.

<sup>361</sup> "Transsexuals Hex Robin Morgan." *The Advocate*, July 18, 1973: 21.

article in full was left with the impression that transsexuals and LBQ women (presented in the headline as a monolithic group) were completely at odds with each other.<sup>362</sup> One challenge to this assumption came in a letter from *Advocate* reader Angela Keyes Douglas, who wrote in response to the article on the conference that “[t]he small core of anti-transsexual genetic females in DOB who forced [Elliott] out are a sickening example of stupid blindness ... Few people are more oppressed than transsexuals, and the recent actions of the DOB have only added to this oppression.”<sup>363</sup>

Two weeks after the article on the West Coast Lesbian Conference was published, *The Advocate* carried a column that asked, “Are transvestites hurting the gay movement’s struggle to get respectability?” Observing that “transvestites are now treated by the gay movement the way Gays used to be treated by straight liberal movements,” author Arthur Evans opined that “[prejudice] against transvestites divides us against ourselves in a way that plays into the hands of those who want to oppress *all* gays, whether transvestites or not.”<sup>364</sup> He also reminded readers that transvestites and “street queens” had been largely responsible for the Stonewall Riots four years earlier and cautioned the “gay movement” not to embrace the conservative conformity that many felt was necessary to acceptance by the American mainstream.

In general, gay male culture was tolerant of transvestites, embracing drag queens and female impersonators as quasi-mascots at gay pride events. That they engaged in cross-dressing for entertainment, and not as a matter of course, unquestionably played a significant role in their acceptance by gay male culture; habitual cross-dressers were

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<sup>362</sup> Pichulina Hampi, “Transsexual Issue Plagues Lesbians.” *The Advocate*, May 9, 1973: 4.

<sup>363</sup> Angela Keyes Douglas, “Letter to the Editor.” *The Advocate*, June 20, 1973: 36.

<sup>364</sup> Arthur Evans, “Should TVs Embarrass Gay Cause?” *The Advocate*, May 23, 1973: 37.

given a much less warm reception. But even those who were completely tolerant of cross-dressing didn't always accept transsexuals. One reader wrote into *The Advocate* to explain, "If a man dresses as a woman for a gag, or because he just plain enjoys it, this is one thing, and I can understand and condone it, but if he is actually convinced that he *is* a woman, then I cannot help believing that he is in serious, serious trouble."<sup>365</sup> The acceptance of cross-gender play by the gay male community was therefore clearly tied both to an individual's intent—cross-dressing for entertainment, as opposed as cross-dressing in an effort to "pass" as a member of the opposite sex—and the temporality of the cross-gender behavior (a man donning a dress for a special event, versus wearing one every day). In short, when the cross-dressing connoted an individual's innate cross-gender identification, as in the case of transsexuals who dressed as the gender they felt themselves to be, it took on a different meaning, and met with a different response, than the "drag" performances of female impersonators.<sup>366</sup>

Radical feminists did not evince much interest in parsing the difference, however. As Robin Morgan's speech demonstrated, many feminists believed that male transvestitism for any reason was "an obscenity."<sup>367</sup> Some gay men were puzzled by the antagonism of lesbian feminists towards transvestites. One gay man, an early member of NOW and ostensibly a feminist, pointed out that "[Lesbians] feel no reservations or do any double-takes about dressing in male clothing."<sup>368</sup> This comparison may have made it

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<sup>365</sup> John Marvin, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, June 20, 1973: 36.

<sup>366</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz notes that in the 1970s, "gay men, lesbians, and feminists increasingly cast transsexuals as irrelevant, out of style, invasive, or conservative" as gender non-conformity fell out of favor within homosexual subcultures. *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002): 258.

<sup>367</sup> "Transsexuals Hex Robin Morgan." *The Advocate*, July 18, 1973: 21.

<sup>368</sup> Bruce Voeller, quoted in Dudley Clendenin and Adam Nagourney, *Out For Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999): 169.

clear to lesbian feminists that gay men were either blind to, or chose to ignore, the power dynamics at play when a privileged group chose to co-opt the identity of a less powerful group. A public confrontation between lesbian feminists and transvestites occurred at the 1973 Gay Pride Parade in New York City, when Jean O'Leary (founder of Lesbian Feminist Liberation, an offshoot of the Gay Activists Alliance) presented a statement on men who "impersonate women for reasons of entertainment and profit" to a crowd composed not only of gays and LBQ women, but of the very people O'Leary was criticizing. Ironically, O'Leary had not been able to convince the parade's organizers to put her on the bill for the post-parade rally, and was only given the opportunity to speak after one tipsy, disheveled drag queen stormed the stage to harangue the audience. Not surprisingly, her remarks were not well-received by the predominantly male crowd; one drag queen who had been present at the Stonewall riots bounded up to the stage to accuse O'Leary and her cohort—"these bitches"—of demanding that transvestites "quit being ourselves."<sup>369</sup> The "fiasco," wrote one *Advocate* reader several weeks later, "pointed up one of the largest single issues still dividing gay people in this country. It is high time that we recognize that our conceptions of transvestites, transsexuals, and women have been colored by stereotypes and prejudices promulgated by a straight society."<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Dudley Clendenin and Adam Nagourney, *Out For Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999: 172). Years later, O'Leary would apologize for her remarks, admitting "It was horrible. How could I work to exclude transvestites and at the same time criticize the feminists who were doing their best back in those days to exclude lesbians?" In interview of the drag queen—Rey "Sylvia Lee" Rivera—from around the same time, Rivera said of O'Leary, "We hated each other from day one and always will...[she] was...a bitch in plain English." Clearly O'Leary's attitudes had changed more than Rivera's. Quoted in Eric Marcus, *Making History: The Half-Century Fight for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992): 267, 194.

<sup>370</sup> Kenneth Bland, "Screaming Match Adds Nothing." *The Advocate*, August 15, 1973: 36-7.

The audience's indifference to the criticisms presented by O'Leary and LFL was proof of the vast difference in value systems between lesbian feminist and gay male cultures, just as this debacle underscored the difficulties presented when the two crossed paths. Perhaps following the thought processes of organizers of the rally, who may have refused O'Leary's initial requests to speak because they hoped to avoid any controversies that could generate negative publicity or disturb the spirit of unity the event was intended to promote, the editors of *The Advocate* may have been trying to keep the peace within its pages by minimizing its coverage of lesbian culture (and its less-than-favorable attitudes toward gender roles and masculinity) during the early 1970s.

#### Lesbian Content in *The Advocate*, 1967-75

In light of all these points of disjuncture between lesbian and gay male culture in the early years of *The Advocate*, some researchers have expressed surprise that the magazine covered LBQ women at all.<sup>371</sup> From the publication's earliest days, it had carried some items addressing lesbian concerns, although much of this material was simply reprinted from other sources and not commissioned specifically for *The Advocate*.<sup>372</sup> In order to appreciate the increased quantity and quality of the coverage the magazine provided to lesbian issues in the last half of the 1970s, it is necessary to look briefly at the previous content of *The Advocate*.

Attempts at inclusion appear early on in *The Advocate*, and in fact, its October 1967 issue carried a piece entitled "What's With the Ladies?" Written by Helen Sanders,

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<sup>371</sup> Ronald Joseph Nerio, "Lesbian Representation in the Gay Press: A Content Analysis of *The Advocate*, 1970-1992. Master's thesis, Michigan State University, 1994.

<sup>372</sup> When *The Los Angeles Advocate* became, simply, *The Advocate* in 1970, editor Dick Michaels hired a "professional clipping service to gather news from across the country" in order to reflect the new national focus. Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Lesbian and Gay Press in America* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995): 130.

an editor of *The Ladder*, the column profiled the Daughters of Bilitis, and sought to create common ground with men by encouraging them to get involved with the organization. Though only women could be official members of the group, Sanders wrote, “*The Ladder* is available to all and we frequently have events to which men are invited.”<sup>373</sup> In the March 1968 issue, staff writer Mel Holt observed in his “Happenings” column that “[t]his seems to be the month for lesbians” because of two recent film and stage productions dealing with the subject.<sup>374</sup> He also noted a recent report about the frequency with that housewives disappeared from their families and were later found living as lesbians in San Francisco, after having been led into “temptation” by “practicing” or “latent” homosexuals. Holt dryly noted, “I imagine that the next report we hear will charge that homosexuals are taking husbands away from housewives.”<sup>375</sup> This comment, though flippant in tone, indicates the sense of solidarity that could exist between gay men and LBQ women, similarly persecuted by the psycho-medical establishment.

Though scant, lesbian content was nonetheless scattered throughout *The Advocate*’s early issues. In April 1969, Susan Webb, the first woman to be listed on *The Advocate*’s masthead, debuted the first installment of a feature called “Lesbians in Literature.” The introduction to the series clumsily explained that it would focus on “the vast amount of literature mentioning certain types of emotional reactions of women to members of their own sex, namely, female homosexuality or lesbianism.”<sup>376</sup> The series

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<sup>373</sup> Helen Sanders, “What’s With the Ladies?” *The Los Angeles Advocate*, October 1967: 9.

<sup>374</sup> Mel Holt, “Happenings.” *The Los Angeles Advocate*, March 1968: 7.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Susan Ward, “Lesbians in Literature: Sappho—the 10<sup>th</sup> Muse.” *The Los Angeles Advocate*, April 1969: 28.

ran periodically over the course of seventeen issues, and it was the first lesbian-oriented feature to regularly appear in *The Advocate*.<sup>377</sup> When this is considered alongside the fact that one of *The Advocate*'s biggest features dealing explicitly and exclusively with LBQ women was 1974's two-page story on the same-sex loves of Emily Dickinson, it might appear that the magazine was more enthusiastic about fictional or historic LBQ women than their modern-day counterparts.<sup>378</sup> It is also possible, though, that *The Advocate* was attuned to the popularity of biographical articles among lesbian readers, a trend Barbara Grier observed during her tenure as the editor of the Daughters of Bilitis' magazine; she recalled that "[from] the first days of *The Ladder*, it was apparent that the audience responded to biographical articles second only to book reviews."<sup>379</sup> Given *The Advocate*'s habit of reprinting essays from *The Ladder* it seems likely that the former would have been attuned to the type of content which was being demanded by the readers of the latter, and thus might have featured similar material in the hopes of appealing to this readership as well.

News items about the women's liberation movement, the activities of the Daughters of Bilitis, and the court cases of WACs and WAVEs appeared with some frequency, and women were featured on the front page of the newspaper for the first time in July 1970, in a story entitled "Two L.A. Girls Attempt First Legal Gay Marriage."<sup>380</sup> In addition to hard news pieces, there were also occasional articles that tackled more complex lesbian-related topics, though to varying degrees of success. In February 1972, a

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<sup>377</sup> Robert B. Marks Ridinger, *An Index to The Advocate: 1967-1982* (Los Angeles: Liberation Publications, Inc., 1987): 269.

<sup>378</sup> Dan Allen, "Susan Was Amusin' But Kate Was Great!" *The Advocate*, April 10, 1974: 31-2.

<sup>379</sup> Barbara Grier, "Introduction." In Barbara Grier and Coletta Reid, eds., *Lesbian Lives: Biographies of Women from The Ladder* (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1976): 13.

<sup>380</sup> "Two L.A. Girls Attempt First Legal Gay Marriage." *The Advocate*, July 8 1970: 1.



short essay by Peggy Jayleen Bell examined the plight of LBQ women married to straight men; the piece contrasted the ease with that “married men move around in homophile society” with the sense of alienation married LBQ women experienced from both straight and lesbian society. In spite of the article’s groundbreaking nature, the author’s view of the options available to married LBQ women was dim at best: she could “find a soulmate whose commitments (and thus her demands) are similar to her own,” or else hope to be married to an understanding man who would allow her to “look (however surreptitiously) for fulfillment” with women. As far as Bell was concerned, simply leaving the marriage was not an option: “Whatever her frustration, the married lesbian cannot reinstate her life along different patterns without causing undue heartache to many people.”<sup>381</sup>

Though the tone of the article was sympathetic, the author effectively blamed married LBQ women for their own entrapment by insisting that they were responsible, as wives and mothers, for maintaining the domestic happiness of their families, and thus should—in spite of their own misery—refrain from leaving. These sentiments harkened back to the days of the homophile movement; the plight of married LBQ women had always been a primary concern of the Daughters of Bilitis, and advice in *The Ladder* (particularly in its earlier years) generally ran along similar lines. When juxtaposed with the sexual liberalism and individualism promoted by *The Advocate*, Bell’s essay appears dated at best, and at worst completely ignorant of the progress of the women’s rights movement in helping women develop a sense of themselves divorced from marital and maternal roles.<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Peggy Jayleen Bell, “The Submerged Lesbian.” *The Advocate*, February 16, 1972: 27.

<sup>382</sup> The topic of married LBQ women dominated the advice column in *The Ladder*. Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*: 43.

This essay's failure to acknowledge the teachings of second-wave feminism on a woman's right to self-fulfillment is less surprising than it seems, given the complex relationship between the women's liberation movement and the gay liberation movement. This tension was visible in the pages of *The Advocate*. For example, in response to a review of his book *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* in February 1972, Dennis Altman noted that there had been no mention of the book's inclusion of women. "I go to some lengths to stress that homosexual refers to both women and men, and I would be concerned if any of your readers thought otherwise," he wrote, adding, "I personally regret that the division that seems to exist between [women and men] in so much of the homosexual community. In its way, this is exemplified in the comments of your reviewer, who seems unable to understand why I felt it necessary to discuss Women's Liberation at some length."<sup>383</sup> One month later, an *Advocate* reader presented the frustration of many female gay liberationists in a letter that stated flatly, "Male homosexuals, while just as oppressed as lesbians, are still men. They look at things from a male viewpoint and are concerned with male needs and desires first and foremost... Any gains the lesbians get along the way will be purely accidental. Out of the closets, sisters, and into the woman's movement. There your voices will be heard!"<sup>384</sup>

Features on gay life in U.S. cities appeared regularly in *The Advocate*, and these occasionally probed their subjects beyond the typical travelogue of bars and bathhouses. These "fluff" pieces often inadvertently hinted at forces larger than geography that divided the gay community. For instance, a profile of gay and lesbian life in San Francisco noted frankly that the city "probably has the worst record of any city in the

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<sup>383</sup> Dennis Altman, "Women Too." *The Advocate*, February 16, 1972: 27.

<sup>384</sup> Carla Adams, "Male Chauvinists." *The Advocate*, March 1, 1972: 28.

country with regard to rapport of gay men and gay women” and noted that the gay men there “remain as male chauvinist as redneck jocks.” This impression was confirmed by a female interviewee, who took the opportunity to discuss gay male misogyny’s role in her decision to focus solely on women’s liberation; of herself and her lover, she said “We don’t have to go to gay meetings where we’re called diesel dykes. We can get that on the street.”<sup>385</sup> The same article illustrated the literal invisibility of LBQ women in the minds of many gay men when its author asked why the city’s gay meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous were for men only. One of the group members shrugged, “We had requests from many of the fag hags we knew to let them come. We were afraid that if we allowed any women, it would become Fruit Flies Anonymous.”<sup>386</sup> This vision renders “women” synonymous with “heterosexual,” foreclosing completely on the possibility that opening the meetings to women may have drawn in LBQ women who would have been uniquely able to offer gay men support because of their shared involvement in a community where drinking and bars have traditionally played key roles. Though it may not have been the focus of most articles, gender did, every so often, manage to creep in to *The Advocate*.

Lest these examples give the impression that *The Advocate* was firmly committed to gender parity, it is important to remember that LBQ women were represented in just a fraction of the magazine’s overall content. Readers called the editors on this disparity. One letter from a female reader observed that “concerns of lesbians in *The Advocate* are for all practical purposes non-existent...if *The Advocate* calls itself the ‘Newspaper of America’s Homophile Community,’ it should serve that community or revise the phrase to specify ‘America’s Male Homophile Community.’ *The Advocate* does not seem to

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<sup>385</sup> Dan Allen, “S.F. Groups Work in a Variety of Ways.” *The Advocate*, March 29, 1972: 19.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

recognize lesbians as a part of the homophile community.”<sup>387</sup> And in spite the handful of lesbian- or woman-focused news articles that appeared in its pages, a feminist consciousness still appeared lacking among the magazine’s staff as evidenced by an editorial about “sexists” and “anti-sexists” that ran in August 1972. “We don’t know what these labels mean,” the editors wrote, but “the anti-sexists say that the sexists just look at everyone as a piece of meat...[and] the sexists say that the anti-sexists just aren’t getting any... We hope we haven’t oversimplified the problem.”<sup>388</sup> Using these unorthodox definitions allowed the authors to make the outrageous claim that the Christian Saint Paul was an “early anti-sexist.” The comment evidently rankled some readers. The following issue carried a letter from a reader who seethed, “Your editorial on sexism reveals just how shallow, confused, and outdated your views really are.”<sup>389</sup>

Language was also a battleground where feminists tangled with the editors of the *Advocate*. These struggles illustrated some of the contretemps between LBQ women and gay men. In 1972, Kay Tobin Lahusen, a feminist and active member of the Daughters of Bilitis, took the *Advocate* to task for its use of the term “girls” to describe women; in a letter to news editor Rob Cole, she suggested that writers “concede gracefully that women are women, not girls.”<sup>390</sup> Writer Jack Monroe responded that the newspaper had no intention of changing its use of the term because, in the eyes of editor Dick Michaels,

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<sup>387</sup> Eleanor Sapko, “Nix Dirty, Sexist Advocate.” *The Advocate*, April 26, 1972: 28.

<sup>388</sup> “Square, Square World?!” *The Advocate*, August 16, 1972: 28.

<sup>389</sup> “The Lowdown on Sexism.” *The Advocate*, August 30, 1972: 29. Whether it was simply terribly confused or tongue-in-cheek, it is hard to imagine that, in 1972, the common definition of the term “sexist” would be unknown to any people even remotely familiar with the women’s liberation movement; the term was already in regular use in publications as mainstream as the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*. Fred R. Shapiro. “Historical Notes on the Vocabulary of the Women’s Movement.” *American Speech*, Spring 1985: 7.

<sup>390</sup> Letter from Kay Tobin to Rob Cole, ca. July 29, 1972 (undated). Box 1, Rob Cole Papers, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

“A newspaper...should not try to be the vanguard of changing the existing language.”<sup>391</sup>

This point of view was made explicit in Michaels’ editorial from April 1973, entitled “Word Murder.” In response to the proliferation of gender-neutral terminology—a key project of many feminists—Michaels denounced the “growing band of fanatics who are hellbent on destroying the English language—the only way that we have to get ideas across to one another.” Ignoring the fact that not everyone in the world even spoke English, Michaels railed against “the deluge of non-existent words: spokespeople, spokesperson, chairperson” that many gay organizations were using to describe their members. “The job of a newspaper is to communicate, not to cram brand-new non-words down our readers’ throats or into the English language,” wrote the editors, laying to rest any question of these non-gendered words appearing in *The Advocate*.<sup>392</sup> When a female reader wrote in to protest the editorial’s “blatant and deliberate attack on the women’s movement,” the editors stiffly responded, “The editorial in question was an attack on the abuse and debasement of the English language under pressure only by those with loud voices. It was an attack on nothing else...The proliferation of bombastic, pseudo-intellectual, polysyllabic verbal garbage is one of the main factors that keep gay leaders from reaching any Gays but each other. That movements spawned the verbal garbage is really irrelevant.”<sup>393</sup> Given the frequency with that the women’s liberation movement was accused of sidetracking, competing with, and otherwise hindering the gay liberation movement, the origin of the “verbal garbage” that prevented the gay liberationists from reaching others seemed very relevant, indeed.

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<sup>391</sup> Letter from Jack Monroe to Kay Tobin, July 31, 1972. Box 1, Rob Cole Papers, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

<sup>392</sup> “Word Murder.” *The Advocate*, April 25, 1973: 36.

<sup>393</sup> Pat Underwood, “‘Word Murder’ Attacks Women.” *The Advocate*, May 23, 1973: 36.

The early years of *The Advocate* were marked by an inattention to lesbian issues and lesbian readers that resulted from the conflict between lesbian feminist and gay male attitudes about sexuality, gender, and power. Lesbian-related material appeared in the magazine sporadically, but the quantity and quality of the material was far less than that that was devoted to gay male concerns. The prejudices of the magazine's leadership, as evidenced by editorial commentary, also played a role in determining how much space *The Advocate* would use for lesbian-specific issues.

#### Rising Tides (1975-1980):

In November 1974, *The Advocate* changed hands, purchased by a publisher whose reputation—as an unabashed elitist who decried “victim politics” and had little patience for political correctness—preceded him. David B. Goodstein, never one to do something by half-measures, wasted no time in overhauling *The Advocate*, to the chagrin of many (including the publication's former owner who was appalled by Goodstein's actions).<sup>394</sup> He fired the existing staff, corralled the news coverage into a discrete section, and changed *The Advocate*'s focus from news and politics to culture and “lifestyle.” Particularly in light of this, the fact that *The Advocate*'s exponentially-increased coverage of lesbian issues and feminism increased after the sale comes as a surprise. From 1975 until 1979, while Goodstein played a significant role in the day-to-day operation of *The Advocate*, the pages of the magazine addressed issues such as abortion, the women's rights movement, and the Equal Rights Amendment with more frequency and depth than

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<sup>394</sup> Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*: 168-88.

it had or would in the future. What confluence of circumstance created this growth in the magazine's coverage of women?

First, *The Advocate*'s new owner, the commerce-minded gay entrepreneur David Goodstein, wanted to enlarge the magazine's readership in order to increase revenue. The argument that LBQ women have negligible discretionary income and are not a coveted audience for producers and advertisers is frequently used to explain away their marginalization in the gay press, but in the mid-1970s, this was not enough to dissuade Goodstein from efforts to attract LBQ women to *The Advocate*.<sup>395</sup> In several editorial columns from the mid- to late 1970s, Goodstein repeatedly acknowledged his desire to bring gay women into *The Advocate* fold, and numerous changes in the magazine's content over these years indicate that he, and his editors, backed up this sentiment with action. The deliberateness of this effort is openly addressed in an editorial by newly-named publisher Peter G. Frisch in November 1979 that was intended to downplay its significance or lasting effect.

External forces also enabled this "golden age" to occur. First, public visibility and activity of women—LBQ women in particular—had increased every year that *The Advocate* was published, so undoubtedly there was more news to cover. The effect of the nationwide push for the ERA's ratification, coupled with changing tides within the feminist movement throughout the 1970s, should not be underestimated. These two factors, though closely related, have to be considered separately in assessing their effect on the magazine; the former's is straightforward, while the latter's relationship to *The*

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<sup>395</sup> Some economic scholars have assailed this argument as based on false premises. See M.V. Lee Badgett, *Money, Myths, and Change: The Economic Lives of Lesbians and Gay Men* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

*Advocate*—and to the gay rights movement in general—is far more complicated. The E.R.A., though universally regarded as a method of combating gender-based discrimination, was also believed by many people to have applications relevant to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and thus was perceived as a gay issue worthy of coverage in the magazine. Several articles from this period espoused this viewpoint and attempted to rally *Advocate* readers into supporting the ratification movement, usually initiating a dialogue between readers and editors that played out on the magazine’s correspondence page.

Teasing out the effect of the latter factor *The Advocate*’s coverage of lesbian topics is complicated by the shifting attitudes within the feminist movement itself. As Alice Echols has detailed, radical feminism had been a vocal, “vital and imaginative force within the women’s liberation movement” from 1967 until the early 1970s.<sup>396</sup> The core tenets of radical feminism averred that male supremacy—not class or race, often viewed problematically as “straw men” created to blind women to the root cause of their oppression—was the true enemy of women, and that any societies or institutions founded on patriarchal values or models were irredeemable. Therefore, trying to gain rights within these “corrupt” constructs, as liberal feminists did through their work in the legislative, economic, and judicial spheres of American society, was seen as pointless at best, kowtowing to the enemy at worst. This approach was the same one being utilized by the post-“gay liberation” gay rights movement in the mid-1970s, so it is unsurprising, in retrospect, that *The Advocate*, a proponent of this approach, would have cast feminists

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<sup>396</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989): 3.



and feminism in such an unflattering light during the earlier years of the 1970s when radical feminism exerted a large influence over the feminist movement in general.

Concomitant with the diminishing power of radical feminists on the mainstream women's movement was the emergence of cultural and liberal feminism as dominant trends. Cultural feminism placed less emphasis on destroying patriarchy than on constructing an alternative culture that was intended to foster, in Robin Morgan's words, women's "self-determination and power"—an approach gay rights advocates could relate to, given the exponential growth in gay-owned and oriented businesses and social organizations throughout the country throughout the 1970s.<sup>397</sup> More importantly, cultural feminism did not alienate gay men as radical feminism had (by painting them as oppressors and disputing their claims of homophobic discrimination), but reaffirmed a belief that arose time and again in the magazine's pages, namely that the genders were inherently and immutably different (within *The Advocate's* pages, this notion was usually cited in relation to the difference between the sexual behavior and desires of gay men and LBQ women). As Echols succinctly summarized it, "Cultural feminism modified lesbian-feminism so that male values rather than men were vilified."<sup>398</sup> Because its essentialist view of gender did not threaten to disrupt the status quo into which many gay rights organizations wanted to fit, cultural feminism fit naturally into *The Advocate's* program. Articles and features appeared that played on cultural feminist values or promoted the institutions—including publishing houses, record labels, and social service agencies—founded by cultural feminists. While cultural feminism gradually ceded power, in the late 1970s, to the liberal feminist establishment, *The Advocate* maintained its pro-feminist

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<sup>397</sup> Robin Morgan, "Rights of Passage," *Ms.* September 1975, p. 99.

<sup>398</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*: 244.

stance as liberal feminism and liberal gay rights activists shared principles, strategies, and goals.

Reader correspondence from this era indicates that the magazine's audience was not only aware of, but deeply emotional about, the changes it observed. These letters also expose the extent to which *The Advocate* could influence its readers' behavior—in this case, away from sexism and misogyny. The negative feedback the magazine received during this time often relied on the “legacy” argument, invoking a heritage to which Goodstein's new cadre of writers and editors had little loyalty. However, by 1979, *Advocate* editors were themselves invoking this heritage to explain why the publication had winnowed down its coverage of lesbian issues in the last two years of the decade, and I will explore some of the motivations that led the magazine's own people to deny its immediate history.

### The Influence of Cultural Feminism

Cultural feminism was defined, in part, valuing the character traits, including peacefulness, nurturance, and cooperativeness, that were traditionally associated with women. The notion of inherent differences between men and women was one with which *The Advocate*, through its regular references to men's sexual voraciousness and anti-monogamous “nature,” was already familiar, and therefore culture feminism was a better fit for the magazine than radical feminism. Demonstrating its comfort, *The Advocate* reflected cultural feminist values in some of the lesbian-oriented, or female-centered, material it carried in the late 1970s.

When *The Advocate* carried content that focused mostly or exclusively on women (not specifically lesbian), it typically revolved around parenthood, marriage and partnership, or sexual fluidity. In these arenas, gender differences were seemingly highlighted. In December 1978, an in-depth interview with the Jane Scott, author of *Wives Who Love Women*, used a pull quote to draw attention to the author's admission that "I don't think we're one hundred percent lesbian, or one hundred percent straight."<sup>399</sup> However, in the body of the article, the author follows that statement with "...but that's from my own life, maybe." The pull quote made it seem as though Scott was making a blanket statement about women's sexuality, when in reality she was admitting that she may simply be extrapolating from her personal experiences. The choice to emphasize and edit Scott's words in this particular way reaffirmed the notion of women's sexual and romantic fluidity that cultural feminism celebrated. This interview was followed by another with lesbian actress Pat Bond, who recollected her time in the Army during World War Two and invoked the same model of sexual fluidity as Scott: "I don't think at 20 you can be that certain of your sexuality...Who knows: maybe some of us came home and were never gay again. When you're trapped in a situation like that, at that age, where does your sexuality go? It's true in women's prisons, it's true in women's schools."<sup>400</sup> Similarly, in 1979, actress Lee Grant observed that "[m]ore and more lately I see women turning to each other...[w]omen are having affairs with other women...I don't know why, but I think it's another kind of barrier they feel they're breaking. Or maybe it's

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<sup>399</sup> M.A. Karr, "Wives Who Love Women: Jane Scott Looks at Lesbians in Wedlock." *The Advocate*, December 13, 1978: 21.

<sup>400</sup> M.A. Karr, "Who The Hell is Carmelita Pope? Pat Bond Remembers..." *The Advocate*, December 13, 1978: 27.

because the relationships they're in with men...are very restrictive."<sup>401</sup> These three articles are emblematic of *The Advocate's* increasing tendency to promote cultural feminist beliefs in its coverage of women.

In an issue from 1976, cultural feminist standards of appearance were acknowledged and apparently received the magazine's benediction. In a review of the women's fashion trends in mainstream fashion magazine *Vogue*, the lesbian author professed she was shocked to find that it showed "clothing any self-respecting woman could actually enjoy wearing, soft, loose, flowing and comfortable."<sup>402</sup> In addition to promoting the style of dress common within the cultural feminist community, this was also *The Advocate's* first real acknowledgement that not all of its lesbian readers were fashion-challenged or "butch" in appearance.<sup>403</sup> With this article, *The Advocate* had taken a concrete step toward acknowledging not only values common to lesbian culture, but also the diversity among LBQ women themselves.

### Liberal Feminism, The E.R.A. and Gay Rights

The suggestion that the E.R.A. might be used to the benefit of gay Americans came from an unexpected source: its enemies. Along with shrilly warning the American public that the Equal Rights Amendment would be used to eradicate single-sex bathrooms and force women into military service, opponents of the E.R.A. were also

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<sup>401</sup> Kim Garfield, "Candidly, Lee Grant." *The Advocate*, September 20, 1979: 42. The interview is then interrupted and the problematic issues raised by Grant's remarks escape further remark. That this would commonly be considered poor journalistic practice is evident from a comment in a book review from the following issue, in that an author is criticized for failing to adequately interrogate her interview subjects' comments on bisexuality and lesbianism. M.A. Karr, "Review: *Sunday's Women: A Report on Lesbian Life Today* by Sasha Gregory Lewis." *The Advocate*, October 4, 1979: 49.

<sup>402</sup> Shelley Singer, "In *Vogue*, Functional Women's Wear." *The Advocate*, March 24, 1976: 26.

<sup>403</sup> It is likely that Goodstein shrewdly recognized that promoting this fact could draw in advertising from retailers of women's fashion. The topic of lesbian fashion scored the cover of the magazine just a few years later.

eager to claim that its adoption would result in the legalization of same-sex marriages. It mattered little that there was no legal precedence for this claim; it was still a powerful *piece de resistance* in the opposition's carefully-painted picture of a society turned upside down after gender roles were "outlawed" by the E.R.A. The opposition conveniently neglected to mention the 1971 case *Baker v. Nelson*, which ruled that "the right to marry without regard to sex [was] not a fundamental right compelled by the federal Constitution."<sup>404</sup> Proponents of the E.R.A. repeatedly explained to members of state legislatures that the amendment would only mandate that, should a state allow marriage between two men, it must also recognize marriage between two women, but this argument again invoked the existence of some form of same-sex marriage, shoring up the connection between the E.R.A. and homosexual rights.

In 1976, articles about the E.R.A. appeared regularly. In April, *The Advocate* ran a detailed analysis of the anti-ERA movement, and in the same month, carried an article detailing the contributions of LBQ women to the International Tribunal of Crimes Against Women.<sup>405</sup> Sasha Gregory-Lewis' editorial urging gay men and women to support ratification of the ERA also appeared that spring, prompting one reader to complain, "It seems obvious to me that the main beneficiaries of the ERA would be heterosexual women and their marriages. Putting aside your foggy notion of liberalism, there is no reason why a homosexual organization would support such a movement."<sup>406</sup>

An editorial response beneath the letter snapped, "Even on a clear day you obviously

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<sup>404</sup> Mary Frances Berry, *Why ERA Failed: Politics, Women's Rights, and the Amending Process of the Constitution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986): 91.

<sup>405</sup> Nancy J. Budd, "Crimes Against Women: Setting Up a World Plan of Action." *The Advocate*, April 21, 1976: 8.

<sup>406</sup> Sasha Gregory-Lewis, "What ERA Can Do." *The Advocate*, March 24, 1976: 16; Gregory Komar, "Who's Foggy?" *The Advocate*, April 21, 1976: 25.

couldn't see forever." *The Advocate's* message was clear: anyone who couldn't make the connection between the oppression of women and the oppression of gay Americans was short-sighted at best.

### Changes in the Newsroom

The number of women writing for *The Advocate* increased significantly from 1974 until 1979. Even before Goodstein took steps towards including female voices in *The Advocate*, it had been clear that in some contexts, especially, the lesbian perspective was sorely needed. For instance, *The Advocate's* reviews (written by gay men) of movies and books with lesbian themes were often myopic at best, insulting at worst. Most assuredly, lesbian characters were the exception rather than the rule in film and theater of the 1960s and early 1970s, and the fact that they were often played for laughs or used to indulge straight male fantasies may have been more evident and troubling to lesbian viewers than gay men. A prime example of this comes from one of the first issues of *The Advocate*, which in March 1968 printed a review of two lesbian-themed productions entitled "Broken Dykes Flood Stage and Screen."<sup>407</sup> The review of art-house film *The Fox* was generally negative, but the (male) author's real outrage was reserved not for the problematic narrative that posited that any truly determined man could seduce even the most hardened lesbian, but for the graphic on-screen murder of the titular fox. He fumed, "Where has the A.S.P.C.A. gone? Animal lovers, be forewarned!"<sup>408</sup> That the reviewer found this to be the "most disturbing thing about the film" demonstrates his blindness to

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<sup>407</sup> The use of "dykes" in this context may have been offensive to lesbian readers, as the term's negative connotations had not yet been overcome by the radical feminists who would "reclaim" it in the 1970s. Additionally problematic was that the term was being used by a gay man to describe LBQ women.

<sup>408</sup> Bart Cody and Dick Michaels, "Broken Dykes Flood Stage and Screen." *The Los Angeles Advocate*, March 1968: 12.

the repercussions of its lesbian depictions.<sup>409</sup> The accompanying review of the play *The Killing of Sister George* likewise ignored the production's troublesome portrayal of LBQ women as conniving, manipulative, substance-abusing misanthropes, even as it noted that "a straight audience...finds them 'hilarious.'"<sup>410</sup>

Contrast this to the vastly different perspective offered by Gene Damon, editor of *The Ladder*, in a review of the movie version of *Sister George* in February 1969. Reprinted from the DOB publication, her scathing critique said that the movie "has almost as much relationship to the life of the ordinary lesbian as Donald Duck has to the ordinary man...[it] is garish, noisy, tinkles like tin cans in the trash, and purports to be a true picture of the lesbian underworld."<sup>411</sup> In contrast to the earlier male reviewer's measured praise of *The Fox* because it "acknowledged [homosexuality] as an existing fact," Damon astutely differentiated between reality and the depiction of lesbian life in *The Killing of Sister George*. The movie, in her opinion, was "an inevitable step in the progression of movies that appear to deal with lesbians, seen entirely through the eyes of heterosexual males. It will be years before we have a movie that honestly presents homosexual women."<sup>412</sup>

The wide divergence between the assessments of *Sister George* by Dick Michaels and Gene Damon illustrated the need for a lesbian perspective on lesbian-themed productions, as did a review of Isabel Miller's novel *Patience and Sarah* a few years later. The opening sentences of Carl Driver's review make clear the author's perspective

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Gene Damon, "'Sister George' as Phony as Donald Duck." *The Los Angeles Advocate*, February 1969: 4.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

on what had been advertised as a historical romance between two women: “[I]t is far more a novel of women’s fight for equality in the male-dominated world of the 1800s than a story of lesbian love.” Support for this dubious assertion is provided by the author’s observation that “[T]he sex is so underplayed as to leave the reader unsure as to just who does what to whom or even if anything more than a few chaste kisses take place.”<sup>413</sup> In reality, the book contains several clear references to the women’s lovemaking, but for a male reviewer used to the much more explicit depictions of sex in gay male novels, these were easily overlooked. The author’s simplistic method of determining the actual “lesbian” content of the book by quantifying its depictions of sex implied that love between two women, if sexless, didn’t really qualify as “lesbian” at all. The gay male community placed an emphasis on sex that was present to a much smaller degree in the lesbian world, and this review highlights the problems that could occur when differing value systems came head-to-head.

The review of a male *Advocate* writer of the landmark lesbian feminist book *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman* likewise demonstrated this difficulty. Though praising the book as “extremely well-written and conscientiously documented,” Patrick Doyle diminished its importance by characterizing it as “obviously intended to inform and educate the straight world,” adding that “the gay reader’s interest may flag long before he turns the last page.” In a passage effectively absolving gay men for any responsibility to read the book, Doyle wrote, “The list of grievances rings all too familiarly in our ears; we have suffered the attacks of loneliness...[and] the problems relating to jobs and family” but concludes that because “so many books have been published on the topic of male

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<sup>413</sup> Carl Driver, “Lesbian Love in 1816 Connecticut.” *The Advocate*, June 7 1972: 26.



homosexuality that...most homosexual men who read seriously are not tempted to cover once again the same ground, even though the discussion is about gay women.” The experiences of gay men and LBQ women had some significant differences, but Doyle’s review ignored them and implied that gay men could find little.<sup>414</sup>

Some female readers wrote in to complain about male reviewers’ biased evaluations of lesbian-oriented material. Addressing Driver’s review of *Patience and Sarah*, one woman argued that it “serve[d] to point up the increasingly large gap between lesbians and male homosexuals. Apparently [Driver] is so accustomed to reading male-oriented drivel that he now can review a book only for its sex content and blithely ignores the fact that a book, in this advanced day and age, can be about love.” She added, “Lesbian books are reviewed so infrequently in the male-dominated gay press that we should be able to expect more from reviews of ‘our’ books. Maybe by assigning lesbians to do the reviews?”<sup>415</sup> Whether as a direct result of this letter or not, the assigning of female- or lesbian-oriented material to female reviewers became *de facto* policy at *The Advocate* as more women joined its staff, as editorial correspondence suggests.<sup>416</sup> This alone necessitated the engagement of more female writers, bringing gender parity at *The Advocate* into the realm of possibility.

In regard to Goodstein’s attempts to promote gender equality within *The Advocate*, several trends are visible. First, a new willingness to challenge readers’ sexism appeared in the editorial and correspondence pages. The new *Advocate* was not shy about addressing issues of contention between gay men and LBQ women, particularly about

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<sup>414</sup> Patrick Doyle, “Lesbians Look at Life.” *The Advocate*, April 25, 1973: 34, 40.

<sup>415</sup> Nancy Tucker, “Driver and the Gap.” *The Advocate*, July 5 1972: 28-9.

<sup>416</sup> John Preston, Letter to Sue Angus. April 1, 1975. John Preston Papers, Brown University.

gay men's reticence to support issues that seemed only to affect women. The very first issue with Goodstein as Editor-In-Chief featured a short column by News Editor Sasha Gregory-Lewis, entitled "Views from the Newsroom." It began, "Some gay men ask why some lesbians identify more with the women's movement rather than the gay movement," and recounted in harrowing detail the recent heterosexual rape of a lesbian feminist while working alone in her organization's office in New York City. Detailing the help that women's organizations offered to the victim—counseling services, circulating the assailant's picture—while gay organizations did nothing, Gregory-Lewis noted pointedly, "The gay movement should at least begin to support rape legislation reform on behalf of gay sisters."<sup>417</sup> Secondly, new features were added that specifically addressed lesbian readers, women's news items appeared more frequently, and women were more often the subjects of interviews and profiles. Third, links between the gay rights and women's movement were promoted, as evidenced by an editorial by John Preston in March 1975. Referring to the "Ms. Petition for Sanity," he wrote "We know that those of our readers who are women will want to join the Ms. campaign...But the vast majority of our readers are men. We strongly urge you to join us in supporting Ms....It is to *your* own best advantage as gay men to join in coalition with this important move."<sup>418</sup>

#### "What has happened to our good old *Advocate*?": Readers Write Back

Readers were attuned to the increased attention given to women, which earned *The Advocate* both plaudits and complaints. The responses were not evenly divided, as might be expected, into positive ones from women and negative ones from men (although

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<sup>417</sup> Sasha Gregory-Lewis, "Views from the News Room." *The Advocate*, January 29, 1975: 45.

<sup>418</sup> John Preston, "Editorial." *The Advocate*, March 12, 1975: 34.

I was unable to locate any negative feedback from women), and some responses from male readers serve to challenge the stereotype of gay men as misogynists, and also to *The Advocate*'s ability to shape the attitudes of its readers. On the other hand, negative responses from gay male readers often invoked the magazine's history and hinted at a fear of LBQ women "taking over" the magazine.

In spite of the suspicions of Del Martin and her cohort, not all gay men were antagonistic towards LBQ women and were pleased to see gender parity in *The Advocate*. In a letter to the editor, Eric S. Randolph wrote

I am a man, and most women whom I know do not read *The Advocate*. This is simply because for so long, *The Advocate* was practically unaware of gay women. Thank God this has changed. *The Advocate* is probably the best newspaper concerning the gay community and women certainly deserve equal recognition. I applaud your stand to continue to report on the *entire* gay community—women and men. It is time to bury the stereotypes—most women are *not* boot-stomping diesel dykes any more than are the men swishy queens. I hope *The Advocate* will serve to educate the entire world—both gay and straight—to this fact.<sup>419</sup>

Another self-professed "gay man who strongly supports women's liberation" wrote in approval of *The Advocate*'s "new and growing coverage of women" and chastised gay men who "cannot accept women on their own merit. They should realize that sexual attraction is not required in accepting women as equal."<sup>420</sup>

Among *The Advocate*'s female readers, the response was wholly positive. "Here's one woman who thinks you're doing a terrific job," wrote Kris Bronowski, noting with approval the newspaper's attention "to matters that concern gay women, and especially the pictures of really fine-looking *women* (rather than the femme fatale *chicks* that the

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<sup>419</sup> Eric Randolph, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, October 6, 1976: 22.

<sup>420</sup> Name Withheld, "Cancels 'Playgirl.'" *The Advocate*, May 21, 1975: 25.

straight media bombard us with).”<sup>421</sup> Bronowski’s sentiments were echoed the same year by a female writer who thanked the magazine for “discovering that a large percentage of the gay population includes women as well as men,” and compared it favorably to other “male-oriented publications [that] refuse to even acknowledge the lesbian community as an extension of the gay lifestyle.”<sup>422</sup>

During the years between 1975 and 1979, the number of letters complaining about *The Advocate*’s omission of women dropped, and the publication’s response to those few that it did receive was typically contrite. In December 1976, a woman wrote in response to an article called “Black and Gay.” “I enjoyed your article very much, but what about the black gay women? Everything seems to be for the gay man.” The editors responded, “Sorry we overlooked this important element of the gay community. We will try to answer your questions in a future article on black gay women.”<sup>423</sup>

Not everyone was pleased by the changes, however. One pointed communiqué from a male writer read, in its entirety, “I have one question only: When will someone publish a newspaper for homosexual men?”<sup>424</sup> In September 1976, one reader complained, “All I ever see is photos and stories about women. Who cares about them anyway?”<sup>425</sup> Another letter chiding the magazine for its changes sparked a dialogue between readers and editors about sexism within the gay community. The author cited history and capitalism in his defense, asking “What is happening to our good old *Advocate*? Originally, this was a great magazine for men...why the sudden rush to run so

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<sup>421</sup> Kris Bronowski, “Relieved Woman.” *The Advocate*, August 13, 1975: 19.

<sup>422</sup> Jami Paulsrud Shovald, “Discovery.” *The Advocate*, April 23, 1975: 24.

<sup>423</sup> Robin, “Black Gay Women?” *The Advocate*, December 15, 1976: 14.

<sup>424</sup> Walter J. Phillips, “When?” *The Advocate*, April 23, 1975: 24.

<sup>425</sup> B. Comodore, “Too Many Women.” *The Advocate*, September 22, 1976: 22.

many foolish articles on dykes? The buying public for your wares cannot consist of many lesbians. Let them get their own publication. Give *The Advocate* back to the guys—and no more articles on the celebrity fag-hags. A magazine for men run by men: that’s how I’d like to see *The Advocate* again.”<sup>426</sup> In stark contrast to the humble response to letters pointing out women’s omission from the magazine, the editors in this case tersely replied, “*The Advocate* will continue to report on the entire gay community, both men and women.” Some male readers backed up this unapologetic stance, chiding the original author by invoking community solidarity—one wrote that “[the] gay women I know are some of the most intelligent, beautiful, and strong people I have met...If we cut out our sisters, we are cutting out a part of ourselves.”<sup>427</sup> Another reader suggested that misogyny among gay men stemmed from insecurities about masculinity, writing

I am disgusted to read letters criticizing *The Advocate* for either publishing too many articles about women or handing the paper over to women. I am ashamed of sexism among men as a group and among gay men as an emotional anachronism... Some of my fellow males entertain the fragile illusion that gay lib is a ‘man’s movement’ born of a ‘man’s world.’ This attitude I imagine to be an offspring of traditional male chauvinism, which dictates that real feelings are repressed in favor of expressing the so-called masculine prerogative.<sup>428</sup>

That the editors were ready to combat sexist assumptions on the part of their readers was demonstrated by their response to a letter that didn’t concern gender issues at all. Written by John A. Dentinger, the letter discussed the similarities between Libertarian political views and the gay rights movement, and addressed its readers as “Dear Sirs.” The editors dryly responded, “All libertarians may favor gay rights as you suggest, but it is obvious

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<sup>426</sup> Barry Bernstein, “Men Only?” *The Advocate*, September 8, 1976: 23.

<sup>427</sup> Hugh Karnes, “Four Legged Creatures.” *The Advocate*, October 20, 1976: 11.

<sup>428</sup> Brian Sylvia, “Total Coverage.” *The Advocate*, October 20, 1976: 12.

from your salutation that some Libertarians make sexist assumptions about the status of gay publications.”<sup>429</sup>

In spite of alienating some of its male readers, it does appear that *The Advocate*'s increased coverage of women successfully alerted others to their ingrained sexism. In August, 1975, one reader praised an article about a lesbian lawyer and admitted that “[up] until this time, I have habitually skimmed or ignored articles in your publication that dealt with women as the subject. This is a very sexist and bigoted attitude, no doubt. But the point is that I realized it this time without using the rationale that I wasn't interested because the article was addressed to women, not men.”<sup>430</sup> Some male readers were so vigilant in monitoring *The Advocate* for sexism that they could make embarrassing assumptions, as evidenced by a letter printed in January 1976. The author took issue with the year-end review written by Sasha Gregory-Lewis, who happened to be the first female full-time writer hired by *The Advocate* specifically to cover women's issues.<sup>431</sup> Referring to “him” as “Gregory-Lewis,” the writer of the letter accused the article's author of omitting LBQ women, “smear[ing] the attempts of more progressive gays to extend their struggle beyond the narrow interests of their gender, race and class” and taking a “back-handed slap at NOW.” Biron's criticism was punctuated by the editors' austere comment that “Sasha Gregory-Lewis is a woman, a lesbian, and an involved feminist.”<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> John A. Dentinger, “Libertarian View.” *The Advocate*, May 5, 1976: 17.

<sup>430</sup> Bruce Hamilton, “Beautiful Discovery.” *The Advocate*, August 13, 1975: 18.

<sup>431</sup> Chris Bull, ed. *Witness to Revolution: The Advocate Reports on Gay and Lesbian Politics, 1967-1999* (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1999): 82.

<sup>432</sup> Lionel Biron, “Analysis to Forget.” *The Advocate*, January 282, 1976: 18. It is interesting that the editors believed they could undercut the Biron's criticisms by noting that the writer he criticized was female, particularly in light of the magazine's future tendency to feature female writers who challenged feminist orthodoxy; e.g. Pat Califia, Norah Vincent.

## Goodstein's Influence

The influence of David B. Goodstein's attitudes towards women and sexism on the magazine's coverage of lesbian topics becomes clear when issues from earlier periods are compared to those from 1974-1979. Goodstein was well aware of how little *The Advocate* reflected the interests of LBQ women and sought to rectify them, laying bare his intentions in an "Opening Space" column published in January, 1975. He wrote, "We have consciously tried to broaden our coverage of the diverse elements in our community, geographically and in terms of interests. We are especially pleased that more women are reading *The Advocate*."<sup>433</sup>

In a letter from 1975, he wrote affirmatively in response to the proposal of a freelance journalist of some articles on lesbian legal issues for *The Advocate*, admitting "We do not pretend to be knowledgeable about that area of law. I do not wish to ask a man to handle it... We did our best in the special report about gay parents, but I'm sure that our coverage of the legal aspects were far from inclusive." He also acknowledged the obliviousness of many gay men to lesbian issues beyond the obvious. "[I]t is my opinion that there are many legal subjects of concern to gay women other than the lesbian mother issue. Frankly, I think most of our readers are totally unfamiliar with them."<sup>434</sup> Implicit in this admission was the belief that *The Advocate* could serve as an educational tool to remedy this ignorance.

That Goodstein regarded women as an integral part of *The Advocate*'s audience is clear from a 1978 letter to a reader in that he stated that "*The Advocate*...[has] a policy of

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<sup>433</sup> David B. Goodstein, "Opening Space." *The Advocate*, January 14, 1975: 5.

<sup>434</sup> David B. Goodstein, Letter to Renee Hannover, Chicago IL. October 10, 1975. David Goodstein Papers, Cornell University.

concentrating on gay and women's issues only."<sup>435</sup> In May of that year, he received a letter from a reader apprising him of Georgia's failure to ratify the ERA (the magazine had erroneously stated otherwise), and responded, "I am surprised that the home state of the President of the United States has not voted its approval of women's rights and women's equality... The voices of women are voices that not only are entitled but need to be listened to."<sup>436</sup> While Goodstein's reputation for being officious, snobbish, and temperamental was legend among those who worked with him, this particular letter seems to acquit him of sexism, as does his agreement to a publication exchange between *The Advocate* and *Working Woman* magazine.<sup>437</sup> He likewise bemoaned the inability of gay men and LBQ women to work together towards gay rights, while admitting that "I am not sure how similar the concerns of gay women and men are, either. However, the further I get from the rhetoric of the liberationists, the clearer I am that men and women are more alike than we are different. Too much is made of the differences and too little of the 'I love you.'"<sup>438</sup> The magazine's position on separatism, however, as stated by editor David Goodstein in January 1976, was unequivocal: "[N]o one reasonably can believe it is sensible to cut off communication with half the human race (the opposite sex)...[t]hus our majority regards...lesbian separatism as counterproductive. At best it is unrealistic, at worst destructive."<sup>439</sup> Goodstein was committed to coalition-building and saw separatism

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<sup>435</sup> David B. Goodstein, Letter to Terry Nathan, San Francisco CA. May 25, 1978. David Goodstein Papers, Cornell University.

<sup>436</sup> David B. Goodstein. Letter to Zoe Ann Ananda, Newport Beach, CA. May 31, 1978. David Goodstein Papers, Cornell University.

<sup>437</sup> The editors-in-chief agreed to give each other a complimentary subscription to their own magazine. David Jonson, Letter to Kate Rand Lloyd, New York City, NY. September 15, 1978. David Goodstein Papers, Cornell University.

<sup>438</sup> David B. Goodstein, Letter to Tyan Cyranno, Pasadena CA. August 9, 1978. David Goodstein Papers, Cornell University.

<sup>439</sup> David Goodstein, "Opening Space." *The Advocate*, January 14, 1976: 5.



as a dead-end strategy for political change, and the magazine continued to express similar viewpoints for years to come. For instance, one book review from the early 1980s—of a volume entitled “Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology”—criticized the editors for not devoting enough space to Jewish men, adding that “To identify all that is good in Judaism with women is to distort reality.”<sup>440</sup> While *The Advocate* had occasionally run book reviews in which female critics pointed out the sexism of works which focused strictly on gay men, it was a new development for female-centered works to be criticized for excluding men, and the effort to hold all single-gender-focused books to the same standard indicates the magazine’s commitment to treating “women’s literature” the same as it treated men’s and more generally reflects its attitude towards gender equality.

The increased attention to lesbian and women’s issues began to taper off toward the end of 1977, at which time the two columns *The Advocate* had devoted to women’s issues were discontinued. The presence of women and LBQ women in issues of the newspaper from 1978 paled in comparison to that of just two years earlier, and by the end of 1978, the number of female editors had dropped from three to just one. The change in *The Advocate*’s attitudes toward gender-inclusivity were caused in part by the slow retreat of David B. Goodstein into ventures outside the magazine—most notably, his EST-based self-help workshop, The Advocate Experience—and on June 28, 1979, Goodstein announced that he would be stepping down from his position as editor, ceding day-to-day control of the magazine to Peter Frisch. His admission that “[t]he changes in the masthead will reflect what already is reality... we have been planning this move for

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<sup>440</sup> Marcia Pally, “Nice Jewish Girls.” *The Advocate*, August 5, 1982: 39.

many months” may have served as a belated explanation for relatively sudden decline in the magazine’s coverage of women.<sup>441</sup>

The change was also attributable to forces in American culture at large. Outside of *The Advocate* offices, the United States was experiencing feminist burnout. The pace of E.R.A. ratification had slowed substantially between its reintroduction to state legislatures in 1972 and the original ratification deadline of March, 1979; in the last five years of the period, only five states voted to ratify. While a three-year extension to the ratification period was approved in 1978, the cultural momentum that had propelled the E.R.A.’s ratification in the first two years after its reintroduction had decreased, as had the quantity of woman-focused material in *The Advocate*. The increasing unlikelihood of the amendment’s passage may have been a factor in *The Advocate*’s decision to cut back on its coverage of women.

An equally compelling reason for *The Advocate*’s decreasing coverage of women may have been the rise of an anti-pornography movement within mainstream feminism. Historian Ruth Rosen suggests that the 1976 release of a particularly grisly pornographic film, *Snuff*, “sparked the organization of the first feminist anti-pornography organization” and subsequently resulted in the founding of San Francisco’s Women Against Violence in Pornography and the Media and New York’s Women Against Pornography.<sup>442</sup> These groups grew in size and power throughout the end of the 1970s, and their gradual ascent coincides with the slowing of coverage of women in *The Advocate*, whose coffers were lined with funds from advertisers hawking pornographic films, books, and magazines.

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<sup>441</sup> David Goodstein, “Opening Space.” *The Advocate*, June 28, 1979: 5.

<sup>442</sup> Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000): 191-192.

The celebratory attitude of mainstream gay male culture towards uninhibited sexual expression clashed with this increasingly vocal segment of the feminist movement, and it is hard to imagine that *The Advocate* would have been inclined to provide a pulpit to its own critics.<sup>443</sup>

Not everyone on *The Advocate*'s staff approved of this trend. In October 1979, a frustrated *Advocate* employee penned an editorial in which she bemoaned the publication's failure to attract lesbian readers. Subscription manager Nancy Paris Poirier wrote, "It's frustrating working for America's largest-circulating gay newsmagazine when approximately 98 per cent of its readership is male. That frustration becomes nearly excruciating when you realize first-hand, as I do, that there exists an increasingly sizable market of upwardly-mobile lesbians who can't point to one printed page published today with them in mind." She refuted the "dirty rumor persisting in the gay community" by noting that "not all lesbians have an aversion to money," and asked, "Since when is it necessary to look between people's legs to figure out if they're interested in vacations, real estate, and clothes?" Poirier downplayed the argument about economic differences between men and women, pointing out that "no one—that's right, not even Kinsey—has a clear handle on the number of lesbians out there, let alone their economic status, purchasing tastes, or other significant data that publishers could analyze in determining potential marketability." At the conclusion of her well-reasoned refutation, Poirier recounted the reaction of *The Advocate*'s executives to her proposal that the magazine try

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<sup>443</sup> For a detailed overview of the conflicts between anti-porn and "sex-positive" feminists in the last 1970s and early 1980s, see Rosen, Chapter 5.

to bring to its audience the newly-emergent “upwardly mobile” lesbian: “[M]y pleadings for published androgyny were dismissed as idyllic and therefore strategically unsound.”<sup>444</sup>

Two issues later, publisher Frisch affirmed Poirier’s account, explaining that “[t]here is...no way on earth that everything we publish in *The Advocate* could be of interest to every gay male and lesbian simply by virtue of the fact that he or she is gay. That is not enough of a shared experience.” He also blamed LBQ women for their own omission from the magazine, claiming that “the current 2 per cent lesbian readership is up only 1 per cent over the last three years despite assiduous efforts on our part to reach and maintain lesbian readers.” Admitting that the magazine may have appealed to both gay male and lesbian readers in earlier years due to the lack of any alternative, he averred, “That’s just not the case today.” Frisch effectively passed the buck to the rest of the gay market, blithely forecasting a rise in the number of new periodicals and predicting that “one of the first new titles will be for lesbians.”

“So does that make *The Advocate* a gay men’s magazine?” Frisch asked rhetorically. “In fact, that is what it has been for twelve years.” Interestingly, Frisch followed his assertion about the gay male orientation of *The Advocate* with a pledge to “continue to publish things which interest both gay men and lesbians.”<sup>445</sup> What this suggests is that Frisch’s understanding of a gay male magazine was that lesbian interests could be subsumed within it, but not to an extent which would challenge or threaten its core audience. In fact, the magazine did continue to publish articles which focused on lesbian artists, writers, celebrities, and activists, though less frequently than in the last half of the 1970s.

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<sup>444</sup> Nancy Paris Poirier, “Opening Space.” *The Advocate*, October 18, 1979: 5.

<sup>445</sup> Peter Frisch, “Opening Space.” *The Advocate*, November 15, 1979: 5.

Katherine Sender suggests that Frisch's glib response to Poirier's criticisms masked a quartet of reasons that drove the magazine's decision to position itself as a gay male, not "gay and lesbian" magazine. Primary among these was the ideological conflict between commercial publishing (like *The Advocate*) and lesbian-feminist publishing; Sender writes that "*raison d'être* of lesbian feminist publishing at this time was to critique the ideological and material structures of society and the connections between them: patriarchy, capitalism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, imperialism and colonialism."<sup>446</sup> *The Advocate* might occasionally criticize overt racism, and critiquing heterosexism was *de rigueur*, but patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism were largely unmentioned, not least because the 1970s-era *Advocate* was heavily invested in turning these power structures to the advantage of the gay American.<sup>447</sup> This explanation assumes that all LBQ women were sympathetic to the values of lesbian feminism, however, and consequently not interested in the "superficial" topics covered by *The Advocate*. As Poirier's column indicates, this was not reality. Many LBQ women, she reminded readers, were interested in reading about the "arts, politics, fashion, and business" and moreover had been "playing with [money] for years. Even more of us sorely want to get our hands on it."<sup>448</sup> One letter to the editor from 1979 likewise challenged this assumption; the female writer wrote, "I don't read anything in the lesbian periodical press because I'm not interested in feminist political issues and find periodicals like *Off Our Backs* and *Lesbian Tide* too heavily slanted in that direction. What I am is a plain ol'

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<sup>446</sup> Katherine Sender, "Gay Readers, Consumers, and a Dominant Gay Habitus: 25 Years of *The Advocate* Magazine." *Journal of Communication*, March 2001: 84. For an analysis of lesbian-feminist politics in print, see Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

<sup>447</sup> See Chapter 2 for a more thorough discussion of colonialist discourse in *The Advocate*'s travel features.

<sup>448</sup> Nancy Paris Poirier, "Opening Space." *The Advocate*, October 18, 1979: 5.

middle class, upper income lesbian who wants to read news and feature stories about my people, around the country and around the world.”<sup>449</sup> Therefore, it is doubtful that all lesbian readers would gravitate toward lesbian-feminist publications that were generally more serious and introspective than magazines like *The Advocate*.

Secondly, Sender suggests, the divergence of goals between lesbian and gay male activists proved an unbridgeable gap. A primary concern of gay male liberation was sexual freedom—as evidenced by the proliferation of articles in *The Advocate* about public sex, or sex with men who were legally minors—while LBQ women were more concerned with family law, workplace discrimination, and the Equal Rights Amendment. The conclusion is that a lack of common interest made it difficult to publish a magazine that would appeal to both groups. However, the magazine did make a concerted effort in the 1970s to promote the linkage between gay male rights and women’s (not just lesbian’s) rights. Specifically, articles on abortion rights and on the E.R.A. appealed to male readers to recognize that they, too, had a vested interest in the government’s decisions, seeing as they concerned, in the case of abortion, an individual’s right to privacy (a key element in arguments against sodomy laws) and the legality of discrimination. Furthermore, issues concerning divorce and child custody did affect both gay men and LBQ women, as both groups were equally liable to have their custody rights or alimony payments curtailed or suspended by homophobic judges. Military discharges on the grounds of homosexual conduct were also problematic for both gay men and LBQ women, further weakening arguments that blame *The Advocate*’s decision to stop courting lesbian readers on a lack of common interests between the two groups. It is

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<sup>449</sup> Nancy Tucker, “Lesbian Demographics.” *The Advocate*, December 13, 1979: 14-15.

evident that the magazine did, for a time, attempt to emphasize their shared experiences, which calls into question the truth of Fritch's claim that the magazine was simply carrying on a long tradition of ignoring LBQ women.

Lastly, Sender observes, the "lifestyles" that anchored the sexual and political identities of gay men and LBQ women were vastly different; the gay male "lifestyle" promoted by *The Advocate* was tied to image and consumption, while the lesbian-feminist "lifestyle" encouraged by lesbian-specific publications like the *Lesbian Tide* eschewed consumerism and conformity to mainstream ideals of beauty or appearance.<sup>450</sup> As Poirier insisted, there were already plenty of LBQ women who read *Vogue* and enjoyed shopping or fashion, and it is worth noting that by the end of the 1970s, some of the most rigid lesbian-feminist orthodoxies had begun to soften so that these interests were no longer seen as proof-positive of an anti-feminist attitude.<sup>451</sup> If the editors of *The Advocate* had been capable of differentiating between lesbian feminism and lesbianism, proper, perhaps Poirier's arguments would have been more compelling, but Frisch's comments indicate that they remained unconvinced.

Some female readers responded to Poirier's comments, offering confirmation of her assertions. One letter applauded the column, adding that "I assure you that there are many of us who share her view, who will eagerly boost *Advocate* readership as soon as

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<sup>450</sup> Here again is the confusion of "lesbian" with "lesbian feminist," a point that was contested in the very pages of *The Advocate* as early as 1973, when a female *Advocate* staff member, speaking as a "lesbian for 45 years," claimed that she was not herself a feminist and further estimated that only forty per cent of LBQ women were feminist. "Lesbian Culture Center Planned in L.A." *The Advocate*, July 4, 1973: 8.

<sup>451</sup> Additionally, it is worth noting that lesbian feminism was primarily dominated by white middle-class women, and as Esther Newton suggests, the conflation of "lesbian" and "lesbian feminist" also erased class and racial differences among LBQ women. Esther Newton, "Will the Real Lesbian Community Please Stand Up?" *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay: Personal Essays, Public Ideas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

you begin printing a significant number of lesbian-oriented features.”<sup>452</sup> Others, writing anonymously, added, “We subscribe to *The Advocate* because we think it is the best gay newspaper in print...but we would love to see more female orientation expressed in your newspaper.”<sup>453</sup> Another reader disagreed, stating flatly that Poirier’s “suggestion that *The Advocate* become co-ed [would not] do anything for your magazine...[L]et’s leave *The Advocate* the way it is. I would suggest that she or you develop a lesbian equivalent to *The Advocate* rather than change its current format.”<sup>454</sup> Reacting to Frisch’s dismissal of Poirier’s complaints, reader Nancy Tucker wrote, “I’m sorry to learn that *The Advocate* intends to retain its all-male focus, for I suspect that business-wise, it’s missing a good thing. All my demographics—age, income, profession, spending habits, and so forth—put me in that desirable class of *Advocate* readers that I’m sure the paper’s advertising sales personnel like to brag about to prospective advertisers. I’m an exceptional candidate for good ad pitches—except for the fact that I’m a gay woman.” She added, “The pity of the whole thing is that this policy is probably the result of ignorance and some possible anti-lesbian bias than it is of a rational business decision.”<sup>455</sup> The editorial staff chose, uncharacteristically, not to respond to this accusation; this is particularly telling because the editors *were* provoked to publish a rebuttal to the letter which appeared just after Tucker’s, accusing the magazine of unfairly reviewing a theater production. Evidently a reputation for being anti-lesbian was less troubling to the editors of *The Advocate* than that of being an unjust critic of the arts.

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<sup>452</sup> Helen Fox, “On Women.” *The Advocate*, November 15, 1979: 21.

<sup>453</sup> Names Withheld, “More Women.” *The Advocate*, November 29, 1979: 20.

<sup>454</sup> Name Withheld, “No ‘Space.’” *The Advocate*, November 29, 1979: 20.

<sup>455</sup> Nancy Tucker, “Lesbian Demographics.” *The Advocate*, December 13, 1979: 14-15.



Frisch's insistence that *The Advocate* could not be all things to all readers was both confirmed and challenged in December 1979, when *The Advocate* ran a feature called "Perspectives on Gay Press Problems." The piece featured interviews with three editors of LGBT publications, including Jeanne Cordova of the *Lesbian Tide*. When the editors were asked if it was possible to have "a homosexual publication which appeals to both lesbians and gay men," the male editor of Boston's *Gay Community News* replied, "It certainly is...[F]eminism and gay liberation are closely connected, so it is natural for men and women to share media which cover that connection." The other male editor, Chuck Ortleib of *Christopher Street*, cautiously agreed that, though it would "never be 50/50," his paper would not "stay away from lesbian material just because we think some of our male readers are indifferent to it; we'll take that chance." He also remarked that "lesbian writing still hasn't emerged," a claim which likely astounded co-panelist Cordova who was well aware of the proliferation of lesbian writing in the realm of feminist publishing. She alone demurred, saying "Primarily not, although I think the gay male press would like to think so. Politically it's possible, but culturally it's not. Gay men and women's lifestyles and tastes are very, very different."<sup>456</sup> Cordova added, "[That's] like asking, why can't there be one paper in America that everyone reads? Why should there be?" This defense of Frisch's point, though coming from an unlikely source, suggested that there was space enough for lesbian and gay publications to exist independently and few compelling reasons for the two to overlap.

*The Advocate*'s coverage of San Francisco's 1979 municipal elections illustrated what the magazine described as "deep rifts between gay men and lesbians." For the

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<sup>456</sup> "Perspectives on Gay Press Problems." *The Advocate*, December 13, 1979: 21-23.

position of supervisor from the city's 5<sup>th</sup> District (encompassing the Castro area), voters were asked to make a choice between a heterosexual feminist with a good record of supporting gay issues, Kay Pachtner, and openly gay incumbent Harry Britt. According to *The Advocate*, "the seat [had] been widely regarded as belonging by right to homosexuals," not simply because it represented a largely gay part of the city, but because it had been held, briefly but memorably, by Harvey Milk prior to his assassination in 1978. Milk's tenure and subsequent murder had given the seat "a visibility and symbolic value beyond its inherent importance," and the battle for it was watched closely by gay and lesbian Americans throughout the country.<sup>457</sup>

Controversy arose when one of Pachtner's supporters, lesbian feminist professor and activist Sally Gearhart, wrote a letter outlining her reasons for supporting Pachtner and suggesting that lesbian voters and gay male voters had very little in the way of common interests. Gearhart noted that gay men frequently failed to support feminist or lesbian issues, and furthermore sullied LBQ women's reputations with their sexual practices: "In being part of the word 'gay,' weary lesbians have spent untold hours explaining to Middle America that [they] do not worry about venereal disease, do not have sex in public bathrooms, do not seduce small boys, do not go to the baths for flings, do not regularly cruise on Castro Street, and do not want to go to the barricades fighting for the lowering of the age of consent for sexual acts." *The Advocate* added, "Though Gearhart concedes she will defend the right of gay men to their sexuality, she admits that 'many of its dimensions frankly embarrass and frighten me.'"<sup>458</sup> The letter concisely articulated many of the problems the lesbian feminist community had with gay male

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<sup>457</sup> Scott Anderson, "Ballot by the Bay." *The Advocate*, November 1, 1979: 7-9.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*

culture, and it inspired immediate reaction from *Advocate* readers who alternatively challenged or celebrated it.

Gay male reader Mikhail Itkin offered an alliterative challenge to Gearhart's conclusions, writing, "I am deeply concerned about a pernicious Puritanism perversely and pervasively permeating the lesbian feminist movement." Itkin claimed that he observed many LBQ women engaging in just the types of behaviors Gearhart condemned, and called her letter "symptomatic" of "an oppressive erotophobia [*sic*] and misandrism."<sup>459</sup> He was not alone in his views, as a letter from 1980 illustrates. Alluding to the growing rift in the lesbian community over sexual behavior and expression, the writer observed, "There appears to be an increasingly puritan and provincial strain coloring some of the 'Lesbian Community.' This, in a segment of society that should be, instead, on the very cutting edge of the sexual revolution...[T]here is a world of lesbians out here who do indeed see the need for female baths."<sup>460</sup>

Another female reader astutely observed, however, that Itkin was criticizing lesbian sexual and emotional behavior for not conforming to the "standard" set by gay male culture. Itkin, the reader claimed, "seem[ed] to assume that a loving eroticism for women would entail V.D., lesbian bathhouses, and regular cruising of Castro Street laundromats. That's just another way of saying, the men have got it right again: get hep, ladies!"<sup>461</sup> This writer's prediction that lesbian culture would only receive the stamp of approval from gay men when it emulated gay male culture was one which would be borne out in the future years of *The Advocate*.

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<sup>459</sup> Mikhail Itkin, "Boxing Ballot." *The Advocate*, November 29, 1979: 19.

<sup>460</sup> Leslie Powell, "Lesbian Genitals." *The Advocate*, January 10, 1980: 18.

<sup>461</sup> Pat McIntire, "Erotic Self-Expression." *The Advocate*, November 15, 1979: 18.

## The 1980s: The "Sex Wars" and AIDS

In spite of Frisch's statement, LBQ women did indeed continue to be included in *The Advocate's* content throughout the 1980s, oftentimes in ways which ran completely counter to their earlier depiction in the magazine. To some extent, this was an issue of political necessity created by the ascent of the New Right—with the gay community under attack by politicians, it was imperative that gay citizens, both male and female, stay informed and politically active. The groundswell of gay and lesbian political activity precipitated by the Briggs Initiative and Anita Bryant's campaigns in the late 1970s had resulted in more cooperative efforts between gay men and LBQ women, and it was in the interest of self-defense that these coalitions be preserved. By appealing to female readers as well as male, the magazine ensured that women would be kept in the loop as potential members or supporters of gay political or activist groups. Secondly, changing tides within the lesbian community brought to the fore a "new" type of lesbian whose lifestyles and values were more similar to those typically associated with gay men. Additionally, the "sex wars" of the early and mid-1980s made clear the growing ideological differences between the "new" model lesbian and her feminist foremothers. As LBQ women began to celebrate some of the values of the gay male community, and waged public battles over standards of appearance and sexual behavior, they appeared more often in the magazine's pages.

However, the AIDS crisis put the brakes on women's increasing presence in *The Advocate*, though its impact was more pronounced in the later years of the 1980s. In the early 1980s, the magazine's coverage of "Gay-Related Immune Deficiency" (GRID, later known as AIDS) was present but limited, the result both of a dearth of hard facts about

the disease and of editorial bias as well. The attitude of the magazine's publisher, David Goodstein, towards the crisis was exposed in an editorial from 1984. He wrote

I want to disabuse any readers who may believe that our [limited] coverage [of AIDS] means that we are not frightened for ourselves, our loved ones, and our community. We are. But we refuse to behave like Chicken Little. We continue to believe that more gay men will survive AIDS than will die from it. More of us, in fact, die from hepatitis, cancer, heart disease, and, probably, alcoholism and drug abuse than from AIDS. So we are concerned about those dangerous diseases as well.<sup>462</sup>

However, as facts about the disease became better-known, and the number of lives lost to AIDS skyrocketed, *The Advocate* began to devote an increasing amount of its space to topics related to the crisis. Subsequently, LBQ women, less visibly affected by the crisis than gay and bisexual men, appeared more infrequently in the magazine's pages.

On the whole, LBQ women were far from invisible in the pages of the 1980s *Advocate*. In fact, the frequency with which they were referred to and/or quoted in the magazine's articles increased significantly between 1978 and 1982.<sup>463</sup> In 1981, LBQ women were for the first time the subject of a feature story promoted on the cover of the magazine. Certain “types” of LBQ women actually appeared to receive the magazine’s approval—those who embodied the potentially-positive but stereotypical characteristics of gay men—sophistication, affluence, and professional success—and also those who were explicitly sexual and outspokenly opposed to “political correctness.” During the early and mid-1980s, a rift developed between some LBQ women and feminists as they engaged in conflicts which have been termed the “sex wars.” Dealing with issues of

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<sup>462</sup> David Goodstein, "Opening Space." *The Advocate*, May 1, 1984: 6.

<sup>463</sup> Ronald Joseph Nerio. "Lesbian Representation in the Gay Press: A Content Analysis of *The Advocate*, 1970-1992." Master's thesis, Michigan State University Department of Sociology and Urban Studies Program, 1994: 57.

pornography and sexual behavior, these battles effectively divided LBQ women into two camps: those who were opposed to pornography in any form, and similarly opposed to forms of sexual behavior which they believed glorified oppression, violence, or dominance, and those who believed that pornography and certain types of sexual activity (particularly non-monogamy, BDSM, and sexual role-playing) were not inherently incompatible with a feminist worldview. The latter camp, known as “sex-positive” or libertarian feminists, were also known to champion some elements of gay male sexual culture—for instance, public sex or bathhouses—and, within the space which featured lesbian issues during the decade, these women generally predominated.

Additionally, the lesbian community of the 1980s was affected by the cultural values of mainstream America, as it began to accept—and even encourage—materialistic pursuits to an extent which would have been unthinkable in the 1970s. This new trend brought the lesbian community into closer alignment with the attributes of the white middle-class gay male community, and created more opportunities for the magazine to reach out to women (through features on clothing and leisure pursuits). It appears that, in the 1980s, *The Advocate* rewarded with exposure LBQ women and lesbian cultures which affirmed the values of the white middle-class gay male community—understandable, perhaps, as that community sorely needed support as it struggled to survive under siege from disease and the venomous attacks of the New Right.

### The Rise of the New Right

In the late 1970s, the Briggs Initiative and the campaigns of Anita Bryant caused a groundswell of activism among gay men and LBQ women who realized that they could

not be passive in the face of political persecution. Fighting against these early anti-gay efforts was good practice for the battles which arose following the ascent of the New Right in American politics in the early 1980s. *The Advocate* exhorted its readers to join—or at least donate to—gay and lesbian political action groups to an even greater extent than it had in the days of Briggs and Bryant. David Goodstein went so far as to throw himself a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party to which he invited all *Advocate* readers. But this party was more than just a celebration—it was a fundraiser for the Human Rights Campaign Fund, the leading national gay political action committee. Goodstein explained in “Opening Space” column of June 10, 1982, that “1982 presents us with a unique opportunity to go from being perceived as politically powerless to politically powerful...so I want to raise at least \$100,000 for HRCF...I know that when HRCF has enough money to make a difference in 20 or 30 campaigns, the results we want will be achieved.”<sup>464</sup> The price of a ticket to this party was \$150, a not insignificant amount, and though Goodstein later reported that he was heartened by seeing “young, relatively poor gay people digging deeply into their meager supplies of money to help,” he was frustrated that well-to-do gays and LBQ women had not contributed in kind.<sup>465</sup> “Until and unless more of you get involved in the affairs of your communities, cities, states, and nation, not only are we not going to get much further, civilization may not survive. So get the lead out,” he exhorted readers.<sup>466</sup> Disappointed by the lackluster response to his request, in a later column he

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<sup>464</sup> David Goodstein, “Opening Space.” *The Advocate*, June 10, 1982: 6.

<sup>465</sup> David Goodstein, “Opening Space.” *The Advocate*, August 5, 1982: 6.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*

seethed, “Until and unless you give generously to gay organizations, you’re just another useless faggot or dyke.”<sup>467</sup>

Goodstein did not differentiate between gay male and lesbian supporters, taking both to task equally when they failed to step up to meet his challenges, and praising both when they (rarely) met his expectations. The game of politics was essentially one of numbers, to his mind, which he had seen in action during the campaigns against Anita Bryant and the Briggs campaign. Maintaining the unity of all those imperiled by homophobic laws and customs was imperative to successfully combat them, and making sure women remained in the gay political fold was a likely motivation for *The Advocate*’s efforts to appeal to them more during this trying time.<sup>468</sup>

### The Effect of AIDS

It is unsurprising that the AIDS crisis resulted in a change in the quantity of space *The Advocate* devoted to lesbian concerns, as the gay male community clamored for news on the mysterious new illness. Some historians have argued that the crisis also exacerbated existing tensions between gay men and LBQ women, which may have contributed to diminishing coverage of women in *The Advocate* as well. The remarks of veteran lesbian activist and scholar Karla Jay, in the introduction to the 1994 reprint of the influential gay and lesbian anthology *Lavender Culture* illustrate this tension. Echoing some of the rhetoric of the lesbian separatist movement of which she was a part, Jay’s essay argued that AIDS served to further bifurcate the gay and lesbian community

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<sup>467</sup> David Goodstein, “Opening Space.” *The Advocate*, December 8, 1983: 8.

<sup>468</sup> The magazine’s expanded concentration on political issues throughout 1982 was not unnoticed by readers (see Eric Stults, “Political Poop,” *The Advocate*, December 9, 1982: 7.)



and controversially suggested that the advent of AIDS was used as an excuse to silence lesbian concerns; Jay noted that “when lives are at stake and are dramatically presented every day in the media, all else seems of little importance.”<sup>469</sup> “All else,” in this context, likely means debates over gender equality or sexism. Although she affirmed her belief that AIDS “is the *major* cultural disaster in North America in this century,” Jay noted with some bitterness that “the tragedy of AIDS has made the goal of creating lesbian culture even more difficult than it was” because “much lesbian money now goes to AIDS causes.” Claiming that the tendency of LBQ women to contribute to AIDS-related projects was the unfortunate outcome of women being “conditioned to put our own needs last,” and implying that LBQ women were more selfless than gay men, Jay both reinforced the idea of ineluctable gender difference and the belief that AIDS was strictly a gay male issue. Jay observed with some frustration that gay men have “endowed primarily AIDS organizations and gay studies programs” (rather than resources pertinent to the entire LGBT community) and incredulously noted that “[one] even left \$5000 to each of his writer friends so that they could take a bit of time off to create.” The implication of Jay’s statements is that lesbian resources would best be used to build and sustain lesbian culture, since gay men have no interest in doing so, a sentiment similar to those expressed by chary lesbian activists in the 1970s when conflicts over allegiances to the gay liberation or women’s liberation movements arose. Jay illustrated her point by asking readers to “[c]onsider the fact that it took the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York years and years to raise several thousand dollars for the down payment on a building... Then recall that predominantly gay male organizations—legal, AIDS,

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<sup>469</sup> Karla Jay and Allen Young, eds., *Lavender Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

scholarly—have raised that amount (and often much more) in one night, and you'll get the picture.”

Further, Jay argued, while gay men's cultural output during the 1980s focused overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, on AIDS, lesbian cultural products evidenced a concern with issues as varied as “racism, anti-Semitism, ageism, militarism, ecofeminism, and spirituality.” Jay's perspective suggests that while LBQ women are concerned with numerous social ills, gay men care only about issues directly relevant to their own lives. Finally, Jay invokes the ambivalence many LBQ women had felt about cooperating with gay men in the 1970s when she concludes that “AIDS has caused many lesbians to live in two different cultural worlds, one of our own making and *one of the world at large in which we are still twinned in the public imagination with gay men.*”<sup>470</sup>

In the cultural world that LBQ women were creating in the 1980s, then, an affiliation with gay men was provisional at best, and long-simmering tensions brought to the fore by the seemingly endless march of death through the gay and lesbian community posed a daunting challenge to cooperative efforts. David Goodstein's gloomy “forecast” for the gay and lesbian community—published, appropriately enough, in 1984—evidenced a marked change from his formerly gender-inclusive attitude, and predicted that, in the future

we can expect lesbians to separate themselves even more from gay men. Following Margaret Cruikshank's advice, the separatists will no longer call themselves ‘lesbian separatists.’ Rather, they will call themselves ‘autonomous lesbians.’ That really means that gay men should understand, sympathize with, and support with money and time all lesbian concerns, but men must not expect their sisters to support them in turn.”<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>471</sup> David B. Goodstein, “1984: Scenarios for a Gay Future.” *The Advocate*, January 10, 1984: 18.

Contrast Goodstein's perspective with Karla Jay's and it becomes clear that LBQ women and gay men existed at loggerheads during this stressful era, under attack from a new plague and the New Right who hailed it as a form of divine vengeance against homosexuals.

The magazine did attempt, at least once, to address the quandary many LBQ women faced as they attempted to work within LGBT organizations whose focus had dramatically shifted to center on AIDS. In an article from 1984, *Advocate* writer Pat Califia described the involvement of LBQ women, and women in general, in AIDS-related organizations, praising the high turnout of female volunteers in spite of the resistance of some gay men. An anonymous man, quoted by Califia, asked "Why should women be involved? This is a men's issue. We don't want women!" To be fair, LBQ women also expressed sentiments discouraging women's involvement in AIDS groups; one shrugged, "It's really something they brought upon themselves. What do you expect if you screw 50 different men every night? Besides, there are so many rich faggots. Let them take care of it."<sup>472</sup> The idea of gender trumping sexual orientation as a source of community solidarity was one which Califia repeatedly criticized in much of her writing, so her decision to use these quotes to embody the worst of these attitudes was unsurprising.

Califia also used this essay as an opportunity to criticize radical feminist attitudes, which she would do with regularity throughout her career at *The Advocate*. She quoted a letter from radical feminist publication *Womanews* entitled "AIDS—The Unwanted Pregnancy?" in which author Merle Hoffman likened the threat of AIDS to the threat of

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<sup>472</sup> Pat Califia, "Face to Face, Women React to AIDS." *The Advocate*, April 3, 1984: 26-30.

unwanted pregnancy and sanctimoniously observed, "Now, for the first time, men will have to stop and think about whether or not they are willing to pay a price for sexual intercourse—something that women have always had to deal with." Even more objectionable, in Califia's eyes, were Hoffman's attempts to suggest that gay men would learn a good lesson from the epidemic; Hoffman wrote "[at] the very least, AIDS has become a vehicle for putting men in touch with a profound reality: communication, intimacy, and love are far more important than a casual sexual encounter."<sup>473</sup> Califia ascribed this "vicious" viewpoint to the widespread negative attitudes towards gay men's sexual practices in the lesbian and feminist communities, which she roundly condemned. Her unwillingness to tolerate sexual moralism from any quarter would place her on the front lines of a cultural battle between radical feminists and "pro-sex" LBQ women in the early 1980s which had repercussions for the relationship between LBQ women and gay men.

#### The Lesbian "Sex Wars" of the 1980s

By the start of the decade, the feminist anti-pornography movement was in full flower. In 1981, the National Organization for Women passed a resolution affirming that "...pornography, sadomasochism, and public sex...have been mistakenly correlated with Lesbian/Gay rights by some gay organizations and by opponents of Lesbian/Gay rights seeking to confuse the issue" and stating unequivocally their belief that these activities reeked not only of "exploitation and violence" but also "violated the feminist principles

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<sup>473</sup> Letter by Merle Hoffman, *Womanews*, October 1983, p.2, quoted in Pat Califia, "Face to Face, Women React to AIDS." *The Advocate*, April 3, 1984: 26-30.

upon which this organization was founded."<sup>474</sup> Having several years of experience under its belt, groups like Women Against Pornography, along with individuals such as Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, were well-known for their efforts to ban pornography or institute legal mechanisms which would allow pornographers to be held liable for sexual assaults "caused" by their creations.<sup>475</sup> While they explicitly focused on the damage pornography caused to women, the gay male community's traditional acceptance of pornography as one of its cultural fixtures also raised their ire. While women were not actually the subjects of gay male pornography, some radical feminists believed that it nonetheless supported male dominance over women. British feminist scholar Sheila Jeffreys, writing at the close of the "sex wars," claimed that "[g]ay male sexuality is not different in kind from heterosexual male sexuality. All men are trained to be members of and experience the delights of being members of the ruling class. They

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<sup>474</sup> Quoted in Pat Califia, "What is Gay Liberation? An Appraisal of the Present." *The Advocate*, June 25, 1981: 30.

<sup>475</sup> Mackinnon authored the Pornography Victims Compensation Act and was well-known for attempting, in several American cities, to ban the sale of pornographic materials. The familiarity of the American public with the anti-pornography movement can be ascertained by the following articles, all of which appeared in the *New York Times*: Judy Klemesrud, "Women, Pornography, Free Speech" in the *New York Times* (December 4, 1978); Alan M. Dershowitz, "Free--Free--Speech" (February 9, 1979); Georgia Dullea, "In Feminists' Antipornography Drive, 42d Street Is the Target" (July 6, 1979); "Minneapolis Asked to Attack Pornography as Rights Issue" (December 18, 1983); "Minneapolis Mayor Vetoes Plan Defining Pornography as Sex Bias" (January 6, 1984); E. R. Shipp, "Civil Rights Law Against Pornography Is Challenged" (May 15, 1984); E. R. Shipp, "A Feminist Offensive Against Exploitation" (June 10, 1984); "Law on Child Smut Is Sought" (September 26, 1984); Richard Levine and Carlyle C. Douglas, "Ideas & Trends; Setback for Antismut Law In Indianapolis" (November 25, 1984); Judy Klemesrud, "Joining Hands in the Fight Against Pornography" (August 26, 1985); Catharine A. MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, "Feminists and Pornography" (November 10, 1985); Douglas Martin, "Free-Wheeling Debate on First Amendment" (March 8, 1987); Alison M. Jaggard, "FEMINISM UNMODIFIED Discourses on Life and Law. By Catharine A. MacKinnon" (May 3, 1987); Carol Sternhell, "ICE AND FIRE By Andrea Dworkin." (May 3, 1987); Carol Sternhell, "INTERCOURSE by Andrea Dworkin" (May 3, 1987) Andrea Dworkin, "Reviewing Andrea Dworkin" (June 14, 1987); Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Dworkin's Arguments" (June 14, 1987); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "Sex Wars: Not the Fun Kind" (December 27, 1987); Nicholas Davidson, "Questions of Feminism" (May 22, 1988); Lore Dickstein, "Street Fighting Feminist; LETTERS FROM A WAR ZONE Writings 1976-1989. By Andrea Dworkin." (October 29, 1989).

develop a ruling-class sexuality in which power and dominance are eroticized.”<sup>476</sup>

Reflecting on the prevalent attitudes of the time, cultural theorist Paula Graham added that “[r]adical feminists had argued that there was a tendency for the power inequality which structures heterosexuality to be reproduced in male gay sexual practice through the substitution of alternate axes of eroticised power-difference for that of gender—such as class, race, and generational inequalities” and as a result criticized “gay male sexual practices, as well as...lesbians who had retained an earlier feminist model of 'sexual liberation,' or who had organized their identities on a gay model.”<sup>477</sup>

Additionally, the radical feminists who criticized the gay male community’s acceptance of pornography also took the opportunity to condemn some of the community’s other features as misogynistic. Echoing Robin Morgan’s comments from the 1970s, Janice Raymond, one of the most outspoken anti-transgender feminists of the 1980s observed that “[m]ale practices of cross-dressing or transsexualism had been also been argued to reproduce the sexual subjugation of women as a gender-class.”<sup>478</sup> Andrea Dworkin added, “Male homosexual culture consistently uses the symbolic female—the male in drag, effeminacy as a style, the various accoutrements that denote female subjection—as...a touchstone against which masculinity can be experienced as

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<sup>476</sup> Sheila Jeffreys, *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution* (London: Women's Press, 1990): 208.

<sup>477</sup> Paula Graham, *Women Watching Women: Lesbians and Popular Cinema* (1997). <http://www.opengender.org.uk/?q=node/19>. Accessed 20 June 2010. See also Ruth Linden, ed. *Against Sodomasochism* (East Palo Alto, California: Frog in the Well Press, 1982); Amber Hollibaugh and Cherrie Moraga, “What We're Rollin Around in Bed With: Sexual Silences in Feminism” in Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983); Carol Vance, ed. “Introduction,” in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (London: Pandora, 1984); Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex” in Carol Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (Boston: Routledge, 1984); Joan Nestle, “Butch-Femme Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950s” in *A Restricted Country* (New York: Firebrand Books, 1987).

<sup>478</sup> Janice Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979).

meaningful and sublime.”<sup>479</sup> No doubt, the liberation of the gay male community, in relation to its attitude towards women, had been slow in coming—in an interview from 1982, lesbian author Rita Mae Brown admitted that, “As a woman, I am sometimes astonished at the lack of understanding that I will get from gay men...some gay men are really back in the 1950s when it comes to women”—and some members of the gay male community were incensed by these criticisms.<sup>480</sup> In their view, the anti-pornography feminists were promoting a “censorious form of moral panic.”<sup>481</sup> Movements to quash pornography, some argued, “amounted to suppressing gay men's primary mode of self-definition and representation” and these feminists’ willingness to assert “the homogeneity of the gender-class of men” ignored the impact of sexual identity on a man’s experience of his gender.<sup>482</sup> Little surprise, then, that the gay male community—and the LBQ women who appreciated and sometimes emulated aspects of gay male culture—would be such an unreceptive audience for anti-pornography rhetoric.

The “sex wars” effectively divided LBQ women into two camps—on one side, those who opposed not only pornography, but also sexual role-playing and sexual behavior they felt was imitative of heterosexuality (involving the use of phallic objects or penetration), and on the other, the “sex-positive” or libertarian LBQ women.<sup>483</sup> Emotions ran so high between the two groups that a single story on lesbian sadomasochism published in a 1976 issue of the *Lesbian Tide* spurred an eight month-long deluge of

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<sup>479</sup> Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: Women's Press, 1981): 128.

<sup>480</sup> Steve Beery, “Rita Mae Brown.” *The Advocate*, July 22, 1982: 37.

<sup>481</sup> Paula Graham, *Women Watching Women: Lesbians and Popular Cinema* (1997). <http://www.opengender.org.uk/?q=node/19>. Accessed 20 June 2010.

<sup>482</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents* (London: Routledge, 1985): 213.

<sup>483</sup> I use “libertarian” in this sense not to connote any political affiliation but simply to imply an unwillingness to condemn or interfere in the sexual practices of others.

angry letters to the editor.<sup>484</sup> Some sense of the contentiousness of the issue was indicated in a worried reader's letter to Pat Califia's *Advocate* column in 1984. "I'm a lesbian/feminist and heavily into S/M. Please tell me how to find other women in my community...without totally alienating myself from the 'vanilla' women...S/M seems to be a 'dirty word' among feminists and/or lesbians," she observed regretfully. Califia frankly replied, "I've talked to women who were made miserable by gossip just because they requested the use of a sex toy" and suggested that the writer place an ad for like-minded women not in a feminist or lesbian publication, but in a gay male paper instead, suggesting that S/M-friendly LBQ women were more likely to "read the ads in this paper than in a women-only publication."<sup>485</sup> This response suggests that the vociferous denunciations of sadomasochism within the lesbian-feminist community encouraged some LBQ women to forge utilitarian alliances with some aspects of gay male culture.

Indicating the sympathy of gay male culture toward "sex-positive" LBQ women threatened with ostracism by their philosophically-opposed sisters, *The Advocate* focused overwhelmingly on the "pro-sex" LBQ women rather than their opponents, and its allegiances in the sex wars were made clear by its decision to devote an entire issue, in May 1984, to the gay and lesbian leather community.<sup>486</sup> The magazine's major female contributors, including Pat Califia, Gayle Rubin, and Dorothy Allison, were squarely opposed to the anti-porn/anti-BDSM school of thought and embraced a model of sexuality which they sometimes likened to gay men's—that is, one which encompassed

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<sup>484</sup> Sharon McDonald, "My Body or My Politics." *The Advocate*, December 9, 1982: 34.

<sup>485</sup> Pat Califia, "Adviser." *The Advocate*, November 27, 1984: 25-6.

<sup>486</sup> The majority of the letters written in response to this issue were positive, although one woman wrote to say that the article had inspired her to start the "Non-Fist, Non-Leather, Non-S/M society" which would be open only to those "uninterested in strapping on artificial masculinity." P.D. Sterling, "Opinions." *The Advocate*, July 24, 1984: 7.



not only monogamous relationships, but also one-night stands, bathhouses, and sexually extreme forms of behavior. They accused their opponents of making rules for “authentic” lesbianism that some readers obviously took to heart; one young lesbian wrote to Califia’s “Adviser” column about the guilt she felt for enjoying sexual role-play and penetrative sex. Califia responded, “You...are entitled to enjoy [your own body] without getting permission from the patriarchy... You are not obligated to defend your preferences to bigots.”<sup>487</sup> Libertarian LBQ women didn’t hesitate to use loaded terms to describe their opponents. One book reviewer, responding to a lesbian author’s comment criticizing women who practiced S/M, asked impatiently, “How many lessons do we need before...we recognize that if we abandon the principles of tolerance and civil liberties for even one minority, we are on the road to fascism?”<sup>488</sup>

A review of a book of lesbian erotica explicitly criticized the prudish attitudes of some LBQ women. Describing the book’s reception in the lesbian community, the reviewer remarked, “It’s no wonder that a book of lesbian erotica was at first met with distrust and even hostility by some women who were trying to define lesbianism by limiting it...when lesbians themselves assert that this, that, or the other form of sex play is ‘unnatural’ to women...then clearly the name of the game is ignorance.” Injecting some levity, she observed dryly that, “If one believes that arousal art is in itself politically reprehensible, that writing by women meaning to give other women pleasure is immoral, patriarchal, and embarrassing, then [this book] is just not going to appear on one’s Approved List of Suitable Reading for Young Ladies.”<sup>489</sup> Another book review, also

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<sup>487</sup> Pat Califia, “Adviser.” *The Advocate*, May 13, 1982: 26.

<sup>488</sup> Marcia Pally, “Nice Jewish Girls.” *The Advocate*, August 5, 1982: 39.

<sup>489</sup> Camilla Decarnin, “*Graphic Details*.” *The Advocate*, December 24, 1981:56.

concerning a volume of lesbian erotica, noted that the work in question carried a dedication to the “healing and transformation of all who have been hurt by pornography.” The reviewer noted that “[T]he introduction...addresses erotica as separate and distinct from pornography...[but] one woman’s erotica is always going to be another woman’s pornography.”<sup>490</sup> These comments make it clear that, in opposition to the perspective of NOW and other feminists, *The Advocate* sought to recast the arguments against pornography and prostitution as being simply about personal taste rather than politics.

Prostitution and sex work were also contentious issues between libertarian LBQ women and their opponents, and the magazine came down squarely in defense of both. Most often, the opinions belonged to writer Pat Califia, who handled *The Advocate*’s “Adviser” column. In December 1983, she composed a lengthy and earnest response to a female reader’s inquiry on how to hire a professional sex worker, evincing her sincere concern with helping the reader navigate the world of commercial sex.<sup>491</sup> In another installment of her column, Califia wrote to a reader (self-described as “old-fashioned, not at all your women’s-movement kind of lesbian”) dismayed to have discovered that her girlfriend was an exotic dancer that “[t]he lesbian community glorifies women who work blue-collar men’s jobs for men’s wages, but for some odd reason it rejects women who do sex work (which is also a blue-collar job that pays men’s wages. Your girlfriend isn’t selling her body, she’s selling her time, just like a typist, or a nurse, or a maid.”<sup>492</sup> Little

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<sup>490</sup> Bev Balliet, “Sapphic Touch, Volume 1.” *The Advocate*, June 24, 1982: 82.

<sup>491</sup> Pat Califia, “Adviser.” *The Advocate*, December 22, 1983: 50.

<sup>492</sup> Pat Califia, “Adviser.” *The Advocate*, January 20, 1983: 29.

wonder, then, that Califia was a favorite target of organizations like Women Against Pornography.<sup>493</sup>

The fact that the most prominent female writers for *The Advocate* during the 1980s were outspoken in their criticism of sexual moralism is itself significant for what it implies about the magazine's opinion of radical feminism. Califia regularly criticized radical feminist values in her long, eloquent, copiously footnoted essays, and mocked the standards of appearance and behavior stereotypically associated with the lesbian-feminist community. In an "Adviser" column from 1984, she addressed a male reader who complained that, while casual sex was readily available to him, he was unable to find a boyfriend who was "sensitive, responsible, [and] interested in an equal relationship with some political consciousness about what it means to be gay in America today." "Your problem is quite simple," she informed him, "You are a male lesbian. I've seen many of you in the bars, wearing the lesbian uniform (faded Levis, flannel shirts, and running shoes)...trying to hide your mustaches behind your hands when you purchase Adrienne Rich's new book at the local women's bookstore. Some of you even go so far as to own women's music from Olivia Records and claim to like it better than disco...[a]nd, of course, all of you want an egalitarian, romantic, politically uplifting relationship." After suggesting that the reader try to meet men through political activism, educational groups, or religious organizations, Califia wrote, "If this advice helps you to find a husband, maybe you could help me find some loose, bad girls who like verbal abuse and spanking-

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<sup>493</sup> Califia was a polarizing figure in the lesbian community, not only because of her unrepentant support for BDSM and pornography, but also because of her brutally direct (though often humorous) writing. In a negative review of one piece of lesbian literature, Califia opined that it was the result of "let[ting] a bar dyke loose in a library." Pat Califia, "'The Queen of Wands' by Judy Grahn." *The Advocate*, December 22, 1983: 73.

-no strings attached."<sup>494</sup> The same year, Califia also authored a two-page essay on "unmonogamy" which explicitly criticized the social mores of the lesbian community and also detailed her own unorthodox sexual practices. In addition to invoking the ire of radical feminists, columns like these also served to inform gay male readers about the diversity among LBQ women, liberated Califia from the negative stereotypes of LBQ women, and made her a better fit for *The Advocate*, which remained predominantly targeted to gay men.<sup>495</sup>

Emphasizing that not all LBQ women toed the line of radical feminist politics was another way the magazine sought to create common ground between its gay male and lesbian readers. An essay from 1982 entitled "My Body or My Politics" described a self-identified feminist's break with the "anti-sex" attitudes that she perceived the radical feminist movement to have. "The disapproval conveyed by much feminist theory on sex was comprehensive enough to create guilt even for contradictory actions," she observed. Recollecting her attempts to resolve "discrepancies" between her feminist affiliation and her sexual predilections, author Sharon McDonald admitted, "My body pulled rank with seniority, demonstrated superior durability, and cheated by bribing me with pleasure. Bye bye politics, hello happy nights."<sup>496</sup> McDonald suggested that the new "openness" about lesbian sexuality was due, in part, to the influence of "a whole new postfeminist crop of lesbians who make no distinction between restrictions placed on them by well-meaning feminists and those from well-meaning parents," and also to "long-time feminists who found ourselves inadvertently inching further and further away from the party line when

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<sup>494</sup> Pat Califia, "Adviser." *The Advocate*, May 29, 1984: 39.

<sup>495</sup> Pat Califia, "Unmonogamy." *The Advocate*, November 13, 1984: 22-23.

<sup>496</sup> Sharon McDonald, "My Body or My Politics." *The Advocate*, December 9, 1982: 33.

our experiences in bed bore less and less resemblance to our depiction of them out of it.”<sup>497</sup>

McDonald also drew explicit parallels between gay male and lesbian patterns of sexual activity, emphasizing their similarities. “Like gay men, we went to the bars to make sexual contacts, only we called it making friends, not tricking. And while our male counterparts were already home...in bed together, we were bleary-eyed twosomes in coffee shops at 2 a.m., putting in the respectable amount of time of ‘getting to know each other’ first.” Addressing the concerns voiced by LBQ women who asked rhetorically “‘We don’t want to become like gay men, do we, with all that impersonal sex?’” McDonald responded, “I think the answer remains to be seen... perhaps we’ve been mistaking lack of opportunity for lack of desire.”<sup>498</sup> She suggested, “Maybe we’ve been congratulating ourselves on a nobility of purpose that had more to do with sexual cowardice than a supposedly natural womanly tenderness and depth,” adding that she was “dishearten[ed]” by some feminists’ insistence that “saving” one’s sexuality for committed relationships was “morally superior.” “I remember those ideas from parents and priests,” McDonald wrote, and to see them couched in the terms of “a feminist concept of respectful, woman-loving behavior” disturbed her greatly. She insisted, however, that the trend towards greater sexual openness and experimentation in the lesbian community was not a backlash against feminism but against “any wagging finger of disapproval, male or female, traditional or nontraditional. Women are looking to their own guts for guidance, and that strikes me as a profoundly feminist move.”<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid.: 35.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

A feature from 1982 on the Los Angeles lesbian scene succinctly describes the cultural shifts taking place in the lesbian community at large, as the 1980s zeitgeist of personal power and pleasure trumped the earnest political commitments which had defined it in the 1970s.<sup>500</sup> In the late 1970s, the author wrote, “[t]he original movement folks got tired of toeing their own political lines. Sometime post-1975 a lot of activists put down their fliers and picked up tennis rackets. As they guiltily skulked around the gyms and apolitical movie houses, they kept running into each other. Soon a new political philosophy for the ‘80s was born, a marriage of pleasure and politics, with the shocking message that fun was OK.”<sup>501</sup> The popular image of the “lesbian lifestyle”—which had, since the 1970s, been defined as strongly political, anti-materialist, and often humorless—was changing to a new model in which activism played second fiddle to personal achievements. This new version of the lesbian community was much friendlier to capitalism than the old model, which likely accounts for at least part of the magazine’s expanded attention to gay women in the early 1980s. In July, 1984, a two-page feature titled “Days and Nights in L.A.: A Guide to Lesbian Happenings” provided women with names and addresses of a plethora of bars where they could spend their money. No similar feature had ever appeared in the magazine’s pages, so it seems indicative of a shift in how *The Advocate* perceived its lesbian readership.<sup>502</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> See John Taylor, *Circus of Ambition: The Culture of Wealth and Power in the Eighties* (New York: Warner Books, 1991) and Nicholas Mills, ed. *Culture in an Age of Money: The Legacy of the 1980s in America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1990) for a broader overview of American culture in the decade.

<sup>501</sup> Sharon McDonald, “L.A. Lesbians.” *The Advocate*, April 29, 1982: 33.

<sup>502</sup> Sharon McDonald, “Days and Nights in L.A.” *The Advocate*, July 24, 1984: 20-21.

## Change Within the Lesbian Community

Just over two years after Peter Frisch asserted that the magazine was primarily for and about of gay men, lesbian women were the subject of *The Advocate*'s cover story and dominated much of the issue's content. There were efforts throughout to combat stereotypes of lesbians as asexual, impoverished, and unsophisticated. The cover showed two women with their eyes blacked out by a censor's bar and read "Rich and Not Famous: Those Closeted Lesbians of Means." LBQ women had never earned the reputation for affluence enjoyed by the gay male community—in spite of Nancy Paris Poirier's protestations—so *The Advocate*'s decision to focus on this subject was surprising. But, as in the case of the "sex positive" LBQ women who celebrated or emulated some aspects of gay male culture, *The Advocate* seemed more willing to devote attention to women who upheld some of the potentially politically beneficial stereotypes of the gay community at large.

The cover story suggested that economics was to blame for the strained relationship between gay men and LBQ women, suggesting that the wage gap was an "oft-overlooked explanation for why gay men and lesbians frequently do not understand each other's problems and have different political priorities."<sup>503</sup> To offer this explanation to the exclusion of all the other factors which might affect the political priorities of women—and to completely ignore the possibility that some LBQ women might have racial or ethnic identities which could similarly influence their political positions—demonstrates the eagerness of *The Advocate* to suggest that the uneasy relationship between gay men and LBQ women was essentially a problem of economics, as opposed

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<sup>503</sup> Bonnie Burke, "Rich and Not Famous." *The Advocate*, December 24, 1981: 25-58.

to sexism—a suggestion which the magazine’s core readership may have found discomfiting.

The article purported to examine the attitudes of “newly” and “truly” affluent LBQ women towards politics, antigay discrimination, feminism, gay and lesbian activism, and success; it also seemed designed to counter LBQ women’s frequent complaints that mainstream culture was designed to prevent women’s success by creating financial inequity between the genders by showcasing LBQ women who were wealthy and professionally successful. Feminism was blamed for demonizing women who were financially successful, and the article intimated that that many LBQ women deliberately eschewed financial security, a point underscored by a pull quote which read, “Having been poor, I don’t have any respect for those who voluntarily remain so.” While the number of LBQ women who actually pursued insolvency remains unclear, the suggestion remains that feminist rhetoric—not inequities in employment—was to blame for LBQ women’s monetary struggles. A male reader, writing in response to this article, triumphantly proclaimed, “In all likelihood, it is not income disparity but the myth of income disparity that is causing problems between gay men and lesbians. Regrettably, lesbian-feminist ideologues show particular tenacity in clinging to their cherished myths. But that is no reason for the rest of us to buy into them.”<sup>504</sup>

In the feature, the author noted that “the lesbian community holds a number of judgmental attitudes that hit the newly affluent hardest of all,” adding that in response to this criticism, “[the] truly newly affluent, refreshingly, go right for the throat.” As an example, she quoted one woman who sneered, “These lesbian radicals are full of shit. It’s

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<sup>504</sup> Wayne Dynes, “Women’s Issues.” *The Advocate*, January 21, 1982: 9.



just an excuse to hide behind because they're parasites who would rather be on welfare." In an effort to distance themselves from the feminist values which had shaped the lesbian community of the 1970s, these LBQ women crossed over the line from politically moderate to positively reactionary. Several pages later, in a book review, a lesbian *Advocate* staffer drove another nail into the stereotype of LBQ women as anti-capitalist; assessing a book called *Pink Triangles: Radical Perspectives on Gay Liberation*, Sasha Lewis remarked condescendingly that the volume was "directed at those readers who believe that the 100-year old doctrines of Marxism can actually provide a scientific basis for understanding contemporary social problems."<sup>505</sup>

The distance between feminist ideals and the viewpoints of some LBQ women was also demonstrated by one woman's flippant response, quoted in *The Advocate's* feature on "successful" lesbians, to an employer who questioned her sexuality after she appeared on television alongside a well-known lesbian politician: "I said, 'At least you don't have to worry about me taking maternity leave.'"<sup>506</sup> Feminists had long worked to make maternity leave a guaranteed benefit for employed women, and for this woman to make light of the fact that many women risked losing their jobs if they took time off to care for their children indicates that she was neither troubled by the inequity nor particularly sympathetic to other working women simply on the basis of gender.

One of the aims of this article seemed to be downplaying some of the very real gender-based problems that LBQ women faced, possibly in the hopes of getting them to throw their support behind gay and lesbian activism rather than feminist political activities. Alternatively, this might have been an effort to bring the public perception of

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<sup>505</sup> Sasha Lewis, "Pink Triangles." *The Advocate*, December 24, 1981: 56.

<sup>506</sup> Bonnie Burke, "Rich and Not Famous." *The Advocate*, December 24, 1981: 29.

LBQ women into line with that of the model gay citizen—that is, affluent, sophisticated, and successful. Sometimes this effort stretched the limits of credibility, as evidenced by one pull quote which read, “When I think of what most young women go through—trying to please their mothers, trying to get laid and not get pregnant, and trying to juggle a family and career, I think most lesbians are very lucky. We have time to spend on ourselves and our careers.”<sup>507</sup> Implying that lesbian identity eradicated filial obligations, obviated the need to balance personal and professional lives, and entailed no specific risks to one’s career or personal relationships, the speaker—an anonymous “prominent journalist”—tacitly implied that LBQ women who complained about the pressures and challenges they faced as a result of their gender or sexual orientation were simply ungrateful.

The article’s concluding statement was tantamount to an endorsement of the affluent professional lesbian as a role model: “Thanks to successful lesbians who are willing and able to share the lessons they’ve learned with their less affluent counterparts in the movement, we may all benefit from these women’s struggles to achieve money, power, fame and freedom.”<sup>508</sup>

The self-presentation of the affluent LBQ women was repeatedly mentioned in the article, which suggested that an upscale but markedly feminine appearance was desirable. The author wrote, “For most people, the word lesbian conjures up a short-haired woman who wears overalls and heavy boots and eats tofu for lunch. Few people think immediately of, say, a stylishly dressed businesswoman who has a \$200 briefcase, wears gold chains and (gasp!) makeup, and lunches on crab Louis.” It is important to

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<sup>507</sup> Ibid.: 28.

<sup>508</sup> Bonnie Burke, “Rich and Not Famous.” *The Advocate*, December 24, 1981: 58.

remember here that *The Advocate* also displayed admiration for exceedingly masculine lesbians—a gay man’s ode to his “bull dyke” friends, which ran in the mid-1980s, is one example of this. This support of butch/femme culture is not surprising for two reasons. First, the gay male community historically embraced gender role-play, and may have regarded butch/femme culture as analogous to this. Secondly, in the 1980s, many “sex positive” LBQ women affirmed the importance of butch/femme culture in the face of criticism by other women who felt that the roles were oppressive, and therefore it was congruent with the magazine’s support of these “sex positive” LBQ women that it, too, would support a highly gendered mode of self-presentation by LBQ women. Also, by having the article share a page with a cartoon (Fig. 6) in which a lesbian, dressed in trousers and a polo shirt, gapes at a long-haired woman wearing a marabou-edged teddy and high heels, the magazine insinuated that some LBQ women were secretly quite fond of the hyper-feminine appearance they decried as outdated, cumbersome, and oppressive. The caption read, “I can’t believe you actually spent money on such a sexist, degrading outfit! You look wonderful!”

The magazine’s description of the overalls-and-heavy-boots-wearing stereotypical lesbian makes clear its particular disapproval of her androgynous appearance, a sentiment also expressed in a related article entitled “Women Under Wraps: Affluent Lesbians and the Price of Invisibility.” Depicting the scene at an upscale lesbian party in Long Beach, California, the author writes, “No longer fashionable, crop-haired academic women on the edge of being butch stand by the counter in the kitchen and look out of place, obsolete, their hands stuck in the pockets of their pants.”<sup>509</sup> These women stand in

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<sup>509</sup> Leslie Powell, “Women Under Wraps.” *The Advocate*, December 24, 1981: 27-30.

contrast to their modishly dressed fellow partygoers. By explicitly stating that the androgynous look—these women are not feminine, but not really masculine either—is a relic from a bygone era, the author here suggests that women sporting this style are likewise out-of-touch with current times—a convenient and seemingly reasonable explanation for their absence from the pages of *The Advocate*.

Lesbian author Rita Mae Brown went one step further in an interview from 1982, claiming that certain modes of self-presentation were reflective of self-loathing. “I think we need to petition straight people to stop breeding ugly dykes. And if I see one more workshirt, I’m going to just perish from it.” The interviewer asked Brown, “What is that, exactly? ‘I don’t want to look good for men?’” and she responded affirmatively, adding, “When a human being goes out of her way to be unattractive and says it’s natural, it’s self-hate. You can get as mad as you want, honey, but you hate yourself if you walk down the street looking as ugly as you possibly can.”<sup>510</sup> Interestingly, while *The Advocate* eagerly argued that one person’s pornography was another’s erotica, it did not similarly champion personal preference in the matter of appearance. Brown’s “ugly” might well have been another woman’s “natural,” or “comfortable,” but the message the magazine conveyed was that a woman’s unattractive appearance had political significance—perhaps indicating, as suggested by Brown’s interviewer, that she hated men, or (as Brown opined) that she hated herself. It is hard to imagine that Brown would have similarly argued for the political significance of the gold tennis bracelets or bleached coifs of the Los Angeles lesbians profiled in the magazine, who were implicitly coded as

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<sup>510</sup> Steve Beery, “Rita Mae Brown.” *The Advocate*, July 22, 1982: 37.

both modern and feminine—these accoutrements were simply matters of personal preference.

In the 1980s, LBQ women who deviated from the new norm were implied to be mired in the past, unwilling or unable to conform to the standards of the present-day gay and lesbian political movement. In fact, a normative feminine appearance for women was sometimes suggested to be vitally important to the success of the movement. In a profile of National Gay Task Force executive director Virginia Apuzzo, writer Peter Freiberg noted approvingly that Apuzzo "usually wears dressy business suits in public...Looking professional reinforces her argument that the gay rights movement is one that must be taken seriously."<sup>511</sup> Similar comments about gay male political activists' appearance were not common in the pages of *The Advocate*, and this type of remark was emblematic of the entrenched sexism with which many LBQ women continued to think *The Advocate* was hopelessly tied.

As the new figure of the upwardly-mobile, fashion-savvy, sexually adventurous, and not-necessarily-feminist lesbian became more commonplace, and the heated rhetoric surrounding the lesbian "sex wars" cooled, the number of articles in *The Advocate* focusing on lesbian or bisexual women dropped. A biennial study of the content of *The Advocate's* articles between 1970 and 1992 demonstrated that the number of articles focusing on LBQ women surged dramatically in 1984, declined in 1986, and dropped significantly by 1988.<sup>512</sup> Likewise, the use of the term "lesbian" in the pages of the

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<sup>511</sup> Peter Freiberg, "Virginia Apuzzo and the National Gay Task Force." *The Advocate*, May 15, 1984: 20-24.

<sup>512</sup> Ronald Joseph Nerio, "Lesbian Representation in the Gay Press: A Content Analysis of *The Advocate*, 1970-1992." Master's thesis, Michigan State University Department of Sociology and Urban Studies Program, 1994: 48.

magazine jumped dramatically between 1982 and 1984, before dropping significantly in 1988. During the late years of the 1980s, radical AIDS activism, typified by ACT UP (established in 1987), garnered the lion's share of coverage in the pages of *The Advocate*, and gay male culture, which was experiencing extreme tumult as a result of the AIDS crisis, regained its status as the virtual focus of the magazine. However, the founding of ACT UP also signaled the rise of an "us-against-them" mentality among activists which would coalesce around homosexuality in the early 1990s and bring the number of men and women in *The Advocate's* pages closer, at least for a time.

#### The 1990s: Queer Nationalism and Women in Charge

The 1990s was a period of ebb and flow in terms of *The Advocate's* coverage of lesbian topics, a trend attributable largely to two events, one occurring within LGBT culture and one behind the doors of *The Advocate's* offices. During the early part of the decade, the rhetoric of queer nationalism, a philosophy publically espoused by activist groups like Queer Nation, pushed some gay men and women—particularly younger people—into closer cultural alignment. Editor in chief Richard Rouillard, who helmed the magazine during the early 1990s, devoted significant coverage to “queer” activism, and seemed to approve of that movement’s commitment to anti-sexism and gender equality, as indicated by the decision to add the word “lesbian” to the magazine’s official subtitle. But when Rouillard departed, that subtitle seemed the only evidence left of the magazine’s attempts to be more inclusive of women, as coverage of lesbian or gender-related issues dropped off. Contributing to this diminution was the fact that radical queer activism itself had begun to decline in visibility and impact while more traditional forms of political

advocacy—lobbying elected officials, mobilizing voters—were seen as more useful (particularly following the 1996 election a president who promised to battle discrimination against gay and lesbian Americans) and the term “queer” was disparaged as being too “in-your-face” and alienating to potential political allies. The centrality of anti-sexism and gender equality to the platform of the queer nationalists seemed to have affected *The Advocate* during the movement’s ascendancy, but it ebbed away as radical queer activism fell out of fashion.

Just after the decade’s midpoint, *The Advocate* appointed its first female editor in chief, a decision which—as previously mentioned—brought with it a host of expectations for the magazine’s content. Why its coverage of women didn’t expand to as great an extent as some might have hoped (or feared) is attributable to a confluence of circumstances, external and internal. First, it is necessary to remember that Wieder assumed control of the magazine at a time when it was facing direct competition not only from a number of rival publications, but from the mainstream media, which had begun with increasing frequency to cover LGBT issues. In order to remain viable and differentiate itself from other publications, *The Advocate* may have prioritized cultivating a general readership through exclusive celebrity interviews over maintaining an appeal to female readers. The arrival of two new glossy lesbian-oriented publications in the early 1990s, *Curve* and *Girlfriends*, may have contributed to this decision, which may also have rested on the assumption that female readers would select a specifically lesbian publication over one which was nominally “gay and lesbian.” The difficulty of maintaining a truly co-gender magazine which focused on gay and lesbian interests was also illustrated, towards the end of the decade, by the public falling-out between the

female editor in chief and the male publisher of *Out* magazine; the factors contributing to this controversy should also be considered in understanding the limited extent of changes in *The Advocate's* gender-oriented content under Judy Wieder's leadership.

### Queer Nationalism, and Gender-Inclusivity at *The Advocate*, 1990-1992

The early years of the 1990s were marked by increased cooperation between gay men and LBQ women, particularly those coming of age at this time, particularly in the grassroots activist movement embodied by Queer Nation, a loose coalition of groups which espoused a rhetoric of queer nationalism. While it is difficult to precisely summarize the tenets of queer nationalism (due in part to the diverse nature of many of the groups who were affiliated with Queer Nation), in general queer nationalism sought to establish a community of those individuals who were disenfranchised from mainstream culture by virtue of their gender, sexual identities and practices, race, and class—in other words, anyone who was “not normal” or disagreed with the cultural status quo, could be part of the “queer” nation.<sup>513</sup> A more elegant description was offered in one of the earliest examinations of the movement by queer theorists Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, who described Queer Nation’s project as “[taking] up the project of coordinating a new nationality [by] taking as much from the insurgent nationalisms of oppressed peoples as

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<sup>513</sup>Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman illustrated the diversity of Queer Nation affinity groups by listing some of them by name, including “ASLUT (Artists Slaving Under Tyranny); DORIS SQUASH (Defending Our Rights in the Streets, Super Queers United Against Savage Heterosexuals); GHOST (Grand Homosexual Organization to Stop Televangelists); HI MOM (Homosexual Ideological Mobilization Against the Military); LABIA (LBQ women and Bisexuals in Action); QUEERPLANET (an environmental group); QUEERSTATE (which deals with state governments); QUEST (Queers Undertaking Exquisite and Symbolic Transformation); SHOP (Suburban Homosexual Outreach Program); UNITED COLORS (which focuses on experiences of queers of color). Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, “Queer Nationality.” *boundary 2*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Spring, 1992): 149-180. For a list of the groups who were affiliated with Queer Nation, see Allan Berube and Jeffrev Escoffier, “Queer/Nation.” *Out/Look: National Lesbian and Gay Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter 1991): 15-19.



from the revolutionary idealism of the United States [and] invent[ing] collective local rituals of resistance, mass cultural spectacles, an organization, and even a lexicon to achieve these ends."<sup>514</sup> This movement burst into flower in 1990; journalist Randy Shilts described it as having "emerged full-grown on the cultural landscape...suddenly and tumultuously after a dolorous and drowsy decade in which the homosexual rights agenda was overshadowed and overwhelmed with morbidity and mortality."<sup>515</sup> Queer theorist Jeffrey Escoffier similarly claimed that the development of queer nationalism resulted from the AIDS epidemic and, more specifically, from that disease's decimation of gay men. This, Escoffier argues, provoked activists to create a new strategy for organizing, one that recognized the "kinship of all sexual minorities" and acknowledged "the range of possible gender roles, ethnic, and racial identities" within the queer community.<sup>516</sup> Many young members of the LGBT community opted to use the word "queer" to describe themselves, a term which referred not only to their sexuality, but to the inclusivity of their imagined community; as L. Pauline Rankin explained, "In adopting the term *queer*, the newly constituted community sought to represent anyone who differed from the white heterosexual norm."<sup>517</sup>

Along with messages of anti-classism, anti-racism, and anti-sexism, queer nationalists criticized the ubiquity of the term "gay" as a shorthand descriptor of the LGBT community; they claimed that the term itself obscured or erased the concerns of LBQ women in spite of its implied universality. "Queer" was preferential to this term

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<sup>514</sup> Berlant and Freeman, "Queer Nationality": 150.

<sup>515</sup> Randy Shilts, "The Queering of America." *The Advocate*, January 1, 1991: 32-38.

<sup>516</sup> Jeffrey Escoffier, *American Homo: Community and Perversity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998): 215.

<sup>517</sup> L. Pauline Rankin, "Sexualities and National Identities: Re-Imagining Queer Nationalism." *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2000): 186.

because, as one of Queer Nation's manifestos explained, "Queer, unlike GAY, doesn't mean MALE. And when spoken to other gays and LBQ women it's a way of suggesting we close ranks, and forget (temporarily) our individual differences because we face a more insidious common enemy."<sup>518</sup> That the first issue of 1991 bore a cover which screamed, in large block letters, that 1990 had been "The Year of the Queer" suggested that the new currents in LGBT activism were influencing the direction even of *The Advocate*—ironic, because many self-proclaimed queers criticized the magazine for promoting the very values they abhorred, including superficiality, conformity, and consumerism. In spite of the skepticism of some queers towards *The Advocate*, the magazine regularly featured reports on queer activism, and in particular the exploits of Queer Nation, in the early 1990s. This tendency reflects the high visibility of the queer nationalist movement during this time but moreover suggests that there were members of the editorial staff who were sympathetic to its message.

This sympathy, however, was not universal among the *Advocate*'s staff or its readers, as evidenced by a 1991 *Advocate* article by journalist Randy Shilts and the responses it provoked. Entitled "The Queering of America," the feature described Queer Nation's approach as "humorous and insolent...trenchant and...fatuous...insurgent, even menacing," and claimed that the type of activism practiced by Queer Nation represented a revolution in terms of the attitude and approach of gay men and LBQ women towards the heterosexual American mainstream (though considering that Queer Nation's best-known polemic was entitled, "Queers Read This: I Hate Straights," Shilts was really only stating

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<sup>518</sup> Queer Nation, "Manifesto." 1991.

the obvious).<sup>519</sup> Shilts characterized "the arguments [between Queer Nationalists and gay moderates] as "the age-old debate between ever-principled liberals and ends-justify-the-means radicals" and cast radical queer activists (including not only Queer Nation but militant AIDS groups like ACT UP) as naïve idealists. Bemoaning the multi-faceted platforms of these groups, who addressed class, race, and gender-based inequalities, as wrongly taking attention away from the explicitly "gay" causes they "should" have been focusing on, Shilts wrote that queer activism was permeated by

homosexual leftists whose agenda has far less to do with fulfilling the aspirations of Harvey Milk than with honoring the ideals of Leon Trotsky. Since so many of the new breed of young militants have no political ideology of their own, they're vulnerable to this Hegelian rhetoric of yesteryear...Some of the most vocal advocates of the AIDS-activist movement—and unfortunately, in Queer Nation too—are giving up the fight for AIDS drugs so they can take the cause of the class struggle to the streets...It's...bizarre that 21 years of homosexual liberation have left us with gay leaders who tell us that there are higher political priorities than saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of HIV-infected gay men. Making *gay white male* into the major cuss word of the AIDS-activist movement...sounds suspiciously like Jesse Helms."<sup>520</sup>

One *Advocate* reader wrote to the magazine to express his agreement with Shilts' article, claiming that "queers...build a coalition based on fashion, cliquishness, and the worst kind of ageism." He also accused *The Advocate*, perhaps due to its new attention to queer nationalist activism, of having "targeted your magazine for [*sic*] the enraged, the addicted, the homeless" and of "vilify[ing] the white middle-class gay males as the 'great Satans' of the movement."<sup>521</sup> The printed response from editor in chief Richard Rouillard admitted that Shilts' article had provoked "misunderstandings about the thrust of the article and the goals of *The ADVOCATE*" but argued that the magazine was simply

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<sup>519</sup> Randy Shilts, "The Queering of America." *The Advocate*, January 1, 1991: 32-38.

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>521</sup> Champion Read, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, February 12, 1991: 11.

fulfilling its journalistic obligation to cover "the actions and opinions of [the] divergent elements in our community." But, unwilling to back down, Rouillard noted that "Our movement is still grappling with racism, sexism, and underfunding. For practical reasons, we cannot afford to exclude anyone." In being inclusive, however, Rouillard may have alienated readers who had been pleased with the magazine's traditional focus on gay male concerns.

Some readers were nonplussed by the magazine's coverage of queer nationalist activism. Queer nationalists, for example, feared that their terminology and culture was being co-opted by the very establishment it criticized; as a scathing letter from Johnny Noxzema, creator of the Toronto-based queer nationalist 'zine BIMBOX, seethed in 1991

You think that your [coverage of queer nationalist culture] will...make us forget what your generation of misogynist capitalist swine clones and half-baked numbskull granola feminists over 30 are directly responsible for—segregated bars, sexism, racism, classism, separatism, mass complacency, and a complex network of selfish, over-educated, self-appointed rich people overseeing a vast fake-democratic lesbian and gay multinational bureaucracy that dictates how we think, dress, act, and fuck...*You* are the enemy, not Jesse Helms."<sup>522</sup>

Also troubling to some readers of *The Advocate* was the magazine's adoption of the lingo used by adherents of queer nationalism, which "reclaimed" pejorative terms like "faggot," "dyke," "homo," and—of course—"queer." The first issue of 1991 bore a cover which screamed, in large block letters, about "The Year of the Queer" and another cover from 1992 bragged that the fashion spread inside showed the "coolest gaywear and dykewear," while the issue's table of contents described the feature as a showcase for "homo and lesbo couture." These terms were far removed from the politically-correct "gay" and "lesbian" many readers were used to the magazine using. One subscriber wrote

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<sup>522</sup> Johnny Noxzema, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, January 1, 1991: 11.

to the magazine the same year to decry its casual use of the terms "queer" and "faggot," accusing *The Advocate* of promoting the "shame and self-degradation" of its readers by doing so. "These terms are abhorrent to me, and I shall not tolerate them...Please cancel my subscription immediately," he wrote.<sup>523</sup>

In addition to those who rejected queer nationalists' attempts to reclaim these terms, feminist theorists also offered critiques of queer nationalism in general, questioning whether its "inclusivity" actually resulted in the erasure of gender-based concerns. Although a 1991 leaflet from a London-based queer nationalist group claimed that "queer means to fuck with gender" and emphasized the inclusive nature of the queer community by claiming that "there are straight queers, bi-queers, tranny queers, lez queers, fag queers...in every single street in this apathetic country of ours," not everyone believed that this flattening of difference into an amorphous "queer" whole was a positive thing.<sup>524</sup> Feminist theorists Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger, for example, charged that queer nationalism "blurred" the "meanings of heterosexuality and homosexuality...in a fantasy world of ambiguity" and obscured "the material realities of oppression" based on gender.<sup>525</sup> A similar criticisms of "queer" was offered by *Advocate* columnist and lesbian historian Lillian Faderman, who observed that although the term "supposedly includes males, females, transgender people, etc., the focus is...most often on things male in queer discourse."<sup>526</sup> Whether or not "queer" was becoming shorthand for "gay male," though, the fact remains that one of the key tenets of queer nationalism, through whose work

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<sup>523</sup> Charles J. LoPiccolo, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, June 2, 1992: 15.

<sup>524</sup> Anonymous leaflet, "Queer Power Now." London, 1991. Quoted in Cherry Smith, "What Is This Thing Called Queer?" in Donald Morton, ed., *The Material Queer: A Les-Bi-Gay Cultural Studies Reader* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996): 277.

<sup>525</sup> Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger, "The Queer Backlash." In Diane Bell and Renate Klein, eds., *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed* (London: Zed Press, 1996): 375-82.

<sup>526</sup> Lillian Faderman, "Sisters and Brothers." *The Advocate*, November 28, 1995: 88.

“queer” had been reclaimed for self-identification, was gender-inclusivity. I would argue, then, that in spite of Faderman’s criticisms, “queer” was employed most frequently in the pages of the *Advocate* as an inclusive, not exclusive, term, and its appearance signified the magazine’s willingness to address the gender diversity in the LGBT community.

Richard Rouillard, the *Advocate*’s editor in chief during the era of queer nationalism, seemed to personally embrace the anti-sexist, anti-racist, and anti-classist sentiments of queer nationalism and the magazine, under his leadership, made some concrete efforts to make *The Advocate* reflect these concerns. A comment he made in a 1992 editorial column clarified his commitment to addressing the uncomfortable issue of inequality within the gay and lesbian community. Rouillard wrote, "[J]ust how long must women and minorities wait for recognition of their needs, acknowledgement of their absolute right to participate in decisions that intimately affect their lives, decisions that are sometimes made by white-male-run organizations?"<sup>527</sup> This wasn’t simply a rhetorical question, but one that Rouillard actively tried to answer. During his tenure as editor in chief, the magazine was more reflective of diversity in the LGBT community than it had been in previous years, and carried an increasing number of articles on radical queer activists, transgendered people, and people of color. In addition, *The Advocate* more explicitly addressed issues of relevance to lesbian or queer women, a palpable change from its past; the New England-based LGBT publication *Metroline* credited Rouillard with making "notable changes to actively integrate lesbians into the publication [including] the hiring of several lesbians as editors as well as two lesbian columnists.

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<sup>527</sup> Richard Rouillard, "Lavender Fascists, Homocons, and Other Cannibals." *The Advocate*, August 13, 1992: 6.

Lesbian stories and lesbian writers were also being utilized.<sup>528</sup> Reflecting the desire to more fully embrace the female members of the LGBT community, *The Advocate* also changed its subtitle in 1991 to read "gay and lesbian newsmagazine" (though it seems that pushing past "gay and lesbian" to "LGBT" or even "queer" might have been one step too far even for a supporter like Rouillard ).

In terms of content, the Rouillard-led *Advocate* showed parity in the number of news articles which focused only on men (or only on women) and those that referred to both genders equally; in the course of the twenty-two year period that the study examined, only the content during Rouillard's tenure as editor-in-chief achieved this balance.<sup>529</sup> While the magazine was under Rouillard's leadership, its often-racy personal ads were corralled into a separate and detachable section of the magazine, but at the same time, *The Advocate* added a specifically lesbian-oriented classified section. Although male readers might have been offended by the magazine's decision to hide the sexually-explicit personal ads, for the magazine's female readership, which was previously unacknowledged by the personals section, this was a step towards visibility.<sup>530</sup> Also indicative of *The Advocate*'s increasing acknowledgement of its female readers was the splashy redesign (and subsequently higher profile) of Pat Califia's "Adviser" column in 1992 and the tendency of the column to regularly feature at least one letter from a female author. While female readers who had long bemoaned their exclusion from *The Advocate*'s pages may have celebrated these changes, they may have been less appealing

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<sup>528</sup> "Timeline: January 1, 1993." *Metroline*. June 5, 2009. <http://www.metroline-online.com/pages/columns/timeline/timeline-january-21-1993.shtml>. Accessed 10 May 2011.

<sup>529</sup> Ronald Joseph Nerio, "Lesbian Representation in the Gay Press: A Content Analysis of *The Advocate*, 1970-1992." Master's thesis, Michigan State University Department of Sociology and Urban Studies Program, 1994:57.

<sup>530</sup> Eventually, all personals ads were removed and printed in a separate publication, *Advocate Classifieds*. Deirdre Carmody, "The Advocate's Makeover for Madison Avenue." *New York Times*, May 25, 1992.

to those readers who appreciated the magazine's traditional emphasis on gay male concerns and culture—and to the magazine's bottom-line-oriented publisher. That there was a backlash against Rouillard and, implicitly, the changes he made, is suggested by the fact of his sudden departure in 1992. Though *The Advocate's* publisher, Niles Merton, claimed to be "kind of stunned" by the abrupt parting of the "brilliant agent of change" from the magazine, Rouillard himself claimed that "longstanding differences of opinion with management" fueled his decision to leave.<sup>531</sup> Following his departure, *The Advocate* appointed another male editor in chief, under whose guidance the magazine's gender imbalance slowly resumed.

#### Not a Quick Fix: Judy Wieder at *The Advocate*

After Rouillard's departure, *The Advocate* struggled through a difficult period during which it came close to suffering the succeeding editor in chief Jeff Yarbrough, described as "a sort of major (public relations) disaster" which resulted from internal tensions about the magazine's treatment of its female staffers and its coverage of women.<sup>532</sup> In late 1993, three female writers submitted a memo to Yarbrough outlining which reportedly cited "many of the problems facing women at the magazine, as well as to people of color" and which credited Managing Editor S. Bryn Austin for her "vital role in maintaining a balance of lesbian writers and material in the magazine."<sup>533</sup> Following the receipt of this memo, Yarbrough fired one of its writers, longtime *Advocate* staffer

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<sup>531</sup> Garry Abrams, "Rouillard Resigns as *Advocate* Editor." *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1992.

<sup>532</sup> Garry Abrams, "Rough Water Ahead for *The Advocate*?" *Los Angeles Times*, January 28, 1993: E1.

<sup>533</sup> "Timeline: January 1, 1993." *Metroline*, June 5, 2009. <http://www.metroline-online.com/pages/columns/timeline/timeline-january-21-1993.shtml>. Accessed 20 March 2012.



Achy Obejas; at the same time, Austin tendered her resignation. Donna Minkowitz, whose "Friendly Fire" column had run in *The Advocate* since 1990, quit in solidarity, explaining that "'I didn't want to continue giving them credibility when all the other women employees were being treated so shabbily.'"<sup>534</sup>

Austin subsequently hired an attorney and prepared to bring legal action against the magazine; she claimed, "I was discriminated against on the basis of my gender and that I was sexually harassed." The lawsuit was to represent not only Austin but Obejas and Minkowitz as well; attorney Eric Davis said that the women agreed "that the current management structure of *The Advocate* is not interested in issues regarding women."<sup>535</sup> Yarbrough responded that he "felt [Austin] wasn't functioning as an optimum managing editor," but the comments of Richard Rouillard, now established as an editor at the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, called into question Yarbrough's evaluation of Austin's work; he claimed that "I don't think I could have found a better choice for Managing Editor...*The Advocate* was lucky to get her."<sup>536</sup>

No doubt aware of the specter of sexism that hung over the magazine, Yarbrough chose to defend himself against allegations of sex discrimination by noting that the person hired as Austin's replacement was a woman, and claiming that he would look for a female replacement for Minkowitz as well.<sup>537</sup> In light of these events, *The Advocate's* decision to appoint a female editor-in-chief, upon Yarbrough's departure, seems like a calculated effort to compensate for the negative attention that this case brought to *The*

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<sup>534</sup> Garry Abrams, "Rough Water Ahead for *The Advocate*?"

<sup>535</sup> "Timeline: January 1, 1993." *Metroline*.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

<sup>537</sup> Garry Abrams, "Rough Water Ahead for *The Advocate*?"

*Advocate* and as an opportunity for the magazine to demonstrate its commitment to live up to its billing as a "gay and lesbian" magazine.

But appointing Judy Wieder as editor in chief in 1996 was not to be a panacea for the magazine's gender troubles. Before addressing the question of why her leadership did not result in an appreciable and sustained increase in *The Advocate's* representation of women, it is instructive to look at a gender-based controversy which occurred at a rival magazine around the time Wieder became the editor in chief. The case of *Out* magazine illustrative of how gender tensions within a gay and lesbian publication, abetted by existing tensions between gay men and LBQ women in the larger community, might affect the content of a magazine and, moreover, how magazines like *Out* or *The Advocate* were viewed as contested cultural terrain by territorial gender factions within the LGBT community.

Having debuted in 1992 as a glossy, commercial magazine that seemed designed to compete directly with *The Advocate*, *Out* was helmed by two editors, Michael Goff and Sarah Pettit. The two had worked together on the short-lived New York-based magazine *OutWeek*, which historian Rodger Streitmatter described as having "established itself from the start as the most progressive of the gay publications" because of its overt support of ACT UP and Queer Nation, and its controversial policy of "outing" closeted public figures.<sup>538</sup> *OutWeek* was also remarkable for its conscientious efforts to represent both gay men and LBQ women equally; Streitmatter noted that the magazine

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<sup>538</sup> Deirdre Carmody, "Outweek, Gay and Lesbian Magazine, Ceases Publication." *New York Times*, June 28, 1991: D9.

"maintain[ed] a firm policy of depicting women on at least every third cover, even though sales were consistently less for those issues."<sup>539</sup>

With Pettit and Goff reunited at the helm of *Out*, it was no surprise that they would strive for the same type of balance, regarding "gay men and women as a single audience with a common cause."<sup>540</sup> The magazine, however, was far less explicitly political than *OutWeek* had been; a press release described it as a cross between a "gay and lesbian *Mirabella* or *Esquire* with a little gay and lesbian *Cosmo* thrown in." Michael Goff also admitted his desire to make a magazine that would have appeal beyond its target market, telling the *New York Times* that his magazine's journalism would "matter-of-factly [address] gay and lesbian people" instead of taking an "In your face!" approach."<sup>541</sup>

*Out's* focus on lifestyle, rather than politics, immediately posed a problem to the co-gender ideals Goff and Pettit had worked towards at *OutWeek*; while gay men and LBQ women certainly had overlapping interests in the struggle for gay and lesbian civil rights, the degree to which their lifestyles overlapped was significantly smaller. When Goff, unhappy with the magazine's direction, resigned as editor-in-chief of the magazine in 1996, Pettit stepped to the fore, asserting that she would "highlight the more serious aspects of the magazine" in response to the charges of superficiality and "fluff journalism" often leveled at it.<sup>542</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America*: 279.

<sup>540</sup> "Ousted at 'Out.'" *The Village Voice*, February 1, 1998: 53-55.

<sup>541</sup> Deirdre Carmody, "Gay, Lesbian Press is Starting to Emerge Into the Mainstream." *New York Times*, March 2, 1992: A1.

<sup>542</sup> David W. Dunlap, "Out Magazine's Founder Resigns Amid Dispute." *New York Times*, February 5, 1996: D7.

Pettit's high-minded strategy was ultimately unsuccessful; in December 1997, she was fired by the magazine's president, Henry Scott and replaced with a male editor, late of the glossy British men's magazine *Attitude*. Pettit claimed that she had been fired without cause, and brought a wrongful termination and sex discrimination suit against the magazine (eventually settled out of court). Scott insisted that she had been warned about her "imperious and authoritarian" management style and that this, rather than gender, was the cause of her dismissal.<sup>543</sup> Some of Pettit's editorial staff disagreed with this, intimating that Pettit's insistence on covering the concerns of LBQ women as well as gay men was simply not working "in the eyes of the money people."<sup>544</sup> The economic argument held up less well in light of the fact that *Out* thrived during the two years of Pettit's leadership, growing in advertising revenue and circulation. Many members of the gay and lesbian community agreed with Pettit that sex discrimination was, if not the entire motivating force behind her dismissal from *Out*, likely a large factor. For example, LGBT newspaper the *Boston Phoenix* described Pettit's dismissal as "a symbol of the tensions that often exist when gay men and lesbians work together, particularly in a gay-owned business" which themselves resulted from "broader cultural issues [like] sexism and overt gender discrimination."

The criticisms which had been leveled at her by some of the most influential members of the gay male activist community prior to her dismissal also suggest that gender issues played a key role in Pettit's dismissal. Pettit had been chastised by some notable gay male writers who abhorred her editorial decisions to include (or, as the critics

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<sup>543</sup> Michael Bronski, "Sexual Tension." *The Boston Phoenix*, January 1998.  
<http://www.bostonphoenix.com/archive/1in10/98/01/OUT.html>. Accessed 20 March 2012.

<sup>544</sup> Robin Pogrebin, "Ousted Editor Sees Bias at Gay-Lesbian Monthly." *New York Times*, December 8, 1997: D2.

would claim, promote) controversial elements of the gay male community that these writers denounced.<sup>545</sup> However, as the *Boston Phoenix* noted, the subtext of the criticism “was that Pettit, as a lesbian, was not fully qualified to report on gay men's lives and sexuality.” Addressing Pettit, author Larry Kramer wrote in an email that was disseminated to other leading members of the gay community that

I find it beyond acceptable..... that *Out* is entirely edited by lesbians now. . . The *Advocate*, too, is now becoming more lesbian slanted because of its editor [Judy Wieder]...So you and your fellow editors, all women, are left to deal with us as you see fit. I would rather you made it a lesbian magazine entirely. I would not pretend to assume what would interest a lesbian audience or to cast such rigid parameters around this content as you have cast, are casting, around us.<sup>546</sup>

The *Boston Phoenix* noted that Kramer was incorrect in his assumptions about the makeup of the editorial staff at *Out*, which was equally split between men and women, and observed that his “remarks assume (or seem to assume) that lesbians, simply by being lesbians, lack the ability to understand or care about issues that concern gay men.”<sup>547</sup> Henry Scott asserted that neither the complaints of Kramer and his cohort—including well-known gay writers Andrew Sullivan, Gabriel Rotello, and Michelangelo Signorile—nor gender discrimination had any influence on Pettit’s dismissal, and suggested that her editorial style was simply a mismatch for the magazine. The criticisms of Pettit’s managerial style, however, provoke the question of whether she was, to some extent, being pilloried for failing to adhere to traditional expectations of feminine behavior; it seems unlikely that the behavior of a male editor-in-chief, for example,

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<sup>545</sup> What seemed to have incensed these men the most was Sarah Pettit’s coverage of the actions of Sex Panic!, a group that disputed what they perceived as anti-sex messages on the part of AIDS organizations like ACT UP. Kramer and his colleagues felt that providing the members of Sex Panic! with a forum to promote their views was a personal affront to the AIDS activist movement and suggested that LBQ women, as represented by Pettit, simply didn’t “get” the severity of the AIDS crisis.

<sup>546</sup> Michael Bronski, “Sexual Tension.”

<sup>547</sup> Ibid.

would ever be disparaged as “imperious.” Veteran lesbian activist Urvashi Vaid observed that the incident “brings up quite vividly the whole problem of men's fundamental lack of faith in lesbian leadership...[and] also brings up the harsh truth that many men are not at all interested in creating mixed, co-gender publications or spaces, in reading about issues that may affect lesbians more than they affect men, or in otherwise having to deal with lesbians.” It would be unrealistic to think that Judy Wieder, watching these developments from her newly-assumed seat at the editor-in-chief's desk at *The Advocate*, didn't take to heart the claims that lesbian editors could not possibly do justice to the concerns of gay men is unrealistic, and similarly implausible to deny that her awareness of the issue might have affected the extent to which she strove for gender parity in her own, traditionally-male-oriented, magazine.<sup>548</sup>

To be sure, Wieder did effect some changes that increased women's visibility in the pages of *The Advocate*. Shortly following her appointment, she invited the folk singer Janis Ian to become the magazine's “resident iconoclast,” and gave her a monthly column in which Ian could write about almost anything. Ian characterized her hiring as groundbreaking, recalling later that “*The Advocate* had been a real boy's club for years. It had managed to make the transition from a rag filled with sex ads to a serious news magazine, but there were no female columnists, and not much interest in women's issues, let alone gay women.”<sup>549</sup> In the late 1990s, Wieder also invited the provocative lesbian author Norah Vincent to write for the magazine. In addition to adding these regular columnists, Wieder also attempted to increase the magazine's coverage of topics that

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<sup>548</sup> Robin Pogrebin, “Ousted Editor Sees Bias at Gay-Lesbian Monthly.” *New York Times*, December 8, 1997: D2.

<sup>549</sup> Janis Ian, “My History at *The Advocate*.” <http://www.janisian.com/reading/advocate.php>. Accessed 15 March 2012.

were specifically of interest to LBQ women, although the economic drawbacks to this tactic were not insignificant. In the same way that *OutWeek* had noted sluggish sales of issues that featured women on their covers, a 1996 issue of *The Advocate* whose cover story was on breast cancer in the lesbian community sold “very badly.” Later, she opined that, instead of using an image of a woman’s breast on the cover, she should have used an attractive male image instead, to draw readers into the story inside.<sup>550</sup> Wieder claimed that her intent had been to show female readers that “we were there for them,” but the commercial backlash against this may have made it an untenable strategy.<sup>551</sup>

That Wieder felt some pressure to prioritize revenue over ideals is suggested by the increased focus of *The Advocate* on celebrity interviews in the late 1990s, a strategy which was likely to appeal to readers of all genders and sexual orientations. Responding to accusations that the magazine’s focus on celebrities lessened its credibility, Wieder argued that tactic was simply a means to an end, explaining that “[Celebrities] drew reader/browsers into the bigger issues you [were] trying to explore in the publication. Nine out of ten times, if we did it well, we’d have a much bigger audience for difficult subjects people otherwise resisted.”<sup>552</sup> This comment indicates that Wieder was keenly aware that her primary responsibility was to sell magazines, and further suggests that the ongoing sidelining of LBQ women in *The Advocate* of the late 1990s was in part an economically-driven trend. As *Advocate* publisher Joe Landry explained in a 2000 interview with *Folio* magazine, advertisers were eager to reach gay male consumers, not

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<sup>550</sup> Eleanor Brown, “Power and Privilege in the Gay Media.” *Press Pass Q*, September 2004.

<sup>551</sup> Bennett Marcus, “Live Nude Girls.” *Press Pass Q*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (August 2004).  
<http://www.presspassq.com/detail.cfm?id=39>. Accessed 20 March 2012.

<sup>552</sup> Judy Wieder, “The Not-So-Sudden Death of *The Advocate*.” *HuffingtonPost.com*, November 9, 2009.  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/judy-wieder/the-not-so-sudden-death-o\\_b\\_342725.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/judy-wieder/the-not-so-sudden-death-o_b_342725.html). Accessed April 30, 2010.

lesbians; Landry alluded to market research (which has been effectively challenged by economists such as M.V. Lee Badgett) and claimed that gay men “spend more freely and are more easily affected by the advertising directed at them.”<sup>553</sup> While I have criticized as myopic some scholars’ purely economic explanations of the longstanding disenfranchisement of LBQ women from the LGBT press, I believe that financial considerations did play a large role in perpetuating this trend during the 1990s more than at any other time; this era saw the emergence of numerous LGBT-oriented titles (including *Out*, *Genre*, *XY*, *Instinct*, and *Hero*) and also brought a more widespread recognition, on the part of advertisers, of the LGBT market. Given that *The Advocate* had recently passed through a rocky financial period after the departure of Richard Rouillard, ensuring that advertisers remained content and loyal may have been a primary motivating factor in determining the content of the magazine. *Advertising Age* reported in 1996 that *The Advocate*’s circulation statistics in 1996 lagged far behind that of *Out* (*Advertising Age* put *Out*’s circulation at 119,000, and *The Advocate*’s at 74,000), which understandably would have left the magazine’s ownership reluctant to allow any changes that might drive readers (and thus advertisers) away.

Wieder admitted in 2004 that it had been “hard...for us to get any female readers into *The Advocate*” and said that gay men and LBQ women simply did not “have enough in common” to enable the creation of a co-gender LGBT publication.<sup>554</sup> Adding to the magazine’s difficulty of attracting and serving LBQ women, in the 1990s two glossy, professionally-produced publications specifically targeted towards this audience

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<sup>553</sup> Jennifer F. Steil, “Inside the ‘*Out*’ Market.” *Folio: The Magazine for Magazine Management*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (April 1, 2000): 49.

<sup>554</sup> Eleanor Brown, “Power and Privilege in the Gay Media.” *Press Pass Q*, Vol. 6, No. 6 (September 2004). <http://www.presspassq.com/detail.cfm?id=40>. Accessed 20 March 2012.



emerged—*Curve* and *Girlfriends*. *The Advocate*'s continued gender imbalance from the 1990s onward suggests that it believed LBQ women were more interested in—and would be better served by—publications that exclusively addressed their concerns, and the magazine may have seized gratefully on this excuse not to increase its efforts to feature more LBQ women in the pages of *The Advocate*.

Much as Wieder's stint as editor in chief had brought only marginal change to the gender balance of *The Advocate*, so too did the appointment of Anne Stockwell to this position in 2004. Female readers continued to comment on their continued exclusion from *The Advocate* into the new century. In 2004, the magazine received complaints about the absence of LBQ women from its recent "Sex Issue." One woman wrote, exasperatedly, "Women generally get inadequate coverage, but this was absurd," while another charged *The Advocate* with having

encountered the topic of sex and promptly forgot that there are gay women and we do have sex. While gay men have been disenfranchised from the establishment...you have ignored the far greater disenfranchisement of gay women... You have totally left us out in the cold. Oh, wait, that's right. You gave us two token pages on a second-rate lesbian film from India, reviewed at the back of the magazine.<sup>555</sup>

In addition to illustrating that LBQ women were used to being marginalized by *The Advocate*, these letters also suggest that women still constituted some of the magazine's audience. In much the same way that the rocky "marriage of convenience" between early gay male and LBQ female activists had been one that both groups were reluctant to abandon, female *Advocate* readers seemed hesitant to leave *The Advocate* completely,

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<sup>555</sup> Molly Thomas, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, September 14, 2004: 4; Penny Duff, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, September 14, 2004

drawing on the optimism of their forebears to hope that one day the magazine which claimed to represent their community actually would.

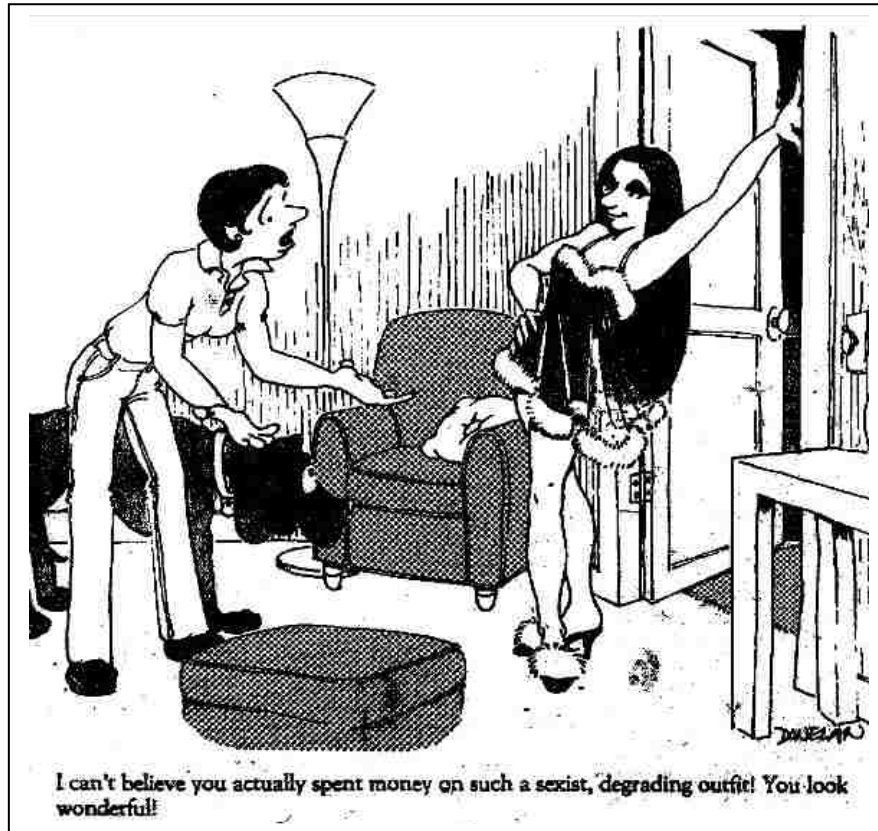


FIG. 6: Cartoon from the 1981 issue of *The Advocate* which focused on “successful” LBQ women.

#### Chapter 4: Outside the Margins: Bisexuality in *The Advocate*

In 2001, legal scholar Kenji Yoshino advanced a provocative argument in the *Stanford Law Review*. Examining the relative invisibility of bisexuality in American culture, Yoshino challenged the popular explanation that bisexuals' limited visibility was related to their small number (relative to homosexuals or heterosexuals), citing studies that demonstrated there were actually more people that identified as not-strictly-hetero- or -homosexual than there were individuals in the "Kinsey 6" or "Kinsey 1" camps. Similarly, Yoshino criticized those who claimed bisexual erasure was an inevitable function of the human tendency to view the world in binaristic terms, sagely observing that this tendency, even if true, does not dictate the terms of that binary (in other words, who decided that heterosexual/ homosexual would be the prevailing binary, rather than, say, monosexual/bisexual?). He instead argued that homosexual and heterosexual individuals are heavily invested in maintaining the symbolic and dialogic invisibility of bisexuality, and that the two groups enter into an "epistemic contract of bisexual erasure."<sup>556</sup> He elaborated on the three forms of "erasure" most common in American culture: the erasure of bisexuals as a class (through, for instance, the use of a homo-/hetero- binary which forecloses on the possibility of anything in between); the erasure of bisexuals on an individual level (that is, by denying that an individual is bisexual or claiming that his/her sexual orientation is unknown); and the delegitimation of bisexuality (by referring to it only in a negative way).

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<sup>556</sup> Kenji Yoshino, "The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure." *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (January 2000): 353-461.

Yoshino's own research on the mainstream American press bore out this assertion; between 1990 and 1999, the *Wall Street Journal* mentioned homosexuals or homosexuality 396 times, while "bisexual" or "bisexuality" appeared nine times, and similar discrepancies were observed in the records of at least five other mass-market national newspapers or magazines.<sup>557</sup> What these findings indicate is that the heterosexual-dominated, heteronormative mass media was upholding its end of the "contract." One would expect, then, that the same ideological motivations would result in the coincident absence of bisexuals from the pages of *The Advocate*, a magazine dominated by images of what historian Lisa Duggan has called "homonormativity"—a view that privileges those in the LGBTQ community who most closely emulate mainstream norms of gender, sexual expression, and lifestyle.<sup>558</sup> The answer is both yes and no. It would be untrue to assert that bisexuality was *literally* absent from the pages of *The Advocate* to the same extent that it was in the mainstream press. But *The Advocate* did frequently engage in these forms of erasure when it did discuss bisexuality, which the following discussion will illustrate.

Yoshino's model can also be extended to discussions of "trans- erasure" which will be the focus of the chapter that follows this one.<sup>559</sup> Even a brief analysis of *The Advocate's* content of topics relating to trans issues exposes the magazine's tendency to erase (individually and as a class) and delegitimize trans identities. The motivations for this phenomenon are similar, if not completely identical to those Yoshino argues drive

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<sup>557</sup> Yoshino's theory also held true in a similar search of academic publications. *Ibid.*: 368.

<sup>558</sup> Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack On Democracy* (New York: Beacon Press, 2003).

<sup>559</sup> In this and the following chapter, I will use the terms "trans" and "transpeople" to refer to a group comprised of transgender, transsexual, and gender-variant individuals for purposes of inclusivity.

bisexual erasure. According to Yoshino, bisexuals are suppressed for three reasons: first, they disturb the hetero-/homo- binary on which much of society is organized; secondly, they call into question the immutability of sexual orientation; and third, they challenge the view of sexual orientation which posits that people choose a partner primarily based on that person's sex. Similarly, trans people are suppressed because they disturb the gender binary, because they challenge the alleged immutability of physical sex, and because they disrupt the notion that physical sex is necessarily a determinant of gender identity. Further, trans people complicate simplistic notions of sexual identity by demanding that their relationships be identified not based solely on how they appear to outsiders, but based instead on how the participants identify (for instance, a relationship between a male-identified biological male and a self-identified woman who is also biologically male should be considered a heterosexual or bisexual relationship rather than a homosexual relationship). Both bisexual and trans-identified individuals, then, challenge some of the fundamentals of the "monosexual" and largely cisgendered mainstream gay/lesbian rights movement (in addition to destabilizing some of the cherished assumptions of heteronormative society), expose the limitations of identity politics, and as a result often find themselves cast as adversarial anomalies by movement mouthpieces such as *The Advocate*.<sup>560</sup>

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<sup>560</sup> The term "cisgendered" refers to individuals who are not transgendered, and is used, as historian Susan Stryker eloquently explains, to "name the usually unstated assumption of nontransgender status contained in the words 'man' and 'woman.'" Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008): 22. Another note on terminology: the terms "pansexual" and "omnisexual" have recently come into favor with individuals who object to the binaristic view of sex/gender implied by "bisexual," but because "bisexual" is still the most widely used and accepted term, and because it is the word used most frequently in *The Advocate* it is the one I will use in this chapter.

Bisexuality: The *Real* "Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name"?

**“Jump off that rail and cast your lot with either the heterosexuals or the homosexuals. This is one time when being half-and-half doesn’t mean you are the cream of the crop. It just means you are confused—let’s face it!”**  
—*ONE* magazine, January 1953<sup>561</sup>

Bisexuality has long been, and continues to persist as, a contentious topic among gay men and lesbians, many of whom flatly refuse to acknowledge it as a valid and stable sexual orientation. Common are claims that bisexuality is simply a term used by self-loathing homosexuals or by heterosexuals who are simply “experimenting” with same-sex sexuality, and also widespread is the belief that bisexuals have no vested interest in the struggles of lesbians and gay men for civil and legal rights—after all, they might spend their whole lives in an apparently heterosexual coupling, dodging social censure as long as their attraction to the same sex is kept under wraps. But this derisive view contradicts the historical record, which I will briefly discuss in order to provide a context for understanding the relationship between bisexuals and the larger gay/lesbian rights movement.

Yoshino’s argument presupposes the existence of a sizeable bisexual population, but ignorance of this fact by homosexuals and heterosexuals alike might be explained by the relatively long time it took for bisexuals to assert a political presence. With the foundations of an organized gay and lesbian rights movement emerging in 1950s America, why did it take nearly three decades for an organized bisexual political group to coalesce? Given that the Gay Liberation Front only predated by two years the formation of the National Bisexual Liberation Group in New York City, the lapse in time between the birth of a national gay political group (the National Gay Task Force, formed in 1973)

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<sup>561</sup> Geraldine Jackson (pseud. Betty Perdue), “As For Me...” *ONE*, January 1943: 16-17.

and a nationally-oriented bisexual political group (the North American Multicultural Bisexual Network, later known as BiNet, formed in the wake of 1987's March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights) is puzzling.<sup>562</sup> The most obvious supposition would be that bisexuals, who by definition would choose to partner with the opposite or same sex, were not as consistently threatened as homosexuals by anti-gay legal and social measures, particularly if they were publically partnered with an opposite-sex partner. This notion assumes that bisexually-oriented men and women are completely circumspect about their same-sex desires, not discussing or otherwise betraying them to anyone, which is difficult to prove historically and frankly, difficult to imagine holding true for all bisexuals (or all humans, for that matter).

This argument is especially weak, keeping in perspective the early and mid-twentieth century. Remembering that Freud's notions of bisexuality posited it as the most immature form of human sexuality—even same-sex desires were incrementally more advanced on his scale of psychosexual development—and that much of the psycho-medical world of the 1950s was hamstrung by practitioners' virulent opposition to any non-normative (read: non-heterosexual) sexual behavior, it would be hard to accept this argument at face value. Any betrayal of one's same sex desires—no matter if one was single or currently engaged in an opposite-sex relationship—was an admission of pathology, and left a person open to the same punitive measures which targeted homosexuals. A woman who admitted any same-sex attraction to her friends, co-workers,

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<sup>562</sup> I differentiate here between radical "grassroots" groups such as the GLF and the NBLF and organizations seeking to use traditional means of power—that is, by working through the legal and political channels—to effect change. It should also be noted that BiPOL, a San Francisco-based group that formed in 1983, is often identified by bisexual historians as the first and oldest bisexual political group but its focus was local rather than national.



or even her husband could quickly find herself in jeopardy of losing her job, her marriage, and access to any children she might have. Even a cursory overview of the historical record shows that some of the individuals ensnared in the treacherous anti-gay government witch hunts of the 1950s identified not as homosexual but as bisexual, or that they only admitted to having same-sex desires—not to having these desires to the exclusion of all others. Enforcers of heterosexual normativity took as their target anyone who deviated from the norm, with little regard as to how that deviation was manifested.<sup>563</sup>

A second popular conjecture that accounts for the late development of an organized bisexual political movement is that most bisexual people in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century United States simply joined existing gay and/or lesbian groups rather than beginning their own. The corollary assumption, then, is that bisexuals believed these groups fully represented their interests. But recent scholarship on both the gay and lesbian movement and bisexual politics suggests that this may not have been the case. As early as the 1970s, bisexual social, educational, and support groups were forming across the United States, suggesting that many individuals felt that their needs were *not* being met by nominally “gay” groups. This was in spite of the fact that bisexuals were generally accepted within the early years of the gay lib movement; one veteran, Loraine Hutchins, asserted that the “early Gay Liberation Front slogans, such as ‘Gay is what we make it,’ interpreted *gay* as meaning all people who wanted to celebrate their homosexual feelings.”<sup>564</sup> But, she added, “as the gay movement became more defined in opposition to

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<sup>563</sup> See David Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) for more information on the anti-homosexual purges of the 1950s.

<sup>564</sup> Loraine Hutchins, “Bisexuality: Politics and Community.” In Beth A. Firestein, ed., *Bisexuality: The Psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996): 240-59. A general timeline of the bisexual movement’s development is provided by Dannielle Raymond and Liz A.

heterosexuality, did the bisexual middle zone become ‘no man’s land,’ and monosexuality become an oath one had to sign—and a rule of conduct one had to enforce—to be considered a legitimate member of the gay or lesbian communities.”<sup>565</sup>

This comment points to the precarious position bisexuals found themselves in as grassroots radicalism ceded ground within the gay community to traditional political activism. Even as the stigma of sickness surrounding same-sex desire slowly dissipated, thanks to the efforts of members of the gay liberation movement, openly bisexual people not only remained to attack by stalwart opponents of same-sex sexuality but also faced resistance from within the gay and lesbian community. The Mattachine Society’s influential ONE Magazine frequently used quotation marks around the word “bisexual” and in a 1959 editorial referred to them as “fence-sitters.”<sup>566</sup> Stephen Donaldson (ne Robert Martin), a veteran of the early days of bisexual lib, recalled that he “took a lot of flak from the leaders of other homophile organizations for being bi,” recalling that his “scandalous” late- ‘60s affair with Martha Shelley (then the leader of the New York chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis and later one of the founders of the Gay Liberation Front) caused other gay leaders much consternation—particularly because the high profiles of both partners in the gay lib movement limited the extent to which they could

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Highleyman, “Brief Timeline of Bisexual Activism in the United States.” In Naomi Tucker, ed. *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries, and Visions* (New York: Haworth Press, 1995): 333-37. Discussion of the shortcomings of the organized gay movement for bisexual participants can be found in Amanda Udis-Kessler, “Identity/Politics: A History of the Bisexual Movement,” in *Ibid.*: 17-30. Also see Lani Ka’ahumanu and Loraine Hutchins, ed., *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1991), widely considered to be a pioneering work in the field of bisexual studies.

<sup>565</sup> While Karl Maria Kertbeny coined the term “monosexual” in 1869 to describe men whose sexual desires were primarily fulfilled by masturbation (rather than by sex with other people), it is currently used to mean individuals who are only attracted to one sex or gender, in contrast to individuals who identify as bisexual, pansexual, or omnisexual. Some people have objected to the term on the grounds that it is usually used to privilege bisexuality (or any non-monosexual orientation) over hetero- or homosexuality and that it suggests a false parallel between hetero- and homosexuality.

<sup>566</sup> Jim Kepner, *Rough News, Daring Views: 1950s Pioneer Gay Press Journalism* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 1998): 106, 186, 207.

be publically castigated.<sup>567</sup> When Donaldson was invited to appear on a television show, along with other delegates to the 1968 convention of NACHO (the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations) he recalled the objections of some gay and lesbian leaders to a “bisexual representing the movement.”<sup>568</sup> Feeling alienated, Donaldson abandoned the gay liberation movement for a brief stint in the Navy; in what might be a textbook illustration of the potential benefits and looming threats bisexuals faced, Donaldson joined the U.S. military (likely because he could honestly say that he was not a homosexual, or that he found women attractive, depending on what, if any, questions he would have been asked while enlisting in a time of war) but found himself shortly discharged for “homosexual involvement.”<sup>569</sup> He subsequently traveled to the 1972 Friends General Congress in Ithaca, New York, and helped to draft the “Ithaca Statement on Bisexuality, which pointedly asked readers to be “aware of their own tendency to assume that any interest in the same sex necessarily indicates an exclusively homosexual orientation, and to further falsely assume that interest in the opposite sex necessarily indicates an exclusively heterosexual orientation.” Although originally intended for a Quaker audience, the document was republished by *The Advocate*, turning it into what Donaldson called “an announcement of bi consciousness to the gay world.”

Why were some homosexuals, themselves so keenly aware of the pain of discrimination, reluctant to embrace bisexuals or their concerns within the scope of

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<sup>567</sup> Eric Marcus, *Making History*: 125.

<sup>568</sup> Stephen Donaldson, “The Bisexual Movement’s Beginnings in the 70s: A Personal Retrospective.” In Naomi Tucker, ed., *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries, and Visions* (New York: Haworth Press, 1995): 33.

<sup>569</sup> The discharge received much attention in the gay press (including *The Advocate* ) and was championed by the American Civil Liberties Union, U.S. State Representative Bella Abzug, and Senator Sam Ervin. In 1977, Donaldson became the first person to get a discharge on the grounds of homosexuality (a “General Discharge”) upgraded to an “Honorable” discharge. *Ibid.*: 44.

activist organizations? While some might have been rubbed the wrong way by bisexuals' frequent derisive comments about "monosexuals" "shutting themselves off" to "half the human race," the main motivations clearly go beyond the level of personal antipathy. Many homosexuals believed that self-identified bisexuals were nothing more than "closeted" homosexuals, a falsehood predicated on the tendency of many later-gay-identified individuals to temporarily identify as bisexual while in the process of "coming out." The idea of stopping at what, for some homosexuals, had been but a way station on the journey to acknowledging their sexual identity, also suggested that bisexuals were immature, just as Freud had intimated. Alternatively, bisexuals were also stereotyped as heterosexuals seeking to "be different," as Stephen Donaldson was accused by one gay friend. The opinions of 1970s radical feminists on bisexuality must also be acknowledged for influencing many homosexuals' view of bisexuals as supremely uncommitted to the cause of gay rights. Pointing out that many feminists had failed (or pretended not) to notice the subtle alteration between TiGrace Atkinson's original statement, "Feminism is a theory, lesbianism is a practice" and the form in which that phrase was widely disseminated ("Feminism is the theory, lesbianism is *the* practice", italics mine), theorist Paula Rust explained, "If lesbianism [was] a form of political protest because it represents a refusal to participate in the most intimate manifestation of male supremacy, then bisexuality [was] a form of cooperation with male supremacy because it represents a willingness to participate in the male supremacist institution of heterosexuality."<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> Paula Rust, *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 1995): 185.

With bisexuals popularly regarded as self-loathing thrill seekers in a state of perpetual childhood, is it any wonder that gullible or misinformed gay and lesbian activists would be hesitant to regard them as equal partners in their struggle for rights (in spite of the fact that bisexuals had been active and influential in gay and lesbian activism from the start)? This left bisexuals in the tricky position of trying to fight with (as in “against”) the organized gay and lesbian movement while at the same time fighting with them (against opponents). Bisexual activist Robyn Ochs would later coin the phrase “double discrimination” to address the prejudice felt by bisexuals both from the heterosexual and homosexual communities.<sup>571</sup> Many bisexuals, especially those who had been rejected by their heterosexual friends or family members because of their same-sex desires, refused to cede their membership in the gay and lesbian community and downplayed their opposite-sex desires in order to avoid censure or, in some cases, out of fear that their credibility within the gay and lesbian movement would be compromised. One bisexual woman recalled that, “[f]or years, bisexuals have felt compelled to hide our true sexual identity in the gay community as well as in the straight world.”<sup>572</sup> As a hidden “minority within a minority,” the opportunities for bisexuals to organize were severely circumscribed.

A cultural moment in which bisexuality was viewed as chic or *a la mode* occurred in the mid-1970s, but its overall effect may have been more deleterious than anything; Yoshino’s theory would categorize this as part of the delegitimation of bisexuality. In

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<sup>571</sup> Robyn Ochs, “Biphobia: It Goes More than Two Ways.” In Beth A. Firestein, ed., *Bisexuality: The Psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1996):217.

<sup>572</sup> Megan Morrison, “Loving Whom We Choose: Bisexuality and the Lesbian/Gay Community—What We Are Doing.” *Gay Community News*, February 25, 1984: 9.

1974 and 1975, mainstream publications such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Redbook* ran articles on bisexuality or “bisexual chic.”<sup>573</sup> Although these articles did not vilify bisexuality, it was generally portrayed as a “fad” or a behavior in which heterosexually-oriented or homosexually-oriented people engaged, rather than as a static sexual orientation. Public insinuations of bisexuality from prominent pop musicians, including David Bowie, Mick Jagger, and Janis Joplin, added to the sense that bisexuality was young, modern, and countercultural, not to mention hedonistic. Though they made great fodder for sensationalistic journalists, none of these qualities exactly telegraphed maturity, intelligence, or respectability. What kind of credibility, then, would people attribute to a bisexual political movement?

Failure to articulate a specifically bisexual politic is another possible suspect for the late development of a coherent national bisexual movement. Gay men and lesbians may assume that the discrimination faced by bisexuals is identical to that which they themselves face--that is, oppression based on their same-sex relationships--but numerous bisexual activists, beginning in the 1980s, have argued to the contrary. Loraine Hutchins, for example, has outlined several “specifically bisexual issues”—including their fight to have “a person’s sexual identity [considered] to be an aspect of an individual’s identity, not defined by their current partner,” and the fact that bisexuals “aren’t just hated because they’re queer, but because they’re seen as ‘sexual’ or having sexual license in an uncontrolled and uncontrollable way.”<sup>574</sup> Additionally, the potential for bisexual oriented individuals to have simultaneous relationships with partners of various genders presents a

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<sup>573</sup> “Bisexual Chic: Anyone Goes,” *Newsweek*, May 27, 1974; “The New Bisexuals,” *Time*, May 13, 1974; Margaret Mead, “Bisexuality: What’s It All About?” *Redbook*, January 1975: 29-31; “Bisexuality: The Newest Sex-Style,” *Cosmopolitan*, June 1974.

<sup>574</sup> Loraine Hutchins, “Bisexuality: Politics and Community.” In Firestein, ed., *Bisexuality*: 243, 251.

challenge to gay and lesbian arguments for traditional (that is, two-partner, fidelitous) marriage. Finally, the bisexual movement frequently hails its roots in the racial and ethnic liberation movements of the 1970s (in fact, the original name of BiNET was the North American Multicultural Bisexual Network) and thus regards itself as particularly well-suited to address issues of multiculturalism and intersecting identities.<sup>575</sup> Although the preceding issues now regularly arise in issues surrounding bisexual rights, the consolidation of this bisexual political program did not occur as quickly as it did among homosexuals, and may account for the comparatively slow development of a specifically bisexual political movement.

The bisexual movement quickly made up for lost time in the 1980s and 1990s, though the infusion of vigor came at great expense. With the emergence of AIDS as a full-fledged epidemic, bisexuals—both male and female—found themselves pilloried as the disease’s main vectors. Male bisexuals were accused, in mainstream media, of having transported the “gay” disease into the heterosexual world, spreading it to their female sexual partners who in turn passed it along to other men, or to offspring in utero, while female bisexuals found themselves cast in the familiar role of subverters of the lesbian community, although this time their weapon was less ideological than lethal. This type of coverage could be classified as delegitimizing, according to Yoshino’s model. So widespread and powerful was this phenomenon that, even fifteen years after the discovery of the “Gay Related Immune Disorder” (an early name for HIV/AIDS), Loraine Hutchins could designate the “scapegoating of bisexuals as carriers of AIDS” as

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<sup>575</sup> The decision to drop “Multicultural” from the organization’s name was not without controversy; see Laura M. Perez, “Go Ahead: Make My Movement,” in Tucker, *Bisexual Politics*: 109-114.

an urgent issue facing bisexuals.<sup>576</sup> The extent to which bisexuals were involved in fighting the AIDS crisis through volunteer work, political action, or grassroots activism also increased their determination to be acknowledged by the gays and lesbians they worked alongside. When gay and lesbian political organizations convened in 1993 to plan the third National March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights, the same national network of bisexual organizations which had grown out of the 1987 March came together to demand that bisexuals be included in the title of the event. From the privileged perspective of the present, where the descriptor “gay and lesbian” has morphed—not always without conflict—into an unpronounceable acronym reflecting a wide spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities, both the narrow margin by which BiNET’s supporters carried the vote, and the conditions under which they were represented, are embarrassing. The main objections to including “bisexual” were that “bisexuality was implied by lesbian and gay, that if bisexuals were included, transgender people would have to be included too; and that including the word bisexual was ‘too sexual’ and wouldn’t fly in some regions of the United States.”<sup>577</sup> The compromise position finally reached was that the event would be known as the March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation.<sup>578</sup> A bisexual activist was one of the event’s featured speakers, and quotes from bisexual attendees peppered the media accounts that covered it.

This is not to suggest, however, that bisexuals were wholeheartedly embraced by all members of the gay and lesbian community in the 1990s; both in gay and lesbian

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<sup>576</sup> Loraine Hutchins, “Bisexuality: Politics and Community.” In Firestein, ed., *Bisexuality*: 251.

<sup>577</sup> *Ibid.*: 248.

<sup>578</sup> Organizers of the March’s subsequent incarnations neatly sidestepped this issue by changing its name to the “Millennium March on Washington for Equality” (2000) and the “National Equality March” (2009).



culture and in the American mainstream, issues of bisexuality were heatedly debated as bisexuals demanded equality, rejected their erasure from “gay and lesbian” historiographies, and watched warily as another wave of (delegitimizing) “bisexual chic” sent ripples through American popular culture. Androgyny reigned in the fashion world of the mid-1990s, cosmetic giant Coty bankrolled the biggest fragrance launch in history for a unisex perfume (Calvin Klein's CKOne), and pop stars coyly hinted at their same-sex desires, while television dramas and blockbuster movies featured bisexual love triangles and gorgeous bisexual murderesses. Still, in the same decade, an issue of the New York-based gay and lesbian newsmagazine *OutWeek* ran an article entitled, “The Bisexual Revolution: Deluded Closet Cases or Vanguard of the Movement?” and a cover of the national gay and lesbian journal *OUT/LOOK* demanded to know, “What do Bisexuals Want?”<sup>579</sup> Although the bisexual movement had been ready with answers to these questions for some time, that they were still being asked was an indication that the gay and lesbian community was having difficulty listening. This came as no surprise, however, considering that efficacy with which bisexual experience was rendered invisible by much of the gay press. The following discussion illustrates how the three discursive methods of erasure identified by Kenji Yoshino were applied in the pages of *The Advocate*.

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<sup>579</sup> For the cover stories in these issues, see Carrie Wofford, “The Bisexual Revolution: Deluded Closet Cases or Vanguard of the Movement?” *OutWeek*, February 6, 1991: 33; Ara Wilson, “Just Add Water: Searching for the Bisexual Politic.” *OUT/LOOK: National Gay and Lesbian Quarterly*, Spring 1992: 22-28; Carol Queen, “Strangers at Home: Bisexuals in the Queer Movement.” *Ibid.*: 23-33. For further illustration of the early 1990s debates over bisexual inclusion in the gay and lesbian movement, see Micki Siegel, “Bisexual Invisibility” (*Gay Community News*, February 18, 1990); Vanessa Tait, “The Bisexuality Debate” (*Boston Phoenix*, August 16, 1991); Bet Power, “Who Gets to ‘Belong’ in the Lesbian Community Anyway?” (*Gay Community News*, April 8-14, 1990); Kim Corsaro, “Bisexuality in the Gay/Lesbian Community: The Controversy Continues” (*San Francisco Bay Times*, May 1991); and Sarah Dreher and Lis Brook, “Visibility? Whose Visibility?” (*Gay Community News*, March 11-17, 1990). More resources can be found in Tucker, *Bisexual Politics*: 341-51.

## Erasure on a Class Level and The Invention of “Sexual Fluidity”

Discussions of sexual orientation in *The Advocate* often presented a binaristic viewpoint in which hetero- and homosexuality were the only options, foreclosing on anything outside or in between the two. Yoshino refers to this tendency as the “class erasure” of bisexuality. Surely the fact that bisexuals are still not included in the magazine’s official subtitle (“The National Lesbian and Gay Newsmagazine”) is the most obvious indication of *The Advocate*’s propensity toward this. Looking more closely at the magazine’s content, however, makes visible not simply the erasure of bisexuals as a class, but more intriguingly exposes the theoretical adaptations that needed to occur in order to defend a dualistic model of sexuality. In this sense, conceptual contractions necessitated rhetorical expansion.

Also, beginning in the late 1990s, the term “sexual fluidity” began to appear in the magazine’s pages, borrowed from scientific reports that flatly denied the possibility of a stable bisexual orientation. This linguistic trick allowed people to describe (and criticize and demean) bisexual *behavior* while refusing to acknowledge bisexuality as a class. “Sexual fluidity” implied a person’s ability to move between heterosexuality and homosexuality, but foreclosed on the potential for that person to pause somewhere between the two poles, re-inscribing the dualistic model of sexuality.

Describing individuals who related sexually and romantically to both men and women as “sexually fluid” also enabled *The Advocate* to erase bisexual individuals, but parsing this tendency when it comes to discussions of people who did not self-identify as bisexual is somewhat complicated. As a general and widely understood rule, it is inappropriate to label people’s sexual orientation (or gender) without their consent, based

on external observations (e.g., “She has had both male and female partners, and thus must be bisexual” or “That man used to be married to a woman and now has a male lover so he must be gay”). The human impulse to label and categorize others, however, competes against this. I would argue that *Advocate* readers’ tendency to perceive as bisexual people who engaged in both same- and opposite-sex relationships (as evidenced by letters to the editor interpreting coverage of these individuals as biphobic) justifies their inclusion in this analysis. Certainly, the behavior being described fits dominant understandings of bisexuality, and it is this concept, not the lesser-known notion of “sexually fluidity,” that is evoked by descriptions of people who were publically known to have partners of both/all genders. If this alone seems an insufficient justification for including coverage of those who did not openly identify as bisexual in my analysis, it is strengthened by the repeated failure of the magazine’s writers to address even the *possibility* of their subjects’ bisexual identity when they were known to have both same- and opposite-sex relationships.

The concept of the “lesbian continuum” also enabled the erasure of bisexuality as a class, specifically in relation to women (who were, as I will discuss later, the subject of the majority of articles about “sexual fluidity” or bisexuality).<sup>580</sup> On several occasions, *The Advocate* featured stories about self-identified lesbians who insisted on retaining that identity in spite of being in long-term romantic relationships with men. This tendency, though clearly not created by *The Advocate*, was treated uncritically in its pages; these women did not indicate that assuming a bisexual identity was even a consideration for

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<sup>580</sup> See Chapter 1 of Paula C. Rust’s *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 1995) for an illustrative discussion of the differences in the treatment of bisexuality between

them, and *The Advocate* declined to push the issue, making it complicit in their conceptual elimination of bisexuality.

An example of the latter tendency was the 1983 article by Harriet Laine entitled “Yes, I’m Still a Lesbian—Even Though I Love a Man,” which erased bisexuality from the realm of possibility by failing even to mention the concept—in spite of the fact that the behavior Laine described would widely be considered bisexual. It effectively suggested that same-sex sexuality was not a prerequisite for a homosexual identity by arguing that the author’s relationship with a man did not preclude her from identifying as a lesbian; this perspective echoed the remarks of many lesbian feminists of the 1970s who existed on what Adrienne Rich famously called the “lesbian continuum.” Laine’s essay reflected on the discrimination its author experienced from the lesbian community after entering into an opposite-sex partnership, and painted lesbians as narrow-minded and intolerant (begging the question of why Laine would wish to identify with them).<sup>581</sup> Laine steadfastly maintained that she identified as a lesbian, in spite of being in a committed long-term relationship with a male partner, and pointedly asked whether “the definition of lesbian is...so constrained” that it precluded this. Presenting herself as a victim of her lesbian friends’ “reverse homophobia,” Laine added, “I hope that in spite of living in such repressive times, my choice of a male partner does not automatically lead to such judgment and condemnation.” People like herself, Laine implied, were more liberated, less old-fashioned, and more democratic than their monosexual counterparts—but strangely she never once used the word “bisexual” in her essay. This is a jarring omission, as it is hard to believe that none of Laine’s friends asked if she were bisexual,

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<sup>581</sup> Harriet Laine, “Yes, I’m Still a Lesbian—Even Though I Love a Man.” *The Advocate*, July 8, 1986: 9.  
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or that Laine herself never considered the possibility of identifying as such. In spite of presenting the case of a woman who loved both women and men, the essayist's complete failure to even nod to bisexuality seems like a strategic decision rather than a simple oversight and effectively erases bisexuality from the realm of possibility.

Not unexpectedly, given the lesbian community's historically conflicted relationship with bisexual women, a significant difference was visible between the reactions of gay male and lesbian readers. Whereas in the 1970s, lesbian separatist publications had accused "women who practice bisexuality" of "undermin[ing] the feminist struggle," male *Advocate* readers praised Laine for her "unconditional love" and criticized Laine's friends (and the lesbian community, by extension) for their "narrow order" and inability to "expand or focus [their consciousness] beyond genitalia," while a letter from a female reader challenged Laine's claim to a lesbian identity.<sup>582</sup> *The Advocate's* editorial staff took the opportunity, in printing this particular letter, to make clear their disdain of the lesbian feminist project by including "[sic]" following the writer's use of the terms "womon" and "womyn," which it had not done in previous eras when lesbian feminism was in vogue.<sup>583</sup> This bears out the first part of an observation made by Paula Rust, whose brief overview of bisexuality in the gay press concluded that in general, "lesbian feminists who object to bisexuality on political grounds are rarely heard from and marginalized as narrow-minded extremists, whereas bisexuals themselves are applauded for their humanism and liberal thinking."<sup>584</sup> Later in her work, however,

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<sup>582</sup> Loretta Ulmschneider, "Bisexuality." *The Furies*, March/April 1973: 2.

<sup>583</sup> Jamie Griffis, Letter to the Editor, *The Advocate*, August 19, 1986: 5; John Kurka, Letter to the Editor: *ibid.* Jack Harrell, Letter to the Editor: *ibid.*

<sup>584</sup> Paula C. Rust, *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 1995): 15.

Rust may be overreaching slightly by using Laine (and other gay-identified individuals who were sexually active with men and women) as examples of “bisexuals,” since Laine and the others either never mention, or explicitly reject, the label for themselves, and Rust is therefore also mistaken in interpreting positive readers’ responses to their stories as pro-bisexual. The audience’s approval may have been less for bisexuality than for a “liberated” view of homosexual identity that allowed for occasional (or even sustained) opposite-sex relationships. This seeming sleight-of-hand is supported by an essentialist view of sexuality, one which insisted—to quote *Advocate* columnist Vito Russo—that “sexual orientation is not what you do. It’s who you are.”<sup>585</sup> As this perspective has historically enabled gay and lesbian people to claim minority status and demand civil rights, it is little wonder that *The Advocate* would defend it, even at the risk of offending some of its own readership.<sup>586</sup>

### Science and the Erasure of Male Bisexuality

Time, however, has a way of changing majority perceptions, and the late-20<sup>th</sup> century advent of advanced scientific research on the etiology of homosexuality seemed committed to the belief that sexual orientation was indicated as much by “what you do” as “who you (say or think you) are.” Even *The Advocate*’s own Pat Califia, whose “Adviser” column reliably contained the most positive and extensive references to bisexuality in the magazine, bluntly told one male advice-seeker in 1992, that “You can’t be bisexual without having same-sex experiences,” a statement which—if taken to its

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<sup>585</sup> Vito Russo, “New Rock Hudson Bios.” *The Advocate*, August 5, 1986: 52.

<sup>586</sup> It is worth noting that those most likely to be offended were lesbian readers, whose importance to *The Advocate* was questionable—see chapter 3 for more discussion of this point.

logical conclusion, would mean that no one could declare themselves gay (or straight) without having had same-sex (or opposite-sex) experiences, rather than desires or attractions.<sup>587</sup> Strangely, this seemingly anti-essentialist perspective was frequently used in the service of an essentialist project; it appeared in several well-publicized scientific reports from the 1990s and 2000s which attempted to discover the biological origins of homosexuality. In an effort to prove that homosexual orientation was innate, researchers seemed intent upon erasing bisexuality from the realm of possibility. One researcher who conducted studies purporting to “disprove” the existence of male bisexuality openly acknowledged that when male subjects self-identified as bisexual, he quizzed them on their behavior and fantasies and quickly discovered that they were “really” homosexual.<sup>588</sup> Even as these subjects claimed to know who they were, scientific data stood ready to prove them wrong. At the same time that this research denied the existence of male bisexuals as a class, it also delegitimized bisexuality by conceptually binding it both to the quality of femininity (which was devalued among many gay men who sought to distance themselves from the effeminate caricatures of homosexuals prevalent in popular culture) and to women, whose presence in the LGBT community had been the cause of consternation for many gay men.<sup>589</sup> Of course, it was problematic that the participants’ sexual histories (which often showed both opposite-sex and same-sex sexual attraction) were regarded as less meaningful, for purposes of categorization, than their sexual self-identification, but even this obvious shortcoming never came in for comment

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<sup>587</sup> Pat Califia, “Adviser.” *The Advocate*, April 7, 1992: 48. It is hard to imagine that Califia truly believed that people could not declare a sexual identity nor know their own sexual orientation without having physically experienced sexual activity.

<sup>588</sup> Chandler Burr, *A Separate Creation: The Search for the Biological Origins of Sexual Orientation* (New York: Hyperion, 1996).

<sup>589</sup> See my third chapter for more on the contested relationship between lesbians and gay men.

in the pages of *The Advocate* , which reported on the research with an uncharacteristically uncritical tone.

The extent to which *The Advocate* was responsible for promoting the erasure of male bisexuals and bisexuality's conflation with women is difficult to quantify. It could be argued that *The Advocate* was merely reporting objectively on the research which drew these conclusions. But bearing in mind *The Advocate* 's complicated relationship with issues of gender, it seems naïve to chalk up to happenstance this trend in its coverage and to deny the influence of editorial decision-making on its occurrence (see figures 1 and 2 for examples of editorial decisions seeming to emphasize the link). Reports from the world of science in the 1990s and early 2000 became common sites both of bisexual erasure and the feminization of "sexual fluidity." Particularly given that *The Advocate* was proud of its reputation for challenging popular assumptions about sexuality and critically analyzing pejorative "scientific" studies presented by gay rights opponents, its relatively uncritical acceptance of data claiming to prove that bisexuality and "sexual fluidity" simply did not exist in men (but was almost ubiquitous in women) is uncharacteristic. In article after article, *The Advocate* quoted "experts" and publicized studies by people who asserted that *all* women were by nature "sexually fluid," whereas men's sexual orientation was stable, fixed--in other words, true and reliable.<sup>590</sup> The implications of these claims are serious. First, they uphold notions of essential gender difference—men are like this, women are like that—which can, and have, been used to excuse discriminatory practices; second, they call into question the authenticity of *any*

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<sup>590</sup> For examples of this, see John Gallagher, "Gay For the Thrill of It." *The Advocate* , February 17, 1998: 32-39; Mubarak Dahir, "Losing That Loving Feeling." *The Advocate* , October 24, 2000: 73-76; Mubarak Dahir, "Why Are We Gay?" *The Advocate* , July 17, 2001: 30-39.



woman's declaration of her sexual orientation; and, finally, they imply that, because they might float in and out of a sexual identity at any given time, women (like the bisexual bogeymen of yore) are less likely to be committed members of the gay and lesbian community and civil rights struggle—a point which could be used to justify the marginalization of women (and bisexuals) in the GLBT community.

Arguably the most damaging aspect of these studies is that they literally erased bisexuals as a class. Male bisexuals simply did not exist—they were, in the words of one prominent and controversial researcher, “gay, straight, or lying.” In June 1996, *The Advocate* published an “adapted excerpt” from a book about the work of one of these researchers, geneticist Dean Hamer, who hoped to find genetic or biological markers for sexual orientation. The editing of this selection is curious when compared to the original text from which it was drawn and suggests that it may have been crafted with an eye towards *The Advocate's* (presumptive) ideal reader, a gay man. While explaining the researcher's findings, author Chandler Burr succinctly claimed, “There are effectively no male bisexuals.” In addition, Burr's excerpt related that Hamer and his team had found evidence that demonstrated the prevalence of sexual fixity in men and the concomitant prevalence of sexual fluidity in women, a claim which is tempered greatly is not present in the book itself. While the excerpt reads, “Sexual orientation isn't a continuous bell (curve). It's a bimodal J, especially for men,” this last clause is absent in the original.<sup>591</sup> Additionally, Burr's original work does not include the “no male bisexuals” claim that appears in *The Advocate* (and bisexuality isn't even included in the book's index of terms, though “lesbians” and “homosexuality” are). Also missing from the magazine's

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<sup>591</sup> Burr: 167.

excerpt was the following passage, which is of no slight importance in evaluating the credibility of Burr's blanket statement—"There are effectively no male bisexuals"—and Hamer's claims that men are either hetero- or homosexual and nothing in-between:

Asked if he had anticipated this striking bimodality for male sexual orientation, Hamer says, 'Well, how many truly bisexual men have you ever met? I have no theoretic argument with bisexuality. It's just that before I started doing research, I'd never met any. Of the men we've interviewed, most identify themselves as either gay or straight. *A handful identified themselves as bisexual, and we did not include them in the DNA analysis because of the possible genetic complexity in their cases and our need, at this stage, for simplicity.*'<sup>592</sup>

Two things become clear from this passage. First, Chandler Burr, not the researcher, is responsible for the claim that male bisexuals don't exist; Hamer implies, quite clearly, that at least "a handful" do. Secondly—and much more problematically—Hamer deliberately excluded self-identified bisexual men from his research, which (in a chicken-or-egg situation) was subsequently presented as evidence of the non-existence of male bisexuals. Furthermore, as queer theorist Marjorie Garber has detailed, Hamer himself admitted that while the "sexual histories" of his male participants showed a much greater degree of overlap between self-identified heterosexuals and homosexuals, these histories were given significantly less weight than the participants' self-identification in publicizing the study. Garber frankly notes that the studies of scientists like Hamer, Simon LeVay, and others to "prove" that sexuality "naturally" occurs in two varieties—heterosexual and homosexual—are "both hortatory and political in tone," keenly aware of their potential use in the campaign for gay and lesbian civil rights.<sup>593</sup> As a result, bisexuality, a potentially disruptive force, is assiduously excluded from these reports.

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<sup>592</sup> Ibid.: 181.

<sup>593</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (New York: Touchstone, 1995): 281

The attempts of scientists to deny the legitimacy of a bisexual orientation in men drew national attention in 2005 due in large part to a study by J. Michael Bailey, a psychologist at Northwestern University. Bailey's work became the focus of a feature article in the *New York Times*, leading to a backlash from many members of the GLBT community. *The Advocate*, however, curiously failed to acknowledge this contretemps at any length, noting only briefly, in a blink-and-you'll-miss-it piece, that Bailey's study had put "some gay activists...in an uproar."<sup>594</sup> Bailey's study exposed self-identified heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual men to homosexual (both all-male and all-female) pornography. Finding that heterosexual men were physically aroused only by the all-female images, and the homosexual men were only aroused by the pornography featuring only men, Bailey and his research team asserted that the failure of bisexual men to respond equally to both sets of stimuli (they tended to respond, like homosexual men, more strongly to the all-male pornography) showed that they were "really" gay.<sup>595</sup> The

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<sup>594</sup> "Outrage Over Bisexual Study." *The Advocate*, August 30, 2005:25.

<sup>595</sup> Bailey is a controversial figure in academia due in part to his 2003 book, *The Man Who Would Be Queen: The Science of Gender-Bending and Transsexualism* (Washington, D.C.: Joseph Henry Press), in which he linked gay male sexuality and transsexuality, his oft-repeated belief that it would be "morally neutral" for pregnant women to abort fetuses because they were likely to be homosexual, and public pronouncements such as, "Middle-class, straight kids at Northwestern who are having sex with other middle-class, straight kids at Northwestern have a close-to-zero chance of getting AIDS." In 2011, he was widely criticized for inviting heterosexual couples to copulate in front of students in his classes. See Robin Wilson, "Dr. Sex." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 20, 2003: A8; and Gary Barlow, "NU Professor Defends Controversial Gay, Trans Research." *Chicago Free Press*, May 4, 2005: 1. Bailey resigned his position as chair of the psychology department at Northwestern due to allegations of ethical violations related to his research. Although a subsequent investigation found no evidence of wrongdoing, this controversy was widely debated in the academic press as a question of "academic freedom" versus "political correctness." Bailey has subsequently participated in studies "demonstrating" a genetic link between non-heterosexuality and neuroticism/psychoticism ("Sexual Orientation and Psychiatric Vulnerability: A Twin Study of Neuroticism and Psychoticism," *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, July 2009) which numerous anti-gay groups have since promoted through their websites and publications. For the controversy surrounding Bailey's book, see Benedict Carey, "Criticism of a Gender Theory, and a Scientist Under Siege." *New York Times*: August 21, 2007: F1, and response by John Casey, "Letter to the Editor." *New York Times*, August 28, 2007: F4. For the report acquitting Bailey, see Lisa Dreger, "The Controversy Surrounding 'The Man Who Would Be Queen': A Case History of the Politics of Science, Identity, and Sex

*New York Times* trumpeted Bailey's claims on the front page of its Science section in an article entitled, "Gay, Straight, or Lying? Bisexuality Revisited." Its author attempted to bolster the credibility of Bailey's work, citing findings from a similar (but twenty-six year old) study, along with unspecified studies from the 1990s which showed that bisexual and homosexual men had "similar numbers of male sexual partners and risky sexual behaviors."<sup>596</sup>The author did not, however, interrogate these "supporting" documents for any biases, blithely accepting their conclusions that self-identified bisexual men were simply gays-in-disguise. Critiques of the technology Bailey used poured in from a variety of sources, arguing that instruments used to measure arousal were inaccurate, while other critics vigorously contested the researchers' assumption that a bisexual identity necessitates that a person experience equal attraction to all genders, or that the attraction s/he experiences to each gender is of the same type (mental, physical, emotional). Further, male viewers' expectation of that "sex" mandates penetration (a trope infrequently used in much mainstream "lesbian" pornography), could mean that women-only films failed to stimulate the bisexual men because the viewers did not recognize them as sexual in the same way that they did the all-male pornography.<sup>597</sup>

The shortcomings of the study are readily apparent, and the researcher's long and troubled relationship to the GLBT community well-documented—so why did *The Advocate* give Bailey's work such slight and uncritical coverage? The laissez-faire

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in the Internet Age," *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, June 2008: 366-421; and peer commentaries, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, June 2008: 444-510.

<sup>596</sup> Benedict Carey, "Gay, Straight, or Lying? Bisexuality Revisited." *New York Times*, July 5, 2005: F1.

<sup>597</sup> See Stephen Prince, "The Pornographic Image and the Practice of Film Theory." *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Winter, 1988): 27-39; Deborah Swedberg, "What Do We See When We See Woman/Woman Sex in Pornographic Movies?" *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1989): 602-616; and Heather Butler, "What Do You Call a Lesbian With Long Fingers? The Development of Lesbian and Dyke Pornography." In Linda Williams, ed., *Porn Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004): 167-197.

attitude might be due to Bailey's overriding professional focus on promoting the idea that sexual orientation is genetically determined; gay leaders hoped that this argument would persuade Americans to support civil rights for gay and lesbian individuals. Paula Ettelbrick of the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, in response to a 1993 study Bailey conducted "proving" a genetic basis for homosexuality in female subjects, suggested that it "could make it easier to present the argument that lesbianism isn't a matter of choice, and therefore lesbians should not be discriminated against simply on the basis of sexual orientation. It may help lessen the stigma against gay people."<sup>598</sup> There were plenty of committed homophobes, however, who also celebrated the possibility that a "gay gene" might be found—and then "corrected," as a congenital defect, in utero—prompting *The Advocate* to ask in a feature article from 1997, "Are We an Endangered Species?"<sup>599</sup>

Apart from a 129-word news brief noting that some people were outraged over Bailey's assertions that male bisexuality didn't exist, the only time that *The Advocate* dealt head-on with Bailey's controversial position on bisexuality was in an online feature in 2006—over a decade after the original studies appeared.<sup>600</sup> In a contentious interview, David Ehrenstein asked Bailey about his comments on bisexuality, and Bailey affirmed that he did not believe that bisexual sexual orientation could exist in men (though he

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<sup>598</sup> Natalie Angier, "Study Suggests Genes Sway Lesbians' Sexual Orientation." *New York Times*, March 12, 1993: A11.

<sup>599</sup> The possibility that women might choose to abort fetuses with genetic markers for homosexuality exposed the limits of some gay and lesbians' support for women's reproductive rights (which, in general, is widely supported by the gay and lesbian community). This cover of this issue featured a photograph of a fetus and asked, "This child has the gay gene. Will he be aborted because of it?" One incensed male reader derided the magazine for "falsely equating a fetus with a child [and] adopt[ing] the rhetoric of the antichoice, antigay, radical right," while another reader smugly noted that, "Were the discovery of a gay gene to become a reality, the pro-life movement would unconditionally defend your right to life...the safest place for a homosexual preborn would be nestling in the womb of a pro-life mother." Steven Rosen, "Letter to the Editor." *The Advocate* July 8, 1997: 6 and Ingrid Krueger, *ibid.*

<sup>600</sup> "Outrage Over Bisexual Study." *The Advocate*, August 30, 2005: 25.

“didn’t doubt” that women could be bisexually-oriented). Pressing the point, Ehrenstein asked, “If there are men capable of having satisfactory sexual relations with both men and women, would that man not qualify as bisexual?” Bailey parsed the question carefully, responding, “Well, we’re talking about sexual orientation. So, for example, if a hypothetical man is married to a woman and only has sex with her, but in order to do so fantasizes about men, and all his sexual fantasies are about men, but he thinks of himself as a heterosexual man, what’s his sexual orientation?”<sup>601</sup> Ehrenstein and Bailey continued to tangle over the difference between sexual behavior, sexual identity and sexual orientation, with the doctor alleging that the former did not necessarily reflect the latter as the interviewer repeatedly challenged the methodology through which his conclusions were reached. Frustrated, Bailey insisted that he was not saying that bisexual men were the same as heterosexual or homosexual men—“They must be different, because they call themselves bisexuals,” he reasoned—but that the differences between self-identified bisexuals and the groups were not reflective of a distinctive sexual orientation. Although Ehrenstein’s interview with the researcher attempted to expose the questionable nature of some of his conclusions, the fact that it was relegated to the magazine’s website appears indicative of the importance *The Advocate* placed on the matter. In declining to publicize Bailey’s failings, *The Advocate* appears to have had little interest in defending the right of bisexuals even to exist.<sup>602</sup>

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<sup>601</sup> David Ehrenstein, “Kinder, Gentler Homophobia?” *Advocate.com*, April 6, 2006. [www.Advocate.com/article.aspx?id=43756](http://www.Advocate.com/article.aspx?id=43756). Accessed February 10, 2011.

<sup>602</sup> In 2010, the *New York Times* carried an article which reported on Northwestern’s “unusual scientific about-face” in releasing a study which appeared to confirm the existence of male bisexuality. This article succinctly highlighted the flaws of the 2005 study and suggested that the results were questionable. David Tuller, “No Surprise for Bisexual Men: Report Indicates They Exist.” *New York Times*, August 23, 2010: D1.

In addition to producing research which marginalized or completely erased bisexual men, Dean Hamer's work also feminized "sexual fluidity" by claiming to present evidence of a definite and distinct split between male and female sexuality. In 1998, *The Advocate* published a lengthy feature on Hamer's work suggesting that that same-sex attraction in women was the result of environmental factors, rather than genetics, while male sexual attraction was not only genetically-determined but, in his words, "consistent, stable, and dichotomous, meaning men were either gay or straight."<sup>603</sup> While the article acknowledged that Hamer's work was controversial, it did not cite any of his critics, least of all bisexuals or lesbians—in fact, the word "bisexual" did not once appear in the article. The only lesbians quoted conveniently seemed to accept Hamer's assertions of inherent and dramatic differences between men's and women's sexuality, even if they suggested that further research into women's sexuality needed to be done. The extent to which the article emphasized the instability of women's sexuality is demonstrated in its graphic design (Fig. 7 and 8).

*The Advocate's* tendency to associate bisexuality or "sexual fluidity" with women was not confined to reports from the word of science. Throughout the magazine, the topic of bisexual or "sexually fluid" behavior was almost always raised in coverage of relationships between lesbian-identified or formerly-lesbian-identified, women and male partners. Although Harriet Laine's 1983 essay for *The Advocate* served as its first sustained discussion of lesbian-identified women romantically partnered with men, the topic arose again in 1997 when JoAnn Loulan, a well-known lesbian-identified therapist and author of several books on lesbian sexuality went public with the news that she was

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<sup>603</sup> John Gallagher, "Gay For the Thrill of It." *The Advocate* , February 17, 1998: 33-39.

in a relationship with a male partner. In an article published in *The Advocate*, Loulan refused to identify herself as either heterosexual or bisexual, claiming that “I’m not into men...My culture is really lesbian- and woman-identified.”<sup>604</sup> After being profiled on the popular television newsmagazine *20/20*, Loulan even appeared on Oprah Winfrey’s talk show to explain her situation. “How does that work?” asked the perplexed hostess. Loulan joked, “Clearly, I’m participating in deviant behavior.”<sup>605</sup> *Advocate* readers’ opinions varied; while some applauded Loulan for having the “courage” to be open about her heterosexual relationship, others were incensed by Loulan’s unwillingness to cede her position as a “lesbian leader” while at the same time enjoying heterosexual privileges and pointedly compared Loulan to a “self-hating closet case.”<sup>606</sup> In contrast to the responses Laine’s essay had stimulated over a decade earlier, the preponderance of pro-Loulan correspondence was from female readers—including one letter from denizens of the lesbian movement Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon—while male letter-writers tended to inveigh against her.<sup>607</sup> It is possible that the reason for this change had to do with the relatively recent trend of feminizing sexual fluidity.

Lillian Faderman used Loulan’s case as a point of reference in an essay for *The Advocate* in which she suggested that though many lesbians and gay men privately

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<sup>604</sup> Katie Cotter, “Dating a Man.” *The Advocate*, February 18, 1997: 41-2.

<sup>605</sup> Michelle Quinn, “Is Lesbian’s Love Life a Question of Identity?” *Albany Times Union*, November 28, 1997.

<sup>606</sup> See letters from Joyce Rodgers, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, and Donna Addison in *The Advocate*, March 18, 1997: 4-6.

<sup>607</sup> See Clint Lohr and Mike Hughes, Letters to the Editor, *The Advocate*, May 27, 1997: 9-10. While I will expand on the point later in this chapter, it should be briefly noted that this change suggests that gay men were defending an essentialist view of sexual orientation to a stronger degree than they had in the 1980s, and that lesbians, in contrast to their earlier rejection of women like Laine and Loulan, were more tolerant of their behavior than they had been in the past. Though it is difficult to attribute the change to just one cause, it may be linked to the widely-publicized findings of scientific studies on homosexuality conducted in the 1990s; many of these claimed to have found biological markers of homosexuality in gay male subjects but for the most part either ignored female homosexuality altogether or claimed that female subjects did not have the same markers.



acknowledged the permeability of sexual identities, gay and lesbian political groups' continued representation of sexual identity as monolithic ("strategic essentialism") was justified by the fact that "the undeniable successes of identity politics have made life easier for many of us." Faderman chalked up the antipathy towards Loulan and other women like her to the fact that they "remind us how simplistic and unstable the notion of identity truly is."<sup>608</sup> Surprisingly (particularly given Faderman's stature as a lesbian and feminist historian), she failed to acknowledge the influence of 1970s radical and lesbian feminism on the cold reception many of these "has-bians" experienced.<sup>609</sup> For many women who accepted the notion that lesbianism was a political "choice" meant to indicate one's commitment to feminist ideals, it would have been understandable to view the "choice" to enter into an opposite-sex relationship as a rejection of the same. Oversight aside, Faderman's tacit endorsement of the binary model of sexuality equated to an affirmation of bisexual erasure. By emphasizing that "many of us" had benefited from political agendas rife with bisexual erasure, Faderman discursively minimized the pain and disenfranchisement suffered by those whose existence was acknowledged, if at all, only as a mere afterthought.

The saga of Anne Heche, which dragged on over a decade, is illustrative of both the magazine's eagerness to erase bisexuality in favor of the less-politicized (and more feminized) "sexual fluidity" and, ultimately, its inability to accept bisexual behavior. The well-publicized coupling of Heche, an actress who refused to categorize her sexual orientation but previously had only been romantically attached to men, and openly

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<sup>608</sup> Lillian Faderman, "Last Word: Politics of the Heart." *The Advocate*, April 29, 1997: 80.

<sup>609</sup> "Has-bian" is a largely pejorative term applied to formerly lesbian-identified women who presently dated men (in the case of Loulan, who maintained her lesbian identification, the term was applied nonetheless). Interestingly, there is no male equivalent to this term.

lesbian comedian Ellen DeGeneres was the implicit subject of *The Advocate's* June 1997 cover, which depicted Heche and the words, "Beyond Bi."<sup>610</sup> The phrase itself implied that bisexuality was passé, and the petulant subtitle—"straight women dating lesbians, lesbians dating straight men, gay men dating straight women—isn't anybody gay?"—suggested that homosexuality itself was in danger of becoming a cultural relic. In spite of this, the article, penned by Ted Gideonese, was a fair treatment of the issue of bisexuality and sexual fluidity. Quoting numerous bisexual activists and well-known lesbian figures who subsequently partnered with men, Gideonese pointedly asked, at its conclusion, whether the gay and lesbian community was more interested in defending essentialism or in championing the "truth." Readers' responses to the article were largely sympathetic; the results of a readers' poll revealed that a majority of them disagreed with the biphobic statements that bisexuals were "really straight, but curious about gay sex, or really gay but feel more comfortable labeling themselves as bisexuals." Most correspondence suggested a "live and let live" attitude towards sexual fluidity among gay and lesbian readers which was somewhat at odds with the resolute essentialism pervading the gay and lesbian political organizations that purported to represent them. "Who am I to say [Anne Heche's] sexuality is not as valid as mine?" one woman wrote, while another reader observed that though his homosexuality was "exclusive and immutable...that doesn't mean everybody's is."<sup>611</sup> This accepting stance was not universal, however; in the poll that appeared on the same page, *Advocate* readers were almost evenly divided between

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<sup>610</sup> Wieder apparently decided to use Heche on the cover after the actress refused to speak directly to *The Advocate* regarding her relationship with Ellen, and the implication that Heche was "beyond bi" (although she had never publically labeled her sexuality) seems to both poor journalistic practice and a pointed exercise of power on the part of *The Advocate*. See Bruce C. Steele, "From The Editor in Chief," *The Advocate*, April 25, 2006: 6.

<sup>611</sup> Julie Bunch, Letter to the Editor, *The Advocate*, July 22, 1997: 6; Mike Hughes, Letter to the Editor: *ibid.*

those who believed that “sexual orientation can change in response to meeting a special person or for other reasons” and those who insisted that “sexual orientation is fixed. If you have a falling-in-love surprise, it means you were kidding yourself before.” In spite of this significant split, the former opinion was virtually silenced as mainstream gay and lesbian political organizations promoted the latter perspective—but only, of course, for the sake of political expediency.

In light of the relatively positive reception Anne Heche received in *The Advocate* for being an outspoken advocate of LGBT rights in the late 1990s, her fall from grace—by virtue of a much-publicized nervous breakdown and subsequent marriage to a cameraman from her television show—was all the more poignant. It illustrates *The Advocate*'s ultimate inability to accept bisexual behavior and suggests that bisexual (or “sexually fluid”) people are treated more sympathetically when they are in same-sex relationships than when they are not. Heche was accused of having proved true many negative stereotypes about sexually fluid or bisexual people, namely that they were flaky, possibly mentally ill, and definitely not to be trusted. *The Advocate* interview published in late 2001 was short on objectivity and long on pointed criticisms of the actress' (admittedly unconventional) behavior and beliefs, and seemed designed to delegitimize bisexuality (or sexual fluidity) by portraying it negatively. Editor-in-chief Anne Stockwell averred that Heche had “sought out” *The Advocate* in order to counter negative perceptions of her, but the article did little to burnish Heche's image. What it did accomplish, however, was to make clear how fervently some gay and lesbian people wished to excise Heche (and, by extension, bisexuals) from the queer community. In the preface to the interview, Stockwell's observation that Heche's “own contradictions,

rooted so deep she can't see them, make Anne a perfect poster girl for America's fractured attitudes toward gays and lesbians" deftly separated Heche from the gay and lesbian community, in spite of Heche's repeated assertions, throughout the interview, that she did not identify as heterosexual. The bulk of the interview questioned Heche's commitment to gay and lesbian equality, and Stockwell specifically addressed the issue of marriage, a longstanding *bête noir* between bisexuals and homosexuals. The exchange that followed upheld negative stereotypes of bisexuals' selfishness and lack of solidarity with gay men and lesbians:

Stockwell: If the gay community had hoped for one gesture from you now, it might have been that you wouldn't marry while gay people still can't.

Heche: Oh, wow, I never even thought about that!

Stockwell: You never thought about it?

Heche: About waiting? [*pauses*] See, then you're not taking into consideration where Coley is coming from. He's a traditional man and we want to start a family. If I deny him that, I'm denying the relationship I'm in...Do I believe that people of the same sex should be able to get married? *Absolutely*. But right now, I am in love with a man, and I *can* get married, and that's a lucky place to be.

Another example of the interview's generally negative tone came when Stockwell, in probing Heche about her claims of sexual abuse at the hands of her father (who Heche claimed had been a closeted gay man), asked a question which seemed unnecessary and potentially embarrassing: "Outside of your recovered memories, your only evidence of having been sexually abused is that you've had herpes since you were very tiny?" The seemingly gratuitous mention of Heche's sexually transmitted disease smacked of the "diseased" stigma surrounding bisexuals or sexually-fluid behavior. Heche patiently answered Stockwell's queries until the author questioned whether Heche would find it difficult if she had a child who was gay or lesbian (interestingly, not "bisexual"), playing

again on notions of bisexual indifference to gay and lesbian concerns. The actress abruptly ended the interview, citing a lack of “respect” on the interviewer’s part.

Several readers concurred, chastising Stockwell for her “cynical line of questioning” and *The Advocate* for its “public ridicule of Heche” and for running what one reader called the most “insensitive, unprofessional piece of journalism” he had ever read.<sup>612</sup> However, others criticized the magazine for featuring Heche at all, and together represented the trifecta of biphobic stereotypes: trendiness, deception, and betrayal of the gay and lesbian community. One writer labeled her a “fake lesbian,” another called her a “compulsive liar and a third accused her of “doing whatever she perceives as cool, bohemian, and self-indulgent.”<sup>613</sup> And though one might think that these comments were strictly reflective of the writers’ antipathy toward Heche, specifically, and not bisexuality/sexual fluidity in general, another brief missive to the magazine suggests otherwise. Teri Rininger wrote, “I beg of you: if you have any plans for Julie Cypher on the cover, don’t do it.” Cypher, formerly-straight-identified, had been the longtime partner of musician Melissa Etheridge, but married a man after breaking up with Etheridge in 2000. Rininger’s comment implied a belief that all women who left female partners for men (or, by extrapolation, who could feel desire for both men and women) were equally uncommitted to gay and lesbian issues and therefore unworthy of inclusion in *The Advocate*.

Associations between Heche and Cypher had appeared earlier in *The Advocate* when both women had split with their famous female partners around the same time. In

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<sup>612</sup> Hillary Rosen, Letter to the Editor; *The Advocate*, December 4, 2001: 6; Gerald Stoddard, Letter to the Editor: *ibid.*

<sup>613</sup> Fran Freemonde, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, December 4, 2001: 4; George Price, Letter to the Editor: *ibid.*; Laurie Lackland, Letter to the Editor: *ibid.*

October 2000, this pair of breakups was the premise of an article entitled, “Losing That Loving Feeling,” which—demonstrating the magazine’s feminizing tendencies in relation to the topic of “sexual fluidity” or bisexuality—examined the phenomenon of women leaving female partners for men. The feature was problematic for several reasons, not the least of which, one reader complained, was that it implied that “lesbians are somehow victimized by straight women who prey on their emotions and are unable to commit for the long haul.”<sup>614</sup> Additionally, the article featured quotes from women who self-identified as heterosexual, didn’t really enjoy having sex with women, but nonetheless pursued same-sex relationships because they enjoyed the companionship of female partners. One of these women made a comment which seemed to justify the widespread antipathy among lesbians toward romantic involvement with non-lesbian-identified women: “I’ll never find a guy who has all the qualities [my girlfriend] does. This girl has everything I want in a relationship except a penis.”<sup>615</sup> The notion that male partners, simply by virtue of their biology, would always trump female partners for those individuals who were attracted to both, had (and sadly continues to have) widespread currency among many lesbians.

Although most of these women were not identified, either by themselves or by the author, as bisexual, they served as ciphers for bisexual women. Some readers perceived the article as a bait-and-switch, purporting to be about “straight” women but really describing behavior which would widely be perceived as bisexual. “Articles such as this not only serve to demonize bisexuals but also keep them in the closet,” one reader

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<sup>614</sup> Maureen Lafferty, Letter to the Editor, *The Advocate*, December 5, 2000: 6.

<sup>615</sup> Mubarak Dahir, “Losing That Loving Feeling.” *The Advocate*, October 24, 2000: 73-76.

chided.<sup>616</sup> In spite of the fact that this article, and others like it, substituted the phrase “sexual fluidity” for “bisexuality,” this reader’s sense that it denigrated bisexuals seemed spot-on. Perhaps it was more politically acceptable to criticize the “sexually fluid” than to overly antagonize the bisexual readership of *The Advocate*, but savvy readers of this article were able to perceive the biphobia that lay at its core.

### Bisexual Erasure on an Individual Level

Yoshino asserted that erasure of bisexuality on an individual level (by denying the bisexuality of a given individual) was one main method through which the wholesale effacement of bisexuals was achieved. *The Advocate* demonstrated this tendency with particular frequency in features pertaining to celebrities or public figures. One mid-’90s reader chastised the magazine for regularly presenting “narrowly defined gay-or-straight references to sexuality that...refus[e] to admit the existence and validity of bisexuality” and for its propensity to label as “gay” celebrities who “have clearly had relationships with both sexes.”<sup>617</sup> This was a long-standing tradition. In 1985, one reader objected to the fact that the magazine had, in referring to singer Elton John, described him as a “bisexual.”<sup>618</sup> Offended by the quotation marks, she complained, “I realize this is a subtle point, but it gives me the distinct impression that you consider the word (and the orientation) a bit of a joke.” Given that John’s had publicly proclaimed his bisexuality in the pages of *Rolling Stone* magazine almost a decade before, the reader’s indignation was understandable.<sup>618</sup> Old habits died hard, for ten years later, a 1995 issue made reference

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<sup>616</sup> Rita Drabkin, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, November 20, 2000: 6.

<sup>617</sup> Chris Hampton, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, February 20, 1996: 12.

<sup>618</sup> Ellen M. Young, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, January 23, 1985: 7.

again to John's "bisexuality."<sup>619</sup> And in 1997, an article ostensibly lauding John claimed that his "definitive coming out came relatively late in his career."<sup>620</sup> The author of that article evidently did not regard John's 1976 admission of his bisexuality as "definitive" enough to qualify as "coming out."

Bisexual pop stars seemed hard for *The Advocate* to accept through the 1990s; one article about singer Richard Fairbrass' announcement of his bisexuality followed its headline with the teaser, "Right Said Fred's lead singer admits there's a big gay side to his bisexuality."<sup>621</sup> The intimation that the bisexual singer's orientation was "really" gay was pursued throughout the feature, with the writer seizing on the singer's claim that bisexuals "don't crave men and women simultaneously...but in phases" as an opportunity to pressure Fairbanks to admit that he was "gay at the moment" because of his current same-sex relationship. A few years later, in the same issue containing an interview with bisexual singer Jill Sobule (which constituted Sobule's first public statement of bisexuality and contained an admission that her longest serious relationship had been with a woman), an *Advocate* writer referred to her as "a straightish gal."<sup>622</sup> Ironically, this arts-focused issue of the magazine had, pages earlier, proclaimed that "while some critics continue to complain over the lack of progress in the fight for gay and lesbian visibility, artists such as...Jill Sobule...have turned 1995 into a great rebuttal." The coverage of Sobule exposes bisexual erasure occurring in tandem on an individual and a class level.

The December 15, 1992 *Advocate* featured actress and comedian Sandra Bernhard on its cover, and inside contained an interview in which the actress for the first time

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<sup>619</sup> Barry Walters, "Out is...In." *The Advocate*, January 24, 1995: 95-96.

<sup>620</sup> John Gallagher, "The Amazing Invisible Men of Show Business." *The Advocate*, May 13, 1997: 26

<sup>621</sup> Ronald Mark Kraft, "Is He Too Sexy, Or Is He Just Over?" *The Advocate*, February 22, 1994: 54-55.

<sup>622</sup> Barry Walters, "Prophets and Profits." *The Advocate*, January 23, 1996: 96-98.



publically affirmed her bisexuality. The feature itself addressed (albeit only briefly) some of the tensions between the lesbian and bisexual communities, and in this regard was positive. But the cover itself (Fig. 9) deliberately ignored this well-known facet of Bernhard's life, billing the interview inside as "Sandra Bernhard: Acting Lesbian."<sup>623</sup> In theory, this line referred to Bernhard's role on the sitcom *Roseanne*, wherein her character fell in love with a woman (after previously identifying as heterosexual) and announced she was gay (later in the series, however, she described herself as bisexual). "The lesbian community would love to know that you're a sister, and bisexuals like me would yelp for joy if you were to stand up and be counted as bi," the interviewer wheedled. Bernhard replied that "I've had long-term sexual relationships with both men and women. If that classifies me as a bisexual, then I'm a bisexual." The decision not to publicize this interview as being the first in which Bernhard affirmed her bisexuality (and therefore her membership in the LGBT community) and instead focus on her fictional character's lesbianism is puzzling—what would cause a magazine to downplay such a "scoop"? Perhaps *The Advocate* was well aware that Bernhard's position as an object of desire for lesbians—or a "dyke dreamboat," as the interviewer colorfully put it—might have been diminished somewhat if her bisexuality was known, damaging potential newsstand sales to her admirers.

*The Advocate* provided a particularly bold example of individual bisexual erasure in a 1994 cover story on an ex-*Playboy* Playmate. When readers opened the issue to read the story behind the headline "Portrait of an HIV-Positive Lesbian Centerfold," they discovered that ex-*Playboy* Playmate Rebekka Armstrong, the article's subject, was

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<sup>623</sup> Lily Burana, "Sandra Bernhard: Acting Lesbian." *The Advocate*, December 15, 1992: 66-72.

“more attracted to men than women” and “prudently refers to herself as bisexual.” In spite of this, the article repeatedly mentioned Armstrong’s “coming out” as a lesbian, leading one reader to pointedly observe that the article’s author “and the editorial staff of *The Advocate* are, like the majority of *The Advocate*’s male readership, still rather uncertain about the existence of bisexuality.”<sup>624</sup> Two years later, mainstream gossip magazine *People* reported that Armstrong had fallen in love with a man and her “lesbian liaisons had ended.”<sup>625</sup>

*The Advocate*’s decision to bill Armstrong as “lesbian” rather than bisexual was, in all likelihood, the bad result of good intentions; the related articles in the Armstrong issue dealt with the largely unacknowledged topic of HIV/AIDS risks of same-sex sex for lesbians, so editors may have attempted to use her as an example in the hopes that female readers would identify with Armstrong’s story. To take a dimmer view of *The Advocate*’s motivation for so blatantly mischaracterizing Armstrong, it is possible that by refusing to label Armstrong as bisexual, the magazine attempted to avoid the conflict between the tropes of “bisexual victim” and “bisexual villain” presented by her story. In spite of her inability to definitively pinpoint how she contracted HIV, the tale Armstrong presented to the press was that her infection had occurred at the hands of a “probably bisexual” male model who subsequently “disappeared” and whose family “wouldn’t give [her] information” when she sought to contact him following her diagnosis. This upheld the stereotype of bisexuals as double-crossing vectors of disease and still allowed “lesbian” Armstrong to emerge as what Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman would call a

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<sup>624</sup> Kirk Job Sluder, “Letter to the Editor.” *The Advocate*, October 18, 1994: 12.

<sup>625</sup> Richard Jerome, “Object Lesson: An AIDS-Stricken Ex-Centerfold Touts Safe Sex to Teens.” *People*, April 7, 1997:

“worthy victim.”<sup>626</sup> Additionally, because of her past as a *Playboy* model and porn star, Armstrong would have easily fit into the role of the lascivious bisexual woman, perhaps making it hard for readers to regard her as an object of sympathy; by calling her “lesbian” the magazine may have attempted to avoid invoking this stereotype. Whatever their motivations, by mischaracterizing Armstrong’s sexual identity, *The Advocate* inadvertently opened the door for homophobes to point to Armstrong’s subsequent marriages to men as proof that a “good man” could cause a lesbian’s same-sex desires to disappear.

### Bisexual Erasure Through Delegitimation

Lillian Faderman observed in *The Advocate*’s “Viewpoint” column of September 5, 1995, that “bisexuality seems suddenly to be everywhere: It makes the cover of *Newsweek*; it is the subject of popular books; Hollywood stars freely cop to their bisexuality; ...and formerly ‘gay and lesbian’ organizations everywhere are becoming ‘gay, lesbian and bisexual’ organizations.”<sup>627</sup> Faderman wasn’t really overstating the facts; *Time*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* had all run major stories on bisexuality in the past three years and, as Faderman noted, it was the subject of *Newsweek*’s cover story in July 17, 1995.<sup>628</sup> Mainstream films such as *Basic Instinct* (1992) and *Three of Hearts* (1993) acknowledged bisexuality, however problematically, and regular characters on popular television shows like *Roseanne* and

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<sup>626</sup> See Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

<sup>627</sup> Lillian Faderman, “A Bisexual Moment.” *The Advocate*, September 5, 1995: 43.

<sup>628</sup> “Bisexuality: What is It?” *Time*, August 17, 1992; “Bisexuality Emerges as a New Sexual Identity.” *Newsweek*, June 17, 1995; “A New Generation Seems Ready to Give Bisexuality a Place in the Spectrum.” *New York Times*, June 12, 1995; “Dating Game Today Breaks Traditional Gender Rules.” *Wall Street Journal*, April 26, 1995; “The Breadth of Bisexuals’ Experience.” *USA Today*, February 24, 1994.

*L.A. Law* were revealed to be bisexual. This unprecedented spate of bisexual exposure gave bisexuality the appearance of being a fad or trend rather than a longstanding and fixed sexual identity, and is exemplary of the third strategy through which Kenji Yoshino argued that bisexual erasure is effected; using this method, erasure is achieved through depictions which “delegitimate” bisexuality by presenting it in a negative light.

In the mainstream media, this included the rendering of bisexuality as a trend or fad and, in relation to the AIDS crisis, of bisexuals as duplicitous and diseased.<sup>629</sup> *The Advocate* did not engage in this form of discourse to a noteworthy extent, instead suggesting that it was not bisexuality that was the fad, but rather heterosexual society’s interest in it, and largely treating AIDS as a gay, rather than bisexual, issue. Though *The Advocate*’s differentiation from the mainstream press on these counts was positive, it employed two discursive means of delegitimation unique to the gay and lesbian press (which therefore had escaped mainstream-focused Yoshino’s notice).<sup>630</sup> First, and most prominently, *The Advocate*, along with other gay/lesbian-oriented publications, questioned whether the sexual fluidity characteristic of bisexuality was a liability for the gay and lesbian political movement, and whether bisexuals were committed participants in the struggle for gay and lesbian civil rights. Secondly, the corollary effect of scientific studies denying the existence of male bisexuality was that bisexuality—or “sexual fluidity,” a term seemingly designed to sidestep the debate over bisexuality and to reify

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<sup>629</sup> For examples of the mainstream media’s treatment of bisexuality in relation to the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, see Alan Richman, “A Dating Dilemma.” *Boston Globe*, July 26, 1984; “Bisexuals and AIDS: The Dangers of a Double Life.” *Newsweek*, July 13, 1987; “The Risky Business of Bisexual Love.” *Cosmopolitan*, October 1989; “Till Death Do Them Part.” *Newsweek* (Latin American edition), September 27, 1993.

<sup>630</sup> Yoshino does briefly note that gays and lesbians are motivated to “erase” bisexuality by fears that bisexuals/bisexuality will jeopardize the gay rights movement through destabilizing the hetero-/homo-dichotomy and by calling into question the essentialist logic on which much of the modern mainstream gay rights movement is based. See Yoshino, 22-23.

the dualistic model of sexual orientation—was, to *Advocate* readers, overwhelmingly associated with women. While to some extent this might seem redeeming—at least scientists were acknowledging the orientation—this actually could be interpreted as another means of delegitimizing bisexuality. The devaluation of femininity or qualities associated with women in many cultures has been examined by scholars such as Sherry Ortner and Nancy Chodorow, and a similar tendency in the gay male community has also been critiqued, not only by lesbian feminists but by gay men wary of replicating the hierarchies of power present in dominant culture.<sup>631</sup> Therefore, the emphatic connections drawn between women and bisexuality both in the studies themselves and the media that promoted them served to diminish, devalue, and delegitimize bisexuality.

The tendency to question bisexuals' commitment to gay and lesbian civil rights appeared frequently in the early and mid-1990s, a trend related to the 1992 elections which Urvashi Vaid hailed as a "rite of passage for the gay and lesbian moment." The *New York Times*, reporting on the election of William Jefferson Clinton to the presidency, observed that the campaign marked the first time that "homosexual issues figured in a Presidential election" and the first time a presidential candidate had openly supported gay rights, which "as recently as a decade ago...was considered political suicide for just about any candidate, let alone one for the Presidency." Vaid, then the head of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, predicted that, "[f]or the first time in our history, we're going to be full and open partners in the Government."<sup>632</sup> Gay and lesbian political

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<sup>631</sup> See Michael A. Messner, *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000): 80-95; Richard Dyer, "Gay Misogyny," in *The Culture of Queers* (London: Routledge, 2002): 46-48;

<sup>632</sup> Jeffrey Schmalz, "The 1992 Elections: Gay Areas Are Jubilant Over Clinton." *New York Times*, November 5, 1992.

organizations fixed even more firmly on promoting an understanding of sexual orientation as innate and immutable, banking on this strategy to curry support from their new ally in the White House. Concomitantly, gays and lesbians—not bisexuals—were portrayed as the potential victims of anti-gay legislation.

Bisexual activist Lani Kaahumanu angrily observed in a 1995 letter to Elizabeth Birch, then the chair of the Human Rights Campaign, that bisexuals (and trans-identified people) were largely excluded from the HRC's program, and invoked only in fundraising materials as potential financial supporters of the organization.<sup>633</sup> In spite of Kaahumanu's caution that "the exclusive lesbian and gay spin of the message feeds into the hands of those extremists who would like nothing better than to see us "queers" get distracted and fight among ourselves [and] the ongoing drama of deciding who is in and who is out of our gay civil rights and liberation movement is counterproductive and a dangerous waste of precious time," mainstream gay and lesbian rights organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign treated challenges to the binary orthodoxies of sex and gender as concrete obstacles to the achievement of political goals. Sexual fluidity—whether or not explicitly associated with bisexuality—was one such challenge. In accordance with *The Advocate's* sympathetic slant toward "establishment" gay and lesbian political organizations, discussions of the topic in *The Advocate* often evinced fear and suspicion.

That some gays and lesbians viewed sexual fluidity and bisexuality as political liabilities was well-illustrated by an article by Chandler Burr in an issue celebrating *The Advocate's* 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Writers were asked to tackle a broad topic from the perspective of a person writing 30 years in the future (that is, 2027). Burr discussed "the

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<sup>633</sup> Letter from Lani Kaahumanu to Elizabeth Birch, November 21, 1995. [http://www.lanikaahumanu.com/BirchLetter\\_112195.pdf](http://www.lanikaahumanu.com/BirchLetter_112195.pdf). Accessed 5/25/11.

politics of bisexuality” in an essay which had less to do with bisexuality than with the political ramifications of the ideological conflict between those who claimed sexual orientation was innate and immutable and the people who made up the tiny wedge of “we are all bisexual” in the aforementioned pie chart. Coming down firmly on the side of essentialism, Burr envisioned a future from which he could sagely intone, “Time heals all wounds, and the battle over bisexuality, so fierce in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, has faded during the last 30 years. ‘Bisexuality exists’ and ‘We’re all really bisexual!’ were battle cries of the past.” While it’s understandable that an essentialist like Burr might celebrate the virtual death of the social constructionist position, rhapsodizing about a future in which people could no longer claim that bisexuality even existed is not—no more so than the far-right wing dream of a world in which homosexuality has ceased to exist. The author accused social constructionists of “tactically betray[ing ] the gay rights movement” by refusing to agree that sexual orientation was inborn, a position which “was of [the] greatest pragmatic, immediate political utility for gaining gay civil rights from America’s voters.” Lest any readers had missed his point, Burr added flatly, “They were traitors to the gay and lesbian movement.” But in Burr’s utopic vision, early 21<sup>st</sup>-century gays and lesbians “came to [their] senses” and agreed that bisexuality was a fixed sexual orientation appearing only in a very small number of individuals (Burr was careful to note “almost exclusively” in women and “virtually” not at all in men), and by promoting the essentialist viewpoint, were able to “persuade and win over our opponents.” He concluded, happily, “And today no one talks much about bisexuality anymore.”<sup>634</sup>

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<sup>634</sup> Chandler Burr, “Going Beyond the Politics of Bisexuality.” *The Advocate*, October 14, 1997: 69-71.

The troubling vision presented by Burr sets up bisexuality as an enemy of the LGBT rights movement, for its existence challenged the essentialist position on which many of its activists had grounded their political strategies. He was far from the first person to present this perspective in the pages of *The Advocate*; Lillian Faderman, a staunch social constructionist and prolific historian of female same-sex sexuality, had wondered in 1995 “What becomes of our political movement if we openly acknowledge that sexuality is flexible and fluid, that *gay and lesbian* does not signify ‘a people’ but rather a ‘sometime behavior?’” But while Burr sees only negative outcomes for this hypothetical scenario, Faderman took a more optimistic position, suggesting that if heterosexuals “admit their own bisexual potential” there would be “no need for identity politics” and “all our battles [would] be instantaneously won.”<sup>635</sup> In spite of this seemingly positive take on bisexuality, Faderman’s implication that all people are bisexual is nonetheless evidence of the “class erasure” Yoshino identified as part of the “epistemic contract.”

A 1994 reader poll seemed to confirm the view of bisexuals as threats to the “born this way” argument on which much mainstream gay rights activism was predicated; it showed that, compared to lesbian respondents, twice as many bisexual respondents said that “choice had something to do with their sexual orientation”—a belief which countered the foundational belief of many gay and lesbian political organizations who predicated their demands for civil rights on the basis of inherent difference.<sup>636</sup> Some members of *The Advocate* audience feared that the trend of lesbians and gay men entering into relationships with the opposite sex would give ammunition to opponents of gay rights;

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<sup>635</sup> Lillian Faderman, “A Bisexual Moment.” *The Advocate*, September 5, 1995: 43.

<sup>636</sup> Janet Lever, “Lesbian Sex Survey.” *The Advocate*, August 22, 1995: 22-30.



one fretted that “if prominent lesbian leaders can ‘choose’ lesbianism...and fall back in love with men, it gives the right wing irrefutable evidence that gay people can change back and be ‘normal’ if they want to. Given this, why should gays be given domestic-partner benefits, be protected by antidiscrimination laws, or be allowed to marry?”<sup>637</sup>

Another reader cautioned that “I don’t...believe now is the time to start advocating bisexuality. We are at a very important moment when, for the first time, people are identifying themselves *strictly* as homosexual and fighting for the right to do so.”<sup>638</sup>

Bisexuals and sexually-fluid individuals were notably used (likely unwillingly) as anti-gay cannon fodder in the “ex-gay” debate, being presented as “proof” that—in the words of one of the ex-gay movement’s leading groups, “people can change.” A 1999 *Advocate* profile of prominent “ex-lesbian” (not her term) writer Jan Clausen, is featured on the website of PFOX, or Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays, while Joann Loulan is held up as a paragon on the websites of groups who advocate “reparative therapy” for homosexuals (though there is no word on Loulan’s opinion of this).<sup>639</sup> The possibility that some of the individuals who claimed that they had “changed” their sexual orientation were actually bisexual, and simply suppressing some of their desires, was unacknowledged in *The Advocate*’s coverage of the topic, prompting one reader to comment, “I can understand why the ex-gay groups want to ignore the bisexual possibility and would prefer to think that [“ex-gays”] have been ‘cured.’ But why have all too many of our gay spokespeople, who seem to pride themselves on inclusivity,

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<sup>637</sup> Clint Lohr, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, May 27, 1997: 10.

<sup>638</sup> Lou Rattacasa, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, October 17, 1995: 6.

<sup>639</sup> [http://pfox.org/Yes\\_her\\_life.html](http://pfox.org/Yes_her_life.html). Accessed February 2, 2011.

overlooked the possibility of bisexuality in the ‘ex-gay’ controversy? Is this oversight, blindness, or some kind of ‘bisexualphobia’?”<sup>640</sup>

The answer to the writer’s question was likely a combination of all three factors. Blindness and oversight, caused by the erasure of bisexuals both individually and as a class, along with biphobia borne out of years of distrust of bisexuals’ commitment to the gay and lesbian civil rights struggle, underpinned *The Advocate*’s habitual failure to adequately represent bisexuals or bisexuality in its coverage. When represented, bisexuality usually appeared in a less-than-favorable light, associated with devalued qualities (femininity, for instance) or cast as an unreliable ally—or worse, as an antagonist—to gays and lesbians seeking civil rights. While the last decades of the twentieth century saw mainstream American media making glacial progress toward inclusivity of gay and lesbian issues, in the major media organ of the mainstream gay and lesbian community, bisexuality remained “the love that dare not speak its name.” Bisexuals were not alone in their exclusion, however. The willingness of the LGBT political establishment to forget its transgendered forebears, and its eagerness to distance itself from this constituency, has been reflected in the coverage that *The Advocate*, has given to transpeople and their concerns, which I will discuss in detail in the chapter that follows.

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<sup>640</sup> Harry D. Simmons, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, December 19, 2000: 6.



FIG. 7 Underscoring the notion that same-sex-attracted women are simply “experimenting” and not “real” homosexuals, the lead-in to the article reads, “A shocking new book by geneticist Dean Hamer suggests that homosexual tendencies may be just a novel experience for some of us, particularly women.” A pull quote at the bottom of the page reads, “Men tend to be more sexually fixed. Women tend to be more sexually fluid. We’ve interviewed lesbians who have always identified as lesbian but who fantasize about men.”



FIG. 8. The table of contents summarizes the article as follows: “Dean Hamer reignites the ‘gay gene’ debate with a new book that makes some people wonder whether lesbians are really gay.”

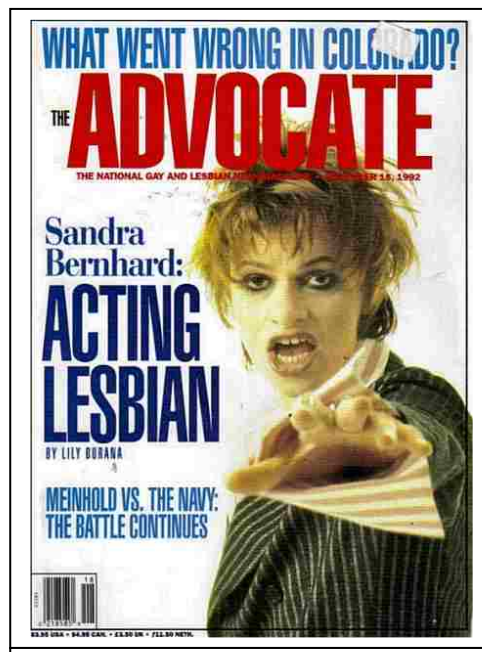


FIG. 9 Bernhard, a bisexual icon, is effectively rebranded as a lesbian in this *Advocate* cover from December 15, 1992. The teaser for the article, found on the issue’s table of contents, mentions Bernhard’s “coming out” and being a “dyke dreamboat.”

## Chapter 5: Strange Bedfellows: Transgender Issues in *The Advocate*

The sense that transpeople are, at best, only marginal members of the nominally-inclusive LGBT community has been reinforced by many late twentieth-century media productions targeted to that group, not only *The Advocate*. Even as the conformist approach promoted by the homophiles fell out of favor in the late 1960s and early 1970s, some gay-oriented publications remained comfortable alleging that “neither transvestites nor transsexuals serve any useful function for themselves or anyone else.”<sup>641</sup> For instance, *The Advocate*, though refraining overt vitriol of this stripe, published an editorial in 1970 implying that “flamboyant,” effeminate men were simply overcompensating in reaction to their inability to attain a “normal” lifestyle.<sup>642</sup> In the eyes of their critics, transpeople convinced the public that gay men were “trying to be women” just as lesbians were “trying to be men,” whereas those critics would have preferred the public see homosexuals as people “trying to be” upstanding and easily assimilated good citizens.<sup>643</sup>

On this note, though, it should be pointed out that although some publications openly criticized transpeople for fracturing the façade of normality that homophiles and later gay rights activists tried so valiantly to construct, there have been many gay men, lesbians and bisexuals who vociferously objected to these attempts at disenfranchisement. Rodger Streitmatter’s thorough study of the gay and lesbian press in America demonstrated marked differences in the treatment of trans-related topics between “establishment” publications such as *The Advocate* and *GAY* and the more politically-radical publications helmed by committed gay libbers or by radical feminists (who

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<sup>641</sup>Hector Simms, “A Biopsy on Miss Thing.” *GAY*, June 1, 1970: 15.

<sup>642</sup>“We Might Like It,” *The Advocate*, November 1970: 20.

<sup>643</sup>Lige Clark and Jack Nichols, “*GAY* and the Drag Queen.” *GAY*, June 22, 1970: 2.

themselves were often split in their opinion of transpeople, most notably male transvestites, drag queens, or transsexual women).<sup>644</sup> But these smaller, more trans-friendly publications were usually shorter-lived, less widely-distributed, and certainly less capitalist in orientation—“fringe” reading material rather than newspapers “of record” like *The Advocate* and its ilk. Dubbed “the East Coast equivalent of the *Los Angeles Advocate*” by Streitmatter, New York-based publication *GAY*—which jibed that “the drag queen is doing for homosexuality what the Boston Strangler did for door-to-door salesman”—was the first weekly newspaper for a homosexual readership to be distributed on newsstands, and so well-respected that lesbian activist Lilli Vincenz recalled in a 1992 interview that “[i]t was the newspaper of the day. If you were gay and you wanted to find out what was going on in the world, you turned to *GAY*.”<sup>645</sup> Like the post-1970 *Advocate*, *GAY* was dependent on advertisers’ money for its survival and thus both generally eschewed topics likely to turn them off (itself an ironic decision, considering the brilliant variety of sexual predilections promoted by the advertisers in both publications) and strove to cultivate a readership appealing to them, a tactic that necessitated the public disavowal of people whose very presence threatened to derail these efforts.

As I have argued throughout this project, however, trends in *The Advocate*'s coverage of marginalized members of the LGBT community cannot be wholly explained by issues of commercial viability; I believe, rather, that the publication has both reflected the real tensions that existed between members of these groups and the burgeoning (white gay-male-centered) LGBT rights movement and encouraged these tensions insofar as

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<sup>644</sup> See Streitmatter, 143-48.

<sup>645</sup> Streitmatter: 121.

doing so was useful to promoting the image of the gay community as embodied by the model of the “ideal” gay citizen. In analyzing *The Advocate*’s coverage of trans issues, I will again turn to the work of Kenji Yoshino and, in particular, his concept of the “epistemic contract of erasure.” Building on his argument that the media deliberately tries to efface the existence of bisexuality (as a concept) and bisexuals (as a group), I will demonstrate that *The Advocate* has attempted in much the same way to displace transgendered people from discussions and representations of the gay/lesbian/bisexual community. The three methods through which this erasure is accomplished—by erasure on both class and individual levels and by delegitimizing depictions of trans people—have been employed since the early years of the magazine, and continue to be utilized currently. In addition, the magazine also employs discursive techniques which, while explicitly addressing the existence of transgender identities, nonetheless attempt to erase transgender people from the gay/lesbian/bisexual community by positing them as “outsiders. All four of these rhetorical strategies reinforce the troubled relationship between trans people and the larger gay/lesbian/bisexual community and contributes, negatively, to the ongoing debate over whether trans people should expect to be acknowledged and included in its political efforts.

### Transpeople and the Homosexual Community: History of a Difficult Relationship

Historically, the relationship between transpeople and the gay/lesbian/bisexual community and related political movement has been strained by ideological differences, prejudice on both sides and by the varying weight which each group puts on particular issues. The sense of antagonism between the two groups even into the late twentieth

century was so palpable that even the mainstream press felt comfortable inveighing against the hesitance of the mainstream lesbian and gay movement to embrace transgendered people and transvestites. Writing for the *New York Times* on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, author Rick Bragg observed that in “[looking] for wider acceptance, many mainstream lesbians and gay men have distanced themselves from the more socially unacceptable transvestites. That is a shame...because the changes brought by Stonewall are as much the cross-dressers' legacy as anyone's.”<sup>646</sup> It speaks to the extent of trans erasure that this comment was offered by a newspaper whose own publisher forbade the use of the term "homosexual" until 1987.

Discussing the connections of transpeople to the gay and lesbian movement at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, historian Shannon Price Minter has written, “The question that calls for an explanation is not whether transgender people can justify their claims to gay rights, but rather how did a movement launched by bull daggers, drag queens, and transsexuals in 1969 end up viewing transgender people as outsiders less than thirty years later?”<sup>647</sup> While providing an excellent opening for an analysis of exploring this fractured relationship, Minter's question appears to accept the widespread assumption that the gay rights movement began with the Stonewall Riots in 1969. As many historians have demonstrated, this is not the case, and to suggest otherwise unfairly diminishes the significant contributions of American homophile organizations that emerged in the 1950s. One might more correctly suggest that the events at the Stonewall marked the public emergence of “gay liberation,” a movement whose attitudes towards sexuality and

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<sup>646</sup> Rick Bragg, “From a Night of Rage, the Seeds of Liberation.” *New York Times*, June 23, 1994.

<sup>647</sup> Shannon Price Minter, “Do Transsexuals Dream of Gay Rights?” In Paisley Currah, Shannon Price Minter, and Richard M. Juang, eds., *Transgender Rights* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006): 142.



gender were markedly different from the homophiles who had preceded them. But the gay and lesbian civil rights movement that coalesced in the early 1970s and that continues to dominate most public discourse about gay rights in the United States has as much—if not more—in common with the early homophiles than the gay liberationists in terms of its perspectives on gender. Several scholars have alleged that the persistence of anti-trans sentiment among organized gay and lesbian political groups is rooted in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century reconceptualization of homosexuality that many homophiles championed; Minter, for instance, charges that the move away from earlier models of “homosexuality as gender inversion [to] the dominant contemporary model of sexual object choice” has resulted in the treatment of trans people as “outsiders” by the mainstream gay and lesbian political movement.

In addition to the strain created by this new understanding of same-sex sexual desire, other factors—including class antagonism—have also contributed to the disenfranchisement of transpeople from the gay liberation fold. The phenomenon of many biologically-male sex workers cross-dressing—whether in keeping with internal impulses or simply in order to appeal to a particular type of client—may have contributed to the perception that transpeople were typically “low class,” socio-economically speaking. The fact is that cross-dressing did allow biologically-male sex workers to market themselves to clients who preferred to think of themselves as heterosexual and, as some female impersonators discovered, when elevated to an art form on the stages of vaudeville or at glamorous “drag balls” like those popular in late-1920s Harlem, cross-dressing could be lucrative, too.<sup>648</sup> The interviews of a working-class lesbian community

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<sup>648</sup> On sex work by cross-dressing males, see George Chauncey, *Gay New York*.

Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis compiled in *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* (1993) similarly hinted at a connection between a woman's economic class and her tendency to dress in stereotypically "male" clothing; the women who performed manual labor, for instance, tended to dress in a more "masculine" fashion than "upwardly mobile" lesbians who held white-collar jobs. At least part of the time, this was simply a function of the work at hand—one could hardly wear a dress to work on a factory floor or in a garage—but some butch-identified women averred that they were happier to "pass" as men than to dress and act in a normatively "feminine" style.<sup>649</sup> The *Advocate*, with its gaze firmly affixed on the upwardly-mobile middle class, may have eschewed discussions of transpeople on the grounds that their affiliation with the working-class would only serve to diminish the image of homosexuals—ardent consumers flush with "disposable income"—it attempted to cultivate for commercial appeal.

Further stress is put on the relationship between transpeople and the LGBT movement by the continued negative depiction or erasure of trans people in discussions or representations of the LGBT community, which shores up perceptions of transpeople as an insignificant minority (at best) or antagonists working against efforts for gay and lesbian civil rights (at worst). The following discussion will explore the historical relationship between the trans community and the gay/lesbian political establishment in the United States, identifying areas of commonality and conflict, to foreground an examination of trans-specific content in the *Advocate*.

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<sup>649</sup> This is not to suggest that working-class same-sex attracted women were all masculine in appearance; Kennedy and Davis assiduously detail the myriad of social conventions governing the appearance of working-class "fems." See Chapter 5 in Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993). See also Meyerowitz.

## Trans Identity and Homosexuality in the United States: Early Connections

As discussed extensively in my first chapter, homosexuality and trans identity were regularly conflated in late-nineteenth and twentieth century legal writings and psycho-medical theories that posited same-sex desire as the outcome of an individual's "gender inversion." But prior to the creation of these models, the American legal system had regularly elided the two phenomena. Laws against same-sex sexuality and cross-gender appearance or behavior had existed in American society since its earliest days, when procreation and social order were perceived as vital to the survival of the colonies. In the mid-nineteenth century, the concerns about sexual deviance, in addition to "gender fraud" (attempting to usurp the privileges of the "opposite" sex by passing as such) and gender deviance, had spurred a fresh wave of anti-cross-dressing laws--thirty alone were passed between 1848 and 1900 in places as diverse as Minneapolis, San Francisco, and Newark, New Jersey.<sup>650</sup> And while certainly not every transperson was (or is) a homosexual, nor did (or does) every homosexual display gender non-conformity, the connection between same-sex sexuality and gender non-conforming appearance had long been encouraged in Western popular culture. Published tales of London's "molly houses" and other "sodomitical subcultures," wherein many of the same-sex-attracted male "characters" dressed, behaved, and sometimes referred to themselves and those like them in stereotypically feminine ways circulated in the United States and England.<sup>651</sup> In the nineteenth century, tales of women who "passed" as men in order to obtain employment

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<sup>650</sup> See William N. Eskridge, Jr., *Gaylaw: Challenging the Apartheid of the Closet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), particularly chapter 1, and Clare Sears, "A Dress Not Belonging to His or Her Sex: Cross-Dressing Law in San Francisco, 1860-1900. Ph.D. dissertation, University of California—Santa Cruz, 2005.

<sup>651</sup> See Clare A. Lyons, "Mapping an Atlantic Sexual Culture: Homoeroticism in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia." In Thomas A. Foster, Ed., *Long Before Stonewall: Histories of Same-Sex Sexuality in Early America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007): 164-203.

or join the military appeared in print; these stories often contained threads in which the subject was implied to have had female lovers or even wives.<sup>652</sup>

In the world of entertainment, too, cross-dressing and gender impersonation had been enjoyed by many Americans as fixtures of minstrel shows and vaudeville performances since the early nineteenth century; in fact, in the post-Civil War era, female impersonators (and, to a lesser extent, male impersonators) were among the highest paid of these peripatetic performers.<sup>653</sup> The private lives of many of these performers shored up the link between transvestism, transsexuality, and same-sex desire, as in the case of Annie Hindle, a male impersonator who wed her female dresser in Michigan in the late nineteenth century. Newspaper coverage of Hindle's nuptials described confusion among the performer's peers about Hindle's actual sex, in addition to expressing befuddlement on the part of the journalists who covered the story. Chicago's *Daily Inter Ocean* announced on June 8, 1886, that "Annie Hindle, A 'Male Impersonator,' Changes Her Sex and Marries A Woman." Various using male and female pronouns to describe Hindle, the journalist wrote, with no small measure of understatement, that "[t]here seems to be a misty uncertainty in regard to [Hindle's] gender." Some of the performer's colleagues swore she was a woman, while others insisted he was a man. Because Hindle had been married to a man in the past, no matter what her sex was believed to be, the

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<sup>652</sup> Notably, some memoirs of women who passed as men in order to fight in the Civil War often emphasized their authors' otherwise conformist behavior as loyal wives or dutiful daughters, either in hopes of avoiding social censure for, or simply justifying, their deception; see Matthew Teorey, "Unmasking the Gentleman Soldier in the Memoirs of Two Cross-dressing Female US Civil War Soldiers." *War, Literature, and the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities*. Vol. 20, Nos. 1/2 (2008): 74-93. Also see Martha Vicinus, "'They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong': The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity." In Dennis Altman, ed., *Homosexuality, Which Homosexuality? International Conference on Gay and Lesbian Studies* (London: GMP, 1987): 171-198, and Holly Devor, ed., *FTM: Female-to-Male Transsexuals in Society* (Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 1997), particularly Ch. 1.

<sup>653</sup> Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross-Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993): 233.

specter of same-sex desire hung like a pall over the controversy.<sup>654</sup> Cases such as this one underscored the association between cross-gender sartorial choices and same-sex sexual practices, and explain why legal proscriptions against one often implicated the other.

This problematic connection also contributed to the decline in the mainstream popularity of gender-impersonating performers as the twentieth century neared its midpoint. In 1923, *Variety* magazine remarked on the ubiquity of female impersonators on the vaudeville circuit, with at least one theater house offering a triple bill.<sup>655</sup> But the public, now versed in the rudiments of sexual psychology as disseminated in the popular press, began to read these performances less as tongue-in-cheek “burlesques” of gender and more as vivid reflections of the performers’ “inversion,” or homosexuality. Some performers, aware of this, attempted to downplay the connection in order to avoid box-office death; many female impersonators took pains to emphasize their normative masculinity offstage.<sup>656</sup> The association between homosexuality and cross-dressing was also reinforced by the fact that many of the stages on which lesser stars of female impersonation appeared were in venues catering to a homosexual clientele; as Vern and Bonnie Bullough observed, “In the days before gay or lesbian bars could publicly advertise, one way of announcing that gays would be welcome would be to feature a female impersonator of one sort or another.”<sup>657</sup> As cross-dressing acts lost the cachet to command mainstream stages, these queer-friendly establishments became almost exclusively the province of drag performers. Due to similar, albeit not identical,

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<sup>654</sup> “Mr. or Miss?” *The Daily Inter Ocean* (Chicago, IL), Issue 76 (June 8, 1883): 3.

<sup>655</sup> *Ibid.*: 236.

<sup>656</sup> *Ibid.*: 237.

<sup>657</sup> *Ibid.*: 239. See Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of sexologists’ perception of gender and sexual “inversion.”

prohibitions that forced same-sex-attracted and transgendered people to the margins of society, these Americans carved out for themselves social spaces that frequently overlapped; the ramifications of this often-uneasy coexistence are the topic of the section that follows.

### Transpeople and Homosexuals: Shared Spaces and Unwanted Correspondence

In the 1950s and 1960s, bars oriented toward homosexual patrons were some of the few places where transgendered or transsexual individuals were welcomed, which necessitated that the two groups (to the extent they were separable) coexist. This coexistence was hardly untroubled; although they shared space with transpeople in the homosexual bar scene, some gay men resented the presence of a visibly gender-transgressive clientele—including effeminate-acting homosexual men. Historian Craig Loftin explained that the roots of this resentment were grounded in fear, writing that “Swishes, through their visibility, tipped off police and vice squads to the camouflaged whereabouts of gay social life and made those spaces more vulnerable to homosexual arrests and mass raids.”<sup>658</sup> In addition to imperiling the safety of the clientele at gay-oriented establishments, the visibility of trans and gender non-conforming people at these establishments encouraged the popular conflation of same-sex desire and gender non-conformity. One early illustration of this trend is a 1969 report on the raid at New York City’s Stonewall Bar that was published in the *New York Daily News*. Appearing after the raid (and subsequent riots) had taken place, the *Daily News* reporter attempted to depict a “typical” West Village denizen and in so doing, elided homosexuality and gender non-conformity:

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<sup>658</sup> Craig M. Loftin, “Unacceptable Mannerisms: Gender Anxieties, Homosexual Activism, and Swish in the United States, 1945-1965.” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Spring, 2007): 582.

She sat there with her legs crossed, the lashes of her mascara-coated eyes beating like the wings of a humming-bird. She was angry. She was so upset she hadn't bothered to shave. A day-old stubble was beginning to push through the pancake makeup. She was a he. A queen of Christopher Street. Last weekend...the elite city police squad had shut down one of their gay clubs [and] New York City experienced its first homosexual riot.<sup>659</sup>

This negative portrayal was not unique to its era or even to the mainstream press; fifteen years later, *Advocate* owner David Goodstein, whose own publication hoped to counter negative portrayals such as the one in the *Daily News*, lashed out at trans- people for making gays and lesbians look bad. Specifically, Goodstein's editorial bemoaned the appearance of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (a queer performance group kitted out in full Catholic regalia) at the 1984 Democratic Convention, held in San Francisco. Jerry Falwell and other members of the Religious Right were tickled to have such camera-ready subjects for their homophobic rhetoric; as the cameras rolled, crowds of flamboyant protestors—many in drag—paraded outside the Moscone Center, causing Falwell to crow that the “fairy demonstrators” had “played right into [my] hands.”<sup>660</sup> Goodstein seethed that their antics had enabled the mainstream media to present San Francisco as the “land of fruits and nuts” and strongly denounced the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence as “an embarrassment and a barrier to our being taken seriously. They are no more representative of our community than Amos and Andy were to the black community.”<sup>661</sup> In addition to exposing his own frustration at his inability to control the image of the gay and lesbian community, Goodstein's sharp words also reiterated

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<sup>659</sup> Jerry Lisker, “Homo Nest Raided, Queen Bees Are Stinging Mad.” *New York Daily News*, July 6, 1969.

<sup>660</sup> Clendenin and Nagourney, *Out For Good*: 506.

<sup>661</sup> David Goodstein, “Opening Space.” *The Advocate*, August 21, 1984: 6.

longstanding criticisms leveled by homosexuals at trans- (and gender non-conforming) people.

The resentment of some homosexuals at being associated with transpeople complicated the relationship between the two groups. In the 1950s and 1960s, many homophiles, generally eager to appear as “average Americans,” feared that the visibility of transpeople would compromise their mission to gain acceptance into the American mainstream. This hardly comes as a surprise, given that gender conformity in appearance was a key element of the homophiles’ strategy. By visually countering homophobes’ claims that homosexuals were abnormal, homophile organizations hoped that their arguments would be given more credence. Craig Loftin’s research on the history of the homophile group ONE, Inc. has illustrated that the organization’s deliberate attempts to cultivate a stereotypically-masculine image extended even to its rhetoric, which emphasized “manly virtues” such as intellectualism and professionalism.<sup>662</sup> Similarly, the Mattachine Society stressed the importance of conforming to gender norms; by taking its pledge, members agreed “to try to observe the generally accepted social rules of dignity and propriety at all times...in my conduct, attire, and speech.”<sup>663</sup> Likewise, the Daughters of Bilitis, a homophile group for women, discouraged its members from straying too far from standards of feminine appearance. Adopting a “mode of dress and behavior acceptable to society” was written into the D.O.B.’s very statement of purpose, and its newsletter, *The Ladder*, frequently contained remarks which (implicitly or explicitly) denigrated women who dressed in a “masculine” manner, regardless of their gender

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<sup>662</sup> Craig M. Loftin, “Unacceptable Mannerisms: Gender Anxieties, Homosexual Activism, and Swish in the United States, 1945-1965.” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Spring, 2007): 577-596.

<sup>663</sup> “The Mattachine Society.” In Shane Phelan and Mark Blasius, eds., *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook in Gay and Lesbian Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1997): 284.



identity. One *Ladder* article from the mid-1950s went so far as to suggest that women who dressed in a masculine manner were psychologically troubled, an ironic implication coming from an organization which sought to challenge that same stereotype as it dogged lesbians.<sup>664</sup> Recent historical work, however, has suggested that to interpret these sartorial directives as conservative is somewhat inaccurate; Martin Meeker, writing on the Mattachine Society, has claimed that this tactic was actually quite radical, given its intention to disrupt prevalent stereotypes of homosexuals that circulated in 1950s and 1960s America.<sup>665</sup> Whether radical or not, this tactic encouraged the incipient conflict between transgendered Americans and homophiles.

The official rhetoric of the homophile leadership was often echoed in the comments of many of their members, many of whom expressed strong opposition to gender non-conformity, generally, and to transpeople specifically. Craig Loftin has argued that the basis for each constituency's aversion differed somewhat, with leaders fearing that gender non-conforming people would impede social acceptance of homosexuals while the general members resented the unwanted attention transpeople and gender non-conformists brought to gay hangouts like bars.<sup>666</sup> Nonetheless, it is difficult to discern a difference between editorial admonishments against excessive femininity—

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<sup>664</sup> Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005): 180. In recent interviews conducted by historian Marcia Gallo, many of the Daughters recollected that large numbers of women at DOB meetings or events wore trousers or jeans, and these interviewees suggested that most members ignored the proscriptions against this; see Marcia Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Lesbian Rights Movement* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007): 24. By the 1970s, the D.O.B.'s official position had changed considerably and *The Ladder* carried several items supporting the right of lesbians to dress in any manner they desired; see Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995): 143-44.

<sup>665</sup> Martin Meeker, "Behind the Mask of Respectability: Reconsidering the Mattachine Society and Male Homophile Practice, 1950s and 1960s." *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (January, 2001): 78-116.

<sup>666</sup> Loftin: 580-82.

“swishing”—and those from readers; *ONE* magazine’s Dorr Legg’s charge that “neurotic” effeminate gay men should “stop their idiotic attempts at femininity and cut out the sex-changeling chitchat” and a *ONE* reader’s assertion that effeminate male homosexuals were “disgusting” and “suffer[ed] from infantilism” might well have been spoken by the same person.<sup>667</sup> Further, the 1953 coverage of the Christine Jorgensen story in *ONE* painted Jorgensen as having promoted the false impression that “all men attracted to other men must be basically feminine,” which the magazine and many readers agreed was a “sweeping disservice” to gay men.<sup>668</sup>

Homophiles’ public declarations against non-normative gender expression notwithstanding, trans people did participate in some homophile groups (although this may have been because they had nowhere else to turn; the Hose and Heels Club, widely acknowledged as the first specifically-trans organization in the United States, wasn’t founded until 1961). It is essential to acknowledge that most homophile organizations offered a variety of services which transpeople, among many others, utilized. Attempting to complicate the overly simplistic (and, he argues, anachronistic) characterization of the Mattachine Society as a “conservative” organization, historian Martin Meeker noted that the Mattachines offered counseling, assistance in finding employment or housing, references for doctors or psychologists, and a host of other services to “sexual variants,” a catch-all term which included not only homosexuals, but “transsexuals, cross-dressers

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<sup>667</sup> Loftin: 583.

<sup>668</sup> Jeff Winters, “As For Me...” *ONE*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (February 1953): 12-13. Like many gays and lesbians who would later voice suspicion of research into a genetic basis for homosexual desire lest it be found to be a “correctible” trait, Winters charged that sex-reassignment surgery might be used to eradicate homosexuality by forcing same-sex-attracted individuals to switch genders. In her discussion of this article, Joanne Meyerowitz notes that some readers of *ONE* took exception to the treatment of Jorgensen and reminded homophiles that their mission was “tolerance for the deviate.” Meyerowitz: 178.

(gay or straight), certain runaway youth, bisexuals, pedophiles, and sadomasochists.”<sup>669</sup>

Just as many “gay rights” organizations in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century have provided vital services to a broad range of people while simultaneously resisting efforts to change their titles to be more inclusive of lesbians, bisexuals and transpeople, the early homophile groups were often more inclusive on a practical level than a discursive one.

### Common Ground and Points of Divergence in Gay/Lesbian and Trans Experience

Many cisgendered gay/lesbian/bisexual identified people and trans-identified individuals did (and do) share certain practical experiences, philosophical beliefs, and political goals, leading to group efforts involving them all. Aaron Devor has written about the collaborative efforts of the early homophile group ONE, Inc. with the Erickson Educational Foundation, an organization that promoted research on transsexuality, during the 1960s and 1970s. Both before and after that period, though, many transpeople were supportive of (and active in) efforts against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, just as many gay, lesbian, and bisexual people fully supported the demands of transgendered people to designate their own identities and control their corporeal appearance. In the late twentieth century, nominally “gay and lesbian” groups have regularly made efforts to be more inclusive of transpeople and trans issues. The road to establishing this working relationship runs over the common ground shared by gay/lesbian/bisexual people and transpeople, but it is also marked by points of divergence which have threatened and continue to imperil the alliance. Several of the most significant of these are detailed below.

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<sup>669</sup> Ibid.: 91.

## **Common Ground: Gender Conformity**

The efforts of some homophiles to try to distance themselves from transpeople in the 1950s and 1960s is somewhat ironic, given the stated and much-publicized desire of many transpeople to look and act in gender-normative ways (although those efforts at visual and behavioral gender conformity was often “queered” by the physical sex of the actor). Joanne Meyerowitz noted that many members of the “first wave” of trans activists “believed that women should marry or work in traditional women’s jobs [and] did not consider themselves radicals feminists, or hippies [and] disassociated themselves from gays.”<sup>670</sup> In 1952, the story of Christine Jorgensen, a male-to-female transsexual, was widely reported in mainstream American media, bringing trans issues into focus for many Americans who had likely never considered them. Jorgensen’s post-operative gender presentation was a marvel of femininity—she was lithe, well-dressed, and genteel—although she came across as a thoroughly modern and sophisticated woman rather than a wilting flower, campy throwback, or sexy siren.<sup>671</sup> She echoed the rhetoric of the homophiles in comments suggesting that the desire of transpeople like herself was to belong to, rather than to repudiate, the mainstream, and the implicit message in her oft-told tale was that the sex-change operation had made her more “normal.”<sup>672</sup> Historians have noted that many clinicians were extremely concerned with the normalizing effects of surgery and usually “rejected candidates who would not conform after surgery to the dominant conventions of gender and sexuality,” an obligation which Jorgenson publically

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<sup>670</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002): 233.

<sup>671</sup> Meyerowitz: 79.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*

fulfilled.<sup>673</sup> Even though some homophiles derided sex-reassignment surgery as the last resort of the self-loathing homosexual, for many transpeople the surgery functioned to bring these individuals into closer alignment with the gender norms that homophiles generally accepted.

### **Common Ground: Coming Out**

In addition to this point of confluence, transpeople and homosexuals also shared common experiences related to “coming out” to themselves. Like many homosexuals, transpeople were often stymied by a lack of information about their “condition,” and they too avidly scanned medical literature to find acknowledgement of the existence of others like themselves. For many transpeople, a primary goal of this research was to learn about what “treatments” were available to them. In an interview with Richard Lamparski, aired in 1967 on New York radio station WBAI, Jorgensen was asked how she learned about the possibility of sexual reassignment surgery, and replied simply, “I was working in a library and I bumped into a book [Paul de Kruif’s 1945 work *The Male Hormone*], and I said, I think I found one of the answers to my life.” Averting that she had not personally known anyone who had undergone the procedure, Jorgensen recalled that “I was rather uninformed...I went and studied many books in the medical library in New York on Fifth Avenue, but most of them were in German or Italian or something else, and I was reading Havelock Ellis’ works and this type of thing, but *The Male Hormone* was the thing that started me on it.”<sup>674</sup> As many transpeople lacked easy access to peers, their conceptual boundaries of the trans experience were delineated by what was covered in medical

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<sup>673</sup> Ibid.: 225.

<sup>674</sup> Christine Jorgensen, interview with Richard Lamparski, aired 1967 on WBAI-New York. Accessed online at <http://www.queermusicheritage.us/aug2000a.html>, 1 September 2011.

literature; in much the same way, many queer Americans in the early twentieth century had worried whether they were doomed to mimic the often grim lives of the “inverts” and “perverts” who peopled sexological works.

### **Point of Divergence: Working with the Psychological and Medical Establishments**

Both homosexual and trans activists engaged with the psychological and medical establishments. Individually, transgender and homosexual people both turned to psycho-medical literature for information they could not find elsewhere, and both transgender and homosexual organizations made an effort to combat anti-gay and anti-trans sentiment by working with professionals in these fields. Much in the same way that homophile groups pursued dialogues with professionals in an effort to counter their beliefs that homosexuals were abnormal, transpeople were forced to serve as real-life models for the “experts” who would pass judgment on them. In spite of these experiential similarities, transpeople and homosexuals had some significant differences in their relationships to the psycho-medical establishment, particularly in the era of “gay liberation.” One of the primary goals of homophile groups like ONE, Inc., the Mattachine Society, and the Daughters of Bilitis was to remediate negative representations of homosexuals by psychological and medical experts, and they frequently invited representatives from these fields to their events and meetings to promote their belief that they were *not* mentally ill and that (as scholars Shane Phelan and Mark Blasius summarized it) “homosexuals were just like ‘everyone else’ in everything other than private sexual activity.”<sup>675</sup> By the 1970s, post-homophile gay and lesbian activists were organizing to have homosexuality

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<sup>675</sup> “The Mattachine Society.” Phelan and Blasius, eds., *We Are Everywhere*: 285.

declassified as a mental illness. But at the same time, many transpeople were struggling to access the sex-reassignment technologies that began to be developed in the 1950s, and in order to do so, needed a bona fide diagnosis from the psycho-medical establishment to do so. As one group argued its case for exclusion from the ranks of the officially disordered, the other desperately tried to fight its way in.

The efforts of gay and lesbian activists to have homosexuality removed from the ranks of mental illnesses in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (the handbook widely used by medical and psychological professionals) culminated successfully in 1973.<sup>676</sup> Because homosexuals were trying to persuade others that they neither wanted nor needed psycho-medical intervention, many failed to understand the eagerness with which trans activists courted experts in these fields. This led to a situation in which, as historian Susan Stryker writes, “gay liberationists...came to see transgendered people as ‘not liberated’ and lacking in political sophistication...[they were] still trying to ‘fit in’ with the system when what they should really be [have been] doing was freeing themselves from medical-psychiatric oppression.”<sup>677</sup> But allowing themselves to be “oppressed” through an official diagnosis of “disordered” was, for many transpeople, a necessary evil.

Accessing the medical interventions necessary to bring one’s appearance into line with one’s gender identity was no easy feat, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s. As Joanne Meyerowitz has detailed in her book *How Sex Changed: A History of*

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<sup>676</sup> Although the American Psychological Association removed “homosexuality” from the DSM in 1973, a new diagnosis, “ego-dystonic homosexuality,” replaced it. This diagnosis was used for people who were psychologically distressed or unhappy about their same-sex sexual desires; some scholars have suggested that its inclusion was intended to appease clinicians who still believed that homosexuality was a pathology. This term was finally removed in 1986.

<sup>677</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*: 98.

*Transsexuality in the United States*, sex-change operations were not widely performed in the United States during this time and were cost-prohibitive for many would-be patients. This set of daunting obstacles did not, however, prevent transpeople from trying desperately to convince doctors to perform the procedure; Meyerowitz notes that in the two years following Johns Hopkins Hospital's 1966 announcement that it would perform sex-reassignment surgeries, nearly 2000 people applied as patients.<sup>678</sup> The fact that only 24 people were selected from this vast pool points to perhaps the largest obstacle impeding trans people's access to sex-reassignment surgeries: the approval of psychological and medical "experts" who would attest that the candidates were "truly" transgendered, and not simply same-sex-attracted individuals looking to avoid the stigma of homosexuality by transitioning to the opposite sex. Thus, transpeople seeking surgery were forced to play by the rules of these professionals, giving the answers doctors wanted and by generally assuring the doctors that the operation was all that stood between them and the "normal" (read: heterosexual) life they professedly desired.

In the 1960s, doctors had adopted the term "true transsexual" (coined in 1966 by Harry Benjamin, a pioneer of sexual reassignment technology) to describe

a person with a characteristic path of atypical gender identity development that predicted an improved life from a treatment sequence that culminated in genital surgery. True transsexuals were thought to have: 1) cross-gender identifications that were consistently expressed behaviorally in childhood,

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<sup>678</sup> Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*: 142.



adolescence, and adulthood; 2) minimal or no sexual arousal to cross-dressing; and 3) no heterosexual interest, relative to their anatomic sex.<sup>679</sup>

“True transsexuals” were generally the only transpeople thought to be “good candidates” for sexual reassignment surgery (SRS), so living up to the criteria set forth in the diagnosis was essential for those who desired SRS. By the late 1960s, however, the “true transsexual” concept gradually fell out of favor as clinicians realized that many of their patients had simply recounted, during pre-operative examinations, what they thought doctors wanted to hear; for instance, they might deny that they derived sexual pleasure from their existing genitals or pretend that their pre-operative sexual desires were homosexual rather than heterosexual.<sup>680</sup> Thus, experts realized that the criteria defining a “true transsexual” were based on misinformation and not reliable indicators of the truth or tenure of an individual’s trans- identity, or their ability to thrive following SRS or similar treatments like hormone therapy. The broader term “gender dysphoria disorder” was subsequently employed in the early 1970s to describe anyone who expressed dissatisfaction with their bodily sex or who claimed cross-gender identification, a move which Meyerowitz points to as emblematic of a “liberal moment” in the fields of medical and psychological study of sex and gender. Some doctors, she writes, “expressed a new willingness to expand their diagnostic turf and their clinics and to approve more patients for surgery.”<sup>681</sup>

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<sup>679</sup> The Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, *Standards Of Care For Gender Identity Disorders, Sixth Version* (February, 2001). Accessed online at <http://www.wpath.org/Documents2/socv6.pdf>, 2 September 2011.

<sup>680</sup> Meyerowitz: 226.

<sup>681</sup> Meyerowitz, 254.

In spite of allowing more individuals access to the designation of “disordered” (and thus deserving of psycho-medical assistance), this change had little practical effect on trans- individuals’ access to treatment. There was still no standard protocol for treating anyone diagnosed from suffering from this catch-all “disorder,” leaving both medical practitioners and transpeople frustrated. As a result, trans activists in the 1970s began to push for the creation of standard diagnostic criteria for transsexuality, which they hoped would facilitate patients’ access to sexual reassignment technologies. Lacking any clear-cut guidelines to determine whether a person would be a good candidate for sexual reassignment surgery, clinicians had previously been forced to rely on their own judgment—informed, of course, by their personal biases. Including “transsexualism” as a “disorder” in the DSM-III (scheduled for publication in 1980), trans activists believed, would provide doctors with guidelines for treatment, and—arguably more importantly—would give transpeople a list of what they would be expected to accomplish in order to “qualify” for sexual reassignment.<sup>682</sup> This effort eventually succeeded in 1980, but transpeople received little support from gay and lesbian activists who had already accomplished their own goals and viewed the work of the transpeople as retrogressive at best.

### **Point of Divergence: Early Trans Activism and The Rhetoric of Normalcy**

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<sup>682</sup> Transsexualism first appeared in the DSM-III (1980) but prior to that, many clinicians used “Gender Dysphoria Syndrome” (later “Gender Identity Disorder”) to describe what Joanne Meyerowitz calls “a broader range of cross-gender identifications that might ultimately lead to surgery.” Meyerowitz: 254.

Many social psychologists have demonstrated that an important component of ethnic identity formation is the differentiation between group members and “others” (often concomitant with the establishment of a hierarchy among the same). At the same time that gay and lesbian groups slowly relaxed their opposition to gender non-conformity—prompted in part by a loosening of cultural strictures against the same—nascent trans- organizations began to exercise exclusionary tactics toward homosexuality in an effort to present themselves as “normal.” As transpeople began to develop an “ethnic identity” similar to that established by same-sex attracted people, they followed the latter’s lead in attempting to draw distinctions between themselves and others, particularly those with whom they might erroneously be linked.<sup>683</sup> In some instances, the rhetoric used to do so contained a homophobic undercurrent, intimating that transpeople were more “normal” than homosexuals, but at other times trans-activists like Christine Jorgenson still evinced support for homosexual rights while insisting on the uniqueness of trans identity.

The viewpoint espoused by early trans activist Virginia (nee Charles) Prince, founder of Los Angeles’ “Hose and Heels Club,” attempted to privilege a very specific form of trans- identity over homosexuality. The group itself, founded in 1961, specifically focused on the needs of heterosexual male transvestites. Prince published a magazine, *Transvestia*, which espoused a generally-conservative point of view not dissimilar from the ones featured in many homophile publications. *Transvestia* (which billed itself as “dedicated to the needs of those heterosexual persons who have become

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<sup>683</sup> On the establishment of a gay “ethnic identity,” see Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (1971) and Steven Epstein, “Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity: The Limits of Social Constructionism.” *Socialist Review*, Vol. 2, No. 93/94 (1987): 9-54.

aware of their ‘other side’ and seek to express it”) has been described by scholar Dallas Denny as “downplay[ing] the importance of eroticism and sexuality in male cross-dressing” and focusing instead on the” evolution of a nonsexual ‘girl within,’ a social woman with male anatomy.”<sup>684</sup> Prince insisted that only men could properly be considered transvestites, since women were able to wear “male clothing” with relative ease, and attempted to downplay the existence of homosexual transvestites by insisting that most male cross-dressers were heterosexual. In these ways, historian Robert Hill argued, Prince attempted to “place transvestism within a group context, domesticate it, and normalize it by promoting the radical idea that transvestites were not immoral, sexual deviants but rather normal, respectable citizens with only a harmless gender variation.”<sup>685</sup>

While trans organizations that coalesced in the post-Stonewall era were generally more inclusive than earlier groups, the worldview espoused by early groups like the Hose and Heels Club was—not unlike the official rhetoric of the homophiles—assimilation-minded and exclusive. In 1961, Prince invited subscribers to *Transvestia* to join her at meetings of what would be known initially as the Hose and Heels Club, and later as the Foundation for Full Personality Expression (FPE). Unfortunately for transpeople who hoped Prince’s efforts would enable them to discover a community of peers, FPE was intended strictly for heterosexuals, preferably those who were married, like Prince.<sup>686</sup> In order to enforce this, would-be members were asked to submit to interviews with local counselors, who were trained to reject “bondage (sic) or masochistic people, amateur

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<sup>684</sup> Dallas Denny, “Transgender Communities of the United States in the Late Twentieth Century.” In Paisley Curragh, Richard M. Juang, and Shannon Price Minter, eds., *Transgender Rights* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006): 172.

<sup>685</sup> Robert S. Hill, “‘As A Man I Exist; As A Woman I Live:’ Heterosexual Transvestism and the Contours of Gender and Sexuality in Postwar America.” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2007: 4.

<sup>686</sup> Virginia Prince, *My Accidental Career*, in Bonnie Bullough et al. (eds), *How I Got Into Sex* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997).

investigators, curiosity seekers, homosexuals, transsexuals or emotionally disturbed people."<sup>687</sup> Even after FPE merged with another organization for transvestites, the Society for the Second Self (popularly known as Tri-Ess), its rigid membership requirements disenfranchised many people on the transgender spectrum; this new group was advertised as "an organization limited to heterosexual cross dressers and to those who are not involved in other such behavior patterns as bondage, punishment, fetishism for rubber, leather, or domination and humiliation."<sup>688</sup> These unseemly elements, Prince worried, might counter the group's claims that heterosexual male transvestites were basically "normal" men with an exceptionally keen appreciation for the trappings of femininity. Keeping homosexuals, female-born transvestites, and sexual fetishists out of Tri-Ess was a way for the group to defend the normalcy, and respectability, of its members. In addition to "normalizing" heterosexual transvestites, Prince also effected to paint homosexuality as more of a social threat than cross-dressing, writing in 1967 that while "practically no [cross-dresser] would advise, induce, or influence another to become a transvestite, most homosexuals...have no hesitation about indoctrinating and initiating others into [homosexuality]."<sup>689</sup>

In opposition to Prince's homophobic distancing tactics on behalf of transvestism, some well-known trans- activists attempted to disrupt the popular conflation of trans identity and behavior and same-sex desire without attempting to privilege one over the other. Christine Jorgensen—the era's best-known public face of transsexuality—insisted in multiple interviews that the two were not necessarily related but emphasized her

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<sup>687</sup> D.H. Feinbloom, *Transvestites and Transsexuals: Mixed Views* (New York: Dell, 1976): 62.

<sup>688</sup> Virginia Prince, *Understanding Cross Dressing* (Los Angeles: Chevalier Books, 1976): 42-43.

<sup>689</sup> Virginia Prince, *The Transvestite and His Wife* (Los Angeles: Chevalier Books, 1962): 16.

support for homosexual rights and her willingness to challenge some of the negative stereotypes about homosexuals. A 1958 interview, released as the LP “Christine Jorgensen Reveals,” featured an exchange in which Jorgensen was asked how she felt about “the problem of homosexuality?” Jorgensen thoughtfully replied, “Well, I don’t personally believe homosexuality is a problem to society in any way or form...it is too often misconstrued that all sorts of sex perverts—and by this I mean child molesting and this type of thing—are homosexual, which is utterly ridiculous...As far as I’m concerned, I believe that...homosexuality in no way affects society or harms society...It is society’s way of thinking toward homosexuality that is the problem.”<sup>690</sup>

In spite of this relatively friendly attitude towards homosexuals, Jorgensen still insisted that homosexuality and transsexuality were unrelated phenomena, echoing the claims of Virginia Prince regarding the sexual orientation of most transvestites (she referred to research that “prov[ed], statistically, that ninety-nine percent of them are heterosexual”) and admitting that she did not feel any particular sense of rapport with homosexuals.<sup>691</sup> Jorgensen’s comments also hinted at some internalized homophobia, unsurprising in a woman of her generation; she admitted that she “was afraid for many years that I might be [homosexual], until I understood what my problems were. I didn’t understand why I would have the different feelings that I had, and to me, if I had them, then it had to be homosexuality, and it was something that I could not accept in my life.”<sup>692</sup> But, Jorgensen added, she also did not try to disabuse homosexuals of the notion

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<sup>690</sup> Christine Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen Reveals* (1958). <http://www.queermusicheritage.us/aug2000a.html>, Accessed 1 September 2011.

<sup>691</sup> Christine Jorgensen, interview with Joe Pyne. Ca. 1966-67. [http://wn.com/christine\\_jorgensen\\_on\\_joe\\_pyne\\_1966\\_or\\_1967](http://wn.com/christine_jorgensen_on_joe_pyne_1966_or_1967). Accessed September 1, 2011.

<sup>692</sup> Christine Jorgensen, interview on WBAI-New York, 1967. <http://www.queermusicheritage.us/aug2000a.html>, Accessed 1 September 2011.

that she had been, prior to her operation, one of their own. The blasé attitude of Jorgensen toward people who mistakenly perceived her as a “former” homosexual suggested that she recognized that, no matter what she did or who she associated with, she would always be perceived as different, or “deviant.” Virginia Prince and the members of Tri-Ess, on the other hand, had a vested interest in presenting male “femmiphiles” (the term coined by Prince) as “normal” and were therefore much more vigilant in their defense against associations between trans identity and same-sex desire.

### **Point of Divergence: Lesbian Feminism and Anti-Trans Sentiment**

As discussed at length in Chapter 3, the relationship between transpeople and one particular subset of the gay and lesbian community was especially fraught during the 1970s and 1980s. I speak here of lesbian feminists, whose vitriol against transpeople—specifically against male-to-female transsexuals—further impaired the ability of trans- and gay/lesbian activists to work together. Though much of the anti-trans sentiment from the lesbian-feminist community originated in the 1970s, the prejudice persisted through the 1980s. Lesbian publication *Coming Up!* published in 1986 a letter to the editor which claimed that “When an estrogenated man with breasts loves women, that is not lesbianism, that is mutilated perversion...He is not a lesbian, he is a mutant man, a self-made freak, a deformity, an insult. He deserves a slap in the face.”<sup>693</sup>

Anti-trans opinions permeated the rhetoric of lesbian feminists in the 1970s. Many lesbian feminists were vocal about their objections to the behavior of male-bodied transvestites who, they claimed, reinforced antiquated and oppressive stereotypes of

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<sup>693</sup>693 Debbie Mikuteit, Letter to the Editor. *Coming Up!* (February 1986): 3-4.

femininity. Anti-trans sentiment was intensified by the efforts of some MTF transsexuals to join lesbian organizations in the 1970s; prominent lesbian feminists such as Robin Morgan decried “the obscenity of male transvestism” and refused to “permit into [women’s] organizations...men who deliberately reemphasize gender roles, and who parody female oppression and suffering.”<sup>694</sup> Toward the end of the 1970s, Mary Daly, a professor of theology at Boston University, called transsexuality “a necrophilic invasion” of women’s space and supervised the doctoral work of Janice Raymond, whose 1979 book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* was an extended diatribe against transsexuals who, she claimed, “rape women’s bodies by reducing the female form to an artifact, appropriating the body for themselves.”<sup>695</sup> Lesbian feminists claimed that the surgical “invention” of women was, as Stephen Whittle has succinctly described it, “a mechanism of patriarchal oppression.”<sup>696</sup>

In spite of the recent emergence of trans-inclusive and trans-positive feminisms, anti-trans sentiment is still palpable in the works of lesbian feminist writers such as Sheila Jeffreys, who in 1997 decried the increasing visibility of trans-related themes (and of transmen in particular) as a threat to lesbian existence. Jeffreys wrote, “The spectacle of lesbians as freaks who really want to be men has returned with renewed vigour from the sexological magazines of the 1950s to haunt popular women’s magazines and lesbian literature today. Since the identity of ‘transsexual’ seems to be learned from such sources,

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<sup>694</sup> Robin Morgan, “Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions?” in Morgan, *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicles of a Feminist* (New York: Random House, 1977): 170-89.

<sup>695</sup> Janice Raymond, “Sappho By Surgery: The Transsexually-Constructed Lesbian Feminist.” In Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006):134.

<sup>696</sup> Stephen Whittle, “Where Did We Go Wrong? Feminism and Trans Theory--Two Teams on the Same Side?” In *ibid*: 196.



then we can expect a proliferation of these very damaging practices among lesbians.”<sup>697</sup> Christopher Shelley’s *Transpeople: Repudiation, Trauma, Healing* offers an array of first-person accounts that illustrate the material outcomes of this rhetoric; his subjects speak of their experiences being “outed” as trans, being mocked or sexually harassed, or being denied entry to women’s or gay/lesbian events or organizations, all at the hands of angry gays and lesbians.<sup>698</sup> The negative perspectives on trans issues promoted by some lesbian feminists continue to pose a great challenge to the successful integration of transpeople into both informal gay/lesbian communities and into the organized gay/lesbian political movement as well.

### **Points of Divergence: The Right to Marry, Civil Rights Ordinances, and ENDA**

Copious discussion has occurred in the pages of popular periodicals, scholarly works, and personal blogs and websites regarding whether or not transpeople and gay/lesbian/bisexual people share enough in the way of common political and social goals to necessitate a working relationship. Some gay writers, particularly those with a conservative political perspective, have charged that they do not. Journalist Paul Varnell, for example, wrote in the *Windy City Times* in 1994 that “transgender” was simply an “add-on” to the existing gay rights movement and asserted that because transpeople do not “experience discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation,” “their issues [are not] ours.”<sup>699</sup> Trans activist and academic Susan Stryker recounted hearing similar comments

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<sup>697</sup> Sheila Jeffreys, “Transgender Activism: A Feminist Perspective.” *The Journal of Lesbian Studies* Vol. 1, Nos. 3/4 (1997): 68.

<sup>698</sup> Christopher A. Shelly, *Transpeople: Repudiation, Trauma, Healing* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

<sup>699</sup> Paul Varnell, “Gay, Bi, Trans, Drag, Etc.” *Windy City Times*, July 28, 1994: 14.

from veteran gay liberationists like Jim Fouratt in 1995: “Transsexuals, he said, had started claiming that they were part of...queer politics, which had to be stopped...they had been trying for years to infiltrate the gay and lesbian movement to destroy it.”<sup>700</sup>

Looking beyond the general right-or-wrong issues of trans-inclusivity, there are significant differences in how transpeople and the gay/lesbian/bisexual political movement view the importance of particular issues.

One of the clearest examples of these differences hinges on the emphasis placed by the gay and lesbian movement on marriage equality in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, which has been the subject of criticism from many LGBTQ individuals who believe that the movement should concentrate on other issues of more pressing need. Transpeople, in particular, have been vocal in their opposition to the movement’s seemingly-unyielding focus on marriage; historian Susan Stryker attributes this to the trans- community’s growing recognition that it might have “more in common with immigrants, refugees, and undocumented workers than...with the gay and lesbian community.” This assertion, though startling, is based on the fact that the lives of these group members are all similarly curtailed by state restrictions on identity documentation. “Pursuing transgender justice increasingly involves joining campaigns and struggles that might seem at first to have little to do with gender identity or expression,” as Susan Stryker elegantly writes, “but everything to do with how the state polices those who differ from social norms and tries to solve the bureaucratic problems that arise from attempting to administer the lives of atypical members of its population.”<sup>701</sup> Rather than fretting over

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<sup>700</sup> Susan Stryker, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies.” In Stryker and Whittle, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006): 1.

<sup>701</sup> Stryker, *Transgender History*: 150.

access to a social institution that itself creates a privileged class of individuals (the married couple), Stryker implies, many transpeople would prefer to challenge institutionalized inequity. Cultural anthropologist Megan Davidson's work on queer youth cultures offers support for this inference; one activist she interviewed complained, "There is no account of gender fluidity in the critiques [of marriage] most gay and lesbian organizations are creating. All this fighting for 'same-sex marriage' should be framed as the right for any type of couple to marry." Another pointedly observed that the movement "is fighting for the rights of traditionally gendered people at the expense of non-traditionally gendered people."<sup>702</sup>

As Megan Davidson has argued, the failure of gay and lesbian activists to frame the marriage issue in a trans-inclusive way has led to transpeople feeling disenfranchised from the movement, which threatens the viability of the movement itself. At first glance, it seems that laws against same-sex marriage might not necessarily affect transpeople, but if a transperson wishes to marry someone whose "official" (legal) gender matches their own, they are stymied by these very proscriptions. The fight to legalize same-sex marriage, then, is clearly one which could benefit transpeople—although perhaps at a psychic cost. For instance, if a male-identified person whose legal sex is female wished to marry another legally-female individual (and assuming that he was unable to or chose not to change his legal sex to male), he would have to do so in the guise of a "same-sex marriage," thereby effectively disavowing his male identity. This mandatory misrepresentation of the truth hardly seems an auspicious omen for a happy marriage. But for transpeople who fervently desire to wed their partners, this imperfect solution may be

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<sup>702</sup>Megan Davidson, "Rethinking the Movement: Trans Youth Activism in New York City and Beyond." In Susan Driver, ed., *Queer Youth Cultures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008): 252.

their only option. Thus, many transpeople do have a stake in the battle over same-sex marriage, and should expect to be included in discussions of the topic.

In addition to transpeople being tacitly excluded from discussions over the wisdom of putting such a great emphasis on efforts to legalize same-sex marriage, transpeople have also been forcibly divorced from projects aiming to enshrine civil rights for gay/lesbian/bisexual people on the grounds that their inclusion might jeopardize the passage of these laws. For instance, in the early 1970s, the Gay Activists' Alliance of New York City attempted to pass a gay rights bill, but decided not to include transpeople in their scope of coverage. Lesbian activist Jean O'Leary, the one-time co-director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, recalled the rationale in a 1996 interview, explaining, "Politically, we had to say, 'This doesn't work. We are never going to get the bill through the city council if transvestites are included in the bill. This is not what our battle is about. It's about gay rights, not transvestite rights. We're talking about being able to love someone of your own sex, being able to have a relationship. This is not about how we dress.'"<sup>703</sup> Reducing the struggle of transpeople for legal protection and recognition to an issue of sartorial freedom was one way for gay and lesbian people to distance themselves from trans- issues which might reflect poorly on them—even if this was a grave oversimplification of the facts.

Three decades later, the 2007 Congressional battle over the Employment Non-Discrimination Act reenacted the same deliberate disenfranchisement of transpeople from the gay/lesbian/bisexual community. The Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), a bill that sought to "prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of sexual

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<sup>703</sup> Eric Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, revised edition (New York: HarperCollins, 2002): 156.

orientation,” had originally been introduced during the 103<sup>rd</sup> Congressional session (1994) but failed to pass during that session or the five that followed. During the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress in 2007, House Representative Barney Frank (D-Mass.) had reintroduced the same bill (H.R. 2015) but with one addition: “gender identity” was now added to “sexual orientation” as a protected category. When the bill again failed to make it out of committee, Representative Frank proposed a new version which left out the gender identity protections (H.R. 3685). The response of transpeople and numerous LGBT organizations to this exclusion was immediate and largely negative; nearly four hundred national, state, and local groups signed a letter addressed to Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi stating their opposition to this non-inclusive bill that “leaves part of our community without protections and basic security that the rest of us are provided.”<sup>704</sup> The bill passed the House on November 7, 2007 but never made it out of the Senate. Frank’s insistence on including in ENDA a stipulation that would make it acceptable for single-sex facilities (such as women’s or men’s shower or changing rooms) to bar transpeople whose physical bodies don’t conform to that sex has further rankled trans activists.<sup>705</sup> While the furor over dropping gender identity from ENDA prompted Barney Frank to include it in the most recent versions of the bill to be introduced, the hard feelings over the willingness of some gays and lesbians to sacrifice transpeople at the altar of political expediency has remained. As *The Advocate*’s editor in chief, Anne Stockwell, wrote in a 2007 editorial

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<sup>704</sup> National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, “United Opposition to Sexual-Orientation-Only Non-Discrimination Legislation.” October 1, 2007.

[http://www.thetaskforce.org/activist\\_center/ENDA\\_oct1\\_letter](http://www.thetaskforce.org/activist_center/ENDA_oct1_letter). Accessed December 23, 2011.

<sup>705</sup> Paisley Curragh, “Expecting Bodies: The Pregnant Man and Transgender Exclusion from the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.” *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 3/4 (Fall-Winter 2008): 334.

In denouncing the sexual-orientation only ENDA, LGBT people achieved a new unity-- but one strong enough only to obstruct progress, not create it. When Barney Frank says that members of Congress need to be more educated about the trans struggle before they'll want to help, that's not a transphobic statement. That's just political common sense. And whatever our vision for a perfect piece of legislation, is it smart to give up a goal 30 years in the making only to go back to square one with no gains at all?<sup>706</sup>

### Trans-Erasure on a Class Level

Class erasure, in Yoshino's theory, is simply the failure to acknowledge a particular group of people. Similar to the situation of the "erased" bisexuals, transpeople or specifically trans- issues appeared only rarely in the pages of *The Advocate*. It could even be argued that the majority of their appearances in the magazine were limited to the single letter "T," appended to the "LGB" acronym used for brevity in discussions of gay/lesbian/bisexual issues. For transpeople, the issue of erasure on a class level could be a matter of life or death. In the summer of 2003, a series of brutal murders targeting transgendered women in the Washington, D.C. area received a brief mention in the *Advocate*, which reported on the local community's subsequent efforts to protect its transwomen.<sup>707</sup> One reader wrote to *The Advocate* in a tone of outraged incredulity, "Two black transgendered women...were murdered...less than a month before your September 30 issue hit the stands. Another transgendered woman was shot and seriously hurt. You reported on all this recent outrage in less than a page, yet in the same issue devoted no less than eight pages to a Caucasian gay male (Matthew Shepard) who was killed five years ago. You call yourselves *The Advocate*. Need I ask for whom?"<sup>708</sup>

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<sup>706</sup> Anne Stockwell, "Getting Real About ENDA." *The Advocate*, November 6, 2007: 4.

<sup>707</sup> "D.C. Nightmare." *The Advocate*, September 20, 2003: 14.

<sup>708</sup> Mark Walcott, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, October 28, 2003: 4.

Reaching beyond a mere denial of the existence of trans people by failing to represent them, an essay that appeared in a 1993 issue of *The Advocate* also appeared to endorse the notion that trans people, while they did exist, did not constitute a discrete group of individuals. This argument, when used to effect the erasure of trans people, is particularly insidious because while it appears to acknowledge the existence of trans people, it simultaneously disavows this very fact. This approach appeared in a “Last Word” column written by journalist Gabriel Rotello. The essay provocatively argued that all lesbian, gay, and bisexual people should identify themselves as transgendered. Citing research (for which no references were provided), Rotello claimed that while

most heterosexuals seem to feel and act and desire and respond and present themselves to the world in a fairly ‘sex-typical’ way—pretty much all male or all female. Gay people, on the other hand, exhibit a whole range of ‘sex-atypical’ characteristics...includ[ing] our inner feelings of maleness and femaleness, our outward appearance as butch or femme...even the way we throw a ball or change a tire.

Rotello suggested that because “research” found that most gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people “occupied a place on a continuum between the two main genders,” that homophobia would more properly be understood as *transphobia*—that is, stemming from peoples’ hatred of homosexuals not necessarily because of their same-sex desires but rather because of their failure to conform to gender expectations. Therefore, he concluded, “if the ultimate cause of our oppression is gender transgression, then shouldn’t it be the focus of our identities and our movement? Shouldn’t we stop being the les-bi-gay-trans-whatever movement, with a new syllable added every year, and simply

become the trans movement?"<sup>709</sup> Underlying Rotello's suggestion was a palpable sense of frustration, if not outright exasperation, with the fact that the "lesbian and gay" movement had gradually been persuaded, through the influence of bisexual and transgendered activists, to acknowledge, at least nominally, its bi- and trans- members; to follow "trans" with the dismissive "whatever," in his imagined queer coalition, suggests this. And while Rotello seemed to be responding in the same way as numerous nominally gay organizations had to lesbians, bisexual, and transgendered people angry about their exclusion from the groups' titles, he actually turned the trend on its head by arguing that the newest and most marginal of the terms, trans, be used as an umbrella (typically, organizations reluctant to change their names to be more inclusive asserted that "gay" was the logical choice because of its commonly-understood meaning). In doing so, he *appeared* to be making a cutting-edge proposition, but in reality, Rotello was not only performing the same effacement of difference necessitated by any substitution of one "universal" term for many disparate ones, but implicitly accepting a conservative gender model in which masculinity and femininity were polar opposites—hardly a radical claim.

Reader Lynx Galluci corrected Rotello's binaristic viewpoint in a letter to the editor, reminding him that "rethinking gender difference means more than allowing people to cross from one category to another...we must also reexamine and redefine the categories themselves." She also observed, pointedly, that while "I'm used to explaining to heterosexuals that I'm not homing in on male territory—loving women isn't a male

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<sup>709</sup> Gabriel Rotello, "Last Word." *The Advocate*, December 10, 1996: 88.



thing to do—[having] to argue the point with gay men seems shocking. The day I have to debate my womanhood with other lesbians, I'll have had it with our community.”<sup>710</sup>

Other readers' arguments against *The Advocate's* attempts to conflate same-sex sexual attraction with gender non-conformity or trans-identity also appeared in response to a 1992 profile piece on basketball star Dennis Rodman, which had run the previous December, generating both positive and negative feedback. When the article's author asked, rhetorically, if the athlete's ability “to move...fluidly across the gender landscape” was something *Advocate* readers envied, Andrew Cherry responded, flatly, “No. *Gay* does not mean ‘genderless;’ it means ‘attracted to people of the same gender’...[It] is simply not accurate to equate homosexuality with the obliteration of gender differences.”<sup>711</sup> A passionate belief in gender difference and fixity was also evidenced by one reader who lambasted historian Lillian Faderman for an article on gay and lesbian parenting. Though seemingly innocuous, Faderman's use of female couples for her theoretical examples rankled this reader, who fumed that, “Contrary to feminist mythology, most children raised without fathers don't function too well in general society.” The reader continued, “Feminist jerks” like Faderman should acknowledge that “people of both gender offer different and invaluable things to their respective children.”<sup>712</sup> With gender itself such a troublesome topic for both readers and writers of *The Advocate*, it seems almost a foregone conclusion that discussion of trans issues would present another quagmire.

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<sup>710</sup> Lynx Galluci, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, February 8, 1997: 8.

<sup>711</sup> Andrew Cherry, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, February 18, 1997: 4.

<sup>712</sup> Lazaro De La Garza, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, March 4, 1997: 4.

### Erasure on an Individual Level: Brandon, Calpernia, and the Pronoun Problem

Discussing the erasure of an individual's trans-identity as a wholly negative phenomenon is a difficult proposition, as for many people who transition, the ultimate goal is to *not* be “read” as trans. Medical interventions are often undertaken for just this reason—so the individual can live as a particular sex without any indication that this “lived sex” differs from their sex at birth. As a result, it might seem too facile to chastise the *Advocate* for refusing to acknowledge the trans-identities or experiences of the individuals they cover if those people would prefer to keep private the discrepancy between the sex as which they live and their biological sex at birth—though this brings up the old debates over “outing” closeted homosexuals. But if the individuals in question are open about their trans- identities, then they ought to be acknowledged. In the late 1990s, two high-profile murders occurred that brought a new seriousness to issues of trans-erasure. I will focus here on the *Advocate*'s erasure of the trans-identity of two individuals, in particular, because a motivation deeper than simple ignorance seems to be at play in both instances. In the cases of both Brandon Teena and Barry Winchell, trans-erasure appears to conveniently advance one of the primary aims of the late-20<sup>th</sup> century gay and lesbian political movement: the passage of hate crime legislation.

In 1997, the mainstream-movie-going American public had a rare opportunity to see a film that dealt with trans- issues. The winner of an Academy Award, *Boys Don't Cry* was based on the life of a Nebraskan named Brandon Teena, who lived as a young man for several years until she was brutally murdered on New Year's Eve, 1993, along with two companions, by two men who had earlier raped him after discovering that he was genitally female. But just as Teena's former “friends” had been deranged by their

inability to accept his stated gender, so too did the *Advocate*'s early coverage of the story fail sufficiently acknowledge Teena's trans-identity, implying instead that he was a lesbian who tried to pass as a man in order to make it easier to date women, or that he was "confused" about his gender or sexual identity. In addition to this schizophrenic depiction of Teena's identity, much of the coverage about his murder cast him as a duplicitous seducer of "heterosexual" women, a technique that Kenji Yoshino identified as "delegitimizing."

The story broke on a national level almost immediately; the *New York Times* carried a brief notice of the murder five days after it occurred. As one might expect from a newspaper which refused to use the word "gay" in lieu of "homosexual" until 1987, the terminology of the article was less-than-enlightened, describing Teena in the headline as a "woman who posed as a man" and mentioning "Ms. Brandon's double life" as a possible motive for the murder.<sup>713</sup> The early *Advocate* articles, though, were hardly better. The brief article about Teena's slaying that appeared in February, 1994, ran under the headline "Deception On The Prairie," and referred to Teena as "passing herself off as a man."<sup>714</sup> A longer feature, entitled "Heartland Homicide" described Teena using female pronouns—"she" and "her"—in spite of correctly identifying him as a "transsexual who had successfully passed as male"—in stark contrast to the male pronouns used by trans-activist Leslie Feinberg in her quoted remarks (see Fig. 10)<sup>715</sup> According to the author, Teena "[posed] as a boy," and "loved the way she felt as a male," comments which seem to diminish Teena's motivation as mere pleasure-seeking rather than an issue of living in

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<sup>713</sup> "Woman Who Posed As A Man Is Found Slain With Two Others." *The New York Times*, January 4, 1994: A11.

<sup>714</sup> "Deception On the Prairie." *The Advocate*, February 8, 1994: 26-7.

<sup>715</sup> Ingrid Ricks, "Heartland Homicide." *The Advocate*, March 8, 1994: 28.

accordance with one's gender identity. The article also quoted Terry Maroney, a spokeswoman for the Lesbian Anti-Violence Project, as referring to Teena as "possibly lesbian" although by all accounts Teena did not identify as a woman. In 1995, the *Advocate* again used feminine pronouns to refer to Teena, and characterized him as a "transvestite" in a brief news item reporting that his killers had been convicted of murder.<sup>716</sup> Even as late as 1999, articles in the *Advocate* were still describing Brandon Teena as "a young Nebraska woman confused about her gender identity" who engaged in a "cross-gender ruse," although by this time the pronouns used to describe him, at least, were masculine. But even this bit of progress was compromised by the fact that his murder was chalked up to "homophobia" rather than transphobia.<sup>717</sup> As one reader pointed out in a letter to the editor, the magazine was wrong to describe Teena as having "[tried] to live as a man."<sup>718</sup> "He did live as a man," the reader corrected, and "for the indiscretion of being himself, he, not she, was murdered."<sup>719</sup>

Was the continued depiction of Teena as a woman simply the result of ignorance? It is possible, given the relative paucity of coverage of trans- issues in the media to that point, that journalists simply did not know which pronouns should be used in reporting on trans-identified individuals. Also possible, however, is that this was a deliberate decision intended to present Teena as a same-sex-attracted woman—a homosexual—whose death would underscore the need for hate crime legislation. The author of "Heartland Homicide" admitted as much, writing that the failure of Nebraska authorities to admit that "sexual bias" had "infuriated gays, lesbians, and transsexuals nationwide."

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<sup>716</sup> "Transitions." *The Advocate*, July 11, 1995: 19.

<sup>717</sup> Michele Kort, "Gone Too Soon." *The Advocate*, July 20, 1999: 51.

<sup>718</sup> Peter McQuaid, "Is Hilary Swank Oscar Bait?" *The Advocate*, September 28, 1999: 60-61.

<sup>719</sup> Matthew Kalley, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, October 26, 1999: 4.

If Teena had been recognized as a man, then his killing would simply have been cast as the outcome of a battle between rival suitors.

*The Advocate* devoted its May 27, 2003 cover story to a newly-released film that focused on the 1999 murder of Pfc. Barry Winchell by homophobic Army comrades. At the time of his death, Winchell was in a relationship with a transgendered woman, Calpernia Addams, a fact which led some of his fellow soldiers to label him a “faggot” and subsequently to beat him to death with a baseball bat as he slept. The case received widespread publicity, leading then-President Bill Clinton to order a review of the military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, which many felt had contributed to the climate of homophobia that enabled Winchell’s brutal murder to occur. The film “Soldier’s Girl,” released in 2003, garnered numerous accolades for portraying Winchell’s and Addams’ relationship in the same light that Addams says they themselves saw it: a fairly typical heterosexual romance. The role of Addams was played by a male actor who was carefully costumed and made up to appear as a woman—in an effort to reflect Addams’ status as a pre-operative transsexual at the time the incident took place—but the cover of *The Advocate* showed the actors who played Addams and Winchell in a homo-affectionate pose, with one actor’s head resting on the other’s shoulder such that a casual glance would suggest that the image was of a gay male couple. The headline, “Boys Do Cry” furthered the erasure of Addams’ gender from the story, and could be seen as an attempt to spin the movie to appeal to a gay male audience by presenting it as, basically, a “gay” story (although there is no definitive evidence that Winchell considered himself gay).

Although the film’s director affirmed to *The Advocate* that his film wasn’t “really a gay film,” he also suggested that the character’s sexual identities were somewhat

unclear even to him, a troubling observation given that the real life Addams had repeatedly insisted that her relationship with Winchell was, in both of their minds, a heterosexual partnership. The author of the article, too, sighed that Winchell's sexual identity would "never be known," a mystery apparently arising from the incompatibility of "relat[ing] to Calpernia as a woman" yet "engag[ing] with all of her physicality." The possibility that Winchell may simply have considered Addams to be a woman with unusual physical features is foreclosed by both the film's director and the *Advocate* writer.<sup>720</sup> Even more blunt is The *Advocate*'s reader poll, printed within the article on Addams and Winchell, which asked respondents, "Do you consider men who date transsexual women to be gay?" Nearly half voted negatively, while the remainder were evenly split between "yes" and "undecided." The responses exposed the breadth of opinion among *Advocate* readers in relation to trans issues; one sniped, "No, I don't, but neither do I consider male-to-female transsexuals to be women. Let's test their chromosomes, shall we? Adding or removing various body parts is on a par with painting stripes on a horse and saying it's now a zebra." Another outraged reader wrote, "Transsexual women are women. To imply otherwise is demeaning and transphobic. That *The Advocate* could even ask such a question implies that you still think trans people's identities are open to *your* interpretation."<sup>721</sup>

Whether or not one chooses to condone it, it is understandable that *The Advocate* and other gay and lesbian organizations would be hesitant to accept Addams' characterization of her relationship with Winchell, because casting their relationship as one between two men allowed the dead man to stand in as a particularly powerful

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<sup>720</sup> Michael Rowe, "Love and Death." *The Advocate*, May 27, 2003: 30-38.

<sup>721</sup> "Reader Comments from Advocate.com." *The Advocate*, June 24, 2003: 12.

emblem for the failure of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” Admitting that Winchell viewed himself as heterosexual would have made this more difficult, although in reality it was others’ perception of Winchell’s sexuality, not his own identity, which led to his slaying. The very first article published by *The Advocate* in the wake of Winchell’s death subtly implied that Winchell was, if not gay, then something other than heterosexual; as his mother talked about her devastation upon hearing of her son’s death, she mentions that the killers “thought Barry was gay.” The author of the article immediately opens the following paragraph with the statement that the woman “may not have known her son’s sexual orientation, but fellow servicemen apparently thought they did.” At no point does Winchell’s mother suggest that she believed her son to be anything other than heterosexual, so for the author to imply that this is inaccurate smacks of condescension. Later in the article, the author reports, with a sense of disapproval, that

In spite of her steadfast commitment to her crusade, Kutteles is anything but certain about how her son lived his private life. She is *reluctant to concede* that Winchell was gay. And she *struggles to understand* his relationship with Calpernia Sarah Addams, a male-to-female preoperative transsexual whom Winchell was dating before his death. ‘I’m not saying that Barry wasn’t gay, only that I didn’t know him to be gay...He never told me he was gay.’<sup>722</sup>

In January 2002, *The Advocate* referred to Winchell as a “gay soldier” in retrospective on the preceding year, and in November of the same year, used an inset photo of Winchell to accompany an article about the possible promotion of Robert Clark, an outspokenly homophobic U.S Army general, to a higher post. The caption read, “Clark was

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<sup>722</sup> Chris Bull, “Life After Death,” *The Advocate*, April 25, 2000: 24-28. Italics mine.

commander of Fort Campbell when *gay soldier* Barry Winchell was murdered (italics mine).”<sup>723</sup> In contrast, *Out* magazine (a glossy fashion and lifestyle magazine targeted toward a gay male readership) referred to Winchell as “gay” only once, in the immediate aftermath of his murder, and subsequently referred to him as being murdered for his relationship with a transgendered woman.<sup>724</sup>

As early as 2000, even the mainstream press had begun to note that, in their attempts not to squander the political capital provided by Winchell’s death, some gay and lesbian organizations were misrepresenting his sexual identity. The *New York Times* carried a lengthy article on the situation, observing that “the fact is that Winchell, killed for being gay, wasn’t gay, at least not in the traditional...sense of the word...But the more that Winchell, like Matthew Shepard before him, has been held up as a martyr for gay equality, the less room there has been for explaining such sloppy complications.”

Addams recounted how, in the days immediately following Winchell’s murder, she was approached by Kathi Westcott, staff attorney for the Servicemembers’ Legal Defense Network and Rhonda White, co-director of a local gay and lesbian political organization, who proposed that Addams allow herself to be represented in the press as a man. White rationalized that ““Barry was dating an anatomical male...How can you say he was gay-bashed if he was dating a woman, you know?””<sup>725</sup> Addams reluctantly agreed, but admitted later that she felt that she had been virtually abandoned by the gay and lesbian organizations so eager to claim Barry Winchell as one of their own. She told a journalist

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<sup>723</sup> “News of the Year,” *The Advocate*, January 22, 2002: 14; Sarah Wildman, “Three-Star Fiasco.” *The Advocate*, November 26, 2002: 13.

<sup>724</sup> See “The Out 100,” *Out*, January 2001: 66; “Out Front Reviews,” *Out*, March 2004: 58; “The Out 100,” *Out*, December 2003: 197; “Out Front Reviews,” *Out*, June 2003: 56.

<sup>725</sup> David France, “An Inconvenient Woman.” *The New York Times Magazine*, May 28, 2000:SM 24-30.



from the *Miami Herald* that “If I could do it over again, I wouldn't let that happen... to just say Barry was gay and leave it at that was an oversimplification at best. Barry had only dated women before me. And he considered me and treated me as a woman when he dated me, which was certainly how I saw myself.”<sup>726</sup>

She was not acknowledged as his girlfriend even at a ceremony hosted by S.L.D.N., where Kathi Westcott proclaimed that, “Without her strength and courage I don't think we would be able to convince the press that this was a hate crime.” The statement paints Addams as a willing conspirator in their efforts to use the murder to political advantage. The S.L.D.N. vigorously objected to the characterization of their efforts as deceptive, demanding (and receiving) a correction which moderated the article's tone, but even within the gay and lesbian community, the S.L.D.N.'s outrage was viewed as unfounded; trans activist Riki Wilchins pointed out in *The Advocate* that the organization had covered the “‘antigay’ crime for a year without once noting in 17 alerts or press releases that Winchell was killed for dating a transwoman.”<sup>727</sup> Even the *New York Times*, which ran a feature story on the case in 2000, noted that “In order to turn the murdered soldier, Barry Winchell, into a martyr for gay rights, activists first had to turn his girlfriend, Calpernia Addams, back into a man.”<sup>728</sup>

*The Advocate* did carry one article which directly addressed journalists' inability or unwillingness to address Addams' transsexuality but also included some specious comments about Winchell's identity. Author Steve Friess positioned the issue as one affecting the mainstream press, writing that “reporters struggled to describe—within the

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<sup>726</sup> Glen Garvin, “HBO's 'Normal', Showtime's 'Soldier's Girl' bring lives of transgendered people to small screen.” *Miami Herald*, March 15, 2003: 1E.

<sup>727</sup> Riki Wilchins, “Words That Kill.” *The Advocate*, August 29, 2000: 9.

<sup>728</sup> France: 30.

confines of TV clips and newspaper sentences—the relationship between a soldier who considered himself a gay man and a preoperative transsexual who considers herself a woman.” Of Calpernia Addams, Friess wrote, “Because she is a biological male, she says, Winchell considered himself gay.” One journalist quoted in the story asked, “How do you show that Winchell’s murder was a hate crime if his girlfriend is referring to herself as a she? Why would someone be enraged by this guy having a girlfriend? When I interviewed Calpernia, I always referred to her as a *she*...[but] after I discussed it with my editors, I had to go through and change it to *he* in the story to keep it clear.”

The “clarity” invoked here required the deliberate manipulation of facts—but *The Advocate*’s coverage was less incensed than exculpatory. One reader wrote in to object to the “poor leadership” exhibited by *The Advocate* by “repeatedly referring to Barry Winchell...as a ‘gay soldier.’ Winchell never self-identified as gay. Winchell did not date men; his lover at the time of his death was a transgendered woman. If you truly care about leadership by example, stop contributing to the invisibility of the trans community.”<sup>729</sup> But in order to better serve the needs of the gay and lesbian political movement, Winchell’s story, like Brandon Teena’s, had to be “spun” in such a way that necessitated the virtual erasure of trans identity. Just as political efforts to achieve legislative recognition of and protection for gay/lesbian/bisexual Americans (such as ENDA) had sacrificed the best interests of trans people, *The Advocate*’s coverage of these stories suggested that it, too, was willing to hide “inconvenient” facts to better serve the needs of gay/lesbian/bisexual people.

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<sup>729</sup> Kate Jerman, “Letter to the Editor.” *The Advocate*, December 24, 2002: 6.

## Erasure Through Delegitimation: Negative Perspectives on Trans Issues

In May 1999 *The Advocate* broke new ground in its coverage of transgender issues by presenting a cover story entitled, “What is Transgender?” Trans issues had never before been given such prominent coverage in the publication’s pages, but this advance was nonetheless somewhat problematic. The cover image featured Greg Louganis, a gay male Olympic champion, and Alexandra Billings, a transgendered female actress (Fig. 11). The copy on the cover read, “This man was born gay. This woman was born a man.” The juxtaposition between Louganis, whose orientation was posited as innate, and Billings, whose gender was implied to be mutable, drew criticism from some readers who otherwise applauded *The Advocate*’s efforts to increase its coverage of trans issues. Several issues from the early 2000s showed that the relationship between transpeople and the mainstream gay and lesbian movement still faced a series of challenges in the new millennium. But a more civil tone of discourse was beginning to emerge, with explicitly transphobic rhetoric generally falling into disfavor. The case of Norah Vincent’s tenure at *The Advocate* illustrates how this change affected the magazine’s content.

Vincent, a self-styled *enfant terrible* in the manner of Camille Paglia, identified herself as an “androgynous lesbian” writer, and her work appeared in a variety of publications ranging from the *Village Voice* to *The New Republic*. Most of her essays inveighed against “political correctness” and “gay left orthodoxy,” but she also demonstrated a marked tendency to criticize transgendered people and issues.<sup>730</sup> She

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<sup>730</sup> For some examples of Vincent’s writing on this topic, see: “Welcome to the Transsexual Age.” *Village Voice*, May 21, 2001; “A Real Man,” *Village Voice*, November 16, 1999; “Wedded to Orthodoxy,” *Village*

began to write for *The Advocate* in 1998 and through 2003, contributed opinion pieces that conformed to this standard. It is not an exaggeration to say that Vincent's essays constituted the majority of explicitly trans-negative—delegitimizing, to use Yoshino's term—content in *The Advocate* during this period.

In one of these essays, published in January 2000, Vincent described *Boys Don't Cry*, the 1999 mainstream movie about the murder of Brandon Teena, as a “lesbian film.” She referred to Teena as a “pre-op transsexual” and used female pronouns in describing him, effectively negating Teena's self-identification as a man. Her insistence on viewing Teena as a woman was underscored by her description of him as a “latter-day Joan of Arc.”<sup>731</sup> When *Advocate* readers wrote in to complain, Vincent responded by using her next essay to argue that transpeople and their supporters were Orwellian-style destroyers of the truth who simply refused to “accept facts.” Admitting she had initially accepted critics' point that transpeople should be referred to using their pronoun of choice, Vincent later “realized why Brandon Teena wasn't male. She wanted to be perceived and treated as a male, which is fair enough, but that alone did not make her one, any more than my cat's perception of herself (and desire to be treated as) a person makes her human.”<sup>732</sup> Vincent continued, “I felt it was respectful to call the brave woman born Teena by her assumed name, Brandon, or even to refer to her as *he* or *him*, because that, I assumed, fell into the category of self-definition. But I wasn't going to be forced...to concede that she

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*Voice*, February 15, 2000; “The Big Switch: Transsexuals Without the P.C.” *Village Voice*, February 27, 2001.

<sup>731</sup> Norah Vincent, “Caligula, Helen, Brandon, and Me.” *The Advocate*, January 18, 2000: 120.

<sup>732</sup> Norah Vincent, “2+2≠5.” *The Advocate*, October 10, 2000: 80.

was thereby a male, because that's a contradiction of the facts."<sup>733</sup> Vincent insisted that "[y]ou can take hormones. You can surgically deconstruct/reconstruct your genitals. But you are still a member of the same sex...no matter what you do to your limbs and outward flourishes." The *piece de resistance* in this essay was her claim that "I acknowledge and applaud every transgendered person's right to go by another name, take hormones, undergo plastic (or myriad other) surgeries, and, most of all, pursue life, liberty, and equal protection under the law. But I refuse to be intimidated by gender inquisitors into conceding that said person is a member of the opposite sex." In short, Vincent was willing to support the right of transpeople to self-identify, but would not herself acknowledge these identities. In her eyes, chromosomes and physiological markers were the determinants of truth, and any individual who claimed otherwise was as deluded as her pet cat.

Many readers were chagrined by Vincent's essay, and contributed such an influx of mail that the *Advocate* decided to post the overflow on its website. One reader pointed out that Vincent's depiction of transwomen as "chromosomally incorrect" was the same as calling them "unnatural"—the same charge the right wing levels against gay, lesbian, and bisexual people."<sup>734</sup> Another informed Vincent that transpeople "aren't fussing over the use of pronouns; rather, they want to define themselves instead of having the rest of us do that for them," and also offered Vincent sarcastic thanks: "I'm a gay man who was initially bewildered by transgender issues, but now, courtesy of Vincent, I've been shown

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<sup>733</sup> Ironically, Vincent's rejection of "gender theory" as "intellectually unsound" and her professed loathing for "contradiction" did not prevent from using male pronouns to describe someone who she insisted was not male. One wonders how this fine point eluded her.

<sup>734</sup> Debra A. Johnson, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, November 7, 2000: 8.

a sample of the ignorance transgendered people deal with every day.”<sup>735</sup> There were two positive responses, commending Vincent for “having the guts to speak the truth,” but overall, readers leapt to the defense of transpeople and their right to designate their own identities.

In June 2000, Vincent penned another piece for *The Advocate* that was noteworthy for its explicitly anti-trans sentiment. Calling “transsexuals” “the most draconian arm of the PC language police,” Vincent opined that “for the purposes of procreation there are two sexes. Anything else is a genetic/biochemical anomaly we correct to save kids from humiliation in the locker room.” Not content simply to gloss over the vigorous challenges offered by intersex activists to allegedly “beneficial” sex-reassignment surgery performed on infants, Vincent criticized those adults who sought surgical intervention to make their bodies more reflective of their gender identity.<sup>736</sup> She asked, “Why...do transsexuals mutilate their bodies in order to make them conform to the fashionable version of the opposite sex and gender? That only reinforces oppressive stereotypes every bit as much as liposuction or a bimbo’s boob job. If you’re a man in a woman’s body, then live androgynously if you’re such a revolutionary.”<sup>737</sup>

This essay generated such an “enormous response” from readers that the *Advocate* ran out of room to publish them and instead posted the remainder—a whopping 130 letters and emails—to its website. The vast majority that appeared on the website and in print were uniformly negative, with the exception of a sole missive (not coincidentally

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<sup>735</sup> David Danielson, Letter to the Editor: *ibid.*

<sup>736</sup> Challenging the medical orthodoxy that virtually forces birth parents to allow the surgical “correction” of intersexed infants is at the heart of the intersex political movement. See Cheryl Chase, “Hermaphrodites With Attitude: Mapping the Emergence of Intersex Political Activism,” in Stryker and Whittle, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader*: 300-314.

<sup>737</sup> Norah Vincent, “Cunning Linguists.” *The Advocate*, June 20, 2000: 144.

penned by a founding member of lesbian separatist group, Radicalesbians). One transsexual woman wrote that “[i]t is offensive to read her description of my surgery as mutilation when that surgery has brought me wholeness, contentment, and peace,” while a transsexual male writer angrily challenged Vincent to lead by example and “forgo having non-conformist, gender-bent sex with women...and suck some biologically male dick like all good Christian women.” Another reader informed *The Advocate* that Vincent’s column had “reaffirm[ed] my belief that the gay mainstream has no interest in the reality of the transsexual experience, despite the fact that many transsexuals have come from your ranks.”<sup>738</sup> This sentiment might have been directed at Vincent specifically, but could also have applied to the gay press in general, as it is difficult to imagine that a similarly-inflammatory essay which so harshly denigrated people based on their sex, race, or class would have been approved for publication by *The Advocate*’s editors. As one reader, whose letter appeared online, asked pointedly, “Would you print a column written by a Christian giving advice on how Muslims and Jews should live their life? Would you allow a white writer to instruct African-American people on how to be “a revolutionary”? I think not.”<sup>739</sup>

There were three common themes in the letters, which are excerpted in order to illustrate the vehemence of the reader responses. Most commonly, readers opined that Vincent’s perspective was incorrect or offensive. Her “hateful diatribe” was decried by numerous readers; “twisted and violent,” a “reactionary prejudicial piece of garbage,” “unconscionable and baseless banter,” and the “erroneous and incorrect rambling of a

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<sup>738</sup> Beth Thompson, Letter to the Editor, *The Advocate*, July 18, 2000: 6; Ethan Zimmerman, Letter to the Editor: *ibid.*; Jay Snider, Letter to the Editor: *ibid.*

<sup>739</sup> “Ray,” Letter to the Editor. *Advocate.com*. [http://web.archive.org/web/200012081056/http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/816/816\\_norah.html](http://web.archive.org/web/200012081056/http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/816/816_norah.html). Accessed 5 March 2012.

dinosaur” were just some of the more colorful descriptors that readers used to characterize the essay. A second theme that emerged in the letters was the belief among readers that *The Advocate* had severely compromised its credibility and its mission by publishing Vincent’s essay. Moreover, the fact that readers spoke of feeling “saddened,” “shocked,” “disappointed,” and “ashamed” because of the magazine’s actions also points to how personally invested many readers felt in *The Advocate*:

- What’s shocking is...the fact that in the pages of *The Advocate*, existing to give voice to a much-maligned minority, it is apparently acceptable to malign other minorities.
- Exactly who are you claiming to *Advocate* for? Cut the bull and take transsexuals off that list.
- The last place I expected to see a gratuitous put-down of those who are different is in a magazine that celebrates difference.
- [Gender] identity is not a political choice one makes, any more than being a lesbian or a gay man is. *The Advocate* should appreciate this, being the sort of magazine it is.
- If the title of your magazine is *The Advocate* and your audience is queer shouldn’t you ACTUALLY ADVOCATE FOR QUEER PEOPLE?
- I have never before read such smarmy, transphobic, pseudo-intellectual rubbish in a progressive magazine...Your magazine should be reaching out to transgendered people, not alienating us.
- I cannot believe that a magazine that caters to the GLBT community would allow an individual to write and publish an article such as this in *The Advocate*.
- Ms. Vincent’s article really raises an important question as to why, in an age when many lesbian, gay and bisexual organizations are joining forces with transsexuals...*The Advocate* is printing such a prejudicial commentary, trashing the transsexual community.
- I have always held *The Advocate* in the highest regard. When I read Norah Vincent’s article I almost choked on my coffee. How could you allow such trash to be published in *The Advocate*?
- I am ashamed that a magazine that puts itself out there as a leader in discussing the issues of the lesbian, gay and bisexual community would write such a hateful article against transsexual folks.
- I am utterly shocked that “The Advocate” would print such hateful, bigoted, insensitive, psychologically ignorant nonsense as I found in Vincent’s article in which she attacked transqueers...I had expected better from you. You’ve saddened me.



- *The Advocate* should be ashamed of printing Norah Vincent's hateful diatribe against transsexuals...As long as this point of view is given any kind of credibility, such as being published in *The Advocate*, the chances are diminished for transgendered people ever gaining any of the same rights the gay community is fighting for.
- This article disappointed me to say the least; I had previously never failed to pick up a copy of *The Advocate* when the new issue hit the stands, and had always been impressed with the coverage and thought that went into the articles published. Far be it for me to hold you folks ultimately responsible for every bit of idiotic non-educated prejudice the queer community still holds about things that they don't understand, but PUBLISHING this bigoted trash is another issue altogether.
- I find [it] appalling that in 2000, *The Advocate*, which prides itself on being a progressive mouthpiece for the community, would stand behind such unsupportable and conservative dogma.<sup>740</sup>

A third theme in the letters was that the magazine had alienated its audience and would lose readers as a result. Some letters even suggested that a boycott of *The Advocate* was in order:

- I am not interested in reading a magazine that supports and PRINTS her claims of knowledge on a subject she knows absolutely nothing about.
- Unless *The Advocate* takes measures to become more sensitive and informative on gender dysphoria in the near future, I will cancel my subscription and recommend the transsexual community, as well as those supportive of it, boycott *The Advocate*.
- Would you please be so kind to explain to me what is your editorial position on the issue of transgendered people and why you have published Ms. Vincent's column that is full of nonsense on that subject? If it is your editorial position to publish such uneducated rubbish, can I also expect to see columns written by the religious right? And why should I pay to read that?
- I would like to know why *The Advocate* thinks it is okay to print transgender-bashing articles? This would not be tolerated if the attack were on blacks, lesbians, people with HIV/AIDS, Jewish people, etc... so why is it okay to attack our trans sisters and brothers? I will not be buying another issue of *The Advocate*.
- Actually I'm relieved that I saw this piece, as I was about to subscribe to your magazine. Now I understand that my money would be better spent

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<sup>740</sup> "Letters to Norah." Advocate.com. [http://web.archive.org/web/200012081056/http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/816/816\\_norah.html](http://web.archive.org/web/200012081056/http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/816/816_norah.html). Accessed 5 March 2012

attempting to contribute to education. I could not rationalize subscribing to a magazine which would further promote prejudice and such an obvious lack of education and common sense. I will also copy this article, and pass it on to other people who are thinking about subscribing. I would hope that after reading such an obviously prejudicial piece will affect their decision.

- I picked up a copy of your magazine at the Lambda Legal Defense Fund's annual fundraiser and was quite happy to see its great graphics and interesting articles. I was excited to get a subscription, but, having read Vincent's letter, I will not pay for a subscription for your magazine, will urge my friends to stop buying it, and will, to the extent I am able, discourage businesses and people I know who already advertise in the magazine from doing so in the future.

Many of the letters asked why trans people were so infrequently given the opportunity to speak for themselves in the pages of *The Advocate*, and suggested that this situation be remedied. Whether just a coincidence of timing or a sincere effort to appease the readers whose ire had been raised by Vincent's essay, *The Advocate* did begin to feature more trans voices in its pages. In the larger LGBT community, too, debates over trans inclusiveness were slowly beginning to subside as more and more people acknowledged that trans individuals ought to be treated with respect, not derision, by the rest of the LGBT community. One notable event indicating the penetration of this belief occurred around the same time that Vincent's "Cunning Linguists" was published. In New York City, veteran gay activist Jim Fouratt was invited to speak at a rally hosted in June, 2000, by the Heritage of Pride foundation. Fouratt was a vociferous critic of sex-reassignment surgery, and had recently penned a letter to the *New York Times* in response to its coverage of the Barry Winchell murder; in this, Fouratt charged that sex-reassignment surgery was being foisted on gender-variant homosexuals in an effort to make them heterosexual—he lamented, "Modern medicine is once again trying to cure us of our

desire for same-sex love.”<sup>741</sup> Although the letter was not published in the *Times*, it was widely circulated within the LGBT activist community and as a result, his appearance at the HOP rally sparked protests and denouncements. One news report quoted another veteran gay activist, Bob Koehler, who estimated that over one thousand anti-Fouratt fliers had been distributed by constituents of various LGBT groups prior to his talk.<sup>742</sup> The tide within the LGBT community was turning against transphobia. Vincent’s next anti-trans column appeared in the magazine in October, 2000, and spurred seventy-six more, mostly-incensed, letters to the editor; readers were simply not willing to let her comments go unremarked upon.<sup>743</sup> Even the mainstream media was aware of the controversy Vincent had stirred up; the *New York Times* profiled Vincent in 2001, describing her as a “conservative gay columnist...under fire” from the LGBT community.<sup>744</sup>

Vincent’s last *Advocate* column appeared at the end of 2003, and though she claimed that her decision to stop writing for the magazine “had nothing whatsoever to do with the magazine itself or its staff,” the coincidence of her departure with increasing sensitivity to and inclusion of trans concerns in the mass media and in the legal arena is suggestive.<sup>745</sup> Between 1999 and 2003, the visibility of trans people increased significantly, due in part to films like *Boys Don’t Cry* and *Soldier’s Girl* and Jeffrey Eugenides’ Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Middlesex*. During Vincent’s stint at *The*

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<sup>741</sup> Jim Fouratt, Letter to the Editor. <http://web.archive.org/web/20020704045131/http://ntac.org/news/00/05/30fouratt.html>. Accessed 5 March 2012.

<sup>742</sup> Jack Nichols, “Jim Fouratt Slammed at Heritage of Pride Rally.” <http://www.gvny.com/columns/nichols/nichols6-23-00.html>. Accessed 5 March 2012.

<sup>743</sup> [http://web.archive.org/web/200012081004/http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/824/824\\_norahletters.html](http://web.archive.org/web/200012081004/http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/824/824_norahletters.html). Accessed 5 March 2012.

<sup>744</sup> Felicity Barringer, “Conservative Gay Columnist Is Under Fire: Lesbian Columnist Draws Criticism for Conservative Views.” *New York Times*, August 6, 2001: C1.

<sup>745</sup> Norah Vincent, “Goodbye to All That.” *The Advocate*, November 25, 2003: 72.

*Advocate*, the first National Day of Transgender Remembrance was recognized, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force founded its Transgender Civil Rights Project, and eighteen different localities added transgender protections to their human rights laws (adding to the nine localities that had passed such laws between 1975 and 1998).<sup>746</sup> Within this period, *The Advocate*, too, started to make strides towards trans inclusion (although, as the previous discussion illustrates, it continued to perpetrate trans erasure on both an individual and class level); in 2000, transgender activist Riki Wilchins wrote a “My Perspective” piece for the magazine, the same year that Calpernia Addams and Andrea James also penned a column about their experiences as transwomen.<sup>747</sup> In addition, two full-length profiles of transpeople appeared between 2002 and 2004 (both average individuals rather than celebrities); while this is not an astounding number, it is indicative of progress. Given this forward momentum in regards to trans inclusivity, it is understandable that the magazine might have found Vincent’s harsh tone a poor fit. “I wish I could say that I’ll miss [her,]” wrote one reader in response to Vincent’s final column, “but I won’t,” while another added, “Goodbye and good riddance...hopefully y’all can find someone with a conservative voice who isn’t self-hating and just plain full of noxious bile.”<sup>748</sup>

*The Advocate*’s progression on trans issues was illustrated most clearly by its coverage of the murder of transgender teenager Gwen Araujo. Araujo, who lived as a woman, had been killed after her peers discovered that she was transgendered. Unlike its coverage of Brandon Teena’s murder, in which the magazine struggled with using with

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<sup>746</sup> Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Seal Press, 2007): 149.

<sup>747</sup> Calpernia Addams and Andrea James, “Transformations.” *The Advocate*, July 22, 2003: 12.

<sup>748</sup> Bob Doyle Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, December 23, 2003: 6; Jeffery Gregoire, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, December 23, 2003: 6.

pronouns that accurately reflected Teena's lived identity, *The Advocate's* first report on Araujo's murder consistently used the female pronoun and simply noted that her "legal name" had been male. And unlike its 2001 reporting on the murder of trans-identified 16-year-old Fred C. Martinez, Jr., which evinced some confusion (the magazine described the attack as "gay bashing" in one issue, and identified Martinez as transgendered, not gay, in another issue), the coverage of Araujo consistently referred to the victim as transgendered.<sup>749</sup>

*The Advocate*, like the LGBT political movement, continues to struggle with trans inclusivity, and its content has been reflective of ongoing debates over whether transpeople and LGBT people can or should work together. Its willingness to erase transpeople when doing so is politically advantageous for the LGBT rights movement (as in the case of Calpernia Addams) and its longstanding tradition of failing to acknowledge transpeople and their concerns cannot be wholly overcome by recent spates of trans representation in its pages. But unlike *The Advocate's* ongoing marginalization of bisexuality, its relationship to transgender concerns and issues shows some signs of improvement. The "marriage of convenience" between transpeople and the LGBT community's "magazine of record" may yet work out.

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<sup>749</sup> For stories on the Araujo case, see "Crime," *The Advocate*, November 26, 2002: 14; "Gruesome Details," *The Advocate*, April 1, 2003: 17; "A Mother's Defiance," *The Advocate*, March 30, 2004: 20; Greg Hernandez, "Bittersweet Justice," *The Advocate*, November 22, 2005: 35-36. Coverage of the Martinez murder appeared in several issues of *The Advocate*; see Jeremy Quittner, "Death of a Two-Spirit" (August 28, 2001: 24-26); Jon Barrett, "Getting Along in Cortez" (October 9, 2001: 26-30); "Courts: Case Closed" (July 9, 2002: 15).



FIG. 11 The copy on this cover naturalizes Louganis' sexual orientation and denaturalizes Billings' gender.

FIG. 10 The caption on the photo reads, "Just prior to her murder, Teena Brandon dated Lana Tisdel." The *Advocate*, March 8, 1994: 28. Note the use of the feminine pronoun.

## Epilogue and Conclusion

The cultural climate of the present-day United States is, in many ways, vastly different from the one that prevailed when Dick Michaels and Bill Rau began publishing *The Los Angeles Advocate* in 1967. Mainstream media regularly portrays LGBT people positively and gives relatively even-handed treatment to issues of LGBT rights. Significant advances toward LGBT equality have been made in the legal and political arenas. At the time of this writing, the U.S. military had just repealed its anti-LGBT “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” rule, and Barack Obama had made history by becoming the first sitting U.S. President to express his support for same-sex marriage. On this basis, it would seem that *The Advocate*’s effective demise in 2009 was not to be mourned over much—if these wars have been won, why not disband the troops?

The problem, of course, is that the wars are far from over. In spite of these gains, LGBT people have still to be fully accepted as equal citizens of the United States. Many states rigorously defend their rights not to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states, to not allow LGBT individuals or couples to become foster or adoptive parents, and to protect the right of employers to terminate employees on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In addition, while major media organs do present LGBT news, the reporting usually does not reflect the perspective of the LGBT community and instead opines on topics from an ostensibly heterosexual viewpoint. One topic which provides a vivid illustration of the difference between these two types of reporting is same-sex marriage. While magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* have run cover stories on the topic, their reporting frequently fails to address the fact that there is much debate within the LGBT community about whether LGBT activists should be

putting so much emphasis on fighting for marriage equality or whether their efforts would be better directed toward other ends. Community-based journalism, on the other hand, presents a more holistic picture of the issue, frequently citing supporters and critics alike, as opposed to the monolithic image of an LGBT community whole-heartedly and fervently committed to legalizing same-sex marriage.

To use the aforementioned example, comparing the cover story from *Newsweek*'s January 18, 2012 issue to the ongoing treatment of the topic in *The Advocate* illustrates why the LGBT press is far from obsolete. *Newsweek*'s story, entitled "The Conservative Case for Gay Marriage," was penned by Theodore Olson, a prominent conservative lawyer who in 2009 made waves by leading a court case brought by two same-sex couples against the state of California (the case, *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*, sought to overturn the recently-passed ballot initiative Proposition 8 which restricted "marriage" to opposite-sex couples). Olson's long essay described same-sex marriage in value-laden terms that would appeal to political conservatives; he emphasized the positive impact of marriage on families, communities, society, and the economy. "Marriage is one of the basic building blocks of our neighborhoods and our nation," Olson wrote, and "[the] fact that individuals who happen to be gay want to share in this vital social institution is evidence that conservative ideals enjoy widespread acceptance. Conservatives should celebrate this, rather than lament it."<sup>750</sup>

That Olson's argument relied so heavily on emphasizing that marriage was constitutionally conservative may have been appreciated by those critical of the LGBT movement's emphasis on marriage equality. While it would be misleading to imply that

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<sup>750</sup> Theodore Olson, "The Conservative Case for Gay Marriage." *Newsweek*, January 18, 2012.



*The Advocate*'s coverage of same-sex marriage has been anything less than an endorsement, the magazine nonetheless published stories in which LGBT authors criticized both the institution of marriage and the LGBT political movement's slavering devotion to it. In February 2004, author Richard Goldstein wrote an essay in which he argued that civil unions, maligned by many LGBT activists as a toothless and wan substitute for marriage, were actually a preferable alternative. He cautioned that "employers may cancel domestic-partner benefits once gays can wed...All couples will face the same choice: tie the knot, or you're on your own," and suggested that civil unions would provide "all couples a way to codify their relationship—and protect their children—without taking on the full weight of matrimony." Furthermore, Goldstein noted, privileging marriage "[bolsters] an institution that can be very encumbering and that deprives single people of the government benefits they deserve. The solution to this problem is not to oppose same-sex marriage rights, but to demand universal health care and flexible pensions."<sup>751</sup>

Goldstein's perspective was applauded by some *Advocate* readers, one of whom added that a focus on civil unions would provide "a chance to begin creating true alternatives to traditional marriage—alternatives that could be of great value to all people, not just gays. This does not have to be a second-best substitute but rather a better-than opportunity for relationships of the future."<sup>752</sup> Two years later, Laura Weinstock issued another rejoinder to the marriage-focused LGBT movement, reminding *Advocate* readers that though "basic fairness dictates that [LGBT people] should have [the right to marry]...the institution of marriage was and is saddled with sexism." Weinstock added,

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<sup>751</sup> Richard Goldstein, "Civil Unions: The Radical Choice." *The Advocate*, February 4, 2004: 72.

<sup>752</sup> Kerwin Schaefer, Letter to the Editor. *The Advocate*, March 16, 2004: 6.

“While lesbians clearly suffer from discrimination, rejection from our families, and disconnection from male privilege, many of us also experience greater freedom and power from avoiding the traditional female and heterosexual role. Before we leap into marriage, let’s keep this in mind.”<sup>753</sup>

The same year, Advocate.com published an open letter signed by fifty-five members of the recently-formed activist group Beyond Marriage and written in response to an essay on the site entitled “Gays First, Then Illegals.”<sup>754</sup> The letter chastised author Jasmyne Cannick, who boldly claimed that though

immigration reform is an important issue—and perhaps it could become the next leading civil rights movement—we haven’t even finished with our current civil rights movement...Immigration reform needs to get in line behind the LGBT civil rights movement, which has not yet realized all of its goals...As a black lesbian I find it hard to jump on the immigration reform bandwagon when my own bandwagon hasn’t even left the barn. While I know no one wants to be viewed as a racist when it comes to immigration reform, as a lesbian I don’t want to move to the back of the bus to accommodate those who broke the law to be here.<sup>755</sup>

Beyond Marriage charged Cannick with failing to recognize the “obvious fact that the LGBT community and the immigrant community are not mutually exclusive” and ignoring “the historically interconnected nature of the immigrant and LGBT struggles-- such as the ban on ‘homosexual immigrants’ that extended into the 1990s and the present HIV ban, which

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<sup>753</sup> Laura Weinstock, “The Trouble with Marriage.” *The Advocate*, January 31, 2006: 72.

<sup>754</sup>The group’s mission statement argues that “While [a marriage-focused] strategy may secure rights and benefits for some LGBT families, it has left us isolated and vulnerable to a virulent backlash. We must respond to the full scope of the conservative marriage agenda by building alliances across issues and constituencies...The struggle for marriage rights should be part of a larger effort to strengthen the stability and security of diverse households and families.” Among the “strengthening” measures Beyond Marriage advocates for are “legal recognition for a wide range of relationships—regardless of kinship or conjugal status,” “access for all, regardless of marital or citizenship status, to vital government support programs,” and “freedom from state regulation of our sexual lives and gender choices, identities, and expression.” “Beyond Same-Sex Marriage: A New Strategic Vision For All Our Families and Relationships.” July 26, 2006. [http://beyondmarriage.org/full\\_statement.html](http://beyondmarriage.org/full_statement.html). Accessed 15 June 2012.

<sup>755</sup>Jasmyne Cannick, “Gays First, Then Illegals.” Advocate.com, April 4, 2006. <http://www.advocate.com/politics/commentary/2006/04/04/gays-first-then-illegals>. Accessed 15 June 2012.

disproportionately impacts LGBT people.” The group averred that “only by understanding these connections and building coalitions can we ensure real social change for all” and affirmed their rejection of the “‘scarcity of rights’ perspective espoused by Cannick and other members of the LGBT movement” as a strategy historically used to prevent oppressed groups from forming coalitions with each other.<sup>756</sup>

While Beyond Marriage’s mission statement, issued in July 2006, was the subject of articles in LGBT publications across the nation, including the *New York Blade*, the *Washington Blade*, San Francisco’s *Bay Area Reporter*, and Boston’s *Bay Windows*, it made no ripples in mainstream media, which preferred to characterize all LGBT people as whole-heartedly supportive of a marriage-centric LGBT-rights strategy.<sup>757</sup> This omission, I believe, underscores the importance of community-based journalism. Though the term has traditionally been used to refer to small-town or local publications, in recent years its definition has been expanded to cover publications which serve communities of interest or identity as well. As journalist Jerry Brown explained in the introduction to Jock Lauterer’s *Community Journalism: Relentlessly Local*, community-based publications “[build] their readership and [sustain] their influence by delivering news that is strengthened by institutional memory—in other words, a knowledge of local, state, or regional history that determines and shapes the news content.”<sup>758</sup> LGBT publications similarly draw on readers’ shared experiences and collective knowledge and memory

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<sup>756</sup> Beyond Marriage, “We 55 Respectfully Disagree.” Advocate.com, April 11, 2006. <http://www.advocate.com/politics/commentary/2006/04/11/we-55-respectfully-disagree>. Accessed 15 June 2012.

<sup>757</sup> See Zak Szymanski, “‘Beyond Marriage’ Statement Sparks Dialogue.” *The Bay Area Reporter*, August 3, 2006; Ethan Jacobs, “Activists Call For a Shift in Priorities.” *Bay Windows*, August 3, 2006; Kerry Eleveld, “LGBT Group Looks ‘Beyond Marriage.’” *New York Blade*, August 7, 2006; Elizabeth A. Perry, “Rethinking the Marriage Debate.” *Washington Blade*, August 3, 2006.

<sup>758</sup> Jerry Brown, “Introduction: The Community Newspaper.” In Jock Lauterer, *Community Journalism: Relentlessly Local*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006): xlv.

when they present the news, which—as in the case of same-sex marriage—can result in depictions of issues or events that diverge widely from mainstream publications’ coverage of the same. Thus, claims that LGBT-specific publications have been rendered redundant or obsolete by the emergence of a more tolerant (which is not to say accepting) attitude toward LGBT issues in the mainstream press ring false. Although it falls outside of the scope of this project, research on the differences between the depictions of issues in LGBT and mainstream media would be a welcome addition to the field of journalism studies and media history.

Another promising avenue for future research is an assessment of the Internet’s impact of on the LGBT press. The ability to provide up-to-the-minute information is a major advantage of digital media over print; discussing the “death” of gay print media at the hands of LGBT websites, Michael Lavers observed that “[the] rise of the digital gay press comes down to access to information and how fast a blogger or news site can post it. Towleroad, Pam’s House Blend, and other blogs use social networking to report of relevant legislative votes and to file on-the-scene reports from hate-crime vigils and street protests.” *The Advocate*, like other bi-monthly or even weekly publications, could not hope to keep abreast of new developments as readily as digital media outlets. Editor in chief Anne Stockwell admitted that “as online news coverage took hold, we had to evolve from the original news magazine model because...we couldn’t shave our lead time enough to provide timely news coverage.”<sup>759</sup> As a result, *The Advocate* of the 2000s ran longer, more in-depth reports than it had in earlier years. Bruce Steele, who edited *The*

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<sup>759</sup> Dan Michel, “Measuring Perspective: How Gender, Sexuality, and Rapid Changes in Leadership Affected Editorial Decision-Making at The Advocate Newsmagazine.” M.A. thesis, University of Missouri, 2009: 112.

*Advocate* from 2000 to 2006, suggested that this strategy was intended to encourage readers to pick up the print edition of the magazine (and to justify their expenditure in purchasing it). In a 2009 interview, Steele observed that “people will not read longer articles on the Internet [and] you can be sure that if they’re going to go out and spend the money [on a print copy], they want more than they’re going to get on a Web page.”<sup>760</sup> Jon Barrett, who served as *The Advocate*’s editor-in-chief from 2008 to 2011, agreed, explaining that one of his primary goals was to “beef up the website to better reflect the way people were consuming breaking news and then turn *The Advocate* into a more meaty monthly—one that could take a deeper look at the issues of importance to our readers rather than trying to simply report the news.”<sup>761</sup> Shorter, more Web-friendly news reports were placed on Advocate.com while longer stories were carried in *The Advocate*’s print edition. Research comparing the content of web and print editions of contemporary LGBT publications would demonstrate whether or not this was a common trend in the LGBT press of the early twenty-first century, and might also bring to light heretofore unrecognized tendencies resulting from their often uneasy coexistence.

Related to the issue of virtual and physical LGBT media, future analysis would do well to compare the utility of publications to social networking for LGBT activist mobilization. As Michael Lavers noted in his elegy for the LGBT press, social networking tools like Twitter and Facebook have become “increasingly important organizing tools, supplanting the way ‘Gay, Inc.’—the pejorative for big national

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<sup>760</sup> Michel: 119.

<sup>761</sup> Michel: 110.

organizations—used to marshal the troops.”<sup>762</sup> The advent of social networking tools has also fundamentally changed the shape of LGBT activism; whereas the LGBT activist community of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s was apprised of upcoming rallies and protests mainly through the LGBT press (and accordingly had to plan their events well in advance in order to adequately publicize them), present-day activists can conceptualize, plan, and promote public events within a matter of minutes. This has the advantage of enabling a timely public response to court decisions (Lavers mentioned that the passage of Proposition 8 in California prompted “young activists across the country [to take] to Facebook and [form] huge flash marches”), or anti-LGBT crimes or events. But has social network’s ability to obviate extensive pre-planning also fostered a tendency for LGBT activism to be more reactive than proactive? As activists feel compelled (and are enabled) to respond publically to every case of individual injustice, are larger points about institutionalized homophobia in the United States getting lost? To what extent has the impact of these events changed as they become increasingly commonplace? A comparison between the types of activism encouraged by publications like *The Advocate* and that currently promoted via social networking systems like Twitter and Facebook might be illuminating in this regard.

Finally, research on the demographic differences between visitors to LGBT websites and readers of LGBT print media might shed some light on the confusing image of an LGBT community that is simultaneously depicted as clamoring for anonymity and proud to be “out.” The latter tendency was indicated by a change in *The Advocate*’s mailing practices in 2007; up until then, subscribers to *The Advocate* received their issues

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<sup>762</sup> Michael Lavers, “Gay Print Media on the Wane.” *Village Voice*, June 22, 2010. <http://www.villagevoice.com/2010-06-22/news/gay-print-media-on-the-wane/>. Accessed 16 June 2012.

sealed inside plastic bags with inserts that hid the magazine's cover. That year, they were offered the option to receive it without the external wrapping.<sup>763</sup> This change, in and of itself, suggests a shift in readers' willingness to acknowledge their affiliation with the LGBT community. Keith Boykin attributed this to the "political consciousness" of *Advocate* subscribers, and suggested that "as society moves forward, more and more gay people want to be visible."<sup>764</sup> But less than a decade earlier, LGBT-oriented websites were successfully soliciting advertisers by promising access to "closeted" individuals who wouldn't purchase printed materials that might mark them as LGBT. Hugely successful website PlanetOut.com courted advertisers in 1998 by noting this trend in its "Advertising Client Fact Sheet": "The online medium allows us to reach closeted people, at their anonymous email addresses, [and] PlanetOut is the first advertising vehicle to target new, previously inaccessible gay and lesbian customers, who live in suburbs, small towns and conservative areas."<sup>765</sup> Scholars exploring the growth in audience and revenue shown by LGBT sites like PlanetOut over the last decade and its relation to the concomitant decline in the size and profitability of LGBT print media must, therefore, consider changes in the LGBT community's valuation of anonymity and visibility in assessing these trends.

Just as *The Advocate* functioned as a point of departure for LGBT activist efforts over the last forty-odd years, I have intended this project to serve a strong basis for future research in media studies, American history, and LGBT studies. Certainly, more extensive historical research on racial tensions within the LGBT community would

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<sup>763</sup> Juston Jones, "Advocate to Offer Magazine Without Second Cover." *New York Times*, July 9, 2007: C5.

<sup>764</sup> Ibid.

<sup>765</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/19990220231352/http://www.planetout.com/about/adinfo/factsheet.html>. Accessed 5 February 2012.

enrich our understanding of *The Advocate*'s treatment of the topic, as would historical analysis of transgender representation both in the LGBT press and the LGBT political movement. A consideration of *The Advocate* as a locus for debate between liberal and radical activism would also be a welcome addition to the existing field of literature on American politics and minority journalistic endeavors.

Whatever directions future researchers take, however, it is my fervent hope that they do not lose sight of *The Advocate*'s pioneering nature and the formative effect it has had on LGBT life in the United States. Although this project has highlighted several ways in which the publication may have fallen short of the lofty ideals it espoused, I would hasten to note my conviction that it nonetheless played a positive role in the development and coalescence of a national LGBT community by promoting visibility, contesting homophobia, and giving a voice to the concerns of those long silenced. All things considered, I regret *The Advocate*'s recent demise—and due in no small part to the role it has played in my own life, I can say with certainty that I am not alone.



## VITA

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