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"There was something grotesque": The Application and Limits of Respectability in the Daughters of Bilitis

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“There was something grotesque”: The Application and
Limits of Respectability in the Daughters of Bilitis

by

Elizabeth Diane Greer

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Arts and Letters
and the Department of History
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Living in both the “deviant” and “normal” worlds, the leadership of The Daughters of Bilitis generally adhered to a respectable and assimilationist public persona as evidenced through political activities and the publication of their periodical *The Ladder*. Due to this juxtaposition, the largely middle-class, white membership exhibited socially conservative views in order to make long-term social change, leading to an inherent contradiction between maintaining their middle-class identity and public respectability. Seen from the organization’s founding in 1955 until its collapse in 1970, these contradictions and the focus on respectability politics adds to the existing scholarship on the DOB.

The fifteen-year long span of the San Francisco chapter-saw evolution from their initial conservatism, but the women who helmed the DOB did not understand the complexities of their membership and relied upon middle-class respectability. This respectability included policies of personal and public education, reversal of negative stereotyping, and private socialization. The disparities that arose within the organization resulted in an ideological and political schism between maintaining respectability and agitation for more open political action, including picketing and demonstrations. The Daughters left a legacy for lesbian activism, despite their downfall, and later organizations would move past respectability and, largely as a result of the changing social climate, concentrate less on the public perception of lesbians and more on social equality for homosexuals.

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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

Phyllis Lyon, a bright and vivacious journalist, moved to Seattle in 1949 to take an editorial position for a small construction and engineering periodical called *Pacific Builder and Engineer*.¹ While there, she met Del Martin at a small house party she hosted for other writers and editors from the magazine. Lyon later remembered the sexually ambiguous Martin spending “most of the time in the kitchen with the guys who were trying to teach her how to tie a tie and smoking cigars.”² Martin, a mother and divorcée, dressed the part of the modern, professional woman but to close friends was quite open regarding her sexuality. According to Lyon, the two immediately became friends and eventual lovers after Lyon spent “two-plus years being ‘her good straight friend.’”³ In 1953, the two women moved from Seattle to San Francisco and soon became a couple.

When Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon moved to San Francisco in 1953, they felt alienated from both the straight community and the gay community. The two remembered feeling isolated “until [they] met two men, two gay men who lived around the corner [who] introduced us to the scene in North Beach.”⁴ It was at these bars, though male-dominated, that Martin and Lyon first joined the gay community in San Francisco. In the documentary *Last Call At Maud’s*, Lyon and Martin detail some of their experiences with both mixed bars—those which catered to gay men, lesbians, and heterosexuals—and lesbian bars. Though finally finding a group of friends, Martin and

¹ Marcia Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006), xlii-xliii.

² *No Secret Anymore: The Times of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon*, directed by Joan E. Biren (San Francisco: Frameline, 2003).

³ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, xliii.

⁴ *No Secret Anymore*

Lyon both had jobs and a home to protect in the city which made them uncomfortable with socializing in bars. Both women were fearful as “gay bars [were] the only meeting place [they] had and they were being raided” by police searching for homosexual men and women to arrest.⁵ Following these raids, “the newspapers in the city would print the names and addresses of the people who were arrested in gay bar raids, and on some occasions the police would go so far as to call the employers of the gay people that were arrested.”⁶ By 1955, police surveillance and bar raids had become commonplace in gay bars and made the likelihood of arrest and unemployment a very real threat to women such as Martin and Lyon.

When a phone call arrived from Marie Bamberger to Martin and Lyon inquiring if they might be interested in joining a private organization for lesbians, they jumped at the opportunity for a safe place to socialize with other lesbians.⁷ The founders yearned to create a space safely away from the prying eyes of the police and voyeurs commonplace in bars. The first meeting of the eight founders occurred on September 21, 1955 at the home of Rose Bamberger. At this meeting, the eight founders—including Bamberger, Martin, and Lyon—put forth potential names for their secret group. From a list that included “Qui Vive,” “Two Plus,” “Amazon,” and “Chameleon,” the women voted unanimously on “Daughters of Bilitis.”⁸ The name was chosen unanimously as, Lyon

⁵ *Last Call at Maud's*, directed by Paris Poirier (San Francisco: Frameline, 1993).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, xlv.

⁸ September 21 Minutes, September 1955, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, Box 1, Folder 12, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, San Francisco.

later described, because it was “a name...nobody would know...We could always say it was a Greek poetry group...or it’s like that Daughters of the Revolution.”⁹

This initial meeting of the Daughters of Bilitis was the first time these women were able to meet other women outside of the bar scene. Initially, the organization was formed because it “would be a secret kind of organization,” and according to Phyllis Lyon, they “took the name because nobody would know” they were anything more than a poetry club.¹⁰ Beginning as a secret social organization meant providing a place for women to socialize in safety and security. Though the Daughters of Bilitis had their roots in the working-class bar culture, their aims were more aligned with the middle-class ideas of respectability and education. The membership was largely comprised of women in white-collar professions who dressed in socially acceptable, feminine clothing. Believing they should assimilate into society, dressing in popular feminine style was an extremely important facet of their public image. Because of this, the Daughters tended to exclude women of the working-class and attempted to reeducate butch lesbians. Their existence, caught between the normal and the deviant world, forced the early members of the Daughters to make choices between their middle class and lesbian identities, at least in public. Because of these contradictions, the organization presented socially conservative goals of education to exact long-term change.

The early homophile movement only came into existence following the Second World War because a shared, conscious idea of what “homosexuality” meant was

⁹ *Last Call at Maud’s*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

necessary for identification as gay or lesbian.¹¹ John D’Emilio first defines this movement as a decisive and necessary phase in the history of gay liberation in which gay men and women perceived “themselves as members of an oppressed minority, sharing an identity that subjected them to systematic injustice.”¹² This shared identity was necessary to create a constituency of members for these early homophile groups, the Daughters of Bilitis and the earlier Mattachine Society.

Together with the shared identity necessary for community, the Daughters of Bilitis believed that lesbians needed to adapt to social norms in order to immediately lessen the social discrimination they felt as both women and as lesbians. This belief in the need to adapt while engaging in education for long-term social change coupled with their “uplift ideologies” is similar to the early years of the black women’s club movement of the early twentieth century.¹³ The belief that the lesbian needed to “elevate herself, out of the depths of self-hatred and social strictures” is indicative of this belief in the uplift ideologies.¹⁴ Like the earlier black women’s club movement, the Daughters of Bilitis were well-educated and middle-class women who believed in slow reform. Engaging a politics of respectability was necessary for the creation of the DOB, as out-lesbians were outside of the protection of the nuclear family and thus needed to conform to other social ideals upon which they could then work towards change.¹⁵ Historian Marcia Gallo argues that the founders necessarily balanced their safety with visibility in order to further their

¹¹ John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, Second Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 4.

¹² D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 4.

¹³ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

goals of education.¹⁶ Thus, though the historical definition of respectability politics originated with the black women’s club movement, the Daughters, for similar reasons of protection and rights, developed their own form of respectability politics through which to reform society.

The homophile politics of respectability did not disappear following the dissolution of these groups but instead have colored LGBT politics up to the present. The recognition of same-sex marriage in the United States as a universal, legal alternative to “traditional heterosexual marriage” occurred in 2015 after the 5-4 decision on the *Obergefell v. Hodges* Supreme Court case.¹⁷ The 30 petitioners—14 same-sex couples and two widowers—appealed to the federal courts for recognition of their unions after being denied legal acknowledgment based upon their home states’ definitions of marriage “as a union between one man and one woman.”¹⁸ The court reasoned that though respondents believed this would “demean a timeless institution if marriage were extended to same-sex couples,” the court ruled in favor of the petitioners because they sought recognition “for themselves because of their respect—and need—for its privileges and responsibilities”¹⁹ which accompany the institution at the “center of...social order.”²⁰ This decision to recognize same-sex marriages allows only for the recognition of “normal” couples who are, for these purposes, demographically identical to their

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁷ Yuvraj Joshi, “The Respectable Dignity of *Obergefell v. Hodges*,” *California Law Review* 79 (November 2015): 416; Bill Chappell, “Supreme Court Declares Same-Sex Marriage Legal in all 50 States,” NPR, June 16, 2015.

¹⁸ *Obergefell et al. v. Hodges, Director, Ohio Department of Health, et al.*, 576 U.S. __ (2015) at 1. The petitioners came from Michigan, Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee and had consolidated their cases to appeal to the Supreme Court.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, at 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, at 4.

heterosexual counterparts except for their—now, legally inconsequential—sexual orientation.²¹ Recognition of “good gayness” by the federal court system is a monumental milestone for the LGBT community, but it also represents the remaining vestiges of the historical, homophile ideals of respectability.²²

This thesis responds directly to the existing histories on the Daughters of Bilitis which do not centrally address the reasons for the organization’s dissolution.²³ The narrative story of the DOB has been well-covered by several of the above-mentioned authors, but none have focused wholly on the internal reasons for its dissolution in the 1970s. A majority of the narrative around which the arguments are based come from this body of literature. Specifically, the intervention of this thesis within the larger historiography is a specific focus on the respectability politics which the group adhered to until its extinction. By focusing on the origin of the politics of the Daughters of Bilitis, the narrative of the group revolves around the impact of those politics upon the organization through to its dissolution. The politics of this revolutionary group both enabled it to thrive in the 1950s but disabled its continuing existence in the age of Gay Liberation following the Stonewall Riots of 1969.

²¹ Joshi, “The Respectable Dignity,” 416.

²² Ibid., 417. See also Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), for a further discussion of the opposing queer view of marriage politics. Refer especially to chapter 3, “Beyond Gay Marriage,” for a clear discussion on the need for the queer population to resist regulation of sexuality.

²³ These include Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), Karen Cadora, “The Limits of Lesbiana: Race and Class in Twentieth Century Lesbian Genre Fiction” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1999), D’Emilio’s *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, and Marcia Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006).

This project applies an examination of respectability politics to the larger narrative of the Daughters of Bilitis. Chapter one examines the origins of the Daughters of Bilitis. This includes how the early leadership developed and used forms of respectability politics in their organization to develop both short-term and long-term goals. The second chapter focuses on the changes in educational goals that occurred in the mid-sixties. These changes, though seemingly minimal, demonstrate how the Daughters were willing to make subtle changes to their educational goals in order to further eradicate the stereotype of the lesbian. The last chapter dissects the dissolution of the Daughters of Bilitis and their legacy. This legacy includes how they were able to control their own memory through the use of oral histories in the archive.

Periodicals compile the majority of the primary source base which also includes organizational records and oral histories. The use of the periodical and the discourse contained within its pages allows for a closer examination of the leadership's class-based respectability politics and their internal educational goals. The second chapter also relies upon the magazine, but also utilizes outside newspapers and magazines. The third, concluding chapter relies largely upon oral histories done with the Lesbian Herstory Archive in the late eighties. This allows for multiple views of the end of the organization and furthers the discussion of the creation of the DOB legacy.

The Daughters of Bilitis represent, at their core, a moment of shifting ideals both within and outside of the homophile movement. Though the organization did not last into the 1970s, the Gay Liberation Movement owes its existence to the homophile groups of the 1950s. The DOB and the Mattachine Society paved the way for more radical changes not reliant on respectability politics or reform.

CHAPTER II – AHEAD OF THEIR TIME

Barbara Gittings, a founding member of the New York chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis in 1958, remembered how important ideas of education were to the organization. In the beginning the “motives of the DOB were pretty hazy” and the “sheer survival of the group was important at first.”²⁴ The leadership of DOB, though groping for an identity and tangible community, emphasized assimilation and education of the lesbian as their core purpose. Although Gittings “began to chafe at that later on,” she nor any other member she knew objected heavily to the leaders wanting “to teach you to be a nice little girl so that you can fit into society.”²⁵ Fitting into society through appearance and behavior was paramount to the Daughters.

The Daughters, especially in the early days of the organization, believed they “needed the acceptance of society” and would exact rules and guidelines to strive for that goal.²⁶ Gittings recalled an incident at an early national convention of the DOB where a woman “who had been living pretty much as a transvestite most of her life was persuaded” by the leadership and other members to “don female garb [and] deck herself out in as ‘feminine’ a manner as she could.”²⁷ The women present “rejoiced” over their makeover success—“the ‘feminizing’ of this woman.”²⁸ After she had been made over, Gittings recalled that she felt “there was something grotesque” in the way the woman was “trying to look ‘normal.’”²⁹ This recollection, though skewed considering Gittings’ later

²⁴ Jonathan Ned Katz. *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.; A documentary history*, 2nd Edition (New York: Penguin Group, 1992), 425.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 427.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 429.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

life as a radical activist in the Gay Liberation Front, demonstrates the lengths the leadership of the DOB were willing to go to educate women on dress and appearance for the purposes of assimilation. This singular gaze on the education of appearance stems from the Daughters many attempts to remain a part of the burgeoning middle class of the 1950s.

Though not the first homophile—meaning same love—organization in the United States, The Daughters of Bilitis was the first national lesbian social organization in the nation following the creation of the Mattachine Society for gay men.³⁰ The founding of homophile organizations in the early part of the 1950s could not have happened at a more opportune time.³¹ Following the atrocities of World War II and during the McCarthy-era witch hunts, it was difficult and dangerous for gay men and lesbians to exist publicly, much less organize publicly, but this helped create a shared community due to discrimination.³² The expanding body of literature from medical and legal professionals concerning homosexuality allowed for larger numbers of American citizens to identify as gay men and lesbians. Now a burgeoning body of literature allowing for people to actively identify themselves joined “the new civil rights movement... [which] suggested that minorities had inalienable rights.”³³ This combination allowed for the modest expansion of the homophile movement in the fifties and sixties even under harsh societal discrimination. The Daughters initially focused on reforming the lesbian to better fit into

³⁰ D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 10.

³¹ Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship & Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 378.

³² Kristin G. Esterberg, “From Accommodation to Liberation: A Social Movement Analysis of Lesbians in the Homophile Movement,” in *Gender and Society* 8, no. 3 (1994): 429.

³³ Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, 378.

society rather than a focus on public political action. In addition, the organization also focused on changing or shifting social perceptions of lesbians. This would change around 1966 with other organizations engaging in public picketing and protest to challenge discrimination against gay men and lesbians.

The 1950s were a decade marked by an “ideology of classlessness” from which the homophile organizations were not exempt.³⁴ In the postwar economy of wealth and the apparent triumph of capitalism, the lower classes seemed to disappear as a singular social focus on prosperity and consumerism seemed to have leveled the divisions between classes.³⁵ However, DOB membership was comprised mainly of lesbians who were white and middle-class who “hovered precariously at the edges of privilege.”³⁶ These women, because of their gender, did not share this classlessness ideology due to their second-class economic status as women. Additionally, their sexual identity as lesbians further ostracized them generally from public view and acceptance. Furthermore, the celebration of women as mothers and moral centers of their family in this era further delineated their status in society as many “out” lesbians did not have nuclear families from which to base their moral feminine superiority. As lesbians who were unmarried, and therefore outside of the nuclear family, and in fear of losing their jobs, their connection to the middle class was tenuous. The members clung to this fragile association with the middle class through extricating themselves from the associations of the working-class bar culture. Though a minority of members were working-class or racial minorities, they were rarely comfortable or accepted by the other members. For

³⁴ Cadora, “The Limits of Lesbiana, 85.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

instance, while Rose Bamberger was Filipina and a founding member of the Daughters of Bilitis, she left the organization just one year later due to these differences in class and race. For the Daughters of Bilitis, education and assimilation to general society was paramount, especially in its first decade.

Bars and the working-class associations

In the early fifties, the bar culture was thriving, and for lesbians, bars were essential for socialization and community survival. Additionally, bars were often the only public location where lesbians could meet with other women and learn firsthand about who they were outside of a dictionary or psychological texts. Not simply a place for socialization, bars provided a location for community and identity formation. Extensive research does not exist concerning bars in San Francisco beyond geographical maps for tourists, but Elizabeth L. Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis describe in exquisite detail the stereotypes and class culture of the lesbian bar scene in Buffalo, New York.³⁷ As with all locations for socialization, some of the bars catered to an elite clientele while the more well-known catered to tough dykes, pimps, and prostitutes. Young lesbians and working-class lesbians often went to bars because they had no private spaces of their own where they could socialize or entertain. It was essential for the bars to be private and secluded enough for women to avoid detection by the authorities.³⁸ It is for this reason that many of the bars were in dangerous areas of cities. Many of the bars were in a seedier area of town and gained negative reputations with locals and the police.

³⁷ Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 30.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Though the bars in San Francisco were male-dominated spaces located in dangerous areas of the city, they were the only public spaces available for the lesbian community. Additionally, working-class and self-supporting lesbians “saw drinking in a gay bar as the one pleasure open to them.”³⁹ Though possibly viewed from the outside as a rebellion against feminine ideals, lesbian women found socialization in bars as necessary for community creation and viewed the consumption of alcohol as another way to resist the bonds of femininity.⁴⁰ Beyond the dangers of women drinking outside of the home, the emergence of the butch-femme image further allowed for development of a lesbian subculture but greatly increased the dangers of publicly displaying their sexual identity.

The discrimination against homosexuals would have the greatest effect on lesbians who led sexual lives out of their homes, especially in bars. This primarily affected the working-class lesbian who had fewer options for socialization. However, the more visible the lesbian in the social scene, the more likely police would arrest her either on the street or in the bars. The police regularly stopped butch-presenting women on the streets but all women were in danger when socializing in gay bars. Raids in bars became common, especially as a moral political maneuver during campaign seasons.⁴¹

Working-class lesbians adhered to the controversial butch-femme image and used bars as their locus of socialization in the 1950s. In *Boots of Leather and Slippers of Gold*, Kennedy and Davis argue that a possible initial origin of the butch-femme dichotomy

³⁹ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 163.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁴¹ D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 49-50.

stemmed from a combination of prisons and working-class culture.⁴² Regardless of its origin, the women who chose to present themselves as hyper-masculine butch lesbians forcibly carved out a place in society for themselves by acting and dressing in extremely masculine fashions.⁴³ Any woman beginning to express her lesbian identity became a part of a gendered lesbian subculture in which she was encouraged to choose to present as either butch or femme. Butch lesbians typically presented as masculine while femmes dressed in hyper-feminine styles and acted as submissive partners when in public with a butch partner.⁴⁴ Though femmes adopted an extremely feminine presentation, they usually supported their partner economically, especially if she was unwilling to compromise her butch presentation to find employment.⁴⁵ This dichotomy posed a larger problem for the middle-class lesbians who were more concerned with job security and respectability.

Because of concern with both sexuality and class, lesbians in the fifties became divided on class and social lines. Working-class and middle-class lesbians experienced very different lesbian subcultures especially when considering ages and economic statuses. Because lesbians of different classes had very little in common with one another and “often distrusted and even disliked one another,” they were often in conflict with one another.⁴⁶ Ultimately, because of their lack of basic demographic commonalities, each group had unique subcultures that reflected differing interests and degrees of social access that were reflected in solidified ideas of what the lesbian subculture should look

⁴² Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, 4-5.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 160.

like. Further, each group of women “felt that [their conceptions were] compromised by the other group that shared the same minority status.”⁴⁷

Beginnings of the DOB

The class differences that divided lesbian women into subgroups are evident in the attitudes of the Daughters of Bilitis. Because of the stereotype of the lesbian—working-class, butch, and medically insane—the DOB attempted for several years to educate the members of the organization to distance themselves from what society saw as innately deviant. The politics of uplift and respectability embraced by the DOB were in contrast with the depiction of lesbians in the media where they were accused of a myriad of crimes all stemming from their inherent perversions. The largely pornographic and voyeuristic lesbian pulp novels—the other source of information on lesbians—“reveled in the terror of downward mobility, balancing that fear with a potent eroticization of the working class butch.”⁴⁸ In all, the DOB attempted to remove the stigmas associated with lesbians, and in order to do so they relied heavily on education and reform of lesbians in the organization. The DOB aimed to counter—if not eradicate—this societal image of the lesbian as a working-class and immoral pedophile.

The eradication of the stereotype of the lesbian as immoral and working-class pushed the Daughters toward the use of respectability politics. The DOB took part in respectability politics, meaning—in their case—they believed that through a conservative agenda of education, change was possible. Beyond a simple distaste on the part of many

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Cadora, “The Limits of Lesbiana,” 86.

leaders and members of the DOB for the working-class bar culture, they were also taking a page from black women's activism in the 1880s.⁴⁹ Marcia Gallo argues that the active members of DOB "wanted the paper promises of American equality to be made real" and they were willing to accommodate their own change to more closely align themselves with prevailing social mores.⁵⁰ Hence, the DOB believed social policies could be changed through a reformation of their members first. This attitude is especially evident in editorials and articles featured in *The Ladder* between 1955 and 1966. Not only do the articles themselves support notion of reformation, but according to Gallo, so too does the very name of the magazine which was meant as a description of the very uplift the leadership strove for. The organization's policy of "uplift ideology" shows an intention of the magazine to act as "a vehicle for the individual lesbian to elevate herself...[and] enable others to do the same."⁵¹

The organization began as a social outlet for women not comfortable socializing in bars or other locations with potential police presence. Due to both their second-class status as women and homosexuals, the leadership of the DOB were necessarily concerned with their social status and public identity as lesbians. At the first meeting of the Daughters of Bilitis, the founding members discussed various rules and guidelines for membership and comportment for the fledgling club. In order to join the DOB a prospective member would "have to be 21—and be able to prove it!— must be a gay girl,

⁴⁹ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 18. For a larger discussion of the use of respectability and uplift politics in the black community, see Kevin K. Gaines' *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Refer especially to chapter 3, "Figuring Class with Race: Uplift, Minstrelsy, Migration, and "the Negro Problem."

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 19.

and have good moral character.”⁵² To enact the aims of the founders, the DOB created various dress codes and rules to further a reformation. At the November 9 meeting, the minutes record the decision “to hold dancing lessons with Rose as teacher, and a charm school to aid those who have difficulty walking in high heels, etc.”⁵³ This charm school was created for the sole purpose of teaching butch lesbians to blend in to society.

Dress and Reformation of the Butch

During a special meeting on November 9, 1955, just over one month after forming the organization, the leadership decided on specific rules to institute at all meetings and events. Two of the three rules dictated application processes and party attendance while the third enforced an exclusionary dress code for all members. The minutes read, “if slacks are worn they must be women’s slacks” in response to a prior discussion on the unacceptability of the butch/femme dichotomy.⁵⁴ Lillian Faderman, in *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, argues that the butch/femme roles that were “intrinsic to the young and working-class lesbian subculture” often clashed with the middle-class and older lesbian generation who valued public images that could blend socially.⁵⁵

In October of 1956, the middle-class leadership appeared to feel the need to guide their members, and lesbians outside of the organization, to a specific, more palatable image of the lesbian. Marcia Gallo, in *Different Daughters*, demonstrates the difficulties

⁵² September 21 Minutes.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ November 9 Minutes, November 1956, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, Box 1, Folder 12, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, San Francisco.

⁵⁵ Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 179.

the leadership faced in trying to “navigate the norms of acceptability”⁵⁶ and respectability in the post-war world. The DOB, as evidenced in their published goals and aims, truly believed that lesbians needed to first understand herself and then adjust to society in “all its social, civic, and economic implications.”⁵⁷ *The Ladder* began publishing the aims of the Daughters of Bilitis in the very first edition in 1956 and continued to do so until the magazine shuttered in 1972. The four aims were printed on the inside cover of every issue and the first read: “Education of the variant...to enable her to understand herself and make her adjustment to society in all its social, civic and economic implications...”⁵⁸ During their fourteen-year history, the DOB maintained four aims “for the purpose of promoting the integration of the homosexual into society.”⁵⁹ With a focus on uplifting women, the leadership felt they needed to instruct members on how to dress and behave in public in order to better assimilate into mainstream society. The founders of the DOB were “balancing safety and visibility,” and much of this can be tied to the importance of respectability as well as their own middle-class roots.⁶⁰

The first edition of *The Ladder* featured a president’s message from Del Martin. In the two-page letter Martin defends the foundation of the organization and explains what the DOB and *The Ladder* see as the future for lesbians and women. She explains that the DOB “is a women’s organization resolved to add the feminine voice and viewpoint” to the larger homophile movement dominated by the Mattachine

⁵⁶ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 18.

⁵⁷ “Daughters of Bilitis Purpose,” *The Ladder* 1, no. 1 (1956): 4.

⁵⁸ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 20.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Foundation.⁶¹ The differences between the male homosexual and female homosexual were of utmost importance to the DOB as “women [do not have] much difficulty with law enforcement” but instead deal with problems from “family, sometimes children, employment, [and] social acceptance.”⁶² Later in the October edition, an advertisement titled “Raising Children in a Deviant Relationship” asked for any reader who might be of interest or help to contact the magazine in order to form both a research base as well as a support group. In the close of the previously discussed letter, Martin stressed the need for a lesbian homophile movement to cater solely to lesbians as they had distinct needs and problems. However, Martin further illustrated the purpose by arguing that the “Lesbian is a very elusive creature” due to her fears as well as her ability to camouflage herself better than her male counterpart.⁶³ Martin closed her message by arguing that lesbians should accommodate themselves to society as well as join the movement for visibility with the DOB. The printed purposes of the organization coupled with Martin’s “President’s Message” show that the organization, though pushing for social visibility, was concerned with appearance and the deportment of the lesbians who failed to assimilate into the prevailing levels of social acceptance.

Despite the outlined goals for the DOB, many lesbians were still reticent to join the organization. In the second issue of *The Ladder*, published in November 1956, D. Griffin wrote “The President’s Message,” responding to a specific letter writer afraid to be on the mailing list of the organization or the magazine. After reassuring all readers that their names were safe, citing a 1953 Supreme Court decision, Griffin went on to criticize

⁶¹ Phyllis Lyon, “Once Upon A Time,” *The Ladder* 1, no. 1 (1956): 2-3.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

attendance in local bar scenes and affirmed that the organization was not solely for lesbians but instead for both homosexuals and heterosexuals. She argued that the DOB “wishes to enlighten the public about the Lesbian and to teach them that we aren’t the monsters that they depict us to be.”⁶⁴ The central goal of education and accommodation is further addressed when Griffin quotes from the letter writer’s complaint that “the kids in fly front pants and with the butch haircuts and mannish manners are the worst publicity that we can get.”⁶⁵ The organization had a strict dress code in place for meetings and, according to Griffin, the DOB strictly enforced it. Griffin further argued, the DOB “has already touched on the matter and has converted a few to remembering they are women first and a butch or fem secondly, so their attire should be that which society will accept.”⁶⁶ Griffin’s critique of the stereotypical butch lesbian seen in bars was tied to the organization’s foundation of respectability politics and need to assimilate into mainstream society. On the other hand, her impassioned need to educate and “change” lesbians who were too visible marks the publicized beginning of the DOB “lesbian image” that would contradict many members’ sexual and class identities. The “changeling,” as Griffin labels the converted butch, changed her personal identity, mannerisms, and style in order to become more socially acceptable.⁶⁷ To be socially acceptable was the first step of true assimilation for the DOB. As a result, a large amount of writing on defining the “Lesbian” took up a lot of space in *The Ladder*.

⁶⁴ D. Griffin, “President’s Message,” *The Ladder* 1, no. 2 (1956): 2.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Following Griffin's initial letter, the DOB continued to receive inquiries from women concerned with the makeup of the organization's members. In the January 1957 edition, D. Griffin responded to the queries of several readers who had written the magazine to ask about "the type of people" in the DOB. In response, Griffin answered that the organization was comprised of white collar workers who kept steady employment in well-paying jobs. She further declared that they "aren't bar-hoppers" and instead are middle class women who wanted to be accepted into society regardless of their sexuality.⁶⁸ She concluded by stating that the DOB "want[s] all kinds—those who want help and those who wish to help."⁶⁹ Griffin's offer of assistance was in accordance with the organization's aims of education and uplift as the members are "maintaining [their] own place in society and...want to help others do the same."⁷⁰ The members of the DOB were middle class women who held down well-paying jobs in white-collar profession including journalism, education, and law, and wanted to maintain their positions—presumably by accommodation in feminine dress—and help others rise to that level. This kind of uplift was extremely common throughout the next several years of the magazine.

A reader response in the same edition of *The Ladder* praised the magazine and mused on the impact of obviously homosexual women who were more likely to be arrested and given publicity. To this she urged that they all "face the fact that some of our homosexual kin do get out of line" and lack "morals and ideals."⁷¹ The writer, known only as "A.T.," referred to these women as common problems who "cast a shadow on the

⁶⁸ D. Griffin, "President's Message," *The Ladder* 1, no. 4 (1957): 9.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ A. T., "Letters to the Editor," *The Ladder* 1, no. 4 (1957): 11.

lot of any minority group...whether it be homosexuals, Jews, [or] Negroes.”⁷² A.T., though harsh in her critiques of the lesbians who did not assimilate like their sisters, illustrated the views of several readers and members of the DOB. The women who would not change their appearances, mannerisms, and public antics were viewed as immoral, which could bring the entire organization down. Many women simply needed another community, or as one reader commented: “Too often bars are the only social meeting place [and] When such places are raided and closed, another avenue for ‘hoped for’ companionship and friendship is cut off. It is my hope that this organization will act as a more interesting outlet for social contact.”⁷³ The organization became an essential location of assimilation and insular community for lesbians who, for one reason or another, needed an alternative to the clubs and bars seen as threatening to acceptability within society.

In the February 1957 edition of *The Ladder*, the editor printed a report on the annual meeting of the Los Angeles homophile group, ONE, Inc. The theme of the 1957 meeting was “The Homosexual Answers His Critics,” and *The Ladder* focused specifically on a psychologist’s assessment of how to combat the “anti-homosexual” culture in the United States. The psychologist, Dr. Albert Ellis from New York, presented what he believed to be the “most practical” method fittingly titled “The Palliative Method.” In this method, Dr. Ellis argued that the “social-sexual conditions will continue,” “homosexuals will continue to exist,” and homosexuals will still be penalized.⁷⁴ To combat the current

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Jean Gnagy Letter 12, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, Box 11, Folder 8, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, San Francisco.

⁷⁴ “One’s Annual Midwinter Institute Impressive,” *The Ladder* 1, no. 5 (1957): 3.

situation, and gain slow movements of change, Dr. Ellis recommended that the homosexual should:

1. Remain a law-abiding, responsible citizen.
2. Abhor all feelings and actions showing superiority.
3. Refrain from flaunting their sex preference in public.
4. Avoid over-clannishness and mingle with heterosexuals in as honest and above-board manner as possible
5. Resist in-group favoritism and avoid sticking up for people merely because they are homosexual.
6. Accept the realities of life and avoid self-pity.
7. Help police his own group.
8. Try, in a dignified way, to effect changes in the laws.
9. Try to express protests to the public on discrimination against the homosexual and to correct misinformation in the public's mind.
10. Try to remain undogmatic about homosexuality. Keep an open mind and keep up with recent findings in the field. Be able to accept facts which may be contrary to his own beliefs or pro-homosexual bias.⁷⁵

With the exception of points four and ten, the DOB already abided by most of Dr. Ellis' recommendations. The Daughters did mingle amongst heterosexuals, but their group's organization fostered an atmosphere of "clannishness." Previous articles in *The Ladder* touched on the importance of members and readers knowing their civil rights, while others specifically dictated that some accommodations in the form of dress and manner could alleviate the fears of unwanted discrimination. The DOB's support for these recommendations affirmed the DOB's primary aim of educating lesbians to assimilate into society for better treatment. Or, as the editor wrote in the closing of the summary, this method could lessen antagonisms directed toward homosexuals as they would be less visible in public spaces.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 4.

In the May 1957 edition of *The Ladder* Barbara Stephens wrote a commentary on the problems of integration for minority groups and the public, arguing that many minority groups were stigmatized as a result of both their own actions and the public perception.⁷⁶ Though discrimination against minorities was abhorrent, she argued that many groups designed their own contradictions through the perpetuation of stereotypes within their own groups that further perpetuate their discrimination.⁷⁷ As an example, she argued that the vulnerable lesbian might “find the rough blue jeans and jacket reassuring,” yet these very items were much like raising a “red flag in front of a bull!”⁷⁸ Instead of adhering to stereotypes, Stephens suggested that all lesbians remember that they are neither “insiders or outsiders.”⁷⁹ Instead she argued that women needed to become part of this respectable community of lesbians instead of intentionally instigating harsh reprisals from society due to manner or dress. Similarly, Marion Zimmer Bradley wrote into the magazine and argued that “lesbians...could lessen the public attitudes by confining their differences to their friends and not force themselves...by deliberate idiosyncracies [sic] of dress and speech.”⁸⁰ Though Bradley acknowledged the importance of individual identity, she also wrote that, by making a conscious effort to dress in line with inconspicuous “heterosexual” styles, it would not be “fear or an imposed conformity,” but rather a consideration for the entire community.⁸¹ The articles chosen by the DOB for publication in *The Ladder* speak to their pre-existing attitudes

⁷⁶ Stephens does not suggest that the plight of sexual minorities and African Americans are analogous, but she does see similarities in the problems with public perception.

⁷⁷ Barbara Stephens, “A Plea for Integration,” *The Ladder* 1, no. 5 (1957): 17.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Marion Zimmer Bradley, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Ladder* 1, no. 5 (1957): 20.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

towards masculine-dressed women and obvious public activities that would only serve to perpetuate stereotypes the organization found disagreeable.

Ideas on conforming to society included the topic of lesbian women marrying heterosexual men. In the June 1957 edition of the magazine Nancy Osbourne penned an article titled “One Facet of Fear,” discussing both heterosexual and homosexual marriage in detail. She wrote that all lesbians learned to “conform to the normal pattern of heterosexual life” in order to be accepted by society.⁸² Though she wrote this in the context of a lesbian staying in a heterosexual marriage, she suggested that many respectable lesbians would attempt to walk a tightrope between her fear and her marriage rather than lose her place in society.⁸³ Barbara Stephens also advocated for conformity rather than adherence to the stereotypical butch/femme dichotomy. As “transvestism [in this case wearing masculine clothing], is the tag that labels the lesbian,” Stephens argued for a compromising form of conformity that would not completely ostracize butch lesbians.⁸⁴ As a tentative solution, she offered that lesbians who are self-confident have no need to “barricade themselves by costume,” so the members should work on building up the self-confidence of other lesbians to also become agents of uplift.⁸⁵ The Daughters promoted lesbians, members or not, acting and dressing conventionally, and the publication of the various articles that focus on such issues within *The Ladder* revealed the strict adherence to such practices promoted by the organization.

⁸² Nancy Osbourne, “One Facet of Fear,” *The Ladder* 1, no. 9 (1957): 6.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

The DOB, however, was not the only homophile organization to promote conformity to its members as part of its aims. In August of 1957, the Daughters of Bilitis met with the Mattachine Society on a panel to discuss the topic, “How Can the Homophile World Grow Up?” The moderator of the panel, Basil Vaerlen, a psychotherapist, defined “grown up” as conforming to society while preserving a measure of individuality. To achieve this goal, the panel advised that all homosexuals exercise a degree of conformity and stop “being ‘different’ [as it] is simply an act.”⁸⁶ The two organizations further urged that all homosexuals remember that their only difference from heterosexuals lay with their sexual choices, so they must try to conform as much as possible.

Conforming to societal ideals was of paramount importance for the Daughters. To defend this aim of assimilation, in response to objections from a member, Del Martin argued that this was the impetus for the creation of the DOB, as well as the composition of their membership in 1957. As she suggested in a letter to another member, “there has been a move on the part of the homosexuals...to come out into the open and clear up misconceptions and folklore surrounding” homosexuality.⁸⁷ Many of the fears that limited the ability of homosexuals to “come out into the open” stemmed, in Del Martin’s eyes, from the “stereotypes known to the public, seemingly unaware of the many men and women accepted in their midst who are coping with this particular problem, but who have learned to cover up and assume the double life.”⁸⁸ In essence, Del Martin viewed

⁸⁶ “On Growing Up,” *The Ladder* 1, no. 11 (1957): 6.

⁸⁷ Del Martin Letter #38, 1957, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, Box 10, Folder 15, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, San Francisco.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

the DOB as a source for immediate relief of anxieties. Only after these individual changes could social stereotypes be eradicated.

When fears of association with a homosexual organization arose, the leadership was ready with an answer that provided a panacea to the worries and fears of those who debated joining the organization. Martin's response to the woman above shows how potential members may have assuaged their own fears concerning their association with an openly homosexual organization in an era that was prone to political and social exclusion for any and all identities deemed unworthy to be associated with America. Even so, Del Martin continued by outlining a "two-fold" plan aimed at helping their members. Additionally, she wrote that the DOB aimed to "help [its members] to accept themselves, discard the fears and guilt forced upon them by an unknowing public, and then channel their energies into...useful outlets which would be of benefit to society at large."⁸⁹ One of the DOB's main concerns was to educate its members on what it meant to be productive (lesbian) members of society. This led to Martin's second aim: "How to get people to realize that there is really nothing to fear from [lesbians]."⁹⁰ This two-fold plan addressed the two main concerns often faced by lesbians at this point: how to *be* a lesbian while not *being* deviant in society. In an article titled "Open Letter to Ann Aldrich," Del Martin argued against the type of negative portrayal of lesbians popular fiction author Ann Aldrich propagated.⁹¹ Instead Martin claimed that the majority of lesbians "have made an adjustment to self and society" and "are leading constructive,

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Del Martin, "Open Letter to Ann Aldrich," *The Ladder* 2, no. 7 (1958): 4.

useful lives in the community.”⁹² Martin further asked that Aldrich write a truer picture of the lesbian community instead of focusing on “the bizarre” examples that only served to further the negative social stereotypes.⁹³

Despite their continued struggle to reeducate the public and their members on the nature of lesbianism, the DOB remained steadfast in its aims. In the February 1958 edition, Sten Russell wrote an article on the ONE Symposium that occurred the month before. Most of the article was preoccupied with a debate over homosexual living conditions. Of particular interest to Russell was the preoccupation with the “lesbian partnership.”⁹⁴ Russell pointed out that the “‘butch’ and ‘femme’ tradition” was an example of elementary generalizations.⁹⁵ She defined butch as the “epitome of masculinity” and femme as a “womanly woman.”⁹⁶ Importantly, she further argued that “these extremes constitute[d] only a small minority of the Lesbian culture pattern.”⁹⁷ In a continued effort to disprove some of the traditional stereotypes concerning the lesbian, the Daughters of Bilitis sent out a questionnaire in the June edition *The Ladder*. This four-page survey was sent to all subscribers of the magazine and included questions on family, income, profession, and schooling among other general items. The purpose of the questionnaire was two-fold: gather data on “Lesbians who probably do not otherwise come to the attention of the public” and to ascertain the interest level of the membership

⁹² Ibid., 5.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Sten Russell, “ONE Symposium – Homosexuality, A Way of Life,” *The Ladder* 2, no. 5 (1958): 7.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

of the DOB and the readers of the magazine.⁹⁸ Though the DOB claimed no hypothesis or theory was meant to be tested, there were several clear positive editorial comments regarding the results from the sample size of lesbians to disprove the stereotype of the butch-femme lesbian.

In particular, the report published by the DOB in 1959 argued that the respondents represented “a quite different type of group from that usually studied by doctors and criminologists.”⁹⁹ To support this claim, the DOB focused on education levels, mental health, employment, income, rates of drinking, and bar attendance. Educationally the respondents ranked much higher than the Census Bureau’s figures on white females. 82 percent of respondents completed four years of high school compared to 45 percent of the average female.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, 46 percent completed four years of college, 66 percent completed less than four years, and 16 percent reported postgraduate studies. For comparison, only 6 percent of the average female population completed four years of college.¹⁰¹ Below is a replication of the educational level table from the report:

No. of years attended	No. of persons reporting attendance at High School	No. of persons reporting attendance at College
0	1	52
Up to 1	1	12
2	3	18
3	17	17
4	129	26
Over 4	-	25
“some”	6	6
No reply	-	1
	157	157

⁹⁸ Sociological Survey, 1961, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, Box 8, Folder 9, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, San Francisco.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

The report placed great importance on education level and income levels as the average income of the group was much higher than the average as reported by the Census Bureau. For comparison, the average income reported was \$4,200 annually in relation to \$3,097 annually.¹⁰² Further, the occupations kept by respondents were mainly white-collar professions—38 percent in the professional group and 33 percent in clerical work.¹⁰³ In comparison, only 13 percent of the average female population engaged in professional or semi-professional work. The DOB attempted to rewrite the stereotypes concerning lesbians and redefine their identity’s as middle-class women through this type of publicized academic education.

Of even more importance to the DOB research group was the character shown by the respondents. In particular, they reported that “80 [percent] are registered voters; the average “period of residence at present address” was over 5 years; the “longest period of employment” averages over 6 years.”¹⁰⁴ To further bolster the moral character of the lesbian sample group, the researchers pointed out that only one woman had been a prostitute, only two had been drug users, and only four were alcoholics.¹⁰⁵ Further, the study made particular note of the frequency of drinking and attendance in gay bars.

Frequency of Drinking	No. of persons
Very occasionally (once every 2-3 mos. or less)	20
Occasionally (1-2 times per month)	35
“Socially” (1-2 times per week)	53
Once a day	21
Frequently, or heavily	5
	134

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Research Summary, 1961, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, Box 8, Folder 13, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, San Francisco.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

The DOB analyzed the drinking habits and concluded that most homosexuals drank for social rather than the assumed psychological reasons and much less frequently than the “stereotype of homosexuals as heavy drinkers.”¹⁰⁶ In regards to attendance at bars, the report countered the prevailing assumption that all homosexuals frequented deviant bars. Instead, out of 80 respondents, 34 went out only once or twice per month and 31 went once every few months or less.¹⁰⁷ The purpose of including information that might reflect positively upon the lesbian population was to directly counter the harmful stereotypes that were regularly publicized in the news and popular media. The report proved—at least to the DOB—that lesbians were well-adjusted, reputable, and responsible. The purpose of the research in education was further supported by the November 1959 Editorial combatting the attack on homophile organizations by San Francisco’s mayor. Del Martin wrote that the homophile organizations did not believe that the “problem of sex deviation [can] be solved through legislation...so they have undertaken a program of ‘enlightenment’ – the search for knowledge instead of wild accusation.”¹⁰⁸ Through nearly constant communication with psychologists and other professionals, the hosting of lectures, and the publication of academic articles concerning the homosexual, the DOB began to push more fervently for public education as well as education of the women within the organization.

In the same November edition, the magazine printed an article intended to educate both readers and sections of the public on what the organization was and the reality of the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Del Martin, “Editorial: San Francisco’s Challenge,” *The Ladder* 4, no. 2 (1959): 4.

lesbian.¹⁰⁹ Following a repeated discussion on the details of the organization, the anonymous author attempted to answer several questions on the DOB including topics on morality, child molestation, sex laws, and the “enlightened attitude” proposed by Del Martin. In regards to morality, the author argued that because the DOB engaged in academic studies and published a monthly magazine, there was no cause for the organization to be viewed as a threat to public morality. Further, the organization was comprised of members over 21 years of age and did not sell to or allow minors to engage with the organization. Due to the organization’s strict membership laws and the scientific evidence detracting from the myth of homosexual child molesters, the author also argues that any accusations of child molestation are invalid.¹¹⁰ The acknowledgement and negation of negative stereotypes regarding homosexuality—in this case child molestation—adds to the overarching goal of the Daughters to change both the lesbian and society’s view of her.

The 1961 anniversary message from the president of the DOB restated the purposes of the organization as education of the lesbian, especially the butch, so that lesbians could successfully assimilate into society—the American middle-class specifically.¹¹¹ The organization advanced towards a heavier emphasis on the education of the public, but the organization was still heavily prejudiced against what the DOB called “the minority.” The main complaint of the organization was that the minority was still the only representation of the homosexual that the public saw which made the issue

¹⁰⁹ A significant majority of the subscriptions to *The Ladder* came from professional institutions including doctors’ offices, universities, and other bodies interested in studying lesbians.

¹¹⁰ “What About the DOB?” *The Ladder* 4, no. 2 (1959): 14-16.

¹¹¹ Jaye Bell, “DOB Anniversary: Message From The President,” *The Ladder* 6, no. 1 (1961): 4.

of educating the public that much more difficult. Jaye Bell, the president of the DOB and author of the message, wrote that the organizations could “show them the better life...[by slowing] down the breeding of this defiance” through publications and showing other homosexuals that discretion was of the utmost importance.¹¹² The article also made an argument against the bars as the epicenter of defiance and despair and instead advocated for the education and conversion of the deviant butch lesbian in order to educate the public. Instead of the bar scene, the Daughters of Bilitis offered frequent opportunities for private, and respectable, socialization.

Bell wrote that outward societal conformity was absolutely necessary for homosexuals just as it is for any minority living under social pressures. Though she admitted that the adherence to discretion could be viewed as weak, Bell argued that the DOB had “always taken a strong position on any infringement of rights or harassment of homosexuals simply because they were homosexuals.”¹¹³ The organization did defend the rights of gay bars in articles when the city attempted to revoke their liquor licenses, but at this moment, public activities on the part of the DOB remained piecemeal. On the other hand, the organization was more fully involved in public outreach activities including the July 1961 taping of the discussion “How Normal Are Lesbians?” by the WEVD radio station out of New York. Though the show covered a range of relevant topics, the moderator utilized the survey results from 1959 as published in *The Ladder* and featured a board member of the organization.¹¹⁴ For the next several years, the organization began

¹¹² Ibid., 5.

¹¹³ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁴ “How Normal Are Lesbians?” *The Ladder* 5, no. 10 (1961): 7.

to truly shift toward research and public educational pursuits to pursue their aim of private, lesbian-centered education.

The DOB continued to fight against the standard stereotypes held by the public and in June 1963 published another research call in *The Ladder* for lesbians to work with a group of psychologists led by Dr. Ralph H. Gunlach. Gunlach and his team were collecting information on the lives and backgrounds of lesbians which the DOB hoped would “advance the cause of genuine understanding of the Lesbian.”¹¹⁵ The research would be conducted through more anonymous questionnaires to be a “significant step towards the D. O. B.’s official objective of ‘promoting further knowledge of the homosexual.’”¹¹⁶ Though the research never materialized, this aim demonstrates the DOB’s support of all academic research activities.

In 1963, the New York chapter of the DOB joined other homophile organizations on the East Coast to form the East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO). The December 1963 edition of the magazine featured a write-up on the 1963 convention of ECHO.¹¹⁷ At this time the DOB did not fully support the political activism of ECHO but did not successfully try to shut it either. At the same time, the DOB members began to question the accommodation of expert opinions on homosexuality.¹¹⁸ This combination led to larger debates regarding the purpose of the organization beyond education.

The organization gained both members and further enunciation of their original goals between their origin and their ten-year anniversary. The solidification of their goals

¹¹⁵ “New Research on Lesbians to Begin this Fall – You Can Help!” *The Ladder* 7, no. 9 (1963): 4.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁷ Jody Shotwell, “East Coast Homophile Organizations – Convention 1963,” *The Ladder* 8, no. 3 (1963): 8.

¹¹⁸ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 90.

in education allowed for the more public expression of those aims as seen in chapter two. In the ten-year anniversary edition of *The Ladder*—published in October 1966—the editorial staff reprinted a letter from William E. Beardemphl to the city of San Francisco. The letter was a call to action on the part of the police and public leadership of the city to treat all citizens alike regardless of sexuality. Beardemphl began with an honest acceptance of the need to reexamine the homophile movement on the part of the homophile movement, but pushed the community to also examine attitudes toward homosexuality: “Even while the homosexual has served his community well, his community has not served him...He has been victimized and degraded.”¹¹⁹ The author went on to list a series of grievances against the community that included unequal application of law, police action, and employment discrimination. The call for action on the part of the community was repeated by Del Martin in the same edition.

The October 1966 edition of *The Ladder* also saw the publication of “History of S. F. Homophile Groups” by Del Martin. Martin’s article reviewed a ten-year history of the homophile organizations in the city, specifically focusing on their accomplishments and publications. She brought, chronologically, the reader through discussions of various lawsuits and controversies surrounding homophile movements to their present. In the conclusion of her article, Martin implored society to accept the over 90,000 homosexuals living in the city “demanding full citizenship.”¹²⁰ Martin further charged that “the old techniques of staging raids on homosexual gatherings, barring homosexuals from employment...will not work any more...The homophile community has found its voice

¹¹⁹ William E. Beardemphl, “A Challenge to San Francisco,” *The Ladder* 11, no. 1 (1966): 14.

¹²⁰ Del Martin, “History of S. F. Homophile Organizations,” *The Ladder* 11, no. 1 (1966): 7-15.

and its backbone and will no longer be intimidated.”¹²¹ From this moment to the shutting of the organization’s doors in 1971, the Daughters of Bilitis stood against the outright discrimination and second-class citizenship allotted them as women and homosexuals.

Conclusion

By 1966, ten years after its founding, the Daughters began engaging more actively in public activism but the problems of image still plagued the organization. In an article, “Who is a Lesbian,” Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin described the aims and image of the “Lesbian” they saw as representative of the DOB. Beginning with a sketch of the lesbian inspired by the lower-class image of the butch, they wrote:

Sandy was a typical example of the swaggering “butch” Lesbian when she first arrived in San Francisco. She was dressed in full ‘drag’—man’s suit, tie, shoes, etc. Like so many others entering ‘gay life’ her only knowledge of a Lesbian was that of society’s stereotype—a masculine mannered and appearing woman. She assumed the role and played it well.¹²²

Over the years of publication, *The Ladder* regularly featured complaints centered on the “butch/femme” dichotomous image. Here, Lyon and Martin rejected the image, instead celebrating the “education,” and conversion, of the wayward butch:

¹²¹ Ibid., 15.

¹²² Who is a Lesbian?, 1967, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, Box 35, Folder 14, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, San Francisco.

Two years later, however, Sandy was seen again, this time in a dress, heels, hat, gloves. She had learned to accept herself as a woman. She had learned, too, that Lesbians are attracted to women—not cheap imitations of men.¹²³

With the rejection of the “cheap imitation of [a] man” image in favor of a more feminized and acceptable presentation, Martin and Lyon engaged in the erasure of the working-class lesbian from their politics.

Martin and Lyon were arguably two of the most influential lesbian activists who helped found the DOB. In the same “Who is a Lesbian” article, they wrote: “The Lesbian is thus a secretive, chameleon creature...not easily recognized. She is not distinguishable by appearance, manner or dress.”¹²⁴ “Lesbians”—with a capital “L”—are the women who Lyon and Martin described in this piece as the “real” lesbians. This implied that any woman who fell outside of the respectable image of the DOB was, therefore, not a “Lesbian” with a capital “L,” but instead “Lower-class,” with a capital “L” first and foremost. Lyon and Martin were concerned with the “Lesbian who goes out on the town only occasionally...[who] is more apt to settle down with a partner, build a home and a lasting relationship.” This could only be a representation of the middle-class “Lesbian” who could afford to build a home and socialize outside of bars. Though not explicitly stated, Lyon and Martin summarily dismissed the working-class lesbian by arguing:

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

The literature on the subject of Lesbianism is extremely limited...what data there is available on the Lesbian is based upon women in trouble—from the psychiatric couch or the prison cell.¹²⁵

For the Daughters of Bilitis, the untroubled and invisible “Lesbian,” with a capital “L,” was the tragic victim of their lower-class sisters. Addressing works of pulp fiction, which were filled with colorful representations of the working-class lesbian subculture, Lyon and Martin unequivocally dismissed the “lesbian,” with a lowercase “l,” by stating: “The novel about lesbians, while extremely popular on the newsstands, is most often written by males for a heterosexual male audience and has little or no truth in it.”¹²⁶ For the Daughters of Bilitis, the working-class lesbian was not worthy of inclusion within homophile politics, and, instead, hindered the acceptance of “real Lesbians” by staining their image of respectability. Though the ideas of image and education of the women within the organization was still present, the attitudes and intentions of the leadership shifted more towards active social change outside of the organization.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER III – SHIFTING RESPECTABILITY

On April 25, 1965, three homosexual teenagers participated in the first sit-in for gay rights at a small Philadelphia restaurant. The Janus Society of Philadelphia, a small localized homophile group, organized several sit-ins at Dewey’s Restaurant in response to the manager’s refusal to serve more than 150 people who he suspected of being homosexuals.¹²⁷ The community chose this location for public action primarily because of its popularity with young people and the gay community. The manager based his discrimination wholly on the appearance of patrons targeting masculine women, effeminate men, and other gender non-conforming persons.¹²⁸ Though police arrested and charged the teenagers with disorderly conduct, this event inspired two months of demonstrations at the restaurant. By the end of May 1965, Dewey’s Restaurant was no longer denying suspected homosexuals service at the restaurant. That event—as representative of a larger push for direct action—sparked a break with homophile politics and ushered in a new stage for the gay rights movement of the sixties.¹²⁹

In response to political actions of vocal homophile and homosexual organizations, like the sit-ins of Dewey’s Restaurant, the Daughters of Bilitis began to change their conversation concerning “the lesbian” from one of self-education to education of the public by the mid-sixties. In addition, several members of DOB began to push for more vocal political activism in organizations like the East Coast Homophile Organizations. Though the Daughters of Bilitis began on the West Coast and its national board remained

¹²⁷ Marc Stein. *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 245.

¹²⁸ *OutHistory*; “Marc Stein: Dewey’s Sit-in, Philadelphia, April 25, 1965,” web article by Marc Stein, April 20, 2015.

¹²⁹ D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 174.

centered in that region, political action that will be further discussed in this chapter initiated an evolution in its educational aims. Furthermore, the generational gap that existed within the DOB widened as more radical and militant groups formed outside of the existing homophile movement. Much like other groups in this period, a schism emerged within the group as members began to chafe at the goals and aims of the DOB. This eventually led to the Daughters' downfall in the 1970s.

Amidst these external changes, the Daughters of Bilitis did not change their aims or goals; Instead, they adjusted their goals in education. Rather than focus solely on the education of the lesbian, the leadership began to engage in public outreach to educate them on the mundane reality of homosexual existence. However, organizational leaders did not lose sight of the women they sought to serve and still engaged in a discourse of respectability. This became increasingly problematic for some of their existing members and for the younger generation of lesbians just coming of age. Some women stayed in the organization and agitated for more change from within, with little success, but others left and either created or joined more radical organizations. These new, radicalized groups did not engage in the reformist attitudes of the Daughters, and therefore did not focus as wholly on the exclusion of the working-class stereotype. As a result, they did not publicly reject the eroticized and commercialized sexuality of lesbians in popular culture.

In the mid-sixties, the Daughters engaged in several forms of education and communication that aligned with their purposes. To support these larger goals of education, the Daughters published articles in *The Ladder* which informed the public about the normality of the “non-deviant” lesbian population. These articles, and in one case, radio show, covered many topics including the general homophile movement,

ongoing psychological research, and studies penned by experts in the fields of psychology and law enforcement. In addition, the leadership of the organization engaged in written discourse with several periodicals as another form of education but different in form and voice from their internal publication. These include letters and articles either published in other periodicals or discourse published within *The Ladder*. Moreover, the Daughters, especially as other organizations formed, refused to create a concrete coalition with other groups, especially groups composed of and for gay men. The leaders rejected the coalition based on the goal of protecting their respectable image and to prevent political exploitation by gay homophile groups as token women.¹³⁰ This adherence to image and respectability gave the Daughters credibility and protection in the fifties but hindered their continued existence in the sixties.

The Daughters were not oblivious to the changing homophile movement and attempted to revitalize the group through infrastructure reorganization rather than through reforming or updating their aims. In a revealing 1968 article published in *The Ladder*, Meredith Grey, a member of the DOB, wrote an impassioned argument for restructuring the organization. In doing so, she argued that the organization had undergone several necessary changes through the years which had allowed it to survive. The author intended to illustrate both past changes and future changes that would be necessary to ensure the survival of the Daughters. To this end, Grey guided her readers through a succinct history of the organization. In 1958, when the first out-of-state chapter was formed, the Daughters changed the organizational structure from a centrally localized group in California to one that could endure national growth. Grey dedicated the bulk of her article

¹³⁰ Meredith Grey, "Changing Times," *The Ladder* 12, no. 10 (1968): 20.

to the discussion of organizational restructuring, but she also addressed the ideological changes that took place as well. In 1955, “it was conceived as a self-help social group...but the Daughters were much too ‘square’ to be a simple social club.”¹³¹ The women in the group were generally white, middle-class and middle-aged lesbians who had rather conservative views from the beginning. From the idea of a social club, the DOB tried to help “thousands of women...become more secure productive citizens” through self-education.¹³² Some members chafed at only treating the symptoms of oppression rather than the cause. On the other hand, especially in the first few years, members believed self-education to be the paramount first step. While society scorned the lesbian, the Daughters approached the “problem” of variance by trying to teach lesbians to hide obvious markers of their sexuality. Outside the organization, Grey noted the DOB faced morality and corporation laws that taxed many of the organization’s resources and helped spur the discussion of restructuring.¹³³

Though the article was initially intended as a plea and potential program for restructuring, Grey’s assessment of the aims and purposes of the DOB is insightful. Though Grey argued that the ideological changes in terms of education were extraordinary, in actuality they were minimal at best in comparison to the development of homophile coalitions and splinter groups that broke from the traditional homophile movement. That the organization survived was due to its ability to manage several chapters across state lines rather than due to any revolutionary ideological changes. To

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ The DOB, with out-of-state expansion, faced federal corporation taxes until they were able to change the status of the organization to fully non-profit.

their credit, the Daughters did begin to lessen their focus on educating the butch lesbian in attempts to reform her but did not stop entirely. Instead, the Daughters widened their focus to include more public education opportunities. These included more engagement with other periodicals, radio outlets, public lectures, and other forms of engagement. The New York Chapter did not hold to the same restrictions and many of those members joined other, more militant organizations.

With changes to the DOB's focus came new faces on what would essentially become opposing sides on the issue of direct action. On one—arguably more conservative—side were Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, active members in the DOB, NOW, and later, the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH); Rita Laporte, then president of DOB; Barbara Grier, editor of *The Ladder*; and Shirley Willer, another president of DOB. The Daughters would respond primarily to the actions and politics of other more radical groups based on the East Coast which included the Janus Society of Philadelphia, founded in 1962, the Student Homophile League at Columbia University, founded in 1965, and the Homophile Action League, founded in 1967. Major actors on this more radical side included Frank Kameny, president of Mattachine, Washington, D.C. and Barbara Gittings, member of DOB until 1966 and founding member of the Homophile Action League.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Barbara Gittings' involvement in the Gay Liberation Front will be further discussed in Chapter IV.

Beginnings of the Opposition

Barbara Gittings' history of activism in the gay community is essential to understanding the growing opposition within and outside of the organization. She represented a younger generation of DOB women who rejected the conservative platform of respectability in favor of more radical change. For these reasons, she offers an insightful example to understanding the opposition to the conservative political stance taken by the Daughters of Bilitis. Gittings, born in 1932, had her first encounters with other lesbians between the pages of books, mainly erotic fiction. After moving to New York City, she searched for other lesbians in bars around the city. In an interview with Jonathan Ned Katz, a prominent queer historian, Gittings spoke about her own lesbian identity and the history of the New York chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis. Gittings confessed her deep appreciation for lesbian-themed pulp fiction. The novels "fleshed out [lesbians] in a dimension that simply wasn't available in the scientific materials...and did picture us as diverse people who had happiness" in spite of their often-brutal endings.¹³⁵ Gittings professed that though she found an imagined community in the novels, she yearned for the friendship of the women her fictional characters were based upon. Within months of her move, Gittings took a copy of *Claudine à l'école*, a favorite lesbian novel, with her to a bar and used the sexually explicit line drawings within to help her strike up conversation with another lesbian. Though the woman she met did not share her deep appreciation of literature and instead preferred more explicit pornography, Gittings's ploy worked and her first foray into the bar scene would not be her last. Instead, that first trip inspired Gittings to seek out more literature and a more physical community of lesbians.

¹³⁵ Katz. *Gay American History*, 422.

In her search for a larger community of women, Barbara Gittings travelled to San Francisco in 1956 and met with several homophile organizations including the Daughters of Bilitis. On that first trip, Gittings attended a meeting of the organization in which the members discussed their newly published periodical. Being an avid bibliophile, Gittings became further interested in the organization. Beyond the discussion of a periodical, Gittings found what she had yearned for: “the chance to be with people of my own kind in a setting other than the bars.”¹³⁶ That evening she met with fifteen women of her "own kind."¹³⁷

Following this initial trip, Gittings had little to no contact with the Daughters until 1958 because the organization originally existed solely on the West Coast. In 1958, she attended an outreach meeting for lesbians in the New York area sponsored by the established Mattachine Society. Gittings only vaguely remembers the meeting and recalls that they had unclear motives and nothing more than the original DOB statements of purpose to guide them. As such, the chapter, following incorporation, continued very much as a shadow of the San Francisco organization with no outside purpose until 1961. Like the main organization, the New York chapter invited experts—lawyers, clergymen, and psychologists—to speak at meetings and lectures. Gittings remained convinced that this brand of consciousness-raising was an essential first step and that advanced and “sensible attitudes” regarding public action could only come afterwards.¹³⁸ According to Gittings the people invited to speak at meetings “obviously had a vested interest in

¹³⁶ Ibid., 424.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 426.

having us as penitents, clients, or patients.”¹³⁹ No matter the message or motivation of the experts, the Daughters—as a whole—were “breaking the taboo of silence about homosexuality...[and] anything that helped break the silence, no matter how backward, how silly or foolish it may look to us today, was important.”¹⁴⁰ “The first publications, the first discussion groups and panels—these carried a lot of weight with us...[they] legitimized the existence of [our] organization.” The speakers, regardless of the content of their discussion or lecture, unknowingly lent their societal credibility to the Daughters through their acknowledgement and attendance at organized or sponsored functions.

This acknowledgement, while effective for the conservative purposes of the DOB, was only sufficient for so long. Changes in consciousness were “definitely fomenting in the sixties, well before Stonewall,” Gittings states, “the one thing that Stonewall represents, in my view, is a sudden burgeoning of grass-roots activity.”¹⁴¹ That change of consciousness began with a coalition of homophile groups in the East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO).¹⁴² The coalition of homophile organizations was different from the individual organizations, including the Daughters of Bilitis, because of their goal to “sponsor a public convention on the problems of homosexuality.”¹⁴³ Through these conventions, ECHO’s participants sought to engage members of the organizations in

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 427.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 428.

¹⁴² ECHO existed between 1963 and 1966 before being reorganized under different names in later years. These include The National Planning Conference of Homophile Organizations (NPCHO), the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations (NACHO), and the subsidiary of NACHO, the Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations (ERCHO). For the purposes of this discussion only ECHO will be discussed as its later iterations follow the same organizational blueprint and mission and fall outside of the time period discussed.

¹⁴³ John Anderies, William Way LGBT Community Center, John J. Wilcox, Jr. LGBT Archives, “Joan Fleischmann collection on East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO), Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations (ERCHO), and others, 1963-1994 [bulk:1963-1969] Ms.Coll.26.” Philadelphia, March 10, 2017.

broader conversations as well as sponsor direct action picketing events. These picketing events began in 1965 and included picketing the White House, the Pentagon, and the Civil Service Commission in the hopes of engaging with government officials on the subject of homosexuality.¹⁴⁴ Though ECHO was founded in 1963 with the help of the New York Chapter of the DOB, the San Francisco-based national board of the Daughters of Bilitis did not participate in or condone public political activism.

The inclusion of direct action in ECHO, specifically, and the homophile movements began with Frank Kameny. In 1961, Kameny, a gay man fired from federal employment due to his homosexuality, lost his very public court case against the Federal Government and founded the Washington, D.C., Mattachine Society. Kameny was inspired by the Black Civil Rights movement, and his purpose was to publicly counter the idea that homosexuality was a sickness.¹⁴⁵ Together with the Janus Society of Philadelphia and the New York chapter of the DOB, Kameny created the ECHO coalition.¹⁴⁶ The initial aims of the coalition represented a largely universal desire for the homophile organizations to work together and promote a larger positive and productive discussion with the public that would lead directly to social change.¹⁴⁷ The coalition hosted annual conferences where keynote speakers included a DOB member, a reverend, a sexologist, and a pulp fiction author. This wide range of speakers supported their goal of fostering a more inclusive conversation between homophile groups and the public on the topic of homosexuality.¹⁴⁸ The New York chapter of the DOB, which included more

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Katz, *Gay American History*, 427.

¹⁴⁶ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 86.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 87.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

radical members, engaged in more active cooperation and engagement with political activism than the national organization based in San Francisco who refused to wholly engage in coalitions with gay homophile organizations.

Soon, other organizations on the East Coast—including the Janus Society and the Mattachine Society of New York—began to adopt Kameny’s aims, but the San Francisco DOB argued against direct action. Instead, organizations on the East Coast became more militant much earlier than the movements on the West Coast largely because of Kameny’s efforts to create a coalition of homophile organizations. This militancy involved the adoption of direct action and civil disobedience.¹⁴⁹ Specifically, this involved picketing the U.S. Army induction center in New York in 1964 against the rejection of homosexuals from service, the White House in 1965 to combat federal prejudice, and the Civil Service Commission in 1965 over an employment ban.¹⁵⁰ In Philadelphia, Washington, DC, and New York, new radical groups formed and organized with the existing Mattachine and DOB chapters in the area. In opposition, the Daughters believed they, as homosexuals, “did not have the credentials or the right to stand up” and argue for their rights as lesbians and gay men and instead sought the voices of professionals especially in the field of psychiatry.¹⁵¹ Because of their stand against coalitions and outspoken personal public education, the DOB effectively distanced themselves as an organization from Kameny’s movement and focused predominantly on variant education using experts. This focus on consciousness, rather than public

¹⁴⁹ Vicki Eaklor. *Queer America: A People’s GLBT History of the United States*, 2nd Edition (New York: The New Press, 2011), 120.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

¹⁵¹ Katz, *Gay American History*, 427.

education and picketing, would lessen beginning in the mid-1960s, but not to the degree some women wanted.

Barbara Gittings and Kay Lahusen, a fellow member of the New York Chapter, were the main proponents of public political activism and public engagement from the DOB.¹⁵² When Eric Marcus interviewed the two women in the early nineties, they provided a great deal of insight into the inner workings of their involvement with both ECHO—and its later iterations—and the DOB from 1961 through 1968. The two women met at a DOB social function in 1961 and recalled that they grew “increasingly impatient with the organization that brought them together.”¹⁵³ They grew uncomfortable with the social functions and constant psychiatry lectures hosted by homophile organizations. Lahusen and Gittings began “challenging these kinds of activities [and] even before the surge of real activism, Barbara and [Kay] were unhappy with DOB’s posture.”¹⁵⁴ Lahusen and Gittings were beyond exhausted hearing and reading scoldings from the main organization and believed that the aims were largely becoming pointless and unacceptable.¹⁵⁵ Regarding *The Ladder*, Lahusen remembers “the little lesbian was beginning to climb the ladder, upgrading herself so that she would become an OK person instead of a ‘variant’...as if there weren’t thousands of lesbians who were great contributors to society.”¹⁵⁶ Because of their non-adherence to the larger aim of DOB to

¹⁵² Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 87.

¹⁵³ Marcus, *Making History*, 104. Though these recollections take place nearly twenty years after their “impatience,” the facts of their story support this claim whether or not it was a conscious or subconscious memory.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

educate the lesbian, Gittings and Lahusen spearheaded the New York chapter's initial effort to become involved in real political change and activism.

In 1966 this push for activism from within the DOB in New York ended. Barbara Gittings' adamantly voiced support of public activism in *The Ladder* angered many members and led to her resignation as editor of the magazine.¹⁵⁷ Her tenure as editor came to an end just three months after she published "Picketing: Pros and Cons," a debate on both sides of the issue.¹⁵⁸ The article, arguing for direct action, was met with backlash, inspiring an anonymous leader to reprimand Gittings in a letter, that "only dirty, unwashed rabble did this kind of thing."¹⁵⁹ Gittings recognized the need to broaden tactics despite the association picketing had with the lower class seen especially in the hippie-associated anti-Vietnam War protests. That same year, Gittings became inactive in the DOB but remained in close contact with women from the organization in the Philadelphia chapter. As these members wanted to become more involved in direct action agitation, they realized, according to Gittings, they would need to excise themselves completely from the DOB and start a new organization which would allow them the freedom to agitate. The women founded the Homophile Action League that "was dedicated to political action."¹⁶⁰ Gittings immediately joined the league during its formation in 1967 and fully left the Daughters behind.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ "Picketing: Pros and Cons," *The Ladder* 10, no. 8 (1966): 14-19.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Marcus, *Making History*, 125.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 126.

Education through Publication

Though they did not change their beliefs on respectability, the Daughters began to change their stances on education, shifting to more public outreach and writing in response to the growing opposition on the East Coast. In an article titled “Every Tenth Person is a Homosexual!” Barbara Gittings, then editor of *The Ladder*, described the efforts of homophile organizations to set up an exhibit at a public fair discussing homosexuality. Gittings described setting up the booth as “an effort to reach the general public with educational information about homosexuality.”¹⁶² State fair officials cancelled the booth space at the last minute due to the “controversiality of the material” and the organizers instead passed out leaflets outside the main entrances to the general public.¹⁶³ The news coverage of the event resulted in much more public awareness than a simple booth inside of the fairgrounds. In this moment, the Daughters demonstrated a willingness to offend public sensibilities to finish a planned event which supported their existing goals of education.

Following the Second World War, the beginning of the Cold War, and the establishment of the nuclear age, the “interest in the global scope of threats” opened a market for writing in science, history, economics, psychology, and sociology.¹⁶⁴ The obsession with global threats and sites of anxiety meant that a plethora of articles and books were published to pander to the long-established American appetite for texts in the field of psychology. In 1967, much in line with the earlier articles published by the

¹⁶² Barbara Gittings, “Every Tenth Person is a Homosexual,” *The Ladder* 11, no. 1 (1966):21.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Paula Rabinowitz, *American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism to Main Street*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 209-210.

Daughters, Dr. Mark Freedman reached out to the Daughters for help in conducting a psychological survey to further research the psychological signs and causes of female homosexuality. This form of educational literature dovetailed with the existing aims of the DOB as well as their belief that experts should be the ones authoring, researching, and lecturing on homosexuality.

In 1968, Dr. Freedman published the results of those surveys in *The Ladder*. Freedman compared members of the Daughters of Bilitis and women from the volunteer division of an unnamed national service organization. Freedman asked both groups of women to complete a series of questionnaires and psychological tests to evaluate each subject in a “global measure of psychological adjustment.” Dr. Freedman then scored each questionnaire on demographics and mental health and gave each subject a rating on their psychological adjustment.¹⁶⁵ He found no differences between the lesbians and non-homosexuals in their average psychological adjustments and instead found that all women involved were well-adjusted psychologically. Further, the members of the Daughters of Bilitis were not exceedingly neurotic and scored as well-adjusted. He concluded that “homosexuality is not necessarily related to psychological disturbance...[and] individuals who engage in homosexual relations...function effectively in our society.”¹⁶⁶ The intention in publishing these results was clear: any educational piece that promoted the idea that the Daughters of Bilitis were composed of well-adjusted lesbians who aligned themselves to the societal mores was published in *The Ladder*.

¹⁶⁵ Mark Freedman, “Psychological Test Results,” *The Ladder* 12, no. 2 (1968): 3.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Experts from the fields of psychology and psychiatry wrote the bulk of the educational articles published by the DOB in *The Ladder*. This was in direct opposition to the ideals of Frank Kameny who supported homosexuals themselves picketing the State Department and petitioning official boards to push for legal changes for gays and lesbians. That the Daughters' believed homosexuals should not argue for themselves in an official capacity is testament to their original stated purpose of social assimilation. Instead, according to the DOB leadership, homosexuals needed to rely upon the testimony of lawyers and psychologists like Dr. Freedman.¹⁶⁷

Not all the newer educational aims included public surveys or pamphlet drives but some were simply articles written by experts on the subject of homosexuality. In October of 1968, the editor of *The Ladder* published an article written by Ruth M. McGuire. Dr. McGuire, a psychologist, wrote the article in a narrative style depicting a meeting with a prospective patient. This woman, a "Mrs. A" was not actually in the office for herself, but she was rather concerned about her daughter being a lesbian. Over the course of the conversation between the two, McGuire defended homosexuality as a normal reality. Mrs. A. asked McGuire if she could cure homosexuality and McGuire answered, "No, not any more than I, or anyone, can cure heterosexuality."¹⁶⁸ Mrs. A. asked why, as heterosexuality was normal and homosexuality was a sickness. When asked why she believed homosexuality is a sickness or disease, Mrs. A. exclaimed, "all you *doctors* say it is a disease and that homosexuals are sick!"¹⁶⁹ Further pressed, the mother explained what she believed constituted a disease or sickness. Mrs. A. explained to McGuire that a

¹⁶⁷ Katz, *Gay American History*, 425.

¹⁶⁸ Ruth M. McGuire, "The Intake Interview," *The Ladder* 13, no. 1 (1968): 4.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

“disease is something that happens to a person” which “makes a person feel miserable, and if it isn’t cured...can lead to death.”¹⁷⁰ In this definition, Mrs. A. included cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and mental illness. To her, the people who suffered from disease were “very scared...depressed, [and] they lose their jobs and their lives, they are sad, pathetic and wretched people, crippled and cut off from life.”¹⁷¹ In this way, McGuire set up the commonly held beliefs and arguments about the sickness of homosexuality. By placing the article into a hypothetical narrative, the author addressed all of America, adding strength to her professional argument that homosexuality was not a sickness deserving of a cure.

Over further discussion, the two women began to focus on the daughter’s lesbianism, and how her mother knew that she was sick and that McGuire absolutely must cure her. When asked if her daughter showed any of the previously mentioned symptoms of sickness and disease—scared, depressed, loss of job—Mrs. A. responded, “Good heavens, no! Why she’s just fine.”¹⁷² Her daughter, now referred to as Didi, was stable, happy, and had a wonderful job. When questioned further, Mrs. A. responded that she was quite upset at being made to be confused about homosexuality as she realized her daughter was not sick. In the remainder of the narrative, it turns out that Mrs. A. was the real patient, not the lesbian Didi. Instead of curing Didi, the doctor, in a sense, cured the mother of her belief that homosexuality was inherently bad and a sickness. The mother—or society, which she represented—was made to think about lesbianism with an open mind and a wish to understand it.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., 5.

Dr. McGuire's hypothetical session was effective for the type of educational arguments the Daughters of Bilitis propagated over the course of its tenure. The Daughters believed that experts alone could defend homosexuality in a medical sense. Further, experts like Drs. McGuire and Freedman could argue that homosexuality was both normal and not a sickness or a disease, as was popularly believed. The Daughters published articles and provided a space for experts to engage in discourse that would help change the conversation surrounding homosexuality.

Against the Tokenization of Lesbians

The leadership of the Daughters of Bilitis published several articles demonstrating their belief that the homophile movement should not evolve in the direction of ECHO. Del Martin, in her article "Who is a Homophile," discussed both the original purpose of the term "homophile" and its implications in the ever-evolving political climate. The original use of "homophile" was to replace the term "homosexual" as it was and "still is, a 'trigger' word that proved to be a block in efforts to communicate the homosexually-oriented individual as a person." Here, Martin declared that the term homophile was still relevant in the movement as she defined it further as "an effort to communicate to the larger society the concept of the homosexual as a whole person whose sexual identification is but a single fact of his being."¹⁷³ The Daughters very much still supported the idealized and respectable homophile movement that focused predominantly on education. In response to the creation of the East Coast Homophile Organizations, Martin criticized their implied changes to the large community. ECHO only used

¹⁷³ Del Martin, "Who is a Homophile," *The Ladder* 10, no. 12 (1966): 14.

“homophile” in reference to organizations and instead used “homosexual” in reference to gay men and women. Martin criticized this change, and implied that the use of the word “homosexual” ostracized lesbians in favor of gay men and further removed a modicum of respectability from all organizations.

The differences in experience between gay men and lesbians further inspired DOB’s leadership to avoid alliance politics, which might push the aims of the group to the background. Shirley Willer, president of the DOB in 1966, also penned a response to the changing movement titled “What Concrete Steps Can Be Taken to Further the Homophile Movement?” Willer added to Martin’s initial statements on the ostracizing of lesbians in the larger organization with an article on what the DOB believed the “homophile movement should be doing.”¹⁷⁴ The article covered the differences between the male and female homosexual first to dissuade complete convergence in larger umbrella organizations like ECHO. Gay men dealt with police harassment, sodomy laws, and backlash for participation in activities like solicitation, bathroom sex, and transsexual dress. Women, on the other hand, did not endure a large amount of police harassment for illicit activities. Instead, Willer argued that lesbians were more concerned with “job security, career advancement, and family relationships.”¹⁷⁵ Though these concerns were predominantly generationally important, she further stated that the “Lesbian is discriminated against not only because she is a Lesbian, but because she is a woman.”¹⁷⁶ Due to these differences, lesbians were, in her opinion, treated as privileged members in

¹⁷⁴ Shirley Willer, “What Concrete Steps Can Be Taken To Further The Homophile Movement?” *The Ladder* 11, no. 2 (1966): 17.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

the homophile movement and under-privileged in society-at-large. By joining together with male homosexuals and supporting their activism, she argued, lesbians would be tokenized, during meetings by gay men, but if gay men succeeded in repealing anti-sodomy and vagrancy laws she feared goals and aims of lesbians would be quickly discarded and even argued against.¹⁷⁷ Willer argued against the convergence of organizations but instead advocated for better communication and collaboration between them. The Daughters of Bilitis catered to an older, middle-class demographic of lesbians, and Willer closed her editorial by stating that the DOB did not want to “retool” itself to cater to a changing movement. Instead, Willer argued that lesbians and gays should belong to different organizations and that “each person will find the organization of his level and interest.”¹⁷⁸ In this way, Willer declared that the Daughters would not overly-change their aims and purposes for either reasons of sex or age.

In 1969, the DOB decided conclusively they would not become involved in any coalition organization, like the East Coast ECHO from the early sixties. Both Del Martin and Rita Laporte published articles on the decisions not become involved with the coalition group. Martin listed several reasons for the organization not to become involved. These included two reasons stemming from their wish to avoid having their members belong to another organization they did not consciously join. In addition, Martin argued that the DOB did not want to rescind its autonomy to a structured organization. If the Daughters joined the larger homophile group, NACHO—the newer iteration of ECHO—could, in theory, make statements and declarations without their

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 19.

consent. For Martin, the main concern was that NACHO could organize politically using the DOB's name, image, or contacts without the explicit consent of the Daughters.¹⁷⁹

The DOB's decision to not join the coalition is clearly expressed in Rita Laporte's article on the same subject. Laporte argued that the homophile movement ignored lesbians in their politics so it made very little sense to join an organization that could speak for the DOB. She leveraged that the real problem in American society was the inequality existing between the sexes and that as "long as [she] is President of DOB [she] would fight to keep [the organization] independent and to remind the men we will not be forgotten."¹⁸⁰ Laporte argued that if any coalition should, or could, be formed it should be between lesbians and heterosexual women. The "enviable reputation and fine image with the public" the Daughters had built were far too valuable to forfeit for a larger coalition that would include men.¹⁸¹

Education in Discourse

Organizations for gays and lesbians often responded directly to pressure from outside views expressed through newspapers engaged in negative discourse on the subject of homosexuality which catered to the dominant public opinion of non-normative sexual behavior. The inclusion of several of these articles will give the reader an important insight into the tone and attitude of the nation's newspapers as well as the significance of the Daughters' efforts to engage in that discourse. In 1964, the *Press and Sun Bulletin* from Birmingham, New York, reported on the absurdity of homosexuals—

¹⁷⁹ Del Martin, "No to NACHO," *The Ladder* 13, no. 11 and 12 (1969): 17.

¹⁸⁰ Rita Laporte, "NACHO of What Use?" *The Ladder* 13, no. 11 and 12 (1969): 18.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

ECHO, really—advocating for equal rights. The article, titled “Perverts Demand Rights,” reported that over 100 men and women distributed literature inviting the public to a convention on civil rights for gays and lesbians. The convention took place in Washington, D.C. and only further confirmed, for the reporter and his readers, that Washington had truly become a homosexual haven. The article, written under the guise of reporting, was really an argument against the legalization of homosexuality on the grounds of immorality. “Perverts Demand Rights” was an article indicative of its time and typical of the usual press coverage.¹⁸²

In the latter half of the sixties, the Daughters engaged more fully in this public discourse surrounding homosexuality outside of the pages of *The Ladder*. Though they publicly engaged in dialogue to change the conversation, the Daughters were careful not to engage in medical or legal arguments in keeping with their belief that experts should be relied upon. In 1969, Rita Laporte, then president of the DOB, consented to an interview by the *Reno Gazette Journal* on both the organization and her views on lesbians. Laporte was in Reno and had recently given a lecture during the University of Nevada’s “Sex Week.” In discussing the reality of lesbians in the interview, Laporte argued, “we are human beings first, women second, and lesbians third.”¹⁸³ This notion of women second and lesbians last was one long propagated by the organization, especially in their impassioned arguments and articles on dress and decorum for butch lesbians.

¹⁸² John McMullan, “Perverts Demand Rights,” *Press and Sun Bulletin* (Birmingham, NY), October 28, 1964. For further examples see: “San Francisco Police Arrest 14 in Drive on Sex Deviates,” *Oakland Tribune* (Oakland, CA), June 28, 1954; “Study Suggests Patterns of Homosexuality,” *Redlands Daily Facts* (Redlands, CA), June 23, 1959; “Nature Sometimes Mixes Up Sex at Birth,” *The Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), March 21, 1955; “Why Girls Become Lesbians,” *The Observer* (London, England), May 22, 1966.

¹⁸³ “Lesbian Leader: ‘Men Aren’t Necessary,’” *Reno Gazette Journal* (Reno, NV), October 10, 1969.

Laporte further told the reporter that all lesbians “are looking for love, emotional security, and a home just as other women do.” By normalizing this aspect of the lesbian image, she could publicly criticize the popular perception of lesbians as deviant succubae, as illustrated in pulp fiction.

Additionally, Laporte argued that “lesbians were born as they are” and faced problems stemming from family and employment: “Mothers threaten to have their daughters committed...[and] if you have a good job and they find out, you get fired.”¹⁸⁴ By describing the realities of job discrimination, Laporte humanized the problems lesbians faced and removed them as a threat. On the subject of employment, Laporte argued that it was a “myth that [lesbians] would attack or influence little girls” if employed as teachers or other professionals as that fear traditionally lay with male homosexuals alone.¹⁸⁵ Laporte concluded by arguing that she mainly dealt in dispelling myths about lesbians and by reassuring the public that lesbians were not to be feared. Importantly, she did not argue that lesbians should be given equal rights or that homosexuality was not a sickness. Instead she clearly and concisely argued that lesbians offered no harm to either people or social morality by humanizing and distancing lesbians from the more aggressively stereotyped gay men.

In the pages of *Playboy Magazine*, the daughters utilized a different form of discourse that allowed for conversation rather than simply education. In 1967, *Playboy* engaged in a lengthy discourse on the subject of homosexuality with the Daughters of Bilitis. The articles published in *Playboy* preceding this lecture on the topic of

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

homosexuality were objectively written and well received by both homosexuals and the general readership of the magazine. *Playboy* frequently published articles on the topic of sex and sexuality beginning in 1953. Though occasionally brought to court for violating censorship laws, the magazine continued to flaunt morality and obscenity laws. As a result, the magazine received mixed reviews from its readers. Some of the positive responses included those from gay men and lesbians applauding the magazine for confronting many of the issues they dealt with.

In 1967, the then president of the DOB sent an open letter to *Playboy Magazine* on the topic of legislating sexual acts. Previously, in the “Playboy Forum,” there had been discussion of the legislation of oral-genital sex and anal sex. In the letters and responses from readers and editors, they all displayed shock at the federal and local government involving themselves in the sexual acts of consenting adults. The president of DOB, unnamed in her letter, asked why so many of their readers were shocked that police persecuted people for private sexual acts, something homosexuals had long encountered. She tasked *Playboy* as an organization to apply this shock and outrage to the treatment of homosexuals. Further she asked, “Will you accept the fact that two men or two women should also have this privilege [of privacy]?”¹⁸⁶ In response, the editors wrote that although they “confess to a strong personal prejudice in favor of the boy-girl variety of sex but [their] belief in a free, rational and human society demands a tolerance of those whose sexual inclinations are different from [their] own.”¹⁸⁷ This response, though pretty characteristic of *Playboy’s* attitude towards homosexuality since the very first issue in

¹⁸⁶ “The Playboy Forum,” *Playboy Magazine*, January 1966, 64.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

1953, indicated a larger shift in public discourse. The Daughters' engagement with the topic of sexual privacy was significant as they typically educated their members on public dress and decorum. This type of discourse demonstrated the Daughters' belief in their right to sexual freedom, even if only in the privacy of their own homes. Hugh Hefner consistently published articles and held beliefs that all sex should be legalized between adults. The attitude of the response from the editorial staff went over well with the Daughters and several members of the DOB would attend a lecture on the same subject given by Anson Mount, The public affairs director for *Playboy*.

In the August 1967 issue of *The Ladder* Del Martin authored a report on *Playboy's* involvement at a conference where Mount lectured for the Council on Religion and the Homophile. Specifically, Martin was most concerned with what Hugh Hefner had termed the "Playboy Philosophy." The philosophy was, as quoted by Martin, "concerned with the protection of private sexual behavior by consenting adults, whether they be heterosexual or homosexual."¹⁸⁸ Hefner's magazine entertained debates on sexuality and the law regularly in the "Playboy Forum." This, combined with their regular articles on the subject, was aligned with the DOB policy of education.

Though their discussion with *Playboy* centered on the topic of sexual privacy, the Daughters sought multiple audiences and themes for their aims of public education. In response to the Stonewall Inn demonstrations in 1969 and the ongoing anti-Vietnam War movement, the Daughters wanted to distance and differentiate themselves from the more radical and "un-respectable" hippies and queens who had no regard for the DOB policies of education or assimilation. In the June 22, 1970, issue of the *Los Angeles Times*, five

¹⁸⁸ Del Martin, "The Playboy Philosophy," *The Ladder* 11, no. 10 (1967): 7.

members of the Daughters of Bilitis participated in an interview to “shed some understanding of the not-always-gay life of the ‘gay’ girl.”¹⁸⁹ The five women spoke to the reporter and used pseudonyms for protection. In the article, the women discussed the Daughters of Bilitis and their personal lives. An overwhelming theme throughout the article was the desire for the members to demonstrate that they wanted “society to understand that we’re here in the community and not the freaks they seem to think.”¹⁹⁰ The Daughters, already participating in this type of education, wanted to inform the public just how mundane and uninteresting their lives really were.

To demonstrate just how normal their lives were, “Sandy” and “Celia” discussed their partnership and home life with the reporter. Both women worked to support the household and their only complaint was their lack of tax benefits that married heterosexual couples were afforded. In speaking of their relationship as compared to other, Sandy asserted that “many people live less moral lives than we do” and that she and her partner Celia had been living together for some time in monogamy.¹⁹¹ Further, to counter the deviant image, Sandy informed the reporter that the organization itself was respectable as the membership is limited to those “21 and older, to avoid criticism.”¹⁹² This criticism had long plagued the organization, but Sandy flatly rejected “the idea that lesbians recruit or seduce younger girls” as none of the women in the DOB would ever do so.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Lynn Lilliston, “Lesbians Want to Lose ‘Freak’ Image,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1970.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

Public Education and Private Erotica

Though the Daughters of Bilitis shifted its educational focus in the mid-sixties, the leadership attempted to maintain a degree of respectability in their internal educational aims. In addition to articles and editorials published in *The Ladder*, this shift is further illustrated through the changing offerings in the organizational book service which began in 1960. Barbara Grier wrote the “Lesbiana” column from 1957 to 1972 under the pen name, Gene Damon.¹⁹⁴ Grier, an avid reader and librarian by trade, fully believed that books and literature were integral to the lesbian identity. So integral that she later argued, “As far as I was concerned, if you weren’t reading lesbian literature, you were not part of the world.”¹⁹⁵ Her column, comprised of literature reviews and yearly essays, and her readers’ impassioned responses inspired the Daughters to create a sustainable book service in addition to their organizational library.

Over the fourteen years *The Ladder* was in print Barbara Grier and her devoted readers listed and reviewed over 600 titles for the “Lesbiana” column. In the May issue of 1960, the Daughters of Bilitis announced the start of a special book service for readers of *The Ladder*. The column had inspired the creation of a book service managed by the DOB following “many requests from friends and readers of *The Ladder*.”¹⁹⁶ This new branch of the DOB “primarily [sold] fiction and non-fiction concerning the Lesbian” to provide lesbian books to “women who lacked convenient and affordable access.”¹⁹⁷ Though the initial selection of titles was small, the editor promised to increase the

¹⁹⁴ Cadora, “The Limits of Lesbiana,” 83.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁹⁶ “Beginning: DOB Book Service,” *The Ladder* 4, no. 8 (1960): 9.

¹⁹⁷ “Beginning: DOB Book Service,” 9; Joanne Passet. *Indomitable: The Life of Barbara Grier* (Tallahassee, FL: Bella Books, 2016), chap. 3.

offering monthly. Two of the five items for sale were educational, while two were fictional novels by a successful pulp fiction author. Despite their limited selection, the DOB provided readers of *The Ladder* with titles that attempted to adhere to their conservative educational aims. The ad included *Christ and the Homosexual* by a reverend, a quantitative study of lesbians in literature by a psychologist, and two novels on lesbians in addition to a bibliography of lesbian-themed literature. The contrast between *Christ and the Homosexual*—favorably reviewed by the editor—and the two pieces of pulp fiction was stark. The editors made sure to mention that the two novels were “well-written and [ended] happily” to justify the inclusion of pulp fiction on the book service list. These two selections, though on opposite ends of the spectrum, represented one of the problems encountered by the DOB: how could the Daughters balance between their inherent sexuality and their adherence to social and public respectability?

By 1963, the book service primarily sold fiction featuring lesbian subjects, of which a majority was pulp fiction. This pulp fiction made up many of the new titles offered through the service. The book service, which began in May of 1960, offered new titles every two to three months as advertised on the back of the periodical. The archival records of the Daughters of the Bilitis include a small sample of orders from 1964 for books through the in-house book service. The initial offerings were approximately fifty-percent educational and fifty-percent fictional. This percentage remained relatively stable for the first year of the book service but began to shift after Del Martin signed a contract

with Midwood Tower Publishing for a larger selection of titles to sell through the magazine.¹⁹⁸

Midwood Tower generally published a large amount of pulp fiction which catered to a male audience. After Martin signed a contract with the publishing house to sell lesbian fiction, the sales generated by the book service skyrocketed. The initial sales were evenly split between the educational pieces and the fictional works, but after the contract with Midwood, and the influx of new fiction titles, the majority of sales were for the newer, sleazier pulp titles from the publisher. Barbara Grier, editor of the “Lesbiana” column, was outraged at including “trash” in the book service but was overruled by the editor due to the influx of sales. The compromise between the commercial sale of ‘trash’ books for profit and the Daughters’ initial aims of “education of the variant” illustrates the extent of the DOB’s willingness to change their internal educational goals.¹⁹⁹

The sales and operation of the book service were not documented in any detail, but the orders and staff responses show the remarkable popularity of the fiction offerings. Based on information included in these records, a total of 86 books were offered for sale over four years, of which 33 were non-fiction or educational and 53 were fiction—mainly lesbian pulp fiction. Based on a total of 391 sales, the most significant type of sale—326 total orders—from *The Ladder* was popular pulp fiction that featured lesbian content.

A further analysis of the top ten best-sellers showed that these comprised 155 orders, or 39.6 percent of the total sales and 47.5 percent of total fiction sales. These books included titles like the controversial, tell-all lesbian gossip “fiction” *The*

¹⁹⁸ Passet, *Indomitable*, chap. 5.

¹⁹⁹ “Daughters of Bilitis Purpose,” *The Ladder* 1, no. 1 (1956):4.

Grapevine. Most of these books received negative reviews from the Barbara Grier, editor of “Lesbiana,” but were obviously well-received by the readers of *The Ladder*. Of the 86 books sold through *The Ladder* between 1960 and 1966, the most popular and highest grossing depicted images antithetical to the image of respectability the leadership of the Daughters of Bilitis had built their organization upon. The most consumed books provided by the DOB book service were not in-line with the leadership’s goals; instead, readers sought out those that presented contradictory or oppositional representations of lesbian identities. By allowing the sale and review of these books, in increasingly larger numbers, the leadership demonstrated a minute loosening of their concern with image and presentation.

However, the continued publication of articles and opinions on the topic of image, butch presentation, and conservative morality show that the leadership was not willing to move past their roots of respectability. In 1967, *The Ladder* published a critique on the outspoken, obvious lesbian. The author, member Irene Fiske, urged all homosexuals to not forget “that the majority of us are indistinguishable from the heterosexuals.”²⁰⁰ Fiske charged that the noisiest and most obvious homosexuals were actually getting in the way of homophile progress.

These lesbians and gay men, which Fiske identified as the “man-hater and misogynist male homosexual,” were implied to be the butch lesbian and effeminate male.²⁰¹ Fiske argued that even if the butch lesbian regarded “some aspect of accepting behavior is unpalatable” they should not “broadcast [their] individual failures.”²⁰² The

²⁰⁰ Irene Fiske, “On the Rejection of the Status Quo,” *The Ladder* 11, no. 5 (1967): 12.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid., 11.

rejection of respectable behavior and dress, to Fiske, “reflects on the behavior of the ENTIRE GROUP.”²⁰³ These ‘obvious’ homosexuals, according to Fiske, were the “noisiest of the lot ... [while] the well-adjusted square homosexual is likely to sit back and say nothing, being far too busy simply being happy in this world.”²⁰⁴ The well-adjusted homosexual, like many of the middle-class DOB members, dressed in a respectable, feminine style and did not demonstrate publicly or otherwise draw attention to themselves. Because of this, the wayward butches gave a “totally erroneous view to the world outside.”²⁰⁵ These butches and the image they created, Fiske argued, were dangerous for the homophile movement. Fiske concluded by reminding the readers that the fact that the majority of lesbians were indistinguishable from the rest of society that will “someday bring...the legislative, moral climate, and social changes [needed] to function fully and equally in the world.”²⁰⁶ By rejecting the butch and blaming her for the discrimination of lesbians and gays, the Daughters were able to distance themselves from a negative image and to reassert their base of respectability.

Fiske’s article, though not overtly criticizing the dress and mannerisms of the butch lesbian, was indicative of the trend within the organization. Other articles criticized the “masculine appearing woman with a short hair cut[sic]...who hates men” as the common stereotype of the larger lesbian stereotype.²⁰⁷ By rejecting society’s feminine demands this mannish woman made lesbian “synonymous with some bizarre, perverse,

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 12.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Christine Cummings, “A Lesbian Speaks her mind,” *The Ladder* 11, no. 4 (1967): 3.

neurotic and potentially suicidal group.”²⁰⁸ The perverse butch lesbian, according to Barbara Grier writing under a pseudonym, wanted to be left in “the flat beer suds” instead of joining a movement.²⁰⁹ The Daughters of Bilitis, though not trying to educate the wayward butch any longer, still disavowed her overt sexuality. Her very public display of deviant sexuality went against the policy of respectability, and so she and her younger generation were not welcome no matter how evolved the organization became.

Conclusion

When the Daughters of Bilitis began to change the conversation around homosexuality in the mid-sixties they also evolved as an organization. This evolution was necessary for the survival of the organization as members began to rankle at the politics of the organization. The schism that emerged in the organization was caused by their initial educational aims aimed at lesbians themselves. On one side was the organization, full of middle-class, conservative women, and on the other were the younger, sometimes butch, lesbians who wanted more than respectability from their politics.

The opposition that began to strengthen in the mid-sixties was composed of these younger lesbians like Barbara Gittings. Barbara Gittings demonstrated the transitional and generational shift which foreshadowed the end of the DOB as beliefs within the homophile movement shifted. Gittings was initially involved in the Daughters of Bilitis but left after she realized the organization was not evolving as quickly as the rest of American society. The respectability politics and consciousness raising in the fifties and

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 4.

²⁰⁹ Marilyn Barrow, “The Least of These,” *The Ladder* 13, no. 1 and 2 (1968): 31.

early sixties were essential for the growth of the homophile movement, but Gittings soon aligned herself with more radical figures like Frank Kameny. Kameny publicly pushed for immediate political change through public demonstrations and open speaking functions. However, the DOB did not believe that homosexuals were the most effective spokesmen for their inequalities and instead relied upon expert mouthpieces.

This stance on education meant that psychologists and psychiatrists wrote many of the articles published in *The Ladder*. They wrote articles discussing the psychological state of the lesbian and think pieces on the “sickness” of homosexuality. Unlike the Daughters, who would not speak on the medical or legal policies of homosexuality, these psychologists published articles arguing that homosexuality was not a sickness and was instead a normal evolution in humans. In addition, another doctor argued that lesbians were incredibly well-adjusted and, in many cases, more adjusted than their heterosexual counterparts.

The Daughters did not write articles on the subject but did engage in public discourse with several periodicals in the mid-sixties. In these articles, the members of the DOB intended to demonstrate their absolute normalcy and the mundanity of their existence. They wrote in and consented to interviews about lesbian identity. In these they discussed their partnerships, work lives, and the aims of the organization. They attempted to erase myths surrounding themselves and their organization to move the prevailing conversation away from the deviant image of the lesbian. This evolution to a more public discourse was very different from their initial aims of internal education.

With a larger focus on public education, the Daughters published less on educating the butch and deviant lesbian. Though they published less articles centered on

converting the butch lesbian, the DOB instead focused on articles that insinuated that the deviant lesbian was a roadblock to change for the homophile movement. Conversely, the DOB embraced their sexual images to make money from their book service. Over the course of six recorded years of the book service, the Daughters increasingly sold lesbian pulp fiction featuring the very images they sought to silence. The silencing of the butch lesbians and the younger, more radical generation is further evidenced in the Daughters' reluctance to join the homophile coalition.

The Daughters of Bilitis did evolve, but their evolution was not radical enough for many members of the organization. The leadership was too attached to the image they had cultivated over the years as a respectable, middle-class lesbian organization. By 1970, the organization began to decline due their ironfisted grasp on respectability and image.

CHAPTER IV – IT WAS TIME TO *BE* THE MESSAGE

Barone's Variety Room was located on the corner of Quince and Walnut in downtown Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The entrance to Rusty's, the popular lesbian bar upstairs, was in a small side alley off of Quince Street. In order to reach the bar, a patron climbed up a set of old wooden stairs to reach the second floor and proceeded down a corridor to a sound proofed room in the heart of the building. The dimly lit room was small but contained a bar to one side, a jukebox to the other, and a dance floor surrounded by clusters of tables. A patron would pay a two-dollar cover charge to a woman who, one lesbian remembered, wore "a white button-down shirt and slacks" and "look[ed] a little like a gym teacher [she] once had."²¹⁰ The door-woman, who was likely the owner of the bar, Rusty, would in exchange give her a small strip of drink tickets for the night. As the night would wear on, the room filled with young, college-aged women in casual clothes. On one such night in March of 1968, just after the bar filled with young female patrons, lights suddenly flooded the room, and the music abruptly stopped. As police formed a perimeter, the women present realized Rusty's was being raided under Philadelphia Commissioner Rizzo's war on the "commies" and the "fags."²¹¹

Barbara Gittings and several other members of the Philadelphia chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis were among the stunned patrons in Rusty's that night. As the "small posse of trench coat clad figures slowly moved from table to table" and rounded up

²¹⁰ Nancy Love, "The Invisible Sorority," *Philadelphia Magazine* (November 1967).

²¹¹ Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 274.

potential arrestees, the women were “verbally abused [and] police accused them of [being] drunk and disorderly.”²¹² Byrna Aronson, an assistant for the American Civil Liberties Union, had “leaned down to kiss [her] girlfriend on the cheek, and Captain Clarence Ferguson, in a pork-pie hat, tapped [her] on the should and said, ‘You’re under arrest.’”²¹³ When Aronson asked the officer why, she was told she was being arrested for sodomy. A total of twelve women were arrested and booked on different charges that night. Several of the women were charged with “making love on the floor,” being drunk and disorderly, or resisting arrest.²¹⁴ Though the charges were dismissed the next morning, the damage was lasting because all arrest records were sent to the Federal Bureau of Investigations.²¹⁵ This would prevent the women from gaining any employment requiring security clearance due to the Federal Government’s policy against hiring gays and lesbians. Gittings and other members of the Daughters of Bilitis evaded arrest that night, but, after several requests for help from the national board, they became enraged at the lack of action on the part of the national Daughters of Bilitis.²¹⁶

Following the police raid on Rusty’s, members of the Philadelphia Chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis grew angry with the city government and police department. They went to the police station to try and address the situation, and hopefully prevent future unprovoked raids, but they were turned away.²¹⁷ Upset and angry with both the raid and

²¹² Ibid., 275.

²¹³ Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin, interviewed by Manuela Soares, February 20, 1988, “Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin, Tape 1 of 3, February 20, 1988,” Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA, videotape, Lesbian Herstory Archives. <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/document/MV-36>.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 275.

²¹⁷ Gittings and Tobin, interviewed by Soares, February 20, 1988.

their treatment at the police station, DOB members in this chapter became much more politicized and petitioned their national headquarters for help and input on how to deal with the police raids and entrapment in Philadelphia. The incensed members thought the only way they could “do something about this type of situation where the police feel free to walk into a lesbian bar and literally pick women at random and say, ‘You, you, you, and you, you’re under arrest,’ ... is to go after authorities [and] change the political conditions in Philadelphia.”²¹⁸ These Philadelphia members sought guidance from the national organization on how to approach the police department and to inquire if picketing would be an acceptable form of public action.

Rather than acting independently of the national board, the chapter felt it needed permission from the board for any sort of group action. But, in 1968, the Daughters of Bilitis underwent national elections for the organization, further erasing the Philadelphia chapter’s potential ability to initiate any new form of public action. In response, or lack thereof, the national board did not respond to the calls for direction from Philadelphia. Instead, increasingly concerned with the leadership of the national board, the chapter received campaign materials. With no direction or advice from the board regarding the Rusty’s incident, the members no longer felt as if the main organization understood their immediate predicaments. Until the raid, the members “felt they had to write to national headquarters for permission to blow their noses,” but now they saw this amount of structure too restrictive and unacceptable as they could not engage with problems on the local scale. Feeling as if their immediate concerns were not being met by the board, the

²¹⁸ Ibid.

local members grew disappointed as campaign materials for the next election of the national board of the DOB did nothing for their plight.

Because of the bar raid, the lesbians in Philadelphia saw an opportunity for protest in response to discriminatory police action. Gittings and Tobin called the aftermath of the bar raid “ripe for the handling,” knowing there was no better time to act, but because of the structural restrictions within the DOB, the local organization was limited in its response.²¹⁹ Byrna Aronson, a member of the Philadelphia chapter, remembered that raid well as the event that gave their group the “first clear sense of direction.”²²⁰ The initial support she felt from the national board of the Daughters of Bilitis “raised her consciousness and helped her identify with a gay community,” but that event radicalized the women in Philadelphia. Carole Friedman, president of the Philadelphia chapter, remembered the challenge presented by the lack of interest from the national board: “Were we going to really try and change the world or were we going to talk among ourselves about how the world ought to change?”²²¹ The women who were ready for action felt they could not engage without permission from headquarters, but the women at headquarters were too interested in the election, “so they broke away.”²²²

Though middle-class lesbians definitively made up the Philadelphia chapter, the raid on a private lesbian bar they thought had been safe “increased their identifications with the mixed-class bar clientele.”²²³ The raid, for the Philadelphia chapter, erased the

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 275.

²²¹ Ibid., 276.

²²² Gittings and Tobin, interviewed by Soares, February 20, 1988.

²²³ Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 277.

class distinctions and middle-class ideals maintained by the DOB. Assimilation and education—long-treasured by the DOB—were not even close to the solutions the Philadelphia chapter wanted. With the lack of faith in those ideals, the importance of class distinctions also ceased in light of the fact that all lesbians, regardless of class, were harassed and arrested that night at Rusty’s. Instead the members formed an “independent, mixed-gay organization called the Homophile Action League (HAL).”²²⁴ Undoubtedly the dissolution of the Philadelphia chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis was partially due to the difficulties of working underneath the national board, but the raid on Rusty’s forced the women to see that DOB was “insufficiently political and militant.”²²⁵ During its four years of existence in Philadelphia, the HAL engaged in picketing, public demonstrations, and public education. While the women in the Philadelphia chapter of the DOB broke away and formed an independent society, they still adhered to their roots of education but also personally engaged in ‘less respectable’ acts of public demonstration rather than relying upon expert discourse for change.

The Philadelphia exodus from the main organizational hub came about primarily because of the limitations of the national structure. A national structure was initially important, according to Barbara Gittings, “because it was the only way to reach out and get things started in places where there [was] too much fear and not enough energy to overcome that fear.”²²⁶ The beginning years of the Daughters were ones of growth because of the national structure of the group. “After a while a national structure gets cumbersome, problematic, and its [*sic*] better [to] spin things off...which sometimes

²²⁴ Gittings and Tobin, interviewed by Soares, February 20, 1988.

²²⁵ Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 277.

²²⁶ Gittings and Tobin, interviewed by Soares, February 20, 1988.

happens in a very ugly way.”²²⁷ The Daughters had their share of problems as a national organization, according to Gittings, partly because of their adherence to a national structure supported by smaller chapters.²²⁸ Other homophile groups, including the Mattachine Society, had seen the same difficulties in organizing and collapsed into independently operated chapters. The Daughters of Bilitis would have followed a similar pattern if they had also restructured the group to operate strictly on a grassroots level.

The main cause of the organization’s closure revolved around their continued reliance upon respectability politics especially in response to the formation of more radical homosexual groups like the Homophile Action League. As these other homophile organizations began to evolve during the sexual revolution of the sixties and seventies, the Daughters, instead, chose to remain focused on their mission of social education and respectability politics which led to internal factions and significant decreases in membership numbers. In addition to shifting respectability, the other significant cause for collapse was the increasing number of competing organizations. Groups like the Homophile Action League and the radicalized Mattachine Society on the East Coast were joined by student organizations at Cornell and Columbia as well as other radical societies and groups.

Another cause, equally as important for the Daughters, was the growing power of the women’s rights movement of the 1960s. The feminist movement largely discouraged lesbian membership, but the DOB had long believed that heterosexual and homosexual

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin, interviewed by Manuela Soares, February 20, 1988, “Barbara Gittings & Kay Tobin, Tape 2 of 3, February 20, 1988,” Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA, videotape, Lesbian Herstory Archives. <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/document/DV37>.

women needed to work together in their goals for equality of the sexes. Though Betty Friedan referred to lesbians as the “Lavender Menace” whose problems were less political and more sexual, many members within the organization, including Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, chose to align their activism more closely with the women’s rights movement. This further splintering, adding to the exit of lesbians like Gittings who decided to pursue more radical activism, could only add to the weakening of the organization. Both causes were equally important to the collapse of the organization, but the continued reliance upon respectability politics had roots in the origins of the group and played a major role in its ultimate dissolution

From the inception of the Daughters of Bilitis, members and leadership alike had different opinions on the direction the organization should take. Initially, the majority of women in the group supported DOB’s initial aims of education and consciousness-raising sessions and lectures. The Daughters regularly invited legal and medical experts to speak at public lectures and conventions. Internally, they hosted “Gab-n-Javas” which were intended as consciousness-raising meetings for members to discuss a variety of topics concerning the lesbian experience.²²⁹

Well before the dissolution of the DOB national chapter, tensions erupted within the group and resulted in different factions. In New York, there was a “big drive to be

²²⁹ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, interviewed by Manuela Soares, May 9, 1987, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, Tape 2 of 4, May 9, 1987,” Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA, videotape, Lesbian Herstory Archives. <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/document/MV-5>

more social” and the chapter focused its time and money on monthly parties.²³⁰ Others in the group, a growing number by the mid-sixties, saw themselves strictly as a women and lesbian organization where “women could be without the threat of men.”²³¹ By 1968 a large portion of women in all DOB chapters, including founders Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, became involved in the feminist movement.²³² Nina Kaiser, one of the last presidents of the San Francisco chapter, remembered how the Florida branch of NOW to which she belonged was against the public participation of lesbians as they felt lesbian members would get in the way of female progress.²³³ Because of this, some lesbians wanted to “conceal the fact that [they] were lesbians” in order to get involved in the women’s movement.²³⁴ Members choose primary involvement between the two movements because they believed, as repeated in *The Ladder* and by Rita Laporte, that they “are human beings first, women second, and lesbians third.”²³⁵ Martin remembered that members of NOW occasionally “indulged in whispering campaigns and tried to lock the closet door.”²³⁶ However, in her case, the shared sexual oppression that women faced remained far more important than immediate social action for homosexuals—which would not help lesbians to the extent it would gay men.²³⁷ For many, it was only natural

²³⁰ Shirley Willer, interviewed by Manuela Soares, July 11, 1987, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Shirley Willer, Tape 2 of 2, July 11, 1987,” Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA, videotape, Lesbian Herstory Archives. <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/document/MV-24>.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon, and Nina Kaiser, interviewed by Manuela Soares, May 12, 1987, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon, and Nina Kaiser, Tape 4 of 4, May 12, 1987,” Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA, videotape, Lesbian Herstory Archives. <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/document/MV-7>

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Willer, interviewed by Soares, July 11, 1987.

²³⁵ “Lesbian Leader: ‘Men Aren’t Necessary,’” *Reno Gazette Journal* (Reno, NV), October 10, 1969.

²³⁶ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), 282.

²³⁷ Ibid., 287.

to align their politics with the larger population of heterosexual women and place their involvement in the homophile or gay rights movement on a second tier.²³⁸

In the late 1960s, the national organization began to fall apart due to the secondary causes of dwindling membership and a severe lack of funds stemming from general disillusionment with the organization's tactics. Financially, the Daughters of Bilitis, and their periodical, were supported by membership fees, subscriptions to *The Ladder*, monetary donations, and gifts from local businesses.²³⁹ Membership fees were nominal—five dollars for initiation and one dollar per month—but the leadership constantly hounded members for their dues. Similarly, subscribers to the magazine regularly received correspondence from the editors requesting their one-dollar annual payment.²⁴⁰ Even with these forms of income, finances were precarious until an anonymous donor, named “Pennsylvania,” began sending in \$3,000 checks to the Daughters through president Shirley Weller.²⁴¹ This money, as requested by “Pennsylvania,” was primarily intended to fund *The Ladder* with a small percentage going to other programs sponsored by DOB, especially the research fund which helped fund psychiatric research on lesbians.²⁴²

²³⁸ Martin, Lyon, and Kaiser, interviewed by Soares, May 12, 1987. Kaiser chose to become more involved with the Daughters of Bilitis while Martin and Lyon chose to be primarily involved with the women's movement and other gay rights activism instead of the DOB.

²³⁹ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, “Daughters of Bilitis and the Ladder that Teetered,” in *Everyday Mutinies: Funding Lesbian Activism*, ed. Esther D. Rothblum and Nanette Gartrell (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2nd edition, 113.

²⁴⁰ Martin, “Daughters of Bilitis and the Ladder that Teetered,” 115. It should be noted here that the five-dollar amount comes from the 1955 membership cost. These fees would rise to ten dollars for initiation by 1965. Similarly, the one-dollar subscription fee would rise to five dollars by 1965.

²⁴¹ Martin, “Daughters of Bilitis and the Ladder that Teetered,” 117. These checks were addressed to different leaders in the organization who would sign them over to the DOB. The total amount of the checks added up to over \$100,000 over five years.

²⁴² Martin, “Daughters of Bilitis and the Ladder that Teetered,” 117. These outreach programs included investing in research by psychiatrists and psychologists and, notably, a custody case involving a

These donations allowed for *Ladder* staff to publish the periodical on better paper and to invest further in content creation, beginning in 1965. As “Pennsylvania” was a friend of Shirley Willer, Willer had near-complete control over the what programs the donations funded. When Willer left the Daughters of Bilitis, “Pennsylvania” continued sending donation but changed their demarcations. Instead of divvying up the donations between outreach programs and the publication, all monies were now earmarked for the periodical. So, when Rita Laporte and Barbara Grier moved *The Ladder* from national headquarters, all donations and relevant income was also removed from headquarters.

While several members, including Martin and Lyon, were among the early members of DOB to join NOW, fracturing within the group over the subject of feminist activism did occur. However, while there were several contributing factors in the collapse of the Daughters of Bilitis, the iron-fisted adherence to respectability politics was the central cause in their end. It is evident throughout the history of the Daughters of Bilitis that the organizational leadership primarily relied upon their own brand of respectability politics to ground its aims. In the beginning, the founders created policies which were meant to instruct lesbians on how to adhere to societal ideals of both appearance and mannerisms. By the mid-sixties, as more tolerant and permissive homosexual rights groups emerged, the Daughters partially adapted their goals in education to focus more on the public instead of the wayward butch. By the end of the sixties, the splitting that occurred within the organization over leadership and educational aims only intensified, especially following the Stonewall Riots of 1969.

lesbian mother in California. This research was discussed in further detail in Chapter Three and took place in the mid-sixties.

Restructuring and Internal Fracturing

Shirley Willer, president of the national board, and Marion Glass spearheaded an effort to restructure the Daughter of Bilitis into a federation of independent chapters in 1968. Spurred on by the closing of the Philadelphia chapter, Willer and Glass believed the national board and office were becoming too cumbersome for continued existence.²⁴³ Under this restructuring, the group would be renamed the “United Daughters of Bilitis, Inc.” and would encompass only approved chapters “which have been authorized to conduct business as the Daughters of Bilitis.”²⁴⁴ Under this plan, each chapter would operate autonomously and finance themselves while contributing to *The Ladder*.²⁴⁵ The need for this change, Willer and Glass argued, occurred as the number of DOB chapters grew and fewer and fewer officers of the national board were located in San Francisco. Though usually a positive symptom of organizational growth, this led to increased communication difficulties. These difficulties crippled the operations of the national board and further increased member dissatisfaction as these disagreements were publicized. Glass and Willer knew the group was losing vitality and thought restructuring could save the once vibrant Daughters.²⁴⁶

This restructuring plan was never voted on or even put up for discussion during the national conventions of 1968 or 1970. Facing total rejection from the leadership, both Willer and Glass were frustrated and resigned from the Daughters of Bilitis.²⁴⁷ Even with

²⁴³ Willer, interviewed by Soares, July 11, 1987.

²⁴⁴ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 141.

²⁴⁵ Marilyn Barrow, “Changing Times,” *The Ladder* Vol. 13, No. 1 and 2 (1968): 31.

²⁴⁶ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 142.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Willer and Glass missing from the organization, their research and plan for restructuring became serious cause for debate among other members. Jeannette Howard Foster, another influential member, author, and contributor to *The Ladder*, vehemently defended the existence of the national board but observed that while some of the debate reflected “mere healthy differences of opinion” others “sounded dangerously close to civil war and secession.”²⁴⁸ Foster’s view of the in-fighting as a civil war was much closer to the truth than even she realized. When Willer and Glass left the organization, this caused a domino effect in falling membership numbers.²⁴⁹ Stella Rush, co-editor of *The Ladder*, and her partner both remember that they felt as if the organization was imploding over the debates over restructuring and also left the DOB in 1970.²⁵⁰ Restructuring the organization would have allowed for approved chapters to operate with more independence to prevent complete losses, like in Philadelphia. The heated debates soured the organization for the president of the Daughters as well as one editor for the magazine. With key figures leaving the organization in quick succession, regular members began to withdraw as well.

²⁴⁸ Jeannette Howard Foster, “Dominance,” *The Ladder* 13, no. 1 and 2 (1968): 17-18.

²⁴⁹ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 145.

²⁵⁰ Stella Rush and Helen Sandoz, interviewed by Manuela Soares, May 15, 1987, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Stella Rush and Helen Sandoz (aka Sten Russell and Helen Sanders), Tape 1 of 3, May 15, 1987,” Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA, videotape, Lesbian Herstory Archives. <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/document/210>.

Thieving Salvation

In 1970, as they realized the organization could not continue due to the fractious political infighting, Rita Laporte, president of the Daughters of Bilitis, and Barbara Grier, longtime contributor to *The Ladder*, took the mailing list for the periodical from national headquarters. Not able to see a path for saving the organization, Grier and Laporte believed taking the magazine was “an act of lesbian feminist salvation” rather than an outright theft.²⁵¹ The two women saw the growing institutional weakness in the DOB and decided to rescue the magazine in order for it, and its legacy, to survive. Though many members viewed this act as a violation of their privacy, Laporte and Grier believed the magazine should continue outside the organization. Perhaps unintentionally, the two women also removed a majority of the organization’s funding as well. Grier edited the periodical until 1972 and was instrumental in the changing mission of the magazine. Instead of editorials from psychiatrists, the new age of *The Ladder* saw articles on the patriarchy, male chauvinism, racism within lesbian organizations, and the gendered wage gap. The magazine no longer reflected the white, middle-class lesbians of the Daughters of Bilitis. Instead, under Grier’s direction, it illustrated the new lesbian feminist political attitudes of the newer, radical lesbian groups. This shift was largely due to Grier’s transformation within the homophile movement. Like Gittings she had initially accepted the DOB focus on education and assimilation. But by the 1970s both women had grown

²⁵¹ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 161.

disenchanted and left the organization with Grier beginning a new career in lesbian feminist publishing.²⁵²

The Ladder, with its over four thousand subscribers and multiple anonymous lesbian donors, was a key source of revenue for all branches of the DOB. After the publication moved to Reno, Nevada under the care of Grier and Laporte, the Daughters of Bilitis were forced to address this monumental loss of both income and what this meant to the group on a national scale. In an effort to quell the dissension, Del Martin made a motion to willingly divorce the periodical from the DOB, but most long-term members strongly opposed losing their only true source of national income and key organizational asset. Though most members detested the idea of simply giving the magazine to Laporte, the motion carried, and the Daughters of Bilitis officially separated from *The Ladder* on July 12, 1970.²⁵³ The debate over this divorce further led to the downfall of the national chapter board. Helen Sanders, an influential former president, resigned after seeing the tooth and nail fighting occurring within the group, urging, “I see very little love in the bitch-fights that go on in the homophile movement...perhaps we need to love ourselves before we can love anyone else in the cause.”²⁵⁴ The debates first over the restructuring of the group and then over the ‘theft’ of their periodical fully dismantled the once strong national organization. With the removal of the periodical from national headquarters in San Francisco, their unique purpose for existing above the other chapters was also removed.

²⁵² Passet, *Indomitable*, chap. 6.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, chap. 7.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Legacy of Memory

The chief legacies of the Daughters of Bilitis were their long-lasting dedication to education and publication in addition to their influence—intentional or not—on the creation of other gay rights groups. The personal legacies of women who began their lives of activism in the DOB fueled the next generation of LGBT rights work. Specifically, the lives of Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon, Barbara Gittings, and Barbara Grier ensured that the contributions of the Daughters to the homophile movement would not be lost to the passage of time. Martin and Lyon were members of the National Organization for Women (NOW) near its inception and helped found the Council on Religion and the Homosexual in 1964.²⁵⁵ Gittings joined with Dr. Frank Kameny in picketing events at the White House and other federal buildings and helped found the Homophile Action League (HAL) in Philadelphia.²⁵⁶ Additionally, Grier started Naiad Press, a lesbian publishing house, in her living room after she could no longer keep publishing *The Ladder*.²⁵⁷ These women had some of the strongest voices in the organization, but when they felt it had failed them or they themselves had outgrown DOB, they all fought on and brought the core tenet of education with them in their subsequent endeavors. In this way, the Daughters survived in a new age of activism through their original principles of education.

Though many of the larger characters moved on from the Daughters of Bilitis, several chapters continued to operate independently until the mid-nineties under evolving

²⁵⁵ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 169.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁵⁷ Passet, *Indomitable*, chap. 9.

aims and purposes. In the early seventies there were twenty small groups operating independently. A majority of these failed after one or two years but several continued to endure in Cleveland, New Orleans, San Francisco, New York, and Boston. The first four continued to operate under the aims and purposes of the original DOB, but the Boston chapter modernized certain outdated practices but kept the emphasis on social support for individuals and public education.²⁵⁸

Though the organization effectively collapsed in 1970, their periodical continued to be published independently until 1972. Incredibly controversial within the DOB, the “kidnapping” of the mailing list led to the creation of a lesbian publishing house by Grier and her longtime partner. The Daughters’ belief in education, though usually focused on the lesbian herself, lived on in the form of a Naiad Press, led by Barbara Grier, in the creation of the Lesbian Herstory Archive in Brooklyn, New York, and in the existence and formation of newer lesbian societies. In this way, the Daughters survived in a new age of activism through their original principles of education.

Naiad Press grew out of the hole left by the shuttering of *The Ladder* in Barbara Grier’s home beginning in 1972. Grier did not intend to begin a career in publishing following *The Ladder* as newer periodicals had grown to fill the void left by the loss of the DOB publication. These included *Big Mama Rag*, *Lesbian Tide*, *Dyke*, *off our backs*, and many others which “fed a rising spirit of freedom, pride, and visibility.”²⁵⁹ She and Laporte subscribed to these new magazines but began to hear news of authors encountering difficulties finding presses willing to publish lesbian-authored books,

²⁵⁸ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 192-193.

²⁵⁹ Passet, *Indomitable*, chap. 9.

poetry, and pamphlets. Anyda Marchant was one of these authors. Marchant, a Brazilian born, upper-class lesbian, had previously assisted Grier with the final expenses of *The Ladder*.²⁶⁰ In 1973, Marchant, who wrote plot-heavy fiction with lesbian undertones, could not find a publisher for her work. As most of the bigger publishers stuck to printing the more erotic pieces on lesbians, Grier was not altogether surprised. Instead of editing her novel to include overt erotic sex scenes, Marchant reached out to Grier for her professional assistance in self-publishing the book *The Latecomer*.²⁶¹ In spring of the next year, Marchant decided upon the name “Naiad” and hoped that a private press would “be our answer to the editorial policies of other book publishers and magazines.”²⁶² Grier, having written the “Lesbiana” column for over ten years, was more than prepared for managing an independent publishing house.

Marchant paid all startup costs for Naiad, leaving Grier free to focus on future projects and marketing. These future projects included reprints of popular pieces of lesbian pulp fiction and, most importantly, an index of *The Ladder*. The press struggled financially for several years, but due to Grier’s persistent penny-pinching it stayed afloat on subsidies and donations.²⁶³ The press published one book per year until 1976 when it published five. Convinced that the press had financial sustainability, Grier and Marchant made the decision to incorporate the press and turn the press into a business to meet demand for lesbian literature and educational materials.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

The foundation laid by Grier's editing of *The Ladder* and opening of Naiad Press broke ground for other lesbian publishers and educational organizations. Most notably, this includes the Lesbian Herstory Archive which began to grow out of Joan Nestle's apartment in Brooklyn, New York in 1972. Nestle, during the early sixties, was heavily involved in the Black Civil Rights and homophile movements but only after the Stonewall Riots did she become involved in the gay liberation movement. Both Nestle and her partner joined the Daughters of Bilitis in the mid-sixties but by 1969, they left the DOB for other pursuits.²⁶⁵

Together with a group of gay activists, who called themselves the Gay Academic Union, Nestle dedicated herself to collecting and preserving artifacts of the gay liberation movement. The archive would reside for the next fifteen years in her apartment as the archivists collected thousands of publications, tapes, films, and other ephemera for preservation. By the late 1970s, the archivists began engaging in public education in addition to preservation. Teachers would "turn shame into a sense of cherished history" and demonstrate the historical importance of lesbians in the gay liberation movement.²⁶⁶ Nestle and her team of archivists wanted to "include every woman who had the courage to touch another woman, whether for a night or a lifetime" in the story of gay liberation. The Lesbian Herstory Archives' "Statement of Purpose," though a great deal more militant, is reminiscent of the listing of aims on the inside cover of *The Ladder*. Much

²⁶⁵ Joan Nestle and Judith Schwarz, interviewed by Manuela Soares, November 14, 1992, "Pulled Quotes of Joan Nestle & Judith Schwarz, Tape 1 of 2, November 14, 1992," Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA, videotape, Lesbian Herstory Archives. <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/document/DV25>.

²⁶⁶ "History of the Lesbian Herstory Archives," last modified 2017, <http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/history>.

like the Daughters, the LHA wanted to collect artifacts of lesbian life in order to “analyze and reevaluate the Lesbian experience” in the larger historical narrative. Through the forced inclusion of lesbians in the narrative of the gay liberation movement, Nestle and her compatriots further expanded on those respectable goals of education from the very first meeting of the, then unnamed, Daughters of Bilitis in 1956.²⁶⁷

In addition to collecting homophile periodicals and publications from the beginning of the homophile movement, Nestle and four other women also wanted to “collect and preserve our own voices, the voices of our Lesbian community.”²⁶⁸ The women began collecting oral histories from women involved in any part of the gay liberation movement, but especially from women involved in the Daughters of Bilitis. The goal in forming the Lesbian Herstory Archive was a “commitment to rediscovering our past, controlling our present, and speaking to our future.”²⁶⁹ The oral histories collected from 47 former members—including Barbara Gittings, Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon, Barbara Grier, and Rita Laporte—supported the LHA’s goal of preserving the past to speak to the future.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives began sponsoring the “Daughters of Bilitis Video Project” in 1987 at the urging of former members of DOB who worked closely with the archive. The purpose of this project, according to the archival webpage, was to “gather interviews with the founders and former members of the Daughters of Bilitis in order to

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ “June 1975, Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter,”
<http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/news170>.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

document their critical role in the gay/lesbian liberation movement.”²⁷⁰ Though the main purpose of the video collection was to document the history of the organization, the true product of the interviews are the collective personal recollections of their childhoods, sexual awakenings, and personal views of the Daughters of Bilitis both in the past and the present. The interviews were not just documentations of the DOB, but instead the women analyzed several key questions including whether the group was primarily social or activist and the purposes of assimilation.²⁷¹

Represented in the project are 47 past members of the Daughters of Bilitis. Several major figures were present, including: Marion Zimmer Bradley, pulp author and contributor to *The Ladder*; Barbara Gittings, radical former editor of *The Ladder*; Barbara Grier, author of the influential “Lesbiana” column in *The Ladder*; Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, founders of the Daughters of Bilitis; and Edith Eyde, otherwise known as ‘Lisa Ben,’ editor of the first lesbian publication in the United States. In addition to these standout interviews were former members representing chapters of the Daughters of Bilitis across the nation. This archive was an exact implementation of the Daughters’ lasting goals in education as the archivists dedicated themselves to “preserving for the future all expressions of our identity—written, spoken, drawn, filmed, photographed, recorded.”²⁷²

²⁷⁰ “Daughters of Bilitis Video Project,”
<http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/exhibits/show/daughters-of-bilitis-video-pro>

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² “June 1975, Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter”

The site, located in someone's home, itself is a "ritual space within which cultural memory and history are preserved" in a more accessible location for lesbians.²⁷³ This environment was especially important as it allows for the documentation and preservation of more than documents and histories but also the "intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism" that accompanies all queer historical archives.²⁷⁴ The inclusion of oral histories taped after Stonewall on the activities of an organization in existence before Stonewall put the narrative of the LHA in a complex position. The histories, comprising hundreds of hours of oral interviews, were evidence of the motivation to both preserve the history of the Daughters of Bilitis and gave the historical actors the opportunity to present their own history in the best—or, worst—possible light. The Lesbian Herstory Archives contain interviews from women on both the "liberal" and "conservative" sides of the Daughters of Bilitis. This was seen especially clearly in the oral histories of founders Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon and the histories of Barbara Gittings and Shirley Willer.

In the taping of oral histories both the interviewer and the interviewee have partaken in the creation of memory rather than the recounting of objective history. Throughout these interviews, former members cemented their own version of the memory of the Daughters of Bilitis on videotape to be preserved as history. The act of remembrance, as seen in these video tapes, was highly individual for each woman. As an example, Shirley Willer, one of the last presidents of the DOB, angrily argued that the Daughters had been going downhill for several years in light of bad leadership and an unwillingness to evolve. However, when speaking about the last several years of the

²⁷³ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 241.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

organization, Del Martin argued that many women peacefully moved on to other ventures, both in activism and outside. These two views, definitively on polar ends of opinion, demonstrated the ability each woman had in the manufacturing of their collective memory. Taken together, these memories form a history which demonstrates the strength of the organization in its infancy and how the organization was integral to the creation of other activist organizations.

Gay Rights Groups after the Homophile Era

In addition to the legacies of *The Ladder* in the form of publishing and archival collections, the Daughters, and other homophile groups, inspired the birth of several gay rights groups in the late sixties and early seventies. The latter half of the sixties and seventies saw the continuance of the core values of the Daughters of Bilitis in consciousness-raising sessions. Though growing in the ground plowed by the early homophile movements, the newer gay rights movement transformed the core educational values of the Daughters and used consciousness-raising as a nexus for political mobilization. These groups included the previously discussed Homophile Action League, gay and lesbian student organizations, the Gay Liberation Front, and the Gay Activists Alliance among others.

These more radical gay rights groups were heavily inspired by the activism in the Black Civil Rights movement and in the anti-Vietnam War movement. The homophile movement of the fifties and sixties worked to provide social services for gay men and lesbians, education for themselves and the public on homosexuality, and eventually,

challenge the labelling of homosexuality as a sickness.²⁷⁵ The newer gay rights groups in the age of protest emerged from the homophile movements and embraced, in varying degrees, radical direct-action politics. Forms of direct action included marches and sit-ins. Following the 1969 Stonewall riot, these became even more common and gay rights organizations distanced themselves even further from their conservative roots.²⁷⁶

Gay activism evolved slowly from the initial conservative homophile movements. Philadelphia's Homophile Action League (HAL), formed by former members of the Daughters of Bilitis represented both a break from the homophile movement and a bridge to the radical groups of the seventies.²⁷⁷ The Society for Individual Rights (SIR) in San Francisco was another example of a "bridge" group which participated in NPCHO—an offshoot of ECHO—alongside the Daughters before DOB's anti-coalition stance. Both groups were "less interested in 'fitting in'" than the conservative homophile groups but did not engage in militant forms of protest.²⁷⁸ Instead, these groups engaged in political action for LGBT issues.²⁷⁹

The main purpose of HAL was to "strive to change society's legal, social, and scientific attitudes" towards gay men and lesbians in order that they would be recognized as "first class citizen[s] and first class human being[s]."²⁸⁰ This purpose did not diverge completely from those of the original homophile groups but their methods of achieving

²⁷⁵ Simon Hall, "Protest Movements in the 1970s: The Long 1960s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 4 (2008): 656.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 660.

²⁷⁷ Chuck Stewart, ed., *Proud Heritage: People, Issues, and Documents of the LGBT Experience* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2015), 431

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 430.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 431.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

that goal were slightly more radical. In addition to publishing articles and writing to a diverse set of publications, HAL also dedicated itself to boycotting and picketing to protest businesses which discriminated against the LGBT population.²⁸¹ In their first newsletter the group emphasized the word “action” in their name to demonstrate their main difference from the Daughters of Bilitis. Gittings did not conceive HAL to be “a social group...[that] concentrate[s] energies on ‘uplifting’ the homosexual community” as the founders believed that goal to be incorrect and misplaced.²⁸² Instead they wanted to uplift the heterosexual community and focus all the organization’s energies on changing that population.²⁸³

The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was formed directly in the aftermath of the Stonewall riot in June of 1969. Within a month, the group was formed to “use direct confrontation against anyone or any organization that limited gay rights.”²⁸⁴ Unlike both the original homophile movement and the “bridge” groups, the GLF did not engage in any form of consciousness-raising and instead wanted to “blow people’s minds” by demanding immediate equality in all aspects of life for the LGBT population.²⁸⁵ They declared their militancy by naming themselves after the National Liberation Fronts of Vietnam and claiming that “No Vietnamese Ever Called Me a Queer.”²⁸⁶ The GLF did not just focus themselves on gay rights but also supported the antiwar movement and

²⁸¹ Ibid., 432.

²⁸² Ibid., 431.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 461.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Emily K. Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 4.

lesbian feminism.²⁸⁷ The GLF meetings were revolutionary and combined issues of capitalism, racism, and classism. However, when they aligned themselves with the Black Panther movement, many members chafed at the Panthers' homophobic rhetoric and refusal to address LGBT issues.²⁸⁸ These members broke away and formed the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA).

The GLF and GAA together radicalized the gay liberation movement and they began to completely eclipse the older homophile movements.²⁸⁹ With the movement "no longer cap-in-hand, no longer suit-and-tie," they began hosting raucous marches and sit-ins at the very places denying them equal rights.²⁹⁰ "Gay-ins" were held in Los Angeles's Griffith Park to protest unlawful entrapment of gay men but were attacked by police.²⁹¹ Still they organized rowdy and campy demonstrations meant to show the world they refused to assimilate into society and demanded their rights. In both organizations activists would march with church leaders against police brutality, picket to remove a "FAGOTS STAY OUT" sign in West Hollywood, and protest the war with chants of "suck Cock, beat the draft."²⁹² In 1970 they commemorated the Stonewall riots with marches of several thousand gay men, lesbians, and transgendered people turning out in cities across the nation to remind society that they were not going anywhere.

The Daughters of Bilitis, consistent with other homophile organizations, did not allow for members under the age of twenty-one to join their groups. When the Daughters

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Stewart, *Proud Heritage*, 461.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 462.

²⁹⁰ Mark Thompson, ed., *Long Road to Freedom: The Advocate History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 33.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 34.

²⁹² Ibid., 35.

of Bilitis was founded in 1955, the members voted for a rule which would prevent women under the age from joining. The reasoning behind these rules was to avoid police action on the accusation that the Daughters were an immoral group or indoctrinating and corrupting young women. These rules excluded many prospective members over the years and student-led groups inspired by homophile organizations, like the Daughters, began to form on university campuses across the nation.²⁹³

The success of the GLF inspired students across the United States to form their own independent chapters on their campuses. However, before the GLF even formed, an openly bisexual student at Columbia University in New York formed one of the first student organizations in 1966. This group, named the Student Homophile League (SHL), was the first recognized student group of its kind and inspired the creation of other student groups at Cornell, New York University, Penn State, and Stanford.²⁹⁴ Communication with the traditional homophile organizations was limited due to the age restrictions of those groups, but all of these student organizations certainly grew from the progress made by the homophile organizations like the Daughters of Bilitis.

These early student organizations provided peer support and a positive environment for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students.²⁹⁵ As the end of the sixties grew near, the organizations slowly grew in number and began embracing a more militant stance on gay rights, diverging from their homophile forerunners. The members in groups

²⁹³ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 193.

²⁹⁴ David A. Reichard, "‘We Can’t Hide and They Are Wrong’: The Society for Homosexual Freedom and the Struggle for Recognition at Sacramento State College, 1969-1971," *Law and History Review* 28, no. 3 (2010): 630.

²⁹⁵ Reichard, "We Can’t Hide," 631. Here it should be noted that these organizations did not make any notable reference to transgendered students. However, this is not divergent from other homophile or homosexual organizations.

on college campuses were part of the larger, national generational split as seen in the falling membership numbers in homophile organizations like the Daughters of Bilitis. In addition, the more militant civil rights movement and the younger antiwar movement inspired these younger activists. Frank Kameny, commenting on the growth of organizations on college campuses, noted that they served as bases for public education to better advocate for homosexual students.²⁹⁶

These student organizations did not only form in the traditional, bicoastal regions, but instead sprang up all over the nation. By 1972, over 150 separate college gay rights groups had been recognized by their respective campus administrations with innumerable more going unrecognized.²⁹⁷ One such unrecognized group, The University of Kentucky Gay Liberation Front, was rejected recognition by the university based on outdated and incorrect information on homosexuality from the psychiatric profession. Regardless, the group reported that their main purpose, similar to that of the early homophile groups, was to foster understanding between the university's heterosexual and homosexual populations.²⁹⁸ In order to achieve this goal, they wanted to "promote such activities as open forums, sensitivity groups, AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) and VD (venereal disease) lectures, [and] religious study groups."²⁹⁹ This student organization would eventually be granted recognition by their university and become a mainstay on their campus. Though

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 631 n. 6.

²⁹⁷ Richard Wilson, "UK gay group appeals rejection of its registration," *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), June 1, 1972.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

all of the newer gay rights groups seemed to have completely left conservative respectability behind, they owed their existence to the homophile movement of the fifties.

Though the Daughters of Bilitis fell apart on a national scale in the fall of 1970, the legacy of the Daughters exists today through the telling of their story and the existence of lesbian publications and organizations. The gay liberation movement owes its existence to the homophile movement as it arose both as an evolution and as an opposition to the homophile movement.³⁰⁰ The Daughters of Bilitis, together with other homophile movements, worked to educate the public to normalize homosexuality and to fight against legalized discrimination and police oppression. The use of publications like *The Ladder* as a tool to educate a wide audience of readers brought gay and lesbian issues to the public eye. Homophile groups varied in their approaches to the problems surrounding homosexuality, but they all ostracized the working-class and non-white gay men and women through adherence to forms of respectability politics.³⁰¹

Though undoubtedly credited with the first efforts to normalize homosexuality, the class divisions and reliance upon social respectability plagued the Daughters of Bilitis into national collapse. Divisions appeared “between many homophile groups and the working-class, gender-transgressive, and racially diverse queer life of gay bars, house parties, and cruising grounds.”³⁰² These divisions were further exacerbated by the younger, more radical generation of lesbians and gays coming of age in the sixties and seventies. The respectable gay image supported by homophile groups no longer had a place in the radically evolving political culture. Following the Stonewall Riots, “people

³⁰⁰ Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, chap. 1.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² *Ibid.*

suddenly didn't want to abide by the dress rules anymore, they wanted to hold hands, they wanted to attract attention" Gone were the days of wearing skirts and avoiding gay bars. Instead, as one woman said, "We aren't just the bearers of the message, we are the message." Even the more conservative women from older generations realized it was time to "do more than carry the message, it was time to be the message."³⁰³ The message of education, born in the fifties from eight women in a living room, was the legacy they would leave behind.

Conclusion

Living in both the "deviant" and "normal" worlds, the leadership of The Daughters of Bilitis adhered to a conservative public persona as evidenced through political activities and the publication of *The Ladder*. This juxtaposition of their existence, caught between the "deviant and the "normal," the largely middle-class, white membership exhibited socially conservative views to make long-term change. The leadership's goal of long-term social change was the product of McCarthy era homophobia as well as the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement. This combination led to an inherent contradiction of both maintaining class status and public respectability coupled with exclusion of lesbian identities which could be construed as overly publicly "deviant."

The fifteen-year long span of the main organization saw small amounts of evolution from their initial conservatism, but it is evident that the leadership of DOB

³⁰³ Gittings and Tobin, interviewed by Soares, February 20, 1988.

did not understand the complexities of their membership as well as the disparities between the leadership and the membership. This lack of understanding and slow response to change and evolve are but two reasons for both the importance of the organization to later women's and lesbian organizations, but also the very reason for its downfall. The DOB paved the way and forged a beginning for activism dependent on respectability. Later organizations would take up the mantle of activism and, largely as a result of the changing social climate, concentrate less on the public perception of respectability and more on widening the publicity of the existence of lesbians. Though the organization lasted for only fifteen years and the publication lasted for sixteen, it is inarguable that they both had an enormous impact upon future gay rights activism.

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