

“WHAT A GORGEOUS DYKE!”:
CULTIVATING THE DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS LESBIAN IDENTITY, 1955-1975

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I began my master's program rigidly opposed to writing a thesis. Who in their right mind would put themselves through such insanity, I often wondered when speaking with fellow graduate students pursuing such a goal. I realize now, that to commit to such a task, is to succumb to a wild obsession. After completing the paper assignment for my Historical Research and Writing class, I was in far too deep to ever turn back. In this section, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to the following individuals who followed me through this obsession and made sure I came out on the other side. First, I need to thank fellow history graduate student, Ricky Pugh, for his remarkable sleuthing skills in tracking down invaluable issues of *The Ladder* and *Sisters*. His assistance saved this project in more ways than I can list. Thank-you to my second reader, Dr. Kelly Kolar, whose sharp humor and unyielding encouragement assisted me not only through this thesis process, but throughout my entire graduate school experience. To Dr. Susan Myers-Shirk, who painstakingly wielded this project from its earliest stage as a paper for her Historical Research and Writing class to the final product it is now, I am eternally grateful. Her enthusiasm and dedication cannot be matched. And finally, I must thank Laney Humphrey, without whom, nothing is possible. Her love and strength has kept me sane these past two years. Sweetheart, what can I say, you rule this foolish heart.

ABSTRACT

In October of 1955, eight women gathered in San Francisco, California to form the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB). Together, these women pioneered a new path for lesbian rights and forever altered the public perception of lesbianism in the United States as the first lesbian homophile movement. What began as a social club for lesbians to escape the frequently raided gay bars, over time, became a nationally recognized organization dedicated to integrating the lesbian woman into society and educating the heterosexual American public about the lesbian. This thesis uses the Daughters of Bilitis as a focal point for understanding the lesbian experience and identity in twentieth century America. It also explores the development of numerous, and distinct, lesbian subcultures centered around issues of class, generational conflicts, race, and political radicalism. DOB emphasized the notion of the “average lesbian,” an identity set apart from the culturally dominant image of the tough lesbian bar crowd that permeated heterosexual society. In doing so, this thesis argues that DOB created a second mainstream lesbian identity for the latter half of the twentieth century and that a more accurate interpretation of DOB results when we see them as revolutionary without exception.

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CHAPTER I: IT'S BILL-EE-TIS! NOT BILL-EYE-TIS!¹

“The DOB was like the frontier, even if you didn’t travel to it, the very knowledge of its existence gave you a larger sense of yourself.”

—Joan Nestle, 1992 interview

After tapping the butt of her cigarette in an ashtray, Shirley Willer leaned back in her chair and peered seriously out from behind her black, coke-bottle thick glasses at her interviewer. “We were headed toward dignity,” she began in her husky Chicago accent, “we wanted dignity for ourselves. Individually we each had it.... We were leaders of our profession,” Willer remarked, commenting on the life she and her partner Marion Glass led as head of a hospital and research analyst respectively. “Why would we have to separate out our private life from this respect? Why couldn’t we be respected as whole people? That’s what we wanted. And we kept heading that way for the whole chapter and hopefully for the country.”² This sentiment expressed by Willer, New York chapter president and later national president of the Daughters of Bilitis, encapsulates much of the organization’s primary goal— ensuring individual and collective dignity for the lesbian in society.³ To accomplish this, women of Daughters of Bilitis constructed a lesbian identity presentable in any public forum as a means of combating the negative stigmas

¹ The often mispronounced name of Bilitis was given this correct pronunciation in Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Carol and Graf, 2006), 3.

² Manuela Soares, “Lesbian Herstory Archives: Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Shirley Willer, Tape 2 of 2, July 11, 1987,” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*.

³ DOB members had the tendency to use the phrase “the lesbian” as opposed to lesbians when making claims about or discussing the nature of lesbians in society. This linguistic preference will be used throughout the thesis when discussing the DOB’s lesbian identity.

associated with lesbianism in mainstream American culture.⁴

Formed in 1955 in San Francisco, California by eight women, the Daughters of Bilitis, or DOB as it was affectionately called by its members, pioneered a new path for lesbian rights and forever altered the public perception of lesbianism in the United States as the first lesbian homophile movement. The homophile movement was a collection of organizations during the 1950s and 1960s that advocated accommodationist tactics to raise awareness and educate the heterosexual public on the homosexual's oppressed status in society. The prefix "phile," meaning "same love," over "sexual" for the group's title was administered purposefully to deescalate the sexual components of same sex relationships. The organizations included in this movement were The Mattachine Society for gay men established in 1950, followed by the mix gendered group, One Inc.⁵ What began as a social club for lesbians to escape the frequently raided gay bars, over time, became a nationally recognized organization dedicated to integrating the lesbian woman into society and educating the heterosexual American public about the lesbian. Under DOB's direction the lesbian was transformed into the "every woman... from all walks of life," who was "indistinguishable from other women in dress, in manner, in goals and desires, in actions and in interests."⁶ Emphasized by DOB was their notion of the "average lesbian," an identity set apart

⁴ A note on sources: This thesis incorporates a social history methodology approach as it is mostly concerned with the activities and thoughts of DOB members, leaders, and editors. To accomplish this, I have consulted several periodicals that were created or influenced by the DOB, such as, *The Ladder*, *Sisters*, *Focus*, and *The Lesbian Tide*. I accessed copies of *The Ladder* through two different digital collections: the Women and Social Movements in the United States 1600-2000 database from the Middle Tennessee State University library and the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Archives (ALFA) which I accessed through the University of Berkeley's library online. I also used ALFA to view all copies of *Sisters*. I used the manuscript collection, The Papers of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, from the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, California which I accessed digitally from the Austin Peay State University library. Through this manuscript I gained access to *Focus*. *The Lesbian Tide* I utilized digitally as well through the *Independent Voices* online collection. Lastly, I drew heavily from the digital collection of oral histories housed at the Lesbian Herstory Archives titled the "Daughters of Bilitis Video Project."

⁵ For a complete history of the homophile movement, see John D'Emilio *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁶ Untitled document in *Writings, DOB & Lesbiansim, Lyon*, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 93-13, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, Accessed through Austin Peay State University Library Archives *Unbound* online database.

from the culturally dominant image of the tough lesbian bar crowd that permeated heterosexual society as a dangerous and at times laughable stereotype.

This thesis argues that in turning away from bar culture, DOB created a second mainstream lesbian identity for the latter half of the twentieth century.⁷ The Daughters popularized an alternative lesbian lifestyle separate from bar life that instead highlighted lesbians as a professional, visible, and functioning member of society who had lesbian friends and enjoyed an active social life. While not all women who participated in DOB or read the organization's publication *The Ladder* achieved this lifestyle, they subscribed to and hungered for the status *The Ladder* presented as an attainable goal. While bar life gave women a very specific outlet in which to act on their erotic desires, DOB offered lesbians a life equivalent to their heterosexual counterparts, a life representing the lesbian American dream.

Navigating three distinct and turbulent decades of American history, 1950s to the 1970s, the Daughters of Bilitis adjusted alongside their members when necessary to accommodate the effects of a diverse counterculture. At its core, however, DOB remained the middle ground for the average lesbian and provided a space resistant to extreme politics and the overt eroticism of bar culture. Providing women with a solid identity to fall back on, DOB cultivated a safe space for women to meet, connect, and experience what many women deemed a more "authentic" lesbian lifestyle. Important as well in this distinctive lesbian lifestyle were the tools younger generations of lesbians would later use to break away from the homophile fold and begin new organizations in the heyday of lesbian feminism. By creating a middle-ground identity, the DOB instilled confidence in women to pursue other ventures in a radical political environment or to live unabashedly as a lesbian woman.

⁷ Lesbian bar culture refers to the type of community that grew out of bars that catered to lesbian women. This culture was dominated by butch-fem dynamics and became for many women their first coming out experience.

Historiographies of the Daughters of Bilitis are limited. Although, the field of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) history is a bustling and imaginative network of scholars working across interdisciplinary lines, few monographs have narrated exclusively the development and significance of the lesbian experience and identity in the homophile movement and beyond. LGBT history still understands much of its experience through a male gaze.⁸ This thesis looks to expand the literature of lesbian history by using the Daughters of Bilitis as a focal point for the lesbian experience and identity. It also explores the development of numerous, and distinct, lesbian subcultures centered around issues of class, generational conflicts, race, and political radicalism. Most importantly, this thesis reinterprets the historiography of DOB as revolutionary without exception.

Historiography of DOB Scholarship

Lesbian history, along with its identifying term, lesbian, is contested. Historian Nan Alamilla Boyd rightly described the scholarship when she claimed that lesbian history, “as a field, often confuses the identity, as a container, with the community or social form that engages that identity.”⁹ This is fueled by lesbian history scholars’ tendency to cycle through the same questions and arguments in an attempt to definitively construct a lesbian identity over time. How should women who exhibited same-sex desires in the past be defined? Should they be defined? Who should be considered a lesbian? Furthermore, what is a lesbian? Identity forming questions such as these have plagued the study of lesbian history from its inception, leading scholars on

⁸ Linda Garber, "Where in the World Are the Lesbians?" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14 no. 1-2 (2005) 28-50.

⁹ Nan Alamilla Boyd, "The History of the Idea of the Lesbian as a Kind of Person," *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 362.

endless searches for an authentic lesbian past or to further a social constructionist argument of lesbian identity.¹⁰

But rather than confuse lesbian identity as a container for the whole, Boyd advocates that historians investigating the lesbian identity should allow for “messy interactions between ideas and their utility” by “historicizing the production of meanings.”¹¹ Doing so, historians can begin to understand that lesbian as an identity contains a myriad of overlapping and contrasting interpretations based on historical positioning and the personal reflections of people who subscribe to certain identities. Rather than attempting to define and delimit the lesbian, historians should recognize lesbians as “a kind of person,” or idea.

The plurality of the lesbian identity, as a continuously evolving and changing entity, represents a starting point from which scholarship may grow. In this way, lesbian scholarship will always exist in a continuous state of flux, wrestling with its own state of identity, as scholarship channels through different historical understandings of memory. This is especially true when examining the scholarship of the Daughters of Bilitis. Scholarship about this organization grapples overwhelmingly with questions of identity of the organization, its goals and values, and the demographics of participants. Because of the fluid, overlapping, and contrasting identity of the lesbian, the scholarship of the DOB should be framed in thematic

¹⁰ For works on the history of women with same sex desire that explore the essentialist vs the social constructionist debate see, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America,” *Signs* 1 (1975): 1-29; Blanche Wiesen Cook, “Female Support Networks and Political Activism: Lillian Wald, Crystal Eastman, Emma Goldman,” *A Heritage of Her Own* Nancy Cott and Elizabeth Pleck, eds. (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1979) and “The Historical Denial of Lesbianism,” *Radical History Review* 20 (1979): 60-65; Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1981); Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 631-60; Rupp, Leila J. *A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-Sex Love in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004). For a general overview see, Vicinus, Martha, “The History of Lesbian History,” *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 566-596.

¹¹ Boyd, “The History of the Idea of the Lesbian as a Kind of Person,” 363.

rather than chronological terms. Doing so draws attention to the tendency of historians of lesbian history to both abide by and disrupt a progress-driven narrative of gay and lesbian history that emerged out of the excitement of the 1969 Stonewall Riots and the gay liberation movements of the 1970s. A progress-driven narrative of the Daughters of Bilitis leads scholars to frame the history of the DOB in terms of the pre-Stonewall era that is seen as synonymous with invisibility, isolation, and strict assimilationist tactics. This era of isolation is used as a direct contrast to the post-Stonewall era where activism was radical, forward thinking, and more successful than the earlier homophile movement. This type of dichotomy places a large wedge between DOB and lesbian feminism that few scholars attempt to dislodge.

The majority of scholars of the DOB have argued that the DOB's identity was rooted in a predominately white, middle and upper-class membership. These historians maintain that the organization shunned lesbians who "role played" or embodied butch/femme relationship dynamics, as DOB lesbians viewed these roles as synonymous with the working-class bar scene and therefore dangerous. These same scholars argue that the DOB largely ignored the concerns of women of color and actively excluded them.¹² This narrative has dominated the discussion of the DOB and continues to do so in contemporary scholarship. Instances of historians who wish to complicate this narrative crop up intermittently in an attempt to diversify the history of the lesbian homophiles.

Emily Holod in "Politics of Accommodation, Practices of Integration" (2003) argues against the grain of the DOB's dominant narrative by contending that the DOB may have

¹² John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Elizabeth Kennedy Lapovsky and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Steven Capsuto, *Alternate Channels* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000).

publicly dismissed butch/femme relationships, working-class women, and women of color, but privately they admitted these women into the DOB ranks.¹³ Overlooking the nuances of a more diverse demographic of lesbian participants, Holod argues, does a disservice to the history of the organization. Although acknowledging the bravery of the DOB to form a group during the McCarthy era witch hunts, Holod ultimately concludes that the DOB failed. She states the organization, “failed to reach its aim... in the end, the DOB was too concerned with accommodation to the heterosexual society and not concerned enough with building links across cultural, class, and racial lines within the lesbian community.”¹⁴ This positions Holod’s argument in two camps, one that simultaneously disrupts the dominant narrative of the DOB by addressing the diversity of women who participated while also maintaining a traditionalist approach that classifies the DOB as strictly accommodationist in comparison to the gay liberation movement in a post-Stonewall era.

Likewise, Marc Stein in his influential text *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves* (2000) positions the Daughters in a decidedly accommodationist context while also expanding the historiography of the homophile movement by analyzing how constructs of gender intersected with their policies and values. Stein claims that although gay men and lesbians were connected because of their shared minority status, they were divided on issues of gender and the emphasized inherent differences between men and women. These differences, in homosexual circles, became further exaggerated over time. Positioning his argument in a gendered context

¹³ Emily Holod, “Politics of Accommodation, Practices of Integration: The Daughters of Bilitis and their Organizing around Differences of Race, Class and Sexuality,” (Masters thesis, Sarah Lawrence College, 2003).

¹⁴ Ibid, 45.

enables Stein to emphasize the feminist slant to the creation of the DOB and its fragmented relationship to lesbian-feminist and other radical feminist movements.¹⁵

The DOB was created to provide a safe space for women by women to connect, converse, and later, take action. This group functioned as a platform for women to escape the tendency of gay male dominated homophile organizations, such as Mattachine Society and One Inc., to overlook lesbian issues. As Stein explains, “media narratives constructed gay men as visible and lesbians as invisible... lesbians were more likely to define themselves in relation to gay men than the other way around.”¹⁶ Constantly overshadowed by gay men, lesbians found the women-centric DOB appealing, as Stein illustrates, because it acted as a space to discuss lesbian related issues which differed considerably from gay men and their concerns in society. This strand of separation of the sexes can be loosely tied to the lesbian-feminist emphasis on single sex organizing. Stein acknowledges that the DOB’s desire for a women’s-only organization has certain parallels to the later lesbian-feminist model of women’s-only-consciousness-raising groups and political activism. Stein does not elaborate any further, however, on these connections or consider the possibility that the DOB provided women with their first experience of women’s-only organizing that later impacted lesbian-feminist groups.¹⁷

Like Holod who both diversified and restricted the DOB narrative, Stein downplays the DOB’s influence and importance in comparison to post-Stonewall activism, such as lesbian-feminists, who he describes as radical and progressive in pursuing gay and lesbian rights. The

¹⁵ For more scholarship concerning the relationship between lesbians, DOB specifically, and radical feminist groups see, Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women’s Liberation* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1975); Victoria Hesford, *Feeling Women’s Liberation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave* (New York: The Free Press, 2003).

¹⁶ Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Love: Lesbian And Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 175.

¹⁷ For an in-depth analysis of the connections between DOB and later feminist activism see, Marcia Gallo, *Different Daughters* (New York: Carol and Graf, 2006).

DOB, in turn, is consistently portrayed as a group earnestly seeking respectability and pursuing an integrationist model for lesbian acceptance. Admittedly, the DOB saw accommodationist tactics as a strength to garner positive public visibility and a platform to advocate for their rights, but Stein maintains that, in using accommodationist tactics, the DOB oppressed and marginalized others who could not fit the mold of respectability.¹⁸ This positions both Holod and Stein in a more traditional historiographical context when evaluating the role and identity of the Daughters of Bilitis. Other scholars, however, break this tradition and interpret the organization differently while continuing to explore the same contestable questions of identity.

Kelly Anderson's often cited and influential master's thesis, "Out in the Fifties," (1995) disrupts the continuity of the assimilationist narrative of the DOB and instead embraces the paradoxical nature of the organization in terms of its class, racial, and governing identity. As Anderson asserts, "The Daughters of Bilitis is a significant figure in modern lesbian history... the gains made by the group... are paramount to a more complete understanding of the historical struggle over lesbian and gay rights."¹⁹ As opposed to scholarship that limits the scope of the DOB, Anderson emphasizes its centrality to the post-Stonewall gay liberation movements and culture. Incorporating a more forgiving tone, Anderson situates the homophile movement within its original context, the McCarthy witch hunting years of the 1950s.²⁰ Instead of comparing and contrasting the DOB to a later, and for them unknown, liberationist future, Anderson interprets the DOB's integrationist leanings as an understandably pragmatic decision. Believing that the DOB's discourse and image were more complicated than the simplistic assessments earlier

¹⁸ Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Love*, 223-224.

¹⁹ Kelly Anderson, "Out in the Fifties: the Daughters of Bilitis and the Politics of Identity," (Master's thesis, Sarah Lawrence College, 1995), 4.

²⁰ For more on the homophile movement during the McCarthy era period see, David Johnson, *The Lavender Scare* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005). For historical context of the 1950s in which DOB was founded see, Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound* (New York: Basic Books Publishers, 1988).

scholars might suggest, Anderson instead argues that the DOB, while messy, showed evidence of “a radical assertion of lesbian identity.”²¹

Similar to Emily Holod’s argument that the DOB’s demographic was privately more diverse than it publically let on, Anderson’s essay as well emphasizes diversity in the DOB. Both historians understand that the DOB consisted of more than white, middle-class lesbians and that class backgrounds and butch/femme styles fluctuated. However, Anderson, unlike Holod, extends this diverse identity of the DOB into the organization’s politics. Anderson writes, “while trying to gain respectability in the eyes of the public, which meant disputing claims of perversion and illegality, DOB was also trying to develop a positive identity among lesbians.”²² In this way, Anderson’s thesis understands that the Daughters were in a constant balancing act between appeasing the mainstream heterosexual society by advocating normalcy while simultaneously attempting to construct a nuanced and multi-layered sense of identity for all lesbians.²³

Martin Meeker in *Contacts Desired*, (2006) like Anderson, disrupts the traditional narrative of the DOB by positioning the group’s strategies as more radical than accommodationist because of their ability to cultivate strong communication networks between women. As Meeker asserts, past historians have described the homophile movement activists as “unwisely wed to a stifling strategy of progress through respectability.” In contrast, Meeker argues that they, “knowingly used respectability as a mask to hide a much more daring and creative approach.”²⁴ Along with this claim, Meeker unpacks early scholars’ urge to situate the DOB, and other homophile movements, in a post-gay liberationist and feminist model. Doing so,

²¹ Anderson, “Out in the Fifties,” 8.

²² Ibid, 11.

²³ Ibid, 13.

²⁴ Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communication and Community 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 33.

historians of the dominant historiography automatically set the DOB up to fail as they were comparing pre-gay liberationist activist tactics to a later time period. As Meeker summarizes, “the fact that the approaches they developed did not look like activist strategies that became popular in the 1960s does not mean that the homophiles were apologetic or without vision.”²⁵ Rather, Meeker, like Anderson, sees the tactics of the DOB as decidedly pragmatic and useful for the time period they inhabited.

Contacts Desired looks to trace the development and transformation of gay and lesbian communication networks that brought gay people together and allowed them to connect and organize politically. In this way, by framing his argument as an exploration of early gay and lesbian communication tactics, the DOB and other homophile movements emerge as absolutely crucial to the later successes of the gay liberation period that scholars typically favor. As Meeker notes, the homophiles, “pioneered new types of communication networks in which information about sexuality increasingly was candid and public, mediated and accessible.”²⁶ Through these new channels of connection, DOB sought to recast the identity of the lesbian from the negative stereotypes perpetuated by mass media to a healthier middle ground.²⁷ This middle ground was promoted through public lectures, ‘Gab and Java’ meetings, and *The Ladder* which facilitated wider access to the DOB but also, as Meeker argues, provided “representations of lesbianism that ran counter to what few images circulated in the mainstream public sphere... images that cast lesbians as antisocial and that thus naturalized the isolation they may have felt.”²⁸ Like Anderson, Meeker and other historians who deviate from the traditional historiographical

²⁵ Ibid, 33

²⁶ Ibid, 107.

²⁷ For more on the history and development of lesbian print culture see, Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995).

²⁸ Ibid, 86.

narrative of the DOB, understand that the organization teetered on a fine line between combating the opinions of medical professionals and politicians who sought to further demonize homosexuality by wearing the “mask of respectability” while also promoting and encouraging the nuances of multiple lesbian identities.

Although historians such as Anderson and Meeker highlighted the importance of DOB, even within a post-Stonewall context, they do not actively view the DOB through the lens of lesbian feminism. As Anderson stated, “The history of DOB is complex and relies heavily on the imagination and viewpoint of its historian....While the developments of the 1960s and early 1970s are exciting, I will have to leave their exploration to another brave soul.”²⁹ This thesis, in part, takes up that challenge by weighing in on the dichotomized view of DOB and butting up against historians like Lillian Faderman who interpret DOB in a pre and post-Stonewall construct, which, in turn led Faderman to describe DOB as “revolutionary for the ‘50s... but mild by contemporary standards,” overall.³⁰ The traditional historiography understands DOB as “modest” or “conservative,” arguing that they belonged strictly to the pre-Stonewall period, to the “quiet beginnings” of gay liberation where the only way to survive was to “allow themselves to be swept along with the growing militancy” of the time.³¹ Although praising DOB for their courage, Faderman nonetheless casts the group as slightly passive and mild mannered and, in doing so, effectively cancels out their sense of agency.

Interpretations such as this cast the DOB as absolutely alien to the later period of lesbian feminists. As Faderman notes, the lesbian feminists were a different “breed” from “either working-class or middle-class lesbians of the previous generation. They were often college-

²⁹ Anderson, “Out in the Fifties,” 5.

³⁰ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 190.

³¹ *Ibid*, 190-193.

educated and politically aware... they were generally comfortable with language and ideas and knew how to organize as working-class lesbians of the previous generation did not... their militancy often outstripped the capacities and understanding of both older working-class lesbians and middle-class lesbians.”³² In every way it is made apparent that lesbian feminists were the antithesis to DOB, as they sought to reject and deconstruct anything that came before them. As Faderman explains, “DOB and *The Ladder* could not recover from their conservative image... they were seen as too poky for the new activists.”³³ I argue that a more accurate interpretation of DOB results when we see them as revolutionary without exception, without the inevitable *but* after classifying them as courageous or militant.

Embroided in the tempestuous decade of witch hunts, police raids, and persecution of the 1950s, DOB somehow convened and persisted. They fought against the dominant culture and instilled pride and self acceptance in the Lesbian. Although engaged with political events and ideologies, the DOB did not consider itself a political activist organization like the later lesbian-feminists movements. Instead, DOB believed that through the individual—through their journey of finding self-acceptance and pride—the world would change. In this alternate interpretation DOB is still understood as something different from organizations in the later generation whose members understood the necessity of political action and organizing. This thesis does not intend to disrupt that narrative nor the narrative that DOB was mostly middle-class. Instead, this thesis looks to showcase how DOB transformed from the 1950s to the 1970s and remained a central player in defining lesbian identity, even in the heyday of lesbian feminism.

Each new facet of the lesbian identity that developed between the 1950s and 1970s is not a break from the previous generation but rather an extension of that identity in different forms

³² Ibid, 197.

³³ Ibid, 197.

brought on by new generational influences. “The young reinvent the world,” notable DOB member, Barbara Grier commented, “that generation [the liberationists] of men and women eschewed the earlier lesbian and gay male organizations on the grounds that they were not political and therefore not good.”³⁴ At the center of both the DOB and the lesbian feminist worldview is the belief that lesbians deserve recognition and a place at the table. Like DOB, lesbian feminists were not willing to be silent participants of the women’s movement; rather, they fought for their voices to be heard. Indeed, DOB fought to provide lesbians with an alternative space to gather and connect that inspired women to live, each in their own way, as lesbians in America.

Outline of Chapters

Divided into four additional chapters, this thesis explores the growth of the DOB lesbian identity. Chapter two, “Cruisin’ Down the Boulevard, Hot Damn!”: Class History and Growth of Lesbian Subcultures, charts the development of lesbian subcultures beginning in the nineteenth century up until the creation of the Daughters of Bilitis. This chapter investigates the correlation between separate spheres and class divisions as essential to understanding the fundamental roots of DOB’s middle-class identity. Chapter three, “So, How’d Ya First Hear about the DOB?”: Generational Conflicts in *The Ladder* and the Creation of a New Lesbian Identity, transitions into an in-depth analysis of the DOB’s renowned publication *The Ladder* and investigates further the class tensions as well as the generational rifts that emerged as DOB navigated the rising tides of feminism’s second wave. The fourth chapter, “Please, Support Your Local Lesbian”: Diversification of the DOB under Lesbian Feminism, moves into a discussion of DOB’s Lesbian

³⁴ Manuela Soares, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Barbara Grier, Tape 3 of 4, November 27, 1987,” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*.

identity as it diversified under the ideology of lesbian feminism. An examination of three DOB chapter newsletters that later became influential lesbian publications in the 1970s are explored to further the notion that DOB continued to hold considerable sway even in the mists of great change. The fifth and final chapter acts as the conclusion.

CHAPTER II: “CRUISIN’ DOWN THE BOULEVARD, HOT DAMN!”: CLASS HISTORY AND GROWTH OF LESBIAN SUBCULTURES

“I wouldn’t deny it; even though I was getting my brains beaten up I would never stand up and say, ‘No, don’t hit me, I’m not gay, I’m not gay.’ I wouldn’t do that.”

—Unnamed narrator, “Street Dyke,” *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*

“There are so many problems we must face... Heaven knows, the world is full of people who don't understand, and we who do understand should try to make life easier for one another.”

—A. S., San Jose, Calif., *The Ladder*

After moving to San Francisco in 1953, Phyllis Lyon and her partner Del Martin quickly became desperate for lesbian friends. Cruising gay and lesbian bars and hotspots proved futile as Martin remembers, “when we went to the bars we felt like everyone was in a clique and we were outsiders coming in and didn’t know how to get acquainted. And so we really felt like tourists.”¹ Frequent police raids of gay and lesbian bars resulting in arrest, fines, and possibly having one’s name appear in the paper the next morning as a patron of such an establishment were also huge deterrents for Lyon and Martin. So, when gay male friends introduced them to another woman interested in starting a lesbian social club, Martin and Lyon were ecstatic. “We thought *yes*, here was an opportunity to meet more lesbians and finally have more of a social life!” Martin later explained.² In September of 1955 eight women gathered in an apartment, far removed from the

¹ *Last Call at Maud's*. Directed by Paris Poirier. Frameline, 1993.

² *Last Call at Maud's*.

*The title of this chapter is taken from a song by Lisa Ben, pseudonym for Edythe D. Eyde, an editor, writer, and songwriter best known for her publication of *Vice Versa* and quirky songs and parodies depicting gay and lesbian life in the 1950s and 1960s. Ben, Lisa. 1960. “Cruising Down the Boulevard.” Vocal DB 2250, 45 RPM.

bar scene, to discuss the possibility of a secret, social club for women who loved women to meet, connect, and dance without the confines of possible harassment.

“We figured if anyone asked we could tell them it was a Greek poetry club,” Phyllis Lyon snickered, recalling the memory of picking out the organization’s name.³ Dubbed the Daughters of Bilitis from the collection of erotic lesbian poetry, “Songs of Bilitis,” by Pierre Louÿs, the title provided members with the much needed cover of normalcy as it resembled many traditional women’s lodges and clubs at the time. Over the course of a month the newly formed DOB met, constructed the club’s bylaws and constitution, and elected officers. In October of that same year it was decided that DOB needed to launch a membership campaign and so they encouraged their small collective of eight women to invite prospective members to the next meeting.⁴

On the evening of the October meeting, four “very masculine-appearing types” of women “strode in, muttered their names, and plunked themselves down in chairs and stared at us,” recalled Lyon and Martin.⁵ They categorized the butch women as “wary and different... intimidating,” so much so that other DOB members retreated into the kitchen leaving only Martin and Lyon to entertain the “hostile strangers.”⁶ Lyon went on to comment that in the process of attempting to make friendly conversation, the butch women responded only with “a few grunts and one-word responses.” She and Martin revealed their view of the butch women by commenting happily that they did not in fact join the DOB that night.⁷

³ *No Secret Anymore*. Directed by Joan E. Biren. Frameline, 2003.

⁴ “Lesbians United,” in *Historical Research Files & DOB National*, Box# 9/2, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 93-13, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society. Accessed through Austin Peay State University Library *Archives Unbound* online database.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

This meeting between Martin and Lyon, later the most prominent founders and crusaders of DOB, and the four masculine women who represented the tough lesbian bar culture of the time illustrates the divide between lesbian subcultures, a divide that originated in the nineteenth-century, middle class ideology of separate spheres that dictated a division of labor and responsibilities based on gender roles. DOB women forged a new representation of the lesbian identity from the class of women teetering between working and middle-class status and social spheres. These women made up what Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis in *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* considered the “upwardly mobile crowd.” To Lapovsky and Kennedy, the experience of the DOB was a safer and more dignified option than the “riffraff” culture of bar lesbians.⁸

Martin and Lyon along with other DOB members had a clear understanding of who they felt was a right fit for their organization and who, in other cases, needed a little more education and self-acceptance to move beyond the role-playing games of butch and fem. For many DOB participants, butch and fem culture represented an early, uneducated form of lesbian identity. “There are some Lesbians who fit this stereotype,” wrote Lyon, referring to the type of lesbian that embodied all of the “worst masculine attributes,” but these lesbians, she noted, typically fit this role “when they are young and just finding out about themselves.”⁹ Lyon clearly assumed that most women would and should move past this stage of their lesbian identity, but she acknowledged that others, “get trapped in this way of life and never find their way to being a

⁸ Term used to describe butch working-class women in Kennedy, Elizabeth Lapovsky and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁹ Untitled document in *Writings, DOB & Lesbiansim, Lyon*, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 93-13, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, Accessed through Austin Peay State University Library *Archives Unbound* online database.

person rather than a symbol.”¹⁰ This chapter explores the origins of these two distinct understandings of lesbian identities.

Tracing the history of lesbian subcultures in the United States from the nineteenth century up to the early twentieth century demonstrates that the lesbian identity was explicitly bound to the ideology of separate spheres but also to deeply felt class divisions. Although separate spheres ideology is typically associated with gender and the restriction of women to private spheres and men to public spheres, it also deeply affected women who loved women. In this first chapter, I argue that class divisions combined with separate spheres ideology forged lesbian subcultures. Examining the development of these social constructions, underlines the middle-class roots of DOB’s politics and preferred lesbian identity.

Romantic Friendships and Boston Marriages

Class tensions in lesbian subcultures are represented in the delineation of space— how women found other women like themselves and formed communities based on those designated locations and similarities. The history of upper and middle-class lesbian subcultures is the examination of the private, domestic sphere, where love between two women, sexual or not, was categorized by acceptable titles, such as romantic friendships and Boston marriages.¹¹ These two commonly understood practices of same sex attraction afforded women privacy and aligned them with the conventional norms and nineteenth-century understandings of true womanhood.

Inherent in this definition of womanhood and its relationship to women with same sex desire is the changing sexual system highlighted by historian Leila Rupp. Rupp uses this system as a way

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The term “Boston Marriage,” used in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, refers to two women living together independently of men. The term gained popularity from Henry James’s novel *The Bostonians* in which he describes such a relationship between two women.

of understanding how sexuality has presented itself over time and how it provided women with opportunities to cultivate same-sex relationships.

The sexual system Rupp describes is connected to the “large-scale economic, social, and political developments” in the United States.¹² Under this new system, propelled by industrialization and the commercialization of agriculture, women began to work outside the home and exert a public presence. However, chafing against this shifting cultural dynamic, was a societal norm that “emphasized the domestic roles of women. Associating women with the home and men with the world outside, the dominant ideology posited a fundamental difference between men and women and between male and female sexuality.”¹³ Because of this division between genders and physical spheres of activity, men and women were considered, in many ways, as separate species. Men believed women “could command no rational thought as a man could,” rather women “dwelt in the realm of the heart.”¹⁴ Because of this, men were encouraged to form strong bonds between other men in order to better foster “male ‘muscle values’ and ‘rational values’” whereby excluding women to their own sphere based on values of the heart “since male-directed society permitted them little else.”¹⁵ Barbara Welter in her foundational essay, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” expertly outlines the foundation of this separate sphere ideology in the United States. Separate spheres dictated that men belonged to the public sphere as a “busy builder of bridges and railroads, at work long hours in a materialist society,” leaving

¹² Leila J. Rupp, *A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-Sex Love in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 40.

¹³ *Ibid*, 41.

¹⁴ Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendships and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow and Company, INC, 1981), 157-158.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 158.

women confined to the private sphere of the home to care for her family and provide a happy shelter and sanctuary far removed from the outside world.¹⁶

Further, Welter defines the parameters of conventional womanhood in terms of four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. “Put them all together,” Welter asserted, “and they spelled mother, daughters, sister, wife-- woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power.”¹⁷ This power, however, was strictly symbolic and only existed within the home. Once a woman stepped outside this sphere her power dwindled. Domesticity was a virtue “most prized” among women since women were “too pure and good for this world but too weak and passive to resist its evil forces. The best refuge for such a delicate creature was the warmth and safety of her home.”¹⁸ Under this ideology women were perceived as passionless, reserved, and far less sexual than men. It was believed that through marriage this sexual difference between men and women would aid in controlling men’s sexual urges. This model was promoted by the white, urban, middle class who perceived racial and ethnic minorities along with the working class as lacking self-control over their sexuality and therefore as immoral.¹⁹

Changing sexual systems brought on by dividing male and female spaces, separating sexuality from reproduction, and othering sexualities across racial and class lines deeply

¹⁶ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860,” in *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976), 21. Welter’s 1968 essay essentially opened the floodgates on new ways of historicizing women’s experiences in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. For more on the development of separate spheres and women’s spaces see: Nancy F Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977); Mary P. Ryan, *Empire of the Mother* (New York: Haworth Press, 1982); Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980); Carl Degler, *At Odds* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1980); Linda K. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History.” *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (1988): 9-39; Freeman, Estelle and John D’Emilio. *Intimate Matters*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988; Vicinus, Martha, ed. *Suffer and Be Still*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1972.

¹⁷ Welter “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 21.

¹⁸ Rupp, *A Desired Past*, 30-31.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 41-42.

impacted the ways women negotiated same-sex desires and was dependent on their class. In separating the sexes, women formed intense and passionate relationships with other women that were not only tolerated by society but encouraged among women of the upper and middle class. Because women were perceived as mostly asexual, these romantic friendships were not questioned. This same courtesy was not extended to women who loved women in the working classes. Nor would the privileges of acceptability and respectability for upper class women who harbored same sex desire be extended past the late nineteenth century, when the rise of sexology and the study of homosexuality interrupted close female relationships and reframed them as something explicitly sexual. Until then, however, romantic friendships remained tied to authentic and conventional presentations of womanhood.

Notions of true womanhood or the “cult” of womanhood dominate early discussions of same sex attraction between women of the middle and upper classes, as it was within this “cult” that women found ways to act on their same sex desires. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s foundational piece “The Female World of Love and Ritual” examines the relationships between women of the nineteenth century. Smith-Rosenberg argued that because of the strict separation of genders, a female world of homosocial networks emerged where affection and devotion among women was accepted and widely practiced in American society. As Smith-Rosenberg explains, “a specifically female world did indeed develop... built around a generic and unself-conscious pattern of single-sex or homosocial networks. These supportive networks were institutionalized in social conventions or rituals that accompanied virtually every important event in a woman’s life.”²⁰ In this context, women turned to other women for emotional support and understanding to

²⁰ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 60.

create a women-centric, domestic sphere that was not considered a taboo by society until the latter half of the twentieth century.

Romantic friendships and Boston marriages were reserved for white, upper and middle-class women.²¹ In order for these romantic friendships to function, leisure time and education were necessary elements. Written correspondence was the primary method of contacting a beloved in romantic friendships, and without the ability and time to read and write, these relationships could not sustain themselves. Although these women did not typically engage in sexual intercourse or live their lives together, because of familial responsibilities to marry “appropriately,” their relationship and correspondence mirrored that of heterosexual couples of the time.²² Lillian Faderman, a pioneering historian of lesbian history, makes the note that these women “pledged to remain ‘faithful’ forever, to be in ‘each other’s thoughts constantly,’ to live together and even die together,” attesting to the intensity and commitment to the relationship.²³

To gain a better understanding of romantic friendships and their connection to Boston Marriages, we must place them in the context of the emerging “New Woman” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Doing so, further explicates the class divide among women. Smith-Rosenberg describes these New Women as “middle- and upper-middle-class American women born between 1850 and the early 1900s who were educated, ambitious, and, most frequently, single. By the early twentieth century, they had established places for

²¹ Karen V. Hansen, “‘No Kisses Is Like Youres’: An Erotic Friendship Between Two African-American Women During the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” *Gender and History* 7: 2 (1995): 153–182. This essay acts as the primary published source documenting African American women who engaged in romantic friendships. While the possibility of more letters and instances of same sex attraction in African American women during this period is certainly very likely, because of the lack of primary sources concerning African American women and the surplus of evidence concerning white, upper class women, the scholarship lends itself to recounting more stories of white women. For other historians who categorize romantic friendships as white and upper class see: Neil Miller, “Chapter Five: Romantic Friendships Between Women,” in *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

²² Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, 16.

²³ *Ibid*, 16.

themselves within new professions and within government and reform agencies.”²⁴ This New Women signified a shift away from earlier Victorian sensibilities of womanhood to a new definition which hailed women as capable of creating a life outside of marriage to sustain themselves. Faderman designates the emergence of feminism as the key component to the rise of the “New Woman.” She outlines several factors that contributed to feminism’s growth in the United States such as the expanding middle class, the opening of higher education, industrialization, and the traditional homosocial network of women which, combined, “made inevitable the growing strength of feminism in the latter half of the nineteenth century.”²⁵

The New Women extends the tradition of female romantic friendships by once again cultivating a world surrounded by women. Instead of being confined to the home, these homosocial relationships between women reached larger forums in colleges and new careers. As opposed to marrying and breaking the “Female World of Love and Ritual,” women merged into the public sphere to work, and in the process, transformed their romantic friendships into Boston marriages. The New Woman, in essence, was the philosophy on which Boston marriages could thrive. These “marriages” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century created a culture of opportunities for women who loved other women to fashion a new lifestyle outside the confines and responsibilities of a heterosexual marriage. Similar to romantic friendships, these marriages may or may not have included an explicitly sexual component. However, Boston marriages acted as a vessel through which an ambitious woman could refuse to “submerge her own ego to care

²⁴ Carol Smith-Rosenberg, “Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity: The New Woman, 1870-1936,” in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Baum, Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey (New York: Meridian Book, 1989), 265.

²⁵ Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, 181.

for her husband and children,” and instead give her entire self to the work and life she found most rewarding.²⁶

Women in these relationships were no longer dependent on husbands for financial security because of the expanding opportunities for women in education and professional careers. Scholars, like Smith-Rosenberg, identify the proliferation of all-women colleges and universities in the nineteenth century as markers of the cultivation of a middle-class lesbian identity. This vital step in the creation of a lesbian identity was due to the environment of all-women colleges that brought together large numbers of women from similar middle-class backgrounds and provided them substantial economic independence. Here, romantic friendships, or as they were known in all-women’s colleges, “smashes,” and “crushes,” gained traction and it became common-place for young women to form deep attachments to classmates, even taking one another as their dates to annual dances and passing love notes.²⁷ This identity stemmed directly from the women-centric, private sphere of the romantic friendships. As Faderman notes, once college educated women could financially support themselves, “they were no longer economically constrained to give up their female loves in favor of matrimony, and they now had plausible excuses to resist social pressure toward marriage—they could not be adequate wives because they were engaged in pioneering in education and the professions.”²⁸ Women’s colleges provided an opportunity for women to gain physical, intellectual, and economic independence from male-centric spaces.

²⁶ Ibid, 187.

²⁷ See Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 13-18; John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 94-95; Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women’s Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 1984), 165-68 & 282-292.

²⁸ Faderman, Lillian. *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, 12.

Through education, women created yet another powerful form of homosocial environments where women continued to see men as decidedly different and preferred the company and emotional support of fellow women. In Boston marriages, professional, middle-class women, equipped with economic stability through new employment opportunities, could thrive.²⁹ Because the United States had yet to cast a critical eye to these “marriages” and because of these women’s class status, Boston Marriages were casually accepted by American society. In the latter half of the nineteenth century however when sexologists’ interest in homosexual behavior grew, they began to examine close female relationships more intently.

Initially, any form of sexual inversion in women was attributed primarily to the lower and working classes. Faderman argues that this bias resulted from the white, middle and upper class backgrounds of the scientists and sexologists who studied homosexuality in women and found it easier to acknowledge “that intimate relations between women in the classes ‘beneath’ them could go beyond the platonic” rather than admit that the women of their own class might engage in the same kind of relations.³⁰ Over time, however, with the rise of the New Woman and feminists fighting for complete independence for women, physicians began to fear that large numbers of women of their shared class were “rejecting marriage and motherhood in favor of spending their lives with other women.”³¹ Physicians perceived this trend as detrimental to the “particular kind of heterosexuality” they strove to ensure which “consisted of ‘hygienic’ reproduction among middle-class white men and women” that stood in direct contrast to the

²⁹ Perhaps the most famous example of women using their education, ambitious nature, and newfound professional outlets to establish a woman-centric environment is Jane Addams’ Hull House. Robyn Muncy in *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) provides an excellent history of how women accomplished this and prolonged the philosophy of women as ‘kindred spirits’ into the twentieth century.

³⁰ Faderman, Lillian. *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 39.

³¹ Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 99

unsightly form of heterosexuality among the “degenerates,” or lower classes.³² Therefore, as historian Jennifer Terry argues, “although they had been exalted a decade or so earlier, affectionate relationships between middle-class women began to be regarded as pathological refusals to mature.”³³ The medical profession’s obsession with homosexuality transformed it from a mere “symptom,” or activity one chose to partake in, to an “inversion,” or deep seated illness. This cast homosexuality as a defining characteristic that violated gender expectations in society and became synonymous with perversion. And, in the process, this new distinction cut across class lines, as now, upper and middle class women with same-sex desires were linked to their working-class counterparts as deviants in the eyes of mainstream heterosexual society.

Within this long tradition of female homosocial networks lies in the foundation of DOB. Like their counterparts who sought romantic friendships and Boston marriages, women of DOB galvanized around the idea of securing a shared, private space for female desire while simultaneously working to disassociate their identity from the dominant view of lesbianism as a hyper-sexed, masculine woman. By categorizing all same-sex desire among women, regardless of class, as an inversion, and therefore deviant, sexologists triggered a more pronounced divide between women of different classes. Scrambling to insure their status of respectability, women with same-sex desires in the upper and middle classes who participated in romantic friendships needed to widen the gap between their representation of same sex love and the working-class identity.

Ultimately, DOB went to great lengths to separate themselves from the likes of “barhoppers” and women of lower classes who participated in strict butch-fem culture. Much like women engaged in romantic friendships and Boston marriages, DOB held great aversion to

³² Ibid, 100.

³³ Ibid, 99.

these women because of the socially perpetuated stereotype of sexual promiscuity among the working classes. Drawing their identity from a public sphere, working-class lesbians were always in direct opposition to the “female world of love and ritual.”

Working-Class Lesbian Culture

The delineation of space for working-class women took on a drastically different trajectory from that of the middle-class, with its emphasis on the Victorian sensibilities of the domestic sphere. For working-class women who loved women, the leisure time and education required to sustain and develop a romantic friendship was not common. Likewise, it was less economically feasible for working-class women to emulate the Boston marriage unless one of the women could pass as male and obtain better pay. Because of the nature of their work in paid labor, the identity of working-class women was embedded in the public sphere, a space mostly foreign to their middle and upper class counterparts. Understanding these differences between lesbian subcultures, a nineteenth century working-class lesbian consciousness becomes difficult to reconstruct since working-class lesbians left behind little documentation. Although working-class lesbians contributed to the public sphere, their lives, when compared to middle and upper-class women who openly engaged in romantic friendships and Boston marriages, was, ironically, private. Their lives remained private until the twentieth century when the emergence of a distinct and powerful lesbian bar culture, centered around butch-fem relationships, connected the history of working-class lesbians to the proliferation of gay bars brought on by industrialization and urbanization in the nineteenth century.

As the world advanced through industrialization, differences between classes of women widened. Gerda Lerner examines this in “The Lady and the Mill Girl,” in which she states that the political and public status of women “seemed narrower and more confined than ever,” as

culturally in the nineteenth century, the standard for the ideal woman drew closer to Welter's four virtues.³⁴ As Lerner points out, industrialization affected the lives of women deeply, creating increased "differences in lifestyles between women of different classes."³⁵ As occupations and types of work associated with women moved from the home to the factory, women from poorer classes became industrial workers. In contrast, women of middle and upper-class statuses could "use their newly gained time for leisure pursuits: they became ladies."³⁶ As class divisions deepened, views about what constituted ideal womanhood became polarized. Lerner writes, "the image of 'the lady' was elevated as the accepted ideal of femininity toward which all women should strive. In this formulation, lower class women were simply ignored."³⁷ Or, if the values of working-class women were acknowledged, they were typically sexualized. The working-class identity lacked the strict emphasis on separate spheres for men and women and the invisibility of erotic relationships that were common to middle-class women, resulting in a common belief that lower classes exhibited higher levels of promiscuity.³⁸

³⁴ Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," *American Studies Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 1: Spring 1969, 5-16, 7.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 11.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 11.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 11.

³⁸ John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 96. D'Emilio describes the cramped living quarters, lack of privacy, and lack of separate spaces between sexes as evidence for higher sexual visibility and understanding among working class women. Also referenced is the population of prostitutes in working class neighborhoods as evidence of "female eroticism." For more on the connection between working-class women and overt sexuality see, Clement, Elizabeth Alice. "Trick Or Treat: Prostitution and Working-Class Women's Sexuality in New York City, 1900-1932." (PhD diss, University of Pennsylvania, 1998); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983); Nancy Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," *Signs* 4 Issue 2 (1978): 219-236; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast and the Militant Woman: A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America." *American Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1971): 562-84; Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton University Press, 2004); Stephen Brooke, "Bodies, Sexuality and the 'Modernization' of the British Working Classes, 1920s to 1960s." *International Labor and Working-Class History* no. 69 (2006): 104-22.

Overt eroticism in working-class lesbian subcultures became all the more pronounced with the rise of bar culture and commercialized leisure.³⁹ Early on in the development of public lesbian subcultures and a lesbian identity, bars offered the primary, and oftentimes only, opportunity for lesbians to meet other lesbians in a social environment. The location of gay bars, however, were areas typically associated with “moral permissiveness” and prostitution.⁴⁰ The gay bar scene opened opportunities for cultivating a distinctly lesbian space and community of women in the public sphere. However this type of visibility cultivated in the bars, as Nan Alamilla Boyd notes in *Wide Open Town*, butted up against conventional gender norms as gays and lesbians “seemed dangerous and subversive-- resistant to dominant political ideologies.”⁴¹ Factors of difference and eroticism prevalent in the working-class bar culture created a rift between classes of women with same-sex desire. While working-class women, because of their necessary interactions in the public life, were more at ease in saloon and tavern environments, their middle-class lesbian counterparts felt threatened. This directly relates to the separation of spheres between classes and the implications for a middle-class women’s status if she patronized an unsavory establishment with a seedy history steeped in cheap entertainment and brothels. While women of the upper and middle classes established private networks like romantic friendships and Boston marriages to both abide by conventional gender norms and act on same-sex desires, working-class women, instead, acted on their desires publicly by centralizing their relationships to other lesbians in bars. This marks a clear distinction between how working and middle-class lesbians experienced the world and dealt with societal and economic pressures.

³⁹ Kathy Peiss discusses the influence of new forms of entertainment and leisure culture on working-class women’s sense of independence in *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, 31. For more on the connections between between lesbianism and prostitution see, Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 71-83.

⁴¹ Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 72.

This separation continued even as middle-class lesbians became less financially secure during the Great Depression. Faderman explains that women were “discouraged from competing against men for better jobs,” resulting in women settling for lower positions that “demanded a second income for a modicum of comfort and made the legal permanence of marriage attractive.”⁴² For middle-class woman who wanted to maintain their status, living as a lesbian did not afford financial security or social acceptance as it had in early decades through Boston marriages. In contrast, for working-class lesbians this construct of financial security and social acceptance, Great Depression or not, was never part of their world view. World War II, however, ended this economic slump allowing for the growth of a dynamic subculture for both middle and working-class lesbians. Wartime America propelled the development of lesbian communities forward with high paying work, geographical mobility, and increased access to other lesbians only to have those communities suffer a crippling setback in post war culture.⁴³

The 1950s strict adherence to hyper heteronormativity and gender roles significantly altered the landscape of lesbian subcultures by eliminating the freedoms once permitted to lesbians in work and their private lives. As John D’Emilio writes, American society “assumed a posture that accentuated the deviance of women who pursued a female-centered life... [this] posed special problems for lesbian organizations, since many women with a strong sense of their lesbian identity, the butch patrons of gay bars, embodied the least acceptable *image* of

⁴² Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 94.

⁴³ John D’Emilio, “Dual Identity and Lesbian Autonomy” in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 92-107. For more war time LGBT experiences see: Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women In World War II* (New York : The Free Press, 1990); Humphrey, Mary Ann, *My Country, My Right To Serve: Experiences of Gay Men and Women In the Military, World War II to the Present* (New York : Harper Collins, 1990); Leisa Meyer, “Creating G.I. Jane: The Regulation of Sexuality and Sexual Behavior in the Women’s Army Corps during World War II” in *Lesbian Subjects*, ed. Martha Vicinus, William D. Rowley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 66-84; “A National Historian: Reexamining World War II” in *My Desire for History: Essays in Gay, Community, and Labor History*, edited by D’Emilio, John and Estelle B. Freedman, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 83-144.

womanhood.”⁴⁴ Within this conservative culture, tensions between the middle-class women of DOB and working-class lesbian bar cultures were accentuated. The most persistent disagreement that haunted the lesbian homophile organization regarded the presentation of an authentic lesbian image to mainstream heterosexual society. Since the common perception of lesbianism was dictated by the most public and outwardly aggressive, the working-class culture and style of butch and fem relationships was most prominent in public consciousness.

Butch and Fem Subculture

Butch-fem subcultures are understood in tandem with the evolution of the lesbian bar. A notable force of the working-class lesbian bar community, butch women dressed primarily in men’s clothing, earned a reputation for violence, and paired with fem women. They exerted, very publicly, an explicitly erotic lesbian image through the 1940s, 1950s, and into the 1960s. How this subculture developed, mainly how butch women created a space for themselves in the mid-twentieth century is traced to the earlier nineteenth century notion of cross-dressing or “passing.” Bérubé examines this in “Lesbian Masquerade” by exploring the social and economic restrictions that the nineteenth century placed on women. To escape these restrictions, “women entered the privileged world of men by successfully ‘passing’ as men... passing as a man was one way to live an economically independent life.”⁴⁵ Other benefits to passing included earning more money, opening a bank account, writing checks, owning a home, traveling alone, and even voting in some cases.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 100-101. Emphasis in quote is my own.

⁴⁵ Allan Bérubé, “Lesbian Masquerade,” in *My Desire for History: Essays in Gay, Community, and Labor History*, ed. John D’Emilio and Estelle Freeman, The University of North Carolina Press: 2011, 41.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 45.

With these freedoms, women not only needed to dress as a man but also act as one through smoking, drinking, cursing, and physical cues such as tone of voice and walking. An equally important element to the masquerade was learning how to relate to other women as “men.” Bérubé notes that many, but not all, passing women, “courted, lived with, or married other women.”⁴⁷ Taking on a male persona allowed women to not only acquire economic independence but also become “sexually assertive and attractive” to other women without drawing attention to themselves.⁴⁸ This afforded women a new experience unlike the nineteenth century model of womanhood as passive and passionless. Instead, passing allowed women to be assertive, flirtatious, and sexually expressive to their partners, all of which became markers of the butch persona in the later mid-twentieth century lesbian bar scene.

In contrast, most professional and middle-class identifying lesbians refused to associate with the tough lesbian bar scene in the 1950s and 1960s. This deflates the notion that a homogenous experience of lesbianism ever existed as the divide between working and middle-class lesbian social circles grew even wider in the 1950s and 1960s. Faderman notes that, “lesbian subcultures based on class and age not only had little in common with one another, but their members often distrusted and even disliked one another.”⁴⁹ The dominating structure of butch and fem with its deliberate rules, styles, and mannerisms, acted as the distinct mark of membership in the working-class lesbian bar culture. Middle and upper-class lesbians rejected these public establishments and the structure of butch and fem in relationships to conceal their lesbianism for professional purposes or to elevate the status of lesbians beyond the disreputable portrayal of butch characteristics.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid, 45

⁴⁸ Ibid, 45

⁴⁹ Faderman, Lillian. *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 160.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 178-179.

While different classes of lesbian subcultures may have disliked one another, they did however interact in the pre-DOB period primarily in bars. Kennedy and Davis distinguish three categories of women: the upper/middle class-lesbians, the “upwardly mobile types,” and the working class.⁵¹ The three groups are distinguished by how active their members were in bar life. The upper and middle classes were infrequent patrons, instead favoring social activities in women’s groups over the bar scene when possible. The upwardly mobile types, Kennedy and Davis explain, “...unquestionably felt a pull to public, working-class lesbian culture particularly when they were younger.”⁵² However, as Kennedy and Davis note, because of this group’s connection with middle-class lesbian social circles, this interest in the bar scene waned over time. This observation directly relates to Phyllis Lyon’s statement that butch-fem style was traditionally viewed as an immature and uneducated form of lesbianism. For many women who later joined DOB, their first experiences with lesbian social life were bars, much to their dismay. Like Martin and Lyon who felt uncomfortable, or unwanted in the bar scene, others too were disenchanted with the overall atmosphere.⁵³ As for the working-class, the bar scene proved to be a haven for community building and possible romantic entanglements.

Upper and middle-class lesbians not only avoided the bar scene they also, for the most part, rejected the strict butch/fem dichotomy. Varying degrees of “butch-ness” enjoyed varying levels of acceptability based on class. Tough bar lesbians incorporated the style and body language of working-class men who, as Kennedy and Davis describe, “knew how to take care of

⁵¹ Elizabeth Lapovsky and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 133-134.

⁵² *Ibid*, 134.

⁵³ In the Lesbian Herstory Archives online collection of oral histories with DOB members, titled, *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA: Daughters of Bilitis Video Project* the majority of members comment on their experiences in the gay bars and their ambivalence to the scene and butch-fem dynamics.

themselves and did not back away from physical confrontation.”⁵⁴ This presentation of butch prized one’s ability to fight, protect, and appear as tough as possible in any situation. This was not an acceptable image to mainstream heterosexual society or in lesbian social circles outside the bar scene. The upwardly mobile crowd embraced a sporty and collegiate butch style even as they “cultivated a masculine presence without the rough and rowdy mannerisms that prevailed among white and black tough lesbians.”⁵⁵ This crowd’s primary concern was to present a lesbian identity more refined than the tough bar lesbian.

Fems’ representation of gender style in this era also indicated class status. For bar culture, fems incorporated a sophisticated and hyper feminized style that required adoption of the latest fashion trends of the time. In the upwardly mobile group, fems mostly emulated their counterpart butch style, sporty and collegiate, making their combined look less striking and openly queer. Kennedy and Davis describe the upwardly mobile style as “more discreet than that of the tough lesbians. Neither the butch alone, nor the butch-fem couple were immediately and necessarily recognized as lesbians.”⁵⁶ In contrast, the butch-fem couple of the working-class created a striking and obvious example of a thriving and explicitly erotic lesbian lifestyle. These physical markers of style and mannerisms in the butch-fem image delineated class, social circles, and lesbian politics to the public.

As with most of lesbian history, butch-fem culture and relationships are contested both within lesbian communities and among historians. Often thought of as a mere imitation of heterosexual relationships, butch-fem has come under attack and raises a question: Why are strong characteristics of masculinity and femininity so deeply woven into the foundation of

⁵⁴ *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, 164.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 167.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 167.

lesbian culture?⁵⁷ Kennedy and Davis expand on the historiography of the “passing woman” by stating that during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, “manipulation of the basic ingredient of patriarchy-- the hierarchical distinction between male and female-- continued to be an effective way for the working-class lesbian community to give public expression to its affirmation of women’s autonomy and women's romantic and sexual interest in women.”⁵⁸ Therefore, rather than interpreting this culture as merely mimicking the heterosexual model, it is more accurate to claim that together butches and fems railed against conventional social norms and publicly articulated an erotic relationship between two women that existed outside male dominance. A break from the asexual imagery of romantic friendships and Boston marriages, working-class lesbian subcultures defined lesbianism within sexual parameters and, as Kennedy and Davis argue, they “mark the beginning of the modern lesbian identity.”⁵⁹

Kennedy and Davis go on to explain that participants in these lesbian communities viewed themselves as different from society and considered this difference a “core part of their identity.”⁶⁰ This acknowledges a shift in gay and lesbian history that places homosexuality at the center of one’s identity rather than viewing it as a discrete act or behavior one chooses to commit in secrecy. As Kennedy and Davis explain, this shift occurring in the twentieth century meant “being lesbian or gay became a core identity around which people came together with others like themselves and built their lives.”⁶¹ This is especially true when examining the Daughters of Bilitis. They too acknowledged their lesbianism as a core element to their identity. However, instead of abiding by the “modern lesbian identity” found in butch-fem circles, DOB began to

⁵⁷ Ibid, 5

⁵⁸ Ibid, 6.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 8.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 8.

⁶¹ Ibid, 8.

foster and articulate a lesbian identity born from the long tradition of women who favored a woman-centric sphere and who saw themselves a class apart from the women of the bar culture.

Conclusion

Desire between women of upper and middle class status permeated mainstream heterosexual culture by means of both bowing to notions of conventional womanhood and redefining womanhood in the era of the New Woman to best fit their needs. At the same time, middle-class lesbians abided by social conventions in which women and men belonged to distinct spheres of same sex networks. In this sphere, romantic friendships and Boston marriages flourished, providing women with acceptable outlets to act on their unconventional desires. Alongside the growth of middle-class notions of respectability, working-class lesbians, embedded in a mix-sexed, public sphere, cruised through mainstream culture by presenting themselves in alternative, and at times, gender bending ways. These two distinct subcultures were involved in a constant interplay, as their perceived differences caused them to draw finer lines between their identities. The public presentation of the butch-fem lesbian identity dominated the cultural understanding of lesbianism, and as Kennedy and Davis argue, created the modern lesbian identity. This thesis contends that the DOB emerged as a second distinct lesbian identity for the latter half of the twentieth century. How DOB accomplished this task of creating a new, alternative lesbian identity beyond the confines of their small group in San Francisco is rooted to their publication *The Ladder*, a monumental achievement for later lesbian political organizing.

CHAPTER III: “SO, HOW’D YA HEAR ABOUT THE DOB?”: GENERATIONAL CONFLICTS IN *THE LADDER* AND THE CREATION OF A NEW LESBIAN IDENTITY

“The DOB gave me more things to think about. [It gave me] more of a world than what I was seeing reflected in any media and certainly the bar scene, which wasn’t something I could live my life through.”

—Judith Schwarz, 1992 interview

“In [*The Ladder*’s] pages could be found all aspects of our culture.”

—Joan Nestle, 1992 interview

When Barbara Grier stood to address the crowd of women for the first annual Women in Print Conference in 1976 she was introduced as a representative of *The Ladder*. In return, Grier remembers, “every woman in the room stood up and stomped and screamed and applauded at the mention of the magazine. It went on for fifteen minutes... that was the very first time I knew how much *The Ladder* meant to all those women.”¹ Barbara Grier was the last editor in charge of *The Ladder* before it folded in 1972. Without a doubt, *The Ladder* transformed the lives of many women who harbored same sex attraction but felt isolated in their small towns or scared to seek out women in bars. *The Ladder* connected them to a larger network of lesbians. Working as a negative cutter at a photo processing lab when she first moved to San Francisco in the 1960s, Judith Schwartz, Lesbian Herstory Archives founder, remembers leaving her copy of *The Ladder* for other women workers to read. Although the magazine was returned to her tattered, because of the large number of women who read the publication, “it was taken care of, it was treated

¹ Marcia Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*. (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2006), 197.

lovingly... there were tear stains and dog ears.... [but] people took such good care of them.”²

The Ladder was a life preserver, a key source for understanding the nuances and complexities of lesbian life in the later twentieth century. It created “a social discourse in which identity could be constructed diachronically through ongoing dialogue,” that continued each month in the Reader Response section of the magazine where women from all parts of the country could exchange ideas, stories, and news.³ Most importantly, *The Ladder* was the lifeblood of the Daughters of Bilitis’ national organization.

This chapter examines the multiple editorial lenses of *The Ladder*, the second exclusively Lesbian publication in the United States.⁴ Analyzing the content of the magazine with an emphasis on its class tensions and generational turns casts a new light on how the DOB redefined the Lesbian image for themselves and for mainstream heterosexual society. Issues of class dominated the early years of the magazine as the Daughters of Bilitis cultivated a particular type, or “brand,” of lesbianism. In promoting this brand, *The Ladder*’s editors emphasized “upwardly mobile” or middle-class lesbianism and rejected bar life and its strict butch/fem dichotomies. As a result, DOB cultivated a middle ground identity for lesbian life by rejecting both sides of the lesbian identity found in society as either closeted and self-hating or aggressively butch and public. Instead, *The Ladder*’s interpretation of the Lesbian was that of an average citizen doing

² Manuela Soares, “Lesbian Herstory Archives: Daughters of Bilitis Video Project, Judith Schwarz, Tape 1 of 1, 1987” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*.

³ Jody Valentine, “Lesbians Are from Lesbos: Sappho and Identity Construction in *The Ladder*,” *Helios* 35 no. 2 (2008): 145.

⁴ A note on the capitalization of the L in Lesbian. *The Ladder* consistently capitalized Lesbian in all of its issues, and when referencing the DOB, I will continue this capitalization. The distinction of publishing the first lesbian magazine belongs to *Vice Versa*, which was created by the pseudonymous “Lisa Ben.” This publication was short lived with only nine issues starting in 1947. The magazine did not have a mailing list or subscription base. As a result, the circulation of the magazine was limited to whomever Ben met in bars and social settings. Because of *Vice Versa*’s limited release, *The Ladder* is often times hailed as the premier lesbian magazine with its professional layout and wider reach. Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America*, (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995), 1-16.

the best she could to navigate love and work in whichever city she resided. In essence, the DOB Lesbian was the “everylesbian.” Both editors and readers embraced this idealized Lesbian image that they intended for both heterosexual audiences and their lesbian peers.

Over the course of *The Ladder*’s sixteen years from 1956 to 1972, five editors and three distinct editorial phases transformed the magazine, taking on increasingly complex and radical issues. Issues such as how best to fully integrate the average Lesbian into society guided each editorial phase. These phases moved from assimilation (1956-1963) to political militancy (1963-1966) and finally, to a period marked by the feminist movement (1966-1972). Each of these editorial phases grew out of a specific historical period. This makes it pertinent to explore the historical context of the DOB’s transition from a strictly social club to a more public, activist organization before moving into a discussion of *The Ladder*.

Social Club versus Social Activism

Even at its inception, the DOB was fraught with conflict. Although initially developed from a mutual desire among friends to have a safe space to gather free from possible arrest and harassment, slowly, differences in opinions concerning the DOB’s primary function emerged. This cut across class lines, as the DOB’s four working-class members preferred a strictly secret and social club while the four middle-class members favored a mix between social activities and social activism. Tensions came to a boiling point in 1956 when certain DOB members, inspired by Mattachine Society and their public programs, pushed for a women’s educational organization that formed alliances with heterosexual women and worked strategically with other homophile groups to encourage more lesbians to come forward and join.⁵ Martin and Lyon, in

⁵ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 8-9.

particular, spearheaded this approach and sought social change through integration. Education of both the lesbian and the heterosexual public became their primary concern, more important to them than the short-term goal of having a nice place to spend the weekend. However, such a strong shift away from the original intentions of the club created a rift causing half of the founding members to drop out.⁶ Undeterred, Martin and Lyon utilized their new connections with other homophile groups to spark interest in their women's only organization and slowly they began to rebuild with new members.

Essential to DOB's transition from a strictly social club to a more social activist organization were members' understanding that "lesbian," as a term and identity, was deeply stigmatized in heterosexual culture or ignored completely. To combat this, DOB emphasized integration as a defining principle of the organization and as a means of achieving the "paper promises of American equality."⁷ To achieve these goals the DOB was willing to "accommodate themselves to many if not most of the prevailing social norms."⁸ The desire for normality and sameness was crucial for most Americans during the Cold War years, not only for lesbians and gay men, which explains the rationale behind the DOB's "uplift ideology."⁹ *The Ladder* by name alone gives a clear indication of this as it was intended "as a vehicle for the individual lesbian to elevate herself, out of the depths of self-hatred and social strictures. By her actions, she would

⁶ Ibid, 10.

⁷ Ibid, 18.

⁸ Ibid, 18

⁹ For more information on postwar life as it relates to issues of normality and conformity see: Elaine Taylor May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Anna G. Creadick, *Perfectly Average: The Pursuit of Normality in Postwar America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010); *Not June Cleaver : Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*. Ed. Joanne Meyerowitz. (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 1994); Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families And The Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

enable others to do the same.”¹⁰ Spurring this drive for integration were the twin pillars of government persecution and the medical profession’s negative portrayal of homosexuality.

In *Lavender Scare* David Johnson expertly examines the 1950s government-led purges of federal employees under the ideology that both homosexuals and Communists were essentially identical and a great threat to American life. Homosexuality, popularized by the McCarthy era political discourse, was a “psychological maladjustment that led people toward communism and was synonymous with perversion.”¹¹ Johnson argues that this notion of homosexuals as psychologically disturbed permeated American culture, even going beyond psychological or psychiatric terminology to link homosexuality and communism with “a traditional vocabulary of morality.”¹² Communism’s major flaw, according to McCarthy, was its “immoralism,” as “many Americans thought Communists were hostile to the traditional family, and aesthetic in nature.”¹³ According to Johnson, these same characteristics were attributed to homosexuals as “both groups were perceived as alien subcultures that recruited the psychologically maladjusted to join in immoral behavior that threatened the nation’s survival.”¹⁴ As one DOB member recalls from the early days of organizing, “we were not that far away from the Senator McCarthy witch hunts... And so there was tremendous fear, and people had no idea of their rights as just human beings. They didn’t know that it was not against the law to be a homosexual, what one did was what was against the law if you got caught.”¹⁵ The McCarthy era set a precedent of government aggression against gays and lesbians. This led gays and lesbians to establish a general distrust of the federal

¹⁰ Gallo, 18

¹¹ David J. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 16.

¹² *Ibid*, 36.

¹³ *Ibid*, 36-37.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 38.

¹⁵ Manuela Soares, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Billye Talmadge, Tape 1 of 2,” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*.

government and created a foundation of cultural discrimination that DOB and other homophile groups fought against.

While politically during the 1950s homosexuals were likened to Communists and therefore detrimental to the American family, another, arguably more powerful entity than government sought after, analyzed, and attacked homosexuality—the medical field. Jennifer Terry documents the long medical and cultural obsession with homosexuality best in her foundational text that works to answer a very simple question: Why has homosexuality mattered so deeply to the American public? Why has it garnered such intense public controversy? In answering this question, Terry details the medical profession’s response to homosexuality in the 1950s, a field that the DOB founders were well acquainted with and sought to engage. Viewing the national obsession with homosexuality as “episodic” rather than gradual, Terry distinguishes the 1950s as particularly intense and visible. For Terry, the postwar years “marked a watershed in the history of homosexuality,” more than ever “homosexuality became symbolically central in American culture.”¹⁶

Scientific authorities and their research were essential in political debates and in the process of forming public opinion on gays and lesbians. This made scientific opinions incredibly important to DOB leaders and members who actively sought to participate in medical and social scientific studies and to use research to combat homophobia. Terry points out that the homophile movement used social sciences to make two key arguments. First, according to Terry, homophiles argued that homosexuals were not sick or deranged but rather “average people, just like everybody else.”¹⁷ Second, by embracing social sciences and generating numerous scientific

¹⁶ Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 353.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 355-356.

studies and surveys, the homophiles argued that they constituted a minority and a “substantial one worthy of respect for its social and cultural contributions.”¹⁸ Before such substantial breakthroughs however the grand narrative that cast lesbians as antisocial or mentally unstable pervaded American culture in the 1950s. Marked by a conservative turn, the postwar years increasingly articulated what constituted normal and abnormal behavior. In turn, as Martin Meeker argues, lesbians were considered “unconsciously in search of constant masochistic pleasure... and therefore incapable of conscious happiness.”¹⁹ Ideas that lesbians “possessed...psychopathic personalities” absolutely dominated as most of America listened and believed the theories perpetuated by psychologists.²⁰

Along with the medical field and government purges, mass produced paperback novels or “pulp” acted as a second forum to which the heterosexual public and the lesbian herself were introduced to lesbian identities. These novels were marketed primarily toward a male audience and notorious for their racy cover art contributing to the sexualization of lesbianism in American culture. Lesbians in these novels rarely found a happy ending; oftentimes they committed suicide, returned to heterosexual relationships, or went insane.²¹ These novels, in essence, merely confirmed the theories of psychologists and government officials. They helped to “confirm some of America’s most grotesque fears about women and the danger of lesbianism in the 1950s-- that

¹⁸ Ibid, 356.

¹⁹ Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 86-87.

²⁰ Ibid, 87.

²¹ For more on lesbian print culture see, K.M. Cadora, “The Limits of Lesbiana: Race and Class in Twentieth Century Lesbian Genre Fiction,” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1999); K.T. Adams, “Paper Lesbians: Alternative Publishing and the Politics of Lesbian Representation in the United States, 1950-1990,” (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1994); Stephanie Foote, “Deviant Classics: Pulp and the Making of Lesbian Print Culture.” *Signs* 31, no. 1 (2005): 169-90.

it was the cause or at least the symptom of other, more readily apparent social ills: Communism, prostitution, drug use, violence, and criminality overall.”²²

Combined, these elements of discrimination populated not only mainstream heterosexual culture but the lesbian culture as well. Internally, lesbian communities debated the stigmas placed against them and argued over the place and identity of the lesbian within society. Where these essential debates took place was primarily *The Ladder*, which acted simultaneously as a sounding board for the myriad issues plaguing the Lesbian in society but also as a platform for asserting a particular Lesbian lifestyle. Moving through the three editorial phases unlocks the creation of the DOB’s idealized Lesbian woman beginning with *The Ladder*’s early years of assimilationist driven journalism.

Ascending *The Ladder*, 1956-1963

After their first brush with controversy over the intent of the organization, Martin and Lyon pursued the possibility of creating a lesbian magazine. Both had trained as journalists and they saw the publication as an opportunity to make larger connections with other homophile groups while offering up the “feminine viewpoint” in a way that would unite women “for the common goal of greater personal and social acceptance and understanding.”²³ Together, Lyon and Martin made up the first generational and editorial phase of the publication from 1956-1963 beginning with Lyon, 1956 to 1960, and later Martin from 1960 to 1963. Although Lyon and Martin acted individually as *Ladder* editors, the transition between the two “hardly registers in the magazine’s content and style.”²⁴ Both Martin and Lyon aligned themselves with the early

²² Meeker, *Contacts Desired*, 87-88.

²³ *The Ladder*, October 1956, Vol. 1, No. 1, 4.

²⁴ Elyse Vigiletti, “Normalizing the ‘Variant’ in *The Ladder*, America’s Second Lesbian Magazine, 1956-1963,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 36 no. 2 (2015), 49.

assimilationist beliefs of the homophile movement that emphasized conformity as the primary means of gaining acceptance in heterosexual society. Under Lyon and Martin, *The Ladder* stressed two central themes. First, they advocated educating the Lesbian about herself and her community while also educating the heterosexual public about the Lesbian. This was done through the writings of professional experts in fields such as theology, sociology, and psychology, which Lyon and Martin argued, would normalize and validate the “variant.” Second, they encouraged socially acceptable, gender specific dress codes in opposition to the dress of working-class, butch-fem bar culture.

The role of the professional expert in interpreting and gaining acceptance for the Lesbian was key to the DOB’s idea of success. This is evident in *The Ladder*’s debut issue which outlined the group’s purpose to educate the variant on herself, educate the public about the Lesbian, and to participate in research projects by recognized experts.²⁵ During the early years of the DOB, Martin and Lyon fixed on the professional opinion of experts as a means to erode misconceptions concerning the lives of Lesbians.²⁶ In some cases, these experts were pulled in not only to normalize the Lesbian but also to elevate her to a particular class status. In two issues of *The Ladder*, a survey was sent out and interviews were conducted to gather research on the Lesbian’s education and income levels, types of professions, and the longevity of relationships.

The first study was conducted and presented in September 1959 and titled “Some Facts about Lesbians” by Jaffy Conrad. The results of the survey revealed high education levels compared to heterosexual females. Conrad calculated that of the lesbians who participated, “82%

²⁵ “Daughters of Bilitis— Purpose,” *The Ladder* 1 no. 1 (October 1956): 5.

²⁶ Martin and Lyon devoted long editorials to scientists’ opinions on the nature of homosexuality. For a few examples, see “Psychiatrist Urges Medical, Legal Understanding of Homosexual,” *The Ladder* 1 no. 2 (November 1956): 5; “The Homosexual Neurosis,” *The Ladder* 1 no. 6 (March 1957): 13-14; “Are Homosexuals a Menace?” *The Ladder* 1 no. 8 (May 1957). In other cases, the magazine would reference a nameless but “well known” or “well respected” psychologist, or sexologist, who was impressed by the “high caliber of people” involved in the DOB, see: “Why a Chapter in Your Area?” *The Ladder* 1 no. 5 (February 1957): 8.

completed four years of high school... 46% have had four years of college, 66% have had some college, 16% reported college work beyond the fourth year” whereas only 46% of heterosexual females had completed high school and only 6% completed four years of college.²⁷ The results continued on in a similar fashion indicating higher incomes for lesbians and suggesting that most worked in professional or semi-professional environments.²⁸ Conrad concluded that lesbians, on average, were “relatively well-educated, above average in income, relatively high in professional workers, and living a relatively stable, responsible mode of life by certain conventional, if not superficial, standards.”²⁹ *The Ladder* presented lesbians as exemplary American citizens to the heterosexual society while simultaneously reassuring and encouraging its readers that they belonged to a higher status group. This theme continued in a second study published in the July issue of 1962.

The 1962 article illustrated the extent to which members of the DOB perceived themselves as creators of the Lesbian identity. “The Concept of the Lesbian: A Minority in Reverse” by sociologist Suzanna Prosin distinguished the DOB members as a “formal group” within the lesbian minority. Prosin explained, “Your function is that of projecting the concept of the group image and...instructing and enforcing the group’s values...Other members, while not identified with the formal group, identify themselves to you.”³⁰ Prosin’s paper then divided the lesbian couples interviewed for the study into economic brackets. She argued that class determined whether lesbians adhered strictly to butch-fem roles and concluded that class likewise determined similar patterns of strict adherence to gender roles among heterosexuals: “just as in the heterosexual group, role is more enforced in the blue collar and lower white collar

²⁷ Jaffy Conrad, “Some Facts About Lesbians,” *The Ladder* (September 1959): 7-8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁰ Suzanna Prosin, “The Concept of the Lesbian: A Minority in Reverse” *The Ladder* 6 no. 10 (July 1962): 5-6.

classes, so is it apparently in the female homosexual group.”³¹ The study, like many early editorial pieces of *The Ladder*, scrutinized hair styles and lengths, as well as clothing choices, to make connections between social classes and femininity in order to challenge the perception of the Lesbian as hyper masculinized and uncultured.³² This article perfectly ties together the central themes of DOB’s assimilationist years: to fully cultivate the Lesbian brand, Lesbians needed education and validation from professionals and the right “look.”

Assimilationists of the first phase perceived the Lesbian identity as that of an “elusive creature” who “burrows underground in her fear of identification. She is cautious in her associations.”³³ The Lesbian was understood as a fearful, isolated victim, which seems to be a contradiction to tough bar lesbians who prospered during this same era. Emphasizing secrecy and invisibility in the private, domestic sphere, *The Ladder* and the DOB provided lesbians with an alternative to the bar scene. This tension between the image of lesbianism represented in *The Ladder* and in the bar culture was discussed extensively and vehemently in the first editorial phase from 1956-1963. In particular, the question of how lesbians should dress and appear in public became a hotly contested issue among DOB members and their lesbian readers. These tensions were hashed out typically in the President's address and in the Reader’s Response section of the magazine and illuminated conflicts between the tough lesbian bar culture and the professional, upwardly mobile class.

³¹ Ibid, 9

³² *The Ladder* 6 no. 10 (July 1962): 22. Prosin’s concluding remarks, “It is clear that the stereotype projected by literature and held by the public is invalid. The picture of the Lesbian, as an overly masculinized woman, cannot be supported on the basis of the physical appearance of the subject group.” For more examples see, “Job-Hunting Doesn't Need To Be A Problem,” *The Ladder* 1 no. 6 (March 1957): 6-8; “Accept the Challenge,” *The Ladder* 1 no. 7 (April 1957): 13-14; “The President’s Message,” *The Ladder* 1 no. 4 (January 1957): 9-10; “Psychotherapy vs. Public Opinion,” *The Ladder* 1 no. 5 (February 1957), 9-10; “Are Homosexuals A Menace?” *The Ladder* 1 no. 8 (May 1957): 4-6.

³³ Ibid, 7.

One reader's irritation at the "kids in fly-front pants and with the butch haircuts and mannish manner" is highlighted in the November 1956 issue.³⁴ D. Griffin in the President's Message, agreed with this reader's distaste and stated that the DOB was committed to converting these women who should remember "they are women first and a butch or fem secondly, so their attire should be that which society will accept. Contrary to belief, we have shown them that there is a place for them in society, but only if they wish to make it so."³⁵ Dress code became a top concern for DOB leaders who saw working-class butch and fem styles as bad publicity. *The Ladder* emphasized maintaining the status quo and placed the task of conforming, both physically and mentally to society's expectations of femininity, on the Lesbian. It was her responsibility alone to seek the acceptance of heterosexual society.

To achieve this goal, *The Ladder* advocated for Lesbians to think and act positively and join the DOB, as it offered the safer alternative to bar scenes. Del Martin in the "Positive Approach Editorial" stated that lesbians seeking other lesbians was a natural part of self-acceptance. She also noted that, "it is often times this problem of meeting others that leads the Lesbian into circumstances and places, not particularly of her taste or choice, which may expose her vulnerability to prejudice and suspicion."³⁶ This statement draws a line between the Lesbians who represented the DOB crowd and the "kids in the fly-front pants" with butch mannerisms. In Martin's view, the DOB Lesbians subjected themselves to bars because it was the only option available. In contrast to bar culture, the DOB "offers the Lesbian an outlet in meeting others" where she can "relax in an atmosphere of understanding" and indulge since "whatever the interest there is work to be done and fun to be had" at DOB meetings and parties.³⁷ From the

³⁴ Griffin, D. "President's Message," *The Ladder*, November 1956, 4.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 10.

³⁷ Del Martin, "The Positive Approach Editorial," *The Ladder* 1 no. 2 (November 1956): 10.

beginning, *The Ladder*'s editors were not interested in taking on the problems or image of working-class lesbian culture. Instead, they saw themselves as a better alternative to guide the fearful, confused, and victimized Lesbian to self-acceptance.³⁸

In her 1957 President's Message, DOB President D. Griffin adamantly insisted, "We aren't 'bar-hoppers,' but people with steady jobs, most of them good positions."³⁹ The editorial goes on to say that women of *The Ladder* who hope to find acceptance in their workplace as Lesbians are no different from heterosexuals except in sexual attraction.⁴⁰ Griffin concludes that, "We have said before, someone had to start this ball rolling and so here we are. At the moment we are all what might be termed 'white-collar' workers, but we want all kinds--those who want help and those who wish to help."⁴¹ This editorial illustrates the contradictory nature of the magazine. Although it advertised an open policy where anyone was accepted, it clearly delineated the particular types of women who attended DOB meetings or wrote for the *Ladder*, indicating that membership was open to anyone, so long as they played by the rules.

Similarly, as long as any woman of color abided by the DOB's standards, she too could function within the organization. Because of the DOB's primary concern with constructing a lesbian identity divorced from the dominant cultural narrative of the bar scene, they emphasized class issues rather than race. However, while there is no evidence that DOB actively discouraged African American women from joining, the very nature of DOB's constructed identity as that of

³⁸ For more examples of the DOB creating a divide between bar life and themselves, see, *The Ladder* 6 no. 1 (October 1961): 5-6. In this issue Jay Belle (DOB president at the time) described lesbian bars as a place "breeding of defiance towards society" and filled with women who "flaunt their homosexuality" to the public. She goes on to say that only people with "real strength can fight their way out of the example they see there that reeks of defiance, disillusionment, and despair." For another example, see "The Gay Bar-- Whose Problem Is It?" *The Ladder* (December 1959): 4-5. The editorial advises readers that "it is not in their self-interest to attire themselves [in men's clothing]" and encourages them to instead act in a "mode of behavior and dress acceptable to society."

³⁹ D. Griffin, "President's Message," *The Ladder* 1 no. 4 (January 1957): 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 10.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 10.

an upwardly mobile class was in the 1950s synonymous with white, middle-class status.

According to Meeker, DOB leaders simply “did not actively explore the intersections of race and sexuality and thus did not develop a clear understanding of how lesbianism might have been experienced differently by women of color even if class status was shared.”⁴² Although Martin and Lyon advertised themselves and DOB as an inclusive space where anyone was welcome, there was a clear disconnect in meeting the needs of African American women.

Judith Schwarz in her oral history account remembers that there were very few women of color who attended DOB meetings and those who did never stayed long. Schwarz explains that this was because they did not feel wanted: “there was that feeling that they didn’t get talked to as much...people weren’t talking to them as easily as other white women. If two black women came in they usually [would] start out sitting very far apart and then would gravitate [toward one another] and usually they had already known each other anyway.”⁴³

If the lesbian as illustrated by Del Martin was an “elusive creature,” then the African American lesbian was equally so in the 1950s and 1960s. This type of subtle racism is explored by Rochella Thorpe in “A House Where Queers Go” as she investigates the history of African American lesbian subcultures. Thorpe comments that historians have typically fixated on the history of lesbian bars as the pinnacle of lesbian culture and the place where lesbian communities typically formed and hence deterring historians from including African American lesbians, since they were less likely to frequent the bar scene.⁴⁴ Instead, Thorpe targets the history of rent and house parties where “sexuality was expressed more freely than in clubs or dance halls, which

⁴² Meeker, 102.

⁴³ Manuela Soares, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Judith Schwarz, Tape 1 of 1,” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*, 1987.

⁴⁴ Rochella Thorpe, “A House Where Queers Go: African American Lesbian Nightlife in Detroit, 1945-1975,” in *Inventing Lesbian Cultures in America*. Ed. Ellen Lewin (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 41.

were easier targets for vice squad surveillance,” as the primary space where African American lesbians engaged in social activities.⁴⁵ By design, house parties were controlled environments. Invitations to house parties spread by word of mouth or came by way of someone who knew someone. This clandestine system was a way of keeping law enforcement at bay. For African American lesbians, making contact with someone involved in the gay social scene was critical. Unlike white lesbians who could simply hear about a bar and go without knowing anyone, African American lesbians, Thorpe argues, had to form relationships with other lesbians first before knowing where to socialize.⁴⁶ This example echoes Schwarz’s account of African American lesbians, who, although they arrived separately to DOB meetings and sat a part, were actually well acquainted. This suggests that that women of color may have attended DOB functions to scope out the territory, and, when faced with subtle instances of racism, promptly left.

For Thorpe, subtle racism refers to the idea that white lesbians viewed themselves as less racist because of their sexuality.⁴⁷ Within predominantly white lesbian spaces there was an air of “neutrality,” an emphasis on similarities and their ability to overpower any differences. Drawing from historians and cultural theorists, Thorpe remarks, “this claim of neutrality limits the way people of color can express themselves, since to define oneself as black contradicts the logic in which the ‘neutral’ white person is not racist.”⁴⁸ While African American lesbians certainly frequented public bar spaces, the preference was private house parties where both subtle and overt racism could be avoided. Thorpe states, “unfortunately, in securing their own safety in

⁴⁵ Ibid, 43.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 44.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 49

⁴⁸ Ibid, 50.

bars, white lesbians left little space for African American women.”⁴⁹ Likewise, DOB founders and members lacked the perception of racial differences and acted neutrally to women of color in the organization.

A lack of intersectionality in DOB meant issues such as civil rights, women’s, and gay liberation were heavily factionalized and forced members to choose which issue was most pressing to them or to divide their energies among numerous causes. For African American lesbians this was especially critical. A letter from the renowned playwright Lorraine Hansberry to *The Ladder* in 1957 offers a small glimpse into this predicament. Hansberry also offers insight into the necessity of assimilationist tactics of the homophile movement. Hansberry compares the DOB’s urge for women to conform to “a mode of behaviour and dress acceptable to society” to many African American civil rights groups who, likewise, urged their communities to act and dress in fashion with the dominant white culture.⁵⁰ She writes, [emphasis mine] “As one raised in a cultural experience (I am a Negro) where those within were and are forever lecturing to their fellows about how to appear acceptable to the dominant social group, *I know something about the shallowness of such a view as an end in itself.*”⁵¹ Hansberry wrestles with herself in this statement by at once understanding the need to bend to the dominant group but also resist. In this way she mirrors the long struggle of the DOB to be at once inclusive while at the same time restricting of its members. Hansberry summarizes this internal dialogue by reasoning that while accommodationist tactics are regrettable, since regardless of what someone was wearing or doing they were likely to be discriminated against because of their difference, nonetheless, assimilation methods are a political necessity.⁵² Butches or, as she describes, the “ill-dressed” or “illiterate

⁴⁹ Ibid, 51.

⁵⁰ Reader’s Response, L.H.N., New York, N.Y. *The Ladder* 1 no.8 (May 1957): 27.

⁵¹ Ibid, 28.

⁵² Ibid, 28.

Negro” similarly “aggravate the problems of a group” and while she hopes in the future this no longer arises as an issue, for the time being “it still disturbs.”⁵³ From Hansberry’s conclusion, the Lesbian, regardless of racial background, if she chooses the DOB as her home must then submit to the cause of sexuality and assimilation completely for the betterment of everyone.

The centrality of assimilation cultivated by *The Ladder*’s first phase however came under attack as new editors voiced opposing opinions and pushed boundaries in the late 1960s. Under the direction of Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, *The Ladder*’s first editorial phase sculpted an image of the Lesbian as stable, normal, well educated, and gainfully employed, with the DOB as her safe haven. Doing so created barriers between DOB members, African American women, and the network of lesbian bars that acted, in their own way, as systems of uplift, education, and relevance.

Political Militancy and Raising a Lesbian Voice, 1963-1966

The early image of the Lesbian, according to Lyon and Martin, was a frightened, isolated, woman who was well educated but with nowhere to turn. In the magazine’s second editorial phase under editor Barbara Gittings, however, the Lesbian image was transformed into that of a woman unashamed of her homosexuality and willing to fight for her individual rights. This new position, however, was slow to gain traction. Initially in Gittings’ role as editor, she continued the DOB legacy of valuing expert opinions to validate the lesbian experience to heterosexual society.⁵⁴ Beginning in 1965, however, *The Ladder* began to seriously reconsider the role of the professional expert. This is evident in the February-March issue that highlighted the influence of

⁵³ Ibid, 28.

⁵⁴ For more examples of Gittings continuing the DOB tradition of expert advice for lesbian validation, see Barbara Gittings, “The Homosexual Minority in America,” *The Ladder* 7 no. 6 (March 1963); “New Research on Lesbians to Begin this Fall” & “Biblical References to Female Homosexuality,” *The Ladder* 7 no.6 (March 1963).

gay activist Frank Kameny on the homophile movement.⁵⁵ Kameny urged homophile groups to seek legislative changes and civil rights, as the problem was not the individual homosexual but rather the heterosexual society.⁵⁶ He advised homophile movements to change course and forget education and assimilation tactics, arguing that they were doomed to fail in the long run.⁵⁷ This philosophy radicalized Gittings' stance on *The Ladder*'s message and pushed her to take on more militant tactics. As Gittings remembers, "I gave some obeisance to research and therapy as important issues until I met Frank Kameny and after that there was no keeping me back. I sailed off in another direction entirely."⁵⁸

In his analysis of gay and lesbian journalism, historian Rodger Streitmatter argues that the DOB no longer merely advertised when protests would take place. Instead, they "quickly advanced to the more sophisticated levels of political journalism... [they] interpreted how complex court decisions represented stigmatizing of gay people and issued dramatic calls to action to identify specific steps readers could take to help gays cast off their repression."⁵⁹ A tactic used by Gittings to "cast off repression" was the incorporation of "Living Propaganda" as a semi regular segment in *Ladder* issues. These editorials highlighted instances of DOB Lesbians fighting moments of prejudice in their everyday lives by confronting homophobia or simply living openly and happily as Lesbians in their community.⁶⁰ These editorials emphasized the

⁵⁵ Frank Kameny was a gay rights activist and chapter organizer for the male homophile organization, the Mattachine Society, in Washington. Kameny is credited with coining the phrase "Gay is Good!" and being the first openly gay candidate to run for the United States Congress in 1971. Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America*, (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995), 56-58.

⁵⁶ *The Ladder* 9 no. 5-6 (February-March 1965): 14.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 14.

⁵⁸ Manuela Soares, "LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Barbara Gittings & Kay Tobin, Tape 2 of 3, February 20, 1988," Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA, 1988.

⁵⁹ Streitmatter, Rodger. *Unspeakable*, 52.

⁶⁰ For more examples of "Living Propaganda" pieces see *The Ladder* 8 no. 3 (December 1963): 15; *The Ladder* 8 no. 4 (January 1964): 18; *The Ladder* 8 no. 5 (February 1964): 21; *The Ladder* 9 no. 4 (January 1965): 13; *The Ladder* 9 no. 9 (June 1965): 21.

need for individual, daily improvement in the lives of lesbians, not simply changing the laws. Marilyn Barrow, the initial writer of “Living Propaganda” explained in a 1963 column, “even allowing for a miraculous legal success in the next few decades, this would hardly lessen the individual prejudice... And so with every one of us, we are living propaganda. Everyone we meet who knows we are gay, and likes and respects us, is a potential weapon for our struggle.”⁶¹

Along with publishing more militant political content, Gittings made two equally bold moves that transformed the magazine’s aesthetic. First, in March of 1964 Gittings added the subtitle *A Lesbian Review* to the cover of *The Ladder*. In doing so, she deviated from the early DOB philosophy of valuing discretion and subtlety in expressing its lesbian content (see fig. 1). Instead, Gittings proudly displayed the focus of the magazine’s contents on the cover for all to see.

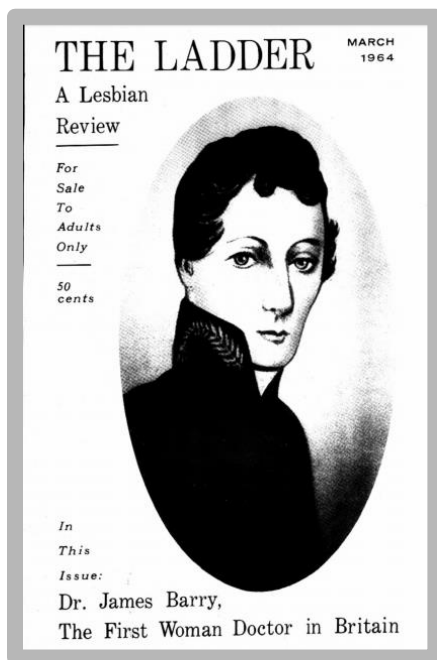


Figure 1. *The Ladder*, March, 1964.



Figure 2. *The Ladder*, November, 1964.

⁶¹ Marilyn Barrow, “Living Propaganda,” *The Ladder* 8 no. 2 (November 1963): 4.

Later that same year in the November issue, Gittings made a second daring move by placing a photograph of a self-identifying lesbian women on the cover (see fig. 2) in contrast to previous *Ladder* editors who used hand drawn images exclusively.⁶² In the past, Gittings had experimented with photography on earlier covers, but the photographs she chose depicted women with their backs turned to the camera.⁶³ The November 1964 issue marked a turning point in the journal's aesthetic choices: all future issues edited by Gittings featured either a “real” lesbian on the cover or some form of artwork celebrating lesbianism.⁶⁴ These tactics made the magazine’s content explicitly proud and seemed to demand that lesbians speak for themselves rather than depend on the knowledge of experts as had earlier DOB editors.⁶⁵ Lesbians, according to Gittings, should be the only experts on lesbianism.⁶⁶

⁶² *The Ladder* 9 no. 2 (November 1964) featured Ger van Braam an Indonesian lesbian who discovered the magazine through a friend and wrote to Gittings including her photograph and an essay titled “Isolation in Indonesia.” See Gallo, Marcia. *Different Daughters*, 93-95 and *The Ladder* 9 no. 2 (November 1964).

⁶³ For early issues that experimented with photography see *The Ladder* issues June-October, 1964.

⁶⁴ Reimagining *The Ladder*’s front cover was highly celebrated by readers, see “Reader’s Response,” *The Ladder* 8 no. 7 (April 1964): 25; In “Reader’s Response,” *The Ladder* 8 no. 8 (May 1964): 22, a reader remarked “The April cover is the height of taste--superb, elite, refined. It gives the magazine the polish it needs.” In previous issues of the Readers’ Response section, readers criticized the artwork, writing “How can you expect to favorably impress professional people and newsstand deals when the magazine looks like high school ‘literary’ annual?” from *The Ladder* 8 no. 7 (May 1963): 25; “Reader’s Response,” *The Ladder* 9 no. 3 (December 1964): 26.

⁶⁵ Gallo, Marcia. *Different Daughters*, 55-56.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 56.

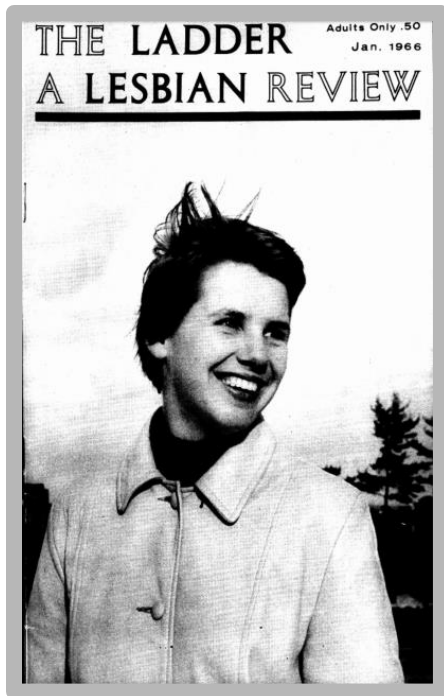


Figure 3. *The Ladder*, January 1966.



Figure 4. *The Ladder*, May 1966.

Gittings broke away from the DOB's original stance on how the Lesbian should interact and gain acceptance in society by focusing on militant political ideologies. However, the images of her *Ladder* covers from 1964 to mid 1966 continued to showcase the young, attractive, and nonthreatening image of the Lesbian promoted by Martin and Lyon. Gittings clearly avoided the butch and fem styles of tough lesbian bar culture. Instead, the images chosen featured women with the mild mannered, sporty, or collegiate look representative of the upwardly mobile classes (see fig. 3 & 4). The photographs are soft, revealing women in casual poses or quiet contemplation as they gaze toward the horizon or forward to the reader.⁶⁷ These stylish

⁶⁷ See *The Ladder* covers from January, May, and July of 1966 & May 1965 for the best examples of the "collegiate" butch look. Other issues show lesbians in various states of activity: July/August issue of 1965 shows two women in a car driving; June, September issues of 1965 show a woman on the beach with her pet. Mostly, however, the magazine shows women in a state of quiet contemplation, see November 1965; June 1966; December 1964; January 1965.

renderings of the Lesbian image entranced readers and, in their minds, elevated the content of *The Ladder*. *Ladder* issues that did not feature an authentic lesbian on the cover instead displayed works of art such as paintings and photographs of sculptures, ballet performances, and film.⁶⁸ In doing so, Gittings may have turned away from assimilationist DOB tactics, but she continued to advocate for a particular presentation of class through idealized Lesbian images in the photographs she selected.

Although Gittings' succeeded in achieving a more stylish and sophisticated journal that was widely accepted, her tactics and inclusion of male voices in the magazine drove the DOB council to fire her in 1966.⁶⁹ In particular, Frank Kameny's recurring voice in *The Ladder*, and Gittings' tendency to side with him, caused considerable friction among DOB leaders and readers who favored female only voices in the lesbian publication. In her book *Different Daughters*, Marcia M. Gallo explains that many DOB members and leaders felt disgruntled and "that their magazine--- now widely admired---was no longer mainly focused on women despite its subtitle *A Lesbian Review*."⁷⁰ This tension between gay males and lesbians dramatically impacted the last editorial phase of the magazine and its final two editors, as *The Ladder* grappled with opposing needs and opinions of the homophile movement and the intensifying women's liberation movement.

⁶⁸ *The Ladder* 10 no. 3 (December 1966) cover image of two ballerinas from the performance "Les Chansons de Bilitis;" *The Ladder* 10 no. 5 (February 1966), cover image of painting by Jan De Ruth titled "Duo;" *The Ladder* 10 no.6 (March 1966) cover image of wooden sculpture "Head of Girl" by Chaim Gross; *The Ladder* 10 no. 7 (April, 1966) cover image of the actresses in the film production of "The Group."

⁶⁹ Under Barbara Gittings the DOB and *Ladder* went through a series of changes and debates that ultimately resulted in Gittings' eviction as editor. A leading debate in Gittings' early years as editor revolved around the question of the relevancy of research and expert opinions on the homosexual. This topic was aggressively debated by *Ladder* contributors Florence Jaffy and Franklin Kameny. See: Florence Conrad, "How Much Research-- and Why?" *The Ladder* 7 no. 12 (September 1964): 20-24; Frank Kameny, "Does Research into Homosexuality Matter?" *The Ladder* 9 no. 8 (May 1965): 14-20; Florence Conrad, "Research is Here to Stay," July-August 1965, 15-21; Frank Kameny, "Emphasis on Research Has Had its Day," *The Ladder* 10 no. 1 (October 1965): 10-14.

⁷⁰ Marcia Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 131.

A Feminist Turn, 1966-1972

In between Gitting's political militancy period and the radical feminist phase spearheaded by Barbara Grier, lies Helen Sandoz's temporary run as editor from November 1966 to August 1968. Although adhering to the women's liberation agenda by including occasional pieces on movement related news, Sandoz preferred a more lighthearted tone for the magazine. Recounting her time as editor, Sandoz commented, "I wanted it [*The Ladder*] to be a little broader than just lesbian... to reflect what later became a feminist movement. I was not into radical feminism but I invited people into the magazine [who found] good, positive items about women."⁷¹ She goes on to say, "we [Sandoz and her partner Stella Rush] tried to balance it out with a couple of short stories, maybe a poem or two, with letters, news about other chapters, just an assortment of things... I just figured that what these people wanted was a little romance in their life, a little poetry, a nice little story, a little success."⁷² Sandoz certainly achieved balanced content, combining sentimental pieces, such as editorials written from the perspective of her cat with more feminist driven material that focused on the political and social outlook of lesbians in society.⁷³ In this way, Sandoz offered readers variety while continuing the DOB's earlier mantra of dissociation with bar lesbians. But now with women's liberation on the rise, this dissociation extended to male homosexuals as well. For *Ladder* writers and readers, both the gay male and

⁷¹ Manuela Soares, "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*.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ For sentimental cat pieces see "An Observation," *The Ladder* 11 no. 7 (May 1967): 12. "Random Thoughts for this Time," *The Ladder* 12 no. 1 (December 1967): 12; "Ben Cat," *The Ladder* 12 no. 3-4 (February-March 1968): 37. For more of Sandoz's feminist pieces see, *The Ladder* 11 no. 7 (January 1967); "The Life of a Lesbian," *The Ladder* 11 no. 6 (April 1967): 2-4; "Without Representation," *The Ladder* 11 no. 10 (August 1967): 2-4; "American Women," *The Ladder* 11 no. 12 (October-November 1967): 2-5; "And the Ladies Gathered," *The Ladder* 12 no. 1 (December 1967): 17-18.

working-class lesbian subcultures hindered the progress of women's equality and tarnished the appropriate and authentic "brand" of lesbianism.

To formally disassociate with the male viewpoint, editorials such as, "What Concrete Steps Can be Taken to Further the Homophile Movement?" dominated the magazine's discourse.⁷⁴ The differences between male and female homosexuals were scrutinized and debated. According to writer Shirley Willer, male homosexuals encountered problems associated with, "police harassment, unequal law enforcement, legal proscription of sexual practices and for a relatively few, the problem of disproportionate penalties for acts of questionable taste such as evolve from solicitations, wash-room sex acts and transsexual attire."⁷⁵ In contrast, Willer argued, Lesbians rarely encountered police harassment and legal trouble associated with cruising. Instead, "job security, career advancement, and family relationships" were her primary concerns.⁷⁶ This list downplayed the life of working-class lesbians who frequented the bar scene and whose social spheres often overlapped and mirrored male homosexual spaces.

It was not until Barbara Grier took over as editor in September of 1968, however, that *The Ladder* solidified its dedication to the feminist movement. Grier removed the subtitle *A Lesbian Review* from the cover, prioritized the literary components of the magazine, and began pushing publications that dealt exclusively with early women's liberation issues. A long time contributor to the magazine since 1957, Grier took on her role as editor with a zealot-like vigor: "I lived, breathed, ate, thought, *The Ladder*," she confessed solemnly.⁷⁷ Grier envisioned *The*

⁷⁴ Shirley Willer, "What Concrete Steps," *The Ladder* 11 no. 2 (November 1966): 17.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 17.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 18. For more examples of the growing divide between lesbians and gay men see: "A Lesbian Speaks Her Mind," *The Ladder* 11 no. 4 (January 1967): 3; "The Basic Bias," *The Ladder* 11 no. 5 (February, 1967): 3; "The Life of the Lesbian," *The Ladder* 11 no. 6 (April 1967): 3.

⁷⁷ Manuela Soares, "LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Barbara Grier, Tape 3 of 4, November 27, 1987," Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA.

Ladder as the *Atlantic Monthly* of Lesbian thought, the highest quality content possible both intellectually and artistically.⁷⁸ She and other contributors believed this type of content would solidify the Lesbian identity to the heterosexual public. Meaning, to cultivate such a high caliber journal would eliminate all public notions of the Lesbian as a masculine bar dweller. However, to take advantage of the rising tide of feminist ideology, the Lesbians of *The Ladder* shifted its focus to the heterosexual woman.

In the August/ September 1970 issue of *The Ladder* something was clearly amiss. Gone were the DOB mission statements that had begun every issue of the magazine since its inception in 1956. Gone were the list of DOB officers and titles and calendar of DOB events. Gone was any trace of the DOB from *The Ladder*'s pages. The August/ September issue was the first published after Barbara Grier and DOB national president Rita Laporte severed ties with the Daughters of Bilitis organization. After stealing the mailing list of subscribers from the national headquarters in San Francisco, Laporte and Grier made *The Ladder* officially its own entity, completely separate from the homophile movement and completely devoted to women's liberation.

Without a doubt, the theft of *The Ladder* was the largest controversy in DOB history. The act divided members and created decades long grudges amongst chapter presidents and readers. The organization's most prominent couple, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, took these events especially hard. They described the act as "despicable" and linked the separation of *The Ladder* from the organization as the leading cause for why the national DOB dissolved that same year. Although reluctant to comment at length on her opinion of Grier and Laporte, Martin claimed that Grier and Laporte had robbed DOB of *The Ladder* in the name of feminism. According to

⁷⁸ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 2011, 146.

Martin, Grier and Laporte believed the publication was not reaching its full potential under DOB editorship and was “behind the times” and needed to catch up to feminism. Martin found this logic laughable, especially notion that stealing from a female-led organization somehow furthered the cause of feminism.⁷⁹

Recalling the national DOB convention from 1968 where Laporte and Grier were elected as president and editor, respectively, Martin argued that a clear shift in DOB thought toward feminism had already begun. In 1966 Martin and Lyon, along with New York DOB representatives, Shirley Willer and her partner Marion Glass, were already discussing the need for DOB to reach more women by stressing the feminist perspective⁸⁰ This was, in large part, influenced by Martin and Lyon’s 1965 couple membership with the National Organization of Women. And, exasperated by the blatant sexism faced in male dominated homophile organizations, Martin in her often quoted editorial, “If That’s All There Is” had bid the male homophile movements adieu by famously stating, “I leave each of you to your own device. Take care of it, stroke it gently, mouth it and fondle it. As the center of your consciousness, it’s really all you have.”⁸¹ Together, these instances, for Martin and Lyon, suggested that the DOB and the Ladder had clearly articulated their feminist leanings. The theft of the Ladder’s mailing list was unnecessary.⁸² In contrast, Grier felt justified in her move to disassociate from the organization, especially since feminist writers that flocked to *The Ladder* after its split with DOB. Grier recalled, “a lot of people came to us after we dropped DOB, that was a clear point... when we severed from the organization and became a literary, critical, quality lesbian magazine with

⁷⁹ Manuela Soares, “Del Martin & Phyllis Lyon, Tape 1 of 4, May 9, 1987,” Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA.

⁸⁰ Ibid, Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA.

⁸¹ Martin, Del, “If That’s All There Is,” *The Ladder*, December/ January 1971.

⁸² Manuela Soares, “Del Martin & Phyllis Lyon, Tape 1 of 4, May 9, 1987,” Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA.

strong feminist leanings that brought [more writers].” But this, according to Grier, did not tarnish the DOB name in anyway, nor did people necessarily dislike the organization, instead, “it was more the idea of.. now [we’ll] make it into what it really should be instead of simply the voice of this organization.”⁸³

Nonetheless, under Grier *The Ladder* prioritized Lesbians as women first and homosexuals second. Grier outlined this in the masthead of the magazine, stating that, “initially, *The Ladder*’s goal was limited to achieving the rights accorded to heterosexual women, that is, full second-class citizenship. In the 1950’s women as a whole were as yet unaware of their oppression. The Lesbian knew. And she wondered silently when her sisters would realize that they too share many of the Lesbian’s handicaps, those that pertained to being a woman.”⁸⁴ Grier linked the oppression of lesbians with that of heterosexual women and raised *The Ladder* to what she viewed as a higher rung meant to include all women in the fight for equality, regardless of sexual orientation.⁸⁵ However, while simultaneously pairing lesbians and heterosexual women together in the fight for equality, she, like other lesbian contributors of *The Ladder*, saw themselves as superior. Phrases such as “the Lesbian knew” and “No heterosexual woman can match the passion some of us Lesbians have for our rights,” cycle through issues of the magazine when discussing the Lesbian’s place in the women’s movement.⁸⁶

The Ladder under Grier’s direction saw a tremendous change in content from a focus on frightened assimilationists to feminist aggressors who demanded their rights and polished their image as the authentic representation of feminism. Instead of mobilizing to normalize their

⁸³ Manuela Soares, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Barbara Grier, Tape 3 of 4, November 27, 1987,” Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA.

⁸⁴ *The Ladder* 14 no. no. 11-12 (August/September 1970): 2.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

⁸⁶ Rita Laporte, *The Ladder* 13 no. 1-2 (October-November 1968): 25

existence to a professional heterosexual society as they had under Martin and Lyon, and somewhat Gittings, or looking to heterosexual middle-class women for validation and acceptance, the lesbians who Grier published articulated the Lesbian's own worth and authority. Rita Laporte, turned "Director of Promotion" after *The Ladder's* break from the DOB, emphasized this authority vehemently in numerous, searing editorials. Laporte saw Lesbianism as a unifying sisterhood not available to heterosexual women and argued that any woman who excluded the Lesbian from the feminist movement was not a feminist. Lesbianism, as it was outlined and understood by *The Ladder*, under Grier's direction became synonymous with feminism, as it represented the movement's most authentic form of women empowerment.⁸⁷

Conclusion

In 1972 *The Ladder* folded, primarily as a result of a significant lack of financial resources. Two years exactly from the day in 1970 that Grier and Laporte debuted the new *Ladder*, Grier ran a particularly bitter editorial stating, "To those of you who have supported us by word, deed and money, as well as by writing for these pages, we simply wish the best in the future. For those of you who have casually read us through the years, indeed sometimes intending to subscribe, but not ever quite getting around to it, we wish you whatever you deserve and leave it to your own consciences to decide just what that might be."⁸⁸ The discontinuation of *The Ladder* was the end of a distinct era in lesbian writing and print culture. "*The Ladder* was a crucial journal," Joan Nestle, key founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, remembers, and

⁸⁷ For Rita Laporte articles see, "The Undefeatable Force Revisited," *The Ladder* 15 no. 11-12 (August-September 1971): 4-7. Examples of lesbianism as an authentic form of feminism, see Jo Harper, "The Lesbian at Work," *The Ladder* 13 no. 7-8 (April-May 1969): 4-7; Kelly Kane, "Conflict of Identity," *The Ladder* 15 no. 11-12 (August-September 1971): 24-25; Rita Mae Brown, "Viewing Sexism," *The Ladder* 15 no. 7-8 (April-May 1971): 29-31; Hope Thompson, "Sex and Sexuality," *The Ladder* 16 no. 5-6 (February-March 1972): 4-16; "Gay and Straight in the Movement," *The Ladder* 15 no. 7-8 (April-May 1971): 23-26.

⁸⁸ Barbara Grier, "Editorial," *The Ladder* 16 no. 11-12 (August-September 1972).

goes on to say, “I was living on the lower East Side [in New York] in the early sixties and [I would go to] these cheap drug stores and sometimes [find] a small, square journal and there’d be a picture of a lesbian on the cover and that was a life line.”⁸⁹ DOB and its *Ladder* gave women the opportunity to speak out and construct a collective identity far removed from the deviant image heterosexual society imposed on them. Both *The Ladder* and DOB functioned as a united front embracing a lesbian identity that favored decorum, intelligence, and high literary and artistic tastes by providing women with poetry, short stories, literature reviews, political and opinion pieces—all written by and for Lesbians.

Although separated from the DOB in 1970, *The Ladder* continued to be adaptable to changing generational opinions and instilled in Grier and Laporte the confidence to pursue larger endeavors such as a high literary driven journal. Furthermore, as chapter three will explore, the DOB legacy did not entirely dissolve with the end of *The Ladder*. Instead, other publications sprang up to fill the void and provided women with another middle ground for the “everylesbian” to ride the wave of radical lesbian feminism.

⁸⁹ Manuela Soares, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Judith Schwarz and Joan Nestle, Tape 1 of 1,” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*.

CHAPTER IV: “PLEASE, SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL LESBIAN”: DIVERSIFICATION OF THE DOB UNDER LESBIAN FEMINISM

“I am in revolt against a complex interwoven system whose every part conspires by both subtle and obvious means with every other part to keep me down. So name any institution or institutionalized idea and you name my oppressor, whether it is the mass media with its perpetuation of the myths about me and the automotive industry which profits from my ignorance of carburetors, or the chivalry that would so nobly put me in the lifeboat first, or the super-stud who wants me in bed and in the world only in one position--on my back where I’m helpless.”

—Sally Gearhart, *Sisters: By and For Lesbians*

From its inception in 1955 the Daughters of Bilitis was invested in exploring the Lesbian as both a homosexual and a woman. Early on in the organization, this exploration meant education and integration of the Lesbian in society with greater emphasis on homosexual rights than women’s rights. For members and leaders of the DOB, this meant focusing on the individual Lesbian, boosting her confidence, and introducing her to a wider network of other lesbians. The method proved successful and far reaching as Jean Cordova, lesbian rights activist and DOB L.A. chapter president, remembered, “DOB was much, much more widely known than the participants would have ever suggested,” and known by tens of thousands of women as a reputable organization for lesbian empowerment.¹ The interplay between these two similarly oppressed identities of lesbian and woman shifted, however, with the second wave of feminism. Now, the Lesbian was guided by her faithful *Ladder* to reinterpret herself as a woman first, homosexual second, asking her, essentially, to rediscover her womanhood.

¹ Manuela Soares, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Jean Cordova, Tape 1 of 1, October 27, 1988,” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*.

Before *The Ladder* was divorced from the DOB national organization and before its untimely demise in 1972, the publication adamantly drew connections between lesbianism and feminism as two deeply intertwined identities. Editorials such as Lesley Springvine's "Out from Under the Rocks—With Guns!" and Wilda Chase's "Lesbianism and Feminism" were commonplace and alerted the DOB Lesbian to issues of feminism and sexism and their interrelatedness with lesbian issues. As Springvine writes, "however much the Lesbian may resent the heterosexual world because of its discrimination against the homosexual, for the sake of her own skin she had better discard any feeling of aloofness and give the women's rights movement all she's got, shoulder to shoulder with her heterosexual sisters."² Springvine goes on to say, "whether we like it or not, the Lesbian future is inextricably bound up with the future of the heterosexual woman."³ For Springvine, the Lesbian was a reluctant but essential helper of the heterosexual women, since, in her words, "the Lesbian is in a much better position to fight for women's rights than the heterosexual woman is." Springvine claimed the Lesbian was obligated to assist her less fortunate sisters in a time of crisis.⁴ In doing so, she argued, Lesbians will be securing their own rights as women.

Likewise, Wilda Chase in her article emphasized that women's issues are, in fact, lesbian issues. Chase claims that women's liberation advances the "interests of lesbians as women" and is a "mutually profitable liaison ... with groups of women who are not lesbians," which creates a "very good means of gaining acceptance of the lesbian as a citizen of the community, and of achieving recognition of lesbianism as a valid lifestyle."⁵ Chase, like Springvine, acknowledges

² Lesley, Springvine, "Out from Under the Rocks- With Guns!" *The Ladder* 14 no. 3-4 (December & January 1969-1970): 10.

³ Ibid, 10.

⁴ Ibid, 10.

⁵ Wilda Chase, "Lesbianism and Feminism," *The Ladder* 14 no. 3-4 (December & January 1969-1970): 13.

that lesbians “have definite advantages over heterosexual women,” since they are not in any way involved with men.⁶ Both Springvine and Chase recognize lesbians as ideal feminists, but lacking essential skills. They argue that lesbians were less politically minded because they interacted outside the heterosexual realm. While lesbians had a “superior sense of self” because they lived outside a male-driven life, their “political IQs” were unfortunately low and in need of advancement.⁷ As feminism exerted its influence on DOB, the Lesbian’s identity as a woman was championed over her sexuality. Under the flag of feminism, the DOB Lesbian identity moved from someone in need of encouragement and education to better accept herself to someone who was an influencer of and participant in a major movement. Through feminism, the DOB Lesbian became powerful in a way she was not before, her identity became linked to political activism and authority.

As this chapter will show, although *The Ladder* dissolved in 1972, its impact and the networks established by DOB chapters gave rise to three important lesbian publications: *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* (1970-1975), *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (1969-1983), and *Lesbian Tide* (1971-1980). These publications carried DOB Lesbians through the rough currents of feminism’s second wave. Despite fading by the end of 1970s, the three publications, intrinsically bound to DOB, diversified the Lesbian identity by challenging its singularity and expanding the lesbian’s political influence. By analyzing the historical context of radical feminism and its influence on DOB, along with the three lesbian publications, this chapter argues that while DOB maintained considerable influence into the 1970s, the Lesbian identity they cultivated in the 1950s and 1960s fragmented after the devastating theft of *The Ladder*. This fragmentation gave way to a new period of history where the idea of a single lesbian identity was challenged. To

⁶ Ibid, 14.

⁷ Ibid, 14.

begin, the interplay between radical feminism, lesbian feminism, and DOB is examined.

Rise of Lesbian Feminism

The DOB's struggle to accommodate both a gay and women's liberation stance was not editorialized in a vacuum. Rather, the debates concerning women's liberation in *The Ladder* were representative of feminism's radical turn in the mid 1960s and the burgeoning counterculture of anti-establishment, anti-war, and free love movements.⁸ Unlike the first wave of women's rights activism in the United States, which was, as activist and historian Sara M. Evans notes, "built slowly from its beginnings in the middle of the nineteenth century," the second wave "arose almost instantly in a fast-moving and unruly storm, massive from the very outset."⁹ Very quickly two forms of feminism, liberal and radical, began raising the consciousnesses of women and formulating tactics for ending oppression. Evans describes these two "different but complementary perspectives" of feminism as rooted within two key slogans: "Equality" and "Liberation." According to Evans, for liberal feminists such as Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique* and founder of NOW, "'equality' made a reasonable, liberal request for legal and economic equity."¹⁰ Older professional women who fiercely aligned with the silent frustrations and sense of isolation in middle-class suburbia that featured in *The Feminine Mystique* embraced this form of feminism. Whereas for radical feminists, the slogan "'liberation' raised a set of radical demands about culture and subjective identity."¹¹ Younger,

⁸ For books documenting the counterculture of the 1960s in the United States see, Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co, 1969); Manuel Luis Martínez, *Countering the Counterculture: Rereading Postwar American Dissent from Jack Kerouac to Tomás Rivera* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Jeff Kasseloff, *Generation on Fire: Voices of Protest from the 1960s, An Oral History* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007); Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009).

⁹ Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York, N.Y.: The Free Press, 2003), 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 24.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 24.

college aged women active in the civil rights and student movements of the 1960s formed this sector.¹² In contrast to liberal feminism, radical feminism rejected any notion of working within the system to evoke change for women. Instead, radical feminists demanded a complete overhaul.

According to historian and activist, Alice Echols, radical feminism “rejected both the political position that socialist revolution would bring about women’s liberation and the liberal feminist solution of integrating women into the public sphere,” Instead, she claimed, they believed that all women formed a “sex-class.”¹³ Echols claimed that radical feminists saw women’s inequality *as women* in both private and public spheres as the essential contributor to their oppression because of their subordination to the patriarchy. Gender superseded class or race-based identities. Because of these distinctions that placed considerable emphasis on gender relations to address female oppression, lesbian feminism was directly interwoven with radical feminism. Unique in lesbian feminism was the belief that heterosexuality was an oppressive construct imposed on women. As a consequence, lesbianism was a political choice women could make in order to reverse their oppression. This was best represented in the commonly used lesbian feminist slogan: “Feminism is the theory; lesbianism is the practice.”

A defining reason, however, for the creation of such a specific offshoot of the radical feminist philosophy, grew primarily out of the deeply felt homophobia of the women’s liberation movement. Many radical feminists, Echols has asserted, “were often skittish if not hostile toward lesbianism. Most commonly, they dismissed lesbianism as sexual rather than political.”¹⁴ Radical

¹² For an extensive history of the interplay between civil rights and student movements of the 1960s see, Carol Giardina, *Freedom for Women: Forging the Women's Liberation Movement, 1953-1970* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2010).

¹³ Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1989), 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 211.

feminists were equally dismissive of the role -playing or butch-femme relationships. These relationships were viewed as hypersexual and “oppressively male,” and therefore detrimental to the cause.¹⁵ The most commonly referenced opposition to lesbianism at the time was NOW president Betty Friedan’s comment that lesbianism threatened the credibility of the women’s movement and therefore was a “lavender menace” to the organization.¹⁶ Lesbian feminists considered it essential to their philosophy that they “persuade feminists that lesbianism was not simply a bedroom issue and that lesbians were not male-identified ‘bogeywomen’ out to sexually exploit other women.”¹⁷ To combat this notion, lesbians of the liberation movement rebranded themselves as the true form of feminism. They accomplished this by interpreting their sexuality and lifestyle as the complete rejection of maleness and positioning themselves in opposition to heterosexual women who lesbian feminists perceived as dependent on men and not yet living up to their true feminist potential.¹⁸ This philosophy was explicitly defined in the now famous position paper “The Woman-Identified Woman.”

In May of 1970 during the opening night of the second Congress to Unite Women, hosted by the National Organization of Women (NOW), forty women ambushed the crowded auditorium in protest. As the lights cut off, loud raucous laughter, rebel yells, and pounding feet could be heard as women charged the stage, demanding their voices be heard. When the lights flickered on again, women crowded the stage wearing matching t-shirts with the lettering “Lavender Menace” scrawled across the front.¹⁹ As a jab at Betty Friedan’s anti-lesbian stance in NOW functions, famous essayist, poet, and feminist, Rita Mae Brown, and others banded

¹⁵ Ibid, 211.

¹⁶ Ibid, 212.

¹⁷ Ibid, 216.

¹⁸ Ibid, 216.

¹⁹ Ibid, 213-216.

together to form the “Lavender Menace,” later renamed the Radicalesbians. The rampant homophobia in the women’s movement fueled the Lavender Menace and their hijacking of the conference. But the most significant turning point of this conference was the distribution of the manifesto, “The Woman-Identified Woman,” which became a cornerstone of lesbian feminist thought.

Beginning with the evocative call and response, “What is a lesbian? A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion,” the Radicalesbians redefined the lesbian identity as the quintessential form of political solidarity among women and as a political choice beneficial to all rather than a sexual choice.²⁰ They accomplished this by outlining the stigmas and negative history behind the term lesbian, stating:

Lesbian is a word, the label, the condition that holds women in line. When a woman hears this word tossed her way, she knows she is stepping out of line. She knows that she has crossed the terrible boundary of her sex role. She recoils, she protests, she reshapes her actions to gain approval. Lesbian is a label invented by the Man to throw at any woman who dares to be his equal, who dares to challenge his prerogatives... who dares to assert the primacy of her own needs.²¹

Instead of viewing lesbians as the enemy attempting to derail the women’s movement, the Radicalesbians advocated that heterosexual women see lesbians as sisters in a shared struggle. They argued that by working together and ceasing all fighting, they could pour their energies into one another instead of men, who only sought to divide women and impose a male defined identity on women. Instead, they argued that through this process of true unity, women could begin finding, reinforcing, and validating their authentic selves.²² And, as the Radicalesbians made clear, “with that real self, with that consciousness, we begin a revolution to end the

²⁰ Radicalesbians, “The Woman-Identified Woman,” 1970, Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Archives, Duke University Digital Collection, 1.

²¹ Ibid, 1.

²² Ibid, 4.

imposition of all coercive identifications, and to achieve maximum autonomy in human expression.”²³

The historical connections between lesbianism and feminism, as articulated by Lillian Faderman, were not new to society in the 1970s. Describing the first women’s movement of the nineteenth century, Faderman outlines that ‘lesbian’ was used as a slur to deter women from joining the movement. Labeling women’s rights activists as lesbians “out to seduce innocent young girls and spread their taint under the guise of feminism,” horrified would-be feminists, discouraging them from joining and crippling the movement.²⁴ Opponents to women’s liberation in the second wave used similar tactics, but, Faderman contends, “this time, in the context of a more radical era, it backfired.”²⁵ Being labeled as lesbians pushed many radical feminists to investigate the term, they discovered as a result that lesbian had “always been a kind of code word for female resistance.”²⁶ And with this investigation, some radical feminists began to see lesbianism as an attractive alternative to heterosexuality, which many women considered a “a sign of female masochism.”²⁷

In this way, lesbian-feminists began to think of themselves as social activist pioneers of the nineteenth century, similar to Jane Addams and the women of Hull House, who devoted all their time and energy into each other and their careers.²⁸ They saw themselves as women who “emphasized the importance of women loving and respecting themselves and other women.”²⁹ Within this thought process, lesbianism became an umbrella term whose definition was stretched

²³ Ibid, 4.

²⁴ Faderman, Lillian, *Twilight Lovers and Odd Girls*, 205.

²⁵ Ibid, 205.

²⁶ Ibid, 205.

²⁷ Ibid, 205.

²⁸ Ibid, 206.

²⁹ Ibid, 206.

far beyond sexual attraction between women to include a political lifestyle. Lesbian feminist thought pushed beyond any argument of essentialism that the gay liberation movements championed and wagered that all women had the capability to choose lesbianism, or “to make a conscious political choice to leave heterosexuality and embrace lesbianism.”³⁰

In promoting the woman-identified woman as the most authentic version of feminism and lesbianism as a necessary element to the women’s movement, the lesbian feminists still needed to address the issue of sex to appease their heterosexual counterparts. Historian Alice Echols explains that lesbians in the women’s liberation movement tried presenting lesbianism as a lifestyle that “offered women something substantially different from the familiar heterosexual pattern of dominance and submission.”³¹ This also meant completely shunning anything that even hinted at the “old gays” and butch-femme role-playing. Instead, lesbian feminists portrayed lesbian sex as “sensuality rather than sexuality, ‘communication’ rather than ‘conquest.’”³²

In the process of de-sexualizing lesbianism, lesbian feminists reinforced “dominant cultural assumptions about women’s sexuality.”³³ Lesbians emphasized love and fidelity as key components to lesbian relationships and insisted that they, unlike men, were not sex obsessed.³⁴ This sanitation of the lesbian identity mirrors DOB’s early educational and assimilationist tactics. DOB sought as well to distance themselves from any unsavory image of lesbian identity, namely, the eroticism of the butch lesbian bar scene. The homophile movement, by design and title, worked to emphasize “same love” and de-emphasize the sexual components of homosexual relationships. In both cases, early DOB organizing and lesbian feminists, they sought to

³⁰ Ibid, 207.

³¹ Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 217.

³² Ibid, 217.

³³ Ibid, 218.

³⁴ Ibid, 218.

desexualize and elevate the lesbian whenever possible. The reasonings behind these tendencies, however greatly differed.

For DOB, lesbian sex and lesbian relationships were never articulated as a political act or statement as was the case in the lesbian feminist movement. Consistently, Martin and Lyon, in promoting DOB, *The Ladder*, and their own personal identities, described the Lesbian as “a woman whose primary interests—socially, emotionally, psychologically, and sexually—are in another woman.”³⁵ Although on the surface this statement appears to mirror the woman-identified-woman rhetoric that encouraged women to direct all of their energies to other women, DOB was explicit in their understanding of lesbianism as an inherently erotic attraction to other women and something innate within themselves, not a political choice. This is emphasized by Martin and Lyon who state that the only difference between the Lesbian and the heterosexual woman “lies only in that she looks to women for her emotional and *sexual* fulfillment.”³⁶

Sexual attraction remained at the forefront of what constituted lesbianism for DOB rather than a political or spiritual unity among women. Martin and Lyon articulated this in 1970 with the article “The Lesbian and the Women’s Rights Movement,” in which they stated, “some women liberationists have been investigating lesbianism as an alternative lifestyle....while we do not encourage these obvious recruits to the Lesbian ranks, we do understand their dilemma.... however we also feel there is a deeper emotional predisposition for women who truly identity as a Lesbian and wonder if these liberationists will not create further emotional problems for

³⁵ Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, *Writings, Lesbianism, General*, 1970, 40/27, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 93-13, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, Accessed through Austin Peay State University Library *Archives Unbound* online database.

³⁶ *Ibid.* Emphasis is my own.

themselves—and for Lesbians they may team up with.”³⁷ Here, Martin and Lyon clarify a crucial difference in the DOB Lesbian identity and the one created and popularized by the women’s liberationist movement. This difference highlights the DOB Lesbian as an *actual* lesbian, whereas, the lesbian feminists promote a form of situational lesbianism. In that, “they [liberationists] are adamant about having an equal partnership with men and refuse to play a secondary role. Until such time as men come to realize they [liberationists] are really serious and begin to take steps to correct the obvious inequalities between the sexes, these women will disclaim heterosexual relationships.”³⁸ And having disclaimed straight relationships, radical feminists then sought out other women as their confidants. Strong rhetoric such as this is reflective of radical feminists’ tendency toward dogmatism and political absolutism that ostracized as well as inspired DOB members.

Lesbian feminism and the DOB enjoyed considerable overlap. They both sought to centralize the lesbian as an important figure in the struggle for women’s rights and acted out against the sexism and homophobia found in gay and women’s rights groups. However, their relationship was contested. Unnerved by the radicalism of lesbian feminism, some DOB members advocated once again for a middle ground where the average lesbian could express herself and meet companions. Others, enamored of the possibility of radical changes, embraced the liberation rhetoric. In either case, politics became a central issue to DOB publications and an unavoidable topic as the personal became heatedly political. Analyzing three publications, *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* (1970-1975), *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (1969-1983), and *Lesbian Tide* (1971-1980), that emerged in the wake of DOB’s collapse as a national

³⁷ Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers. *Writings*, “*The Lesbian & The Women's Rights Movement*,” 36/2, 1970. Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 93-13, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society. Accessed through Austin Peay State University Library *Archives Unbound* online database.

³⁸ *Ibid*.

organization illustrates how the DOB Lesbian identity diversified dramatically and became embedded in a nationwide conversation about women's and lesbian rights. Examining the three publications also highlights the qualities of *The Ladder* that editors found most useful and choose to replicate in their new magazines to advocate their version of the diversified Lesbian identity. As DOB became more factionalized with the onset of women's liberation and the crumbling of national organization, DOB chapters asserted their independence through their local chapter newsletters. Importantly, by looking at these publications individually and within the context of *The Ladder's* influence, it demonstrates that the DOB continued to matter to lesbians and their identity well into the 1970s.

Sisters: By and For Lesbians (1970-1975)

Immediately following the theft of *The Ladder* in 1970, the DOB chapter in San Francisco created the magazine *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* based on their local DOB chapter newsletter. Galvanizing around the need for an exclusively lesbian magazine, *Sisters* looked to fill the void left behind by *The Ladder*. As they specified in their opening editorial, aptly named "DOB Lives!" *The Ladder* was "still being published from Reno, Nevada, and has turned its focus to Women's Liberation." The editors acknowledged this was a worthy cause, but argued that "there still exists a great need for an exclusively Lesbian magazine devoted to Lesbian liberation."³⁹ In this way, *Sisters* aligned themselves firmly with the DOB's original intent to provide the female homosexual viewpoint as it continued to be an underrepresented perspective in both mainstream heterosexual and homosexual circles. Throughout the publication's five-year run this sentiment was never lost. They catered solely to the lesbian perspective and in many

³⁹ "DOB Lives!" *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 1 no. 1 (November 1970).

ways resembled *The Ladder*'s early publishing period under Martin and Lyon. They continued running the DOB's original statement of purpose outlining the organization's four main objectives in their masthead. And, although *Sisters* did not abide by any rule of accommodationist tactics as had Martin and Lyon in the 1950s, the editors did believe in the power of "the establishment" and curated a balanced mix of literary and political content.

For *Sisters*, DOB constituted "the establishment" because of its longevity and history. Being part of the establishment meant wielding power as a member of the homophile collective that carved out a space for gays and lesbians during the hostile McCarthy era, and in doing so, ensuring the future successes of gays and lesbians down the line. *Sisters* viewed this accomplishment as decidedly forward and recognized the radical roots of the homophile movement, even though in 1970 the DOB was regarded as an older, slightly conservative organization. In using the highly stigmatized word "establishment" during a period of extreme anti-establishment rhetoric, *Sisters* highlighted the need for unity among gay and women's liberationists and the homophile community. "We differ from the gay liberation movement only in methodology, and ours IS COMPATIBLE with theirs," Karen Wells, long time *Sisters* editor, reported in her editorial "DOB and Radical Politics." She asserted "our way moves right along with theirs and together we can make a vast difference."⁴⁰ Turning against one another would be detrimental to both gay and women's causes, as Wells went on to write, "if we wish as gay people to get our rights as humans, we must work together as humans. Humans are different—some are radical, some are not. But if we deny this difference, put down those 'establishment' people who want to do their thing for us, we put down their humanness."⁴¹ Concluding, Wells

⁴⁰ Karen Wells, "DOB and Radical Politics," *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 1 no. 2 (December 1970): 28.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 29.

emphasized that radical organizations of the day needed DOB, and vice versa, as they both brought to the table various and influential “tools” for bettering society.

Likewise, the Reader's Response section of the magazine voiced the need for a distinct place for the “non-hip, non radical” lesbian in society.⁴² Responding to a questionnaire sent out by *Sisters* about the possibility of creating a Women’s Center in San Francisco where women, regardless of political leaning, could gather, a woman reader self-described as “an old conservative” denounced the idea. She reasoned that the Center would result in the DOB assimilating to the liberationists, thus making DOB indistinguishable from other radical groups. She explained, “perhaps DOB’s methods have been slow and plodding in comparison, but they cannot be disregarded; we have made steady progress. All lesbians are not radically oriented. All types of people make up our organization, and I am opposed to any mere move which would tend to alienate all but those of one ideology.”⁴³ In this way, *Sisters* continued the tradition of DOB as a mouthpiece for the every Lesbian, enforcing the importance of sustaining a place for the average Lesbian, while simultaneously working to build bridges as *The Ladder* had in response to negative mainstream heterosexual media.

Sisters continued to carry the torch of DOB as the middle ground Lesbian identity while also adapting to a new social climate. A key component to this was greater comfortability with images portraying and discussions of sexuality. In the most obvious way, *Sisters* differed from *The Ladder* in terms of their embrace of lesbian sexuality and female nudity both in content and on the covers of the magazine. *Sisters* frequently featured nude drawings of women individually, in pairs, or even in groups (see figure 5 and 6).⁴⁴

⁴² Reader’s Response, *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 2 no. 1 (January 1971): 7.

⁴³ Ibid, 7.

⁴⁴ For images featuring solitary figures, see the front covers of *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 2 no. 5 (May 1971); *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 5 no. 3 (March 1974); *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 5 no. 5 (May 1974). For images of

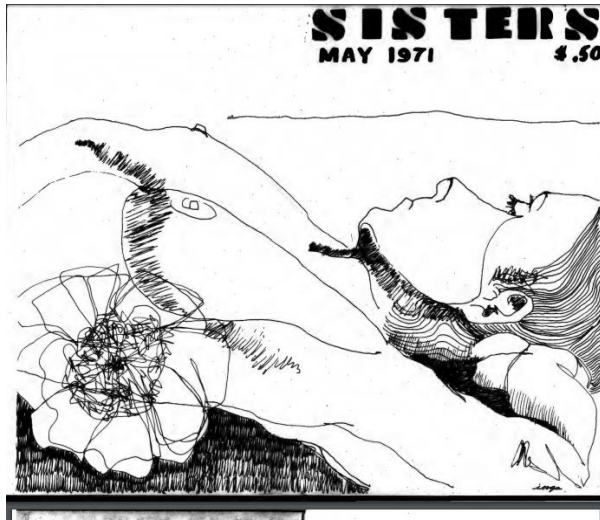


Figure 5. Solitary woman, *Sisters* May, 1971



Figure 6. Pair, *Sisters* June, 1971

The nude female was cast in a variety of poses that could be interpreted in a variety of ways. In some cases, she was drawn as powerful or explicitly sexual (see figure 7). In other cases, the magazine's covers were wickedly suggestive using certain shapes to denote femininity (see figure 8).⁴⁵ These covers would have been inconceivable in the late 1950s and early 1960s in *The Ladder*, as DOB typically shied away from anything explicitly sexual. It was also imperative during the early DOB days to abide by the homophile movement code of conduct, which sought to downplay the sexual elements of homosexuality to a heterosexual public.

women in pairs see the front covers of *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 2 no. 2 (February 1971); *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 2 no. 3 (March 1971); *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 2 no. 6 (June 1971). For images of groups of women see the front cover of *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 3 no. 7 (July 1972).

⁴⁵ For covers featuring power poses, see *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 3 no. 1 (January 1972); *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 4 no. 1 (January 1973); for sexual images see *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 3 no. 8 (August 1972); *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 5 no. 8 (August 1974).

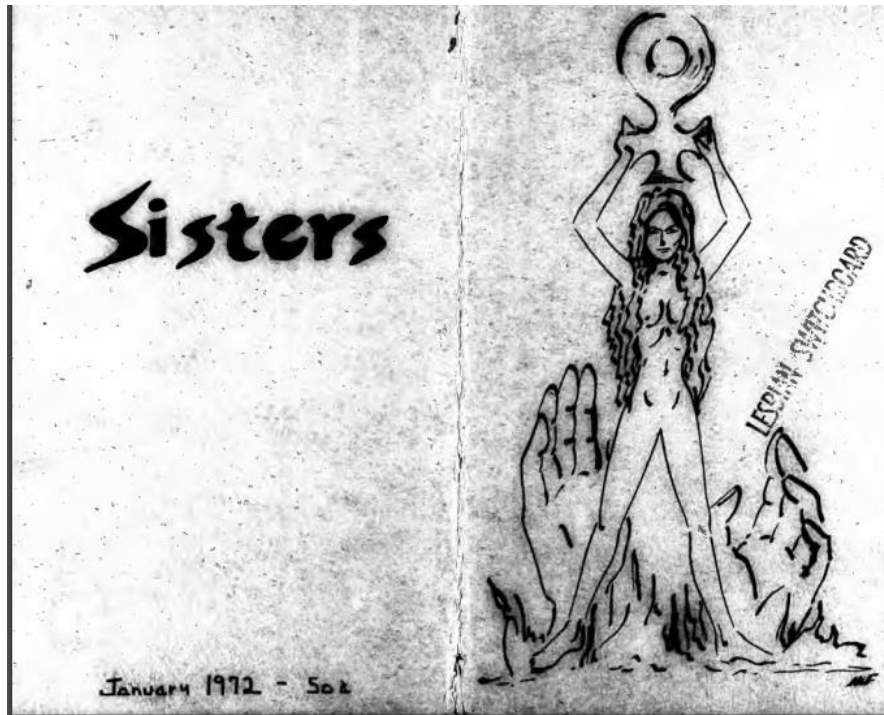


Figure 7. Power pose, *Sisters* January, 1972

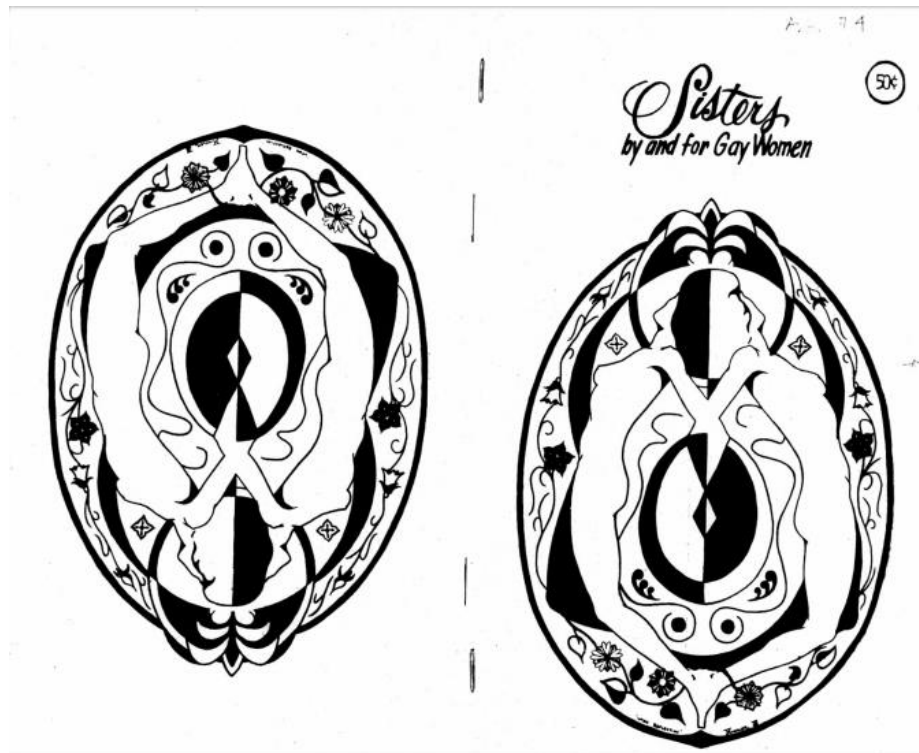


Figure 8. Suggestive shape, *Sisters* August, 1975

Likewise, the content of *Sisters* embraced sexually frank discussions of orgasms or how to find sexual partners. Numerous articles, reader responses, or the “Dear Sag” segments of *Sister* showcase both readers, writers, and editors’ level of comfort with sex related questions or issues. As one reader asked, “What is the difference between a clitoral and vaginal orgasm? Is one more pleasurable than the other?” signed “Curious.”⁴⁶ In other instances, articles such as “Everything You Wanted to Know About Your Girlfriend's Sex Life But Were Too Afraid To Ask,” became more commonplace alongside political articles, event calendars, and horoscope readings.⁴⁷ Although *Sisters* demonstrated a greater acceptance of visible female sexuality, a far cry away from *The Ladder*’s code of respectability, they reinforced a central element to lesbianism that Martin and Lyon differentiated from lesbian feminism. This difference understood the fundamentals of lesbianism as the sexual attraction between two women, not merely a political ideology. The magazine’s flirtation with suggestive covers and sex related content positions *Sisters* as a reinterpretation of *The Ladder* for a new generation of Lesbians. This new generation came of age during the sexual revolution, not the conventional 1950s, and while they too strove for self-acceptance, education, and equality like early DOB members, they also wanted good sex and weren’t afraid to say so.

Sisters expanded the DOB Lesbian identity to embrace more sexually charged opinions and content, while also maintaining a solid and consistent DOB identity that had been cultivated by *The Ladder*. Rarely did *Sisters* deviate from *The Ladder*’s example. Reasons for this are varied, but a number of factors contributed to the loyalty of *Sisters* to *The Ladder*’s agenda. For

⁴⁶ “Dear Sag,” *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 1 no. 1 (November 1970). For more examples of *Sisters* embracing more sexual content, see *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* “Dear Sag,” 1 no. 2 (December 1970): 7; “I was Oppressed by the Big ‘O’” *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 4 no. 6 (June 1973): 25-27; “This Little Piggie Went to Market,” *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 4 no. 8 (August 1973): 14-15.

⁴⁷ “Everything You Wanted to Know About Your Girlfriend's Sex Life But Were Too Afraid To Ask,” *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 2 no. 6 (June 1971): 7.

one thing, *Sisters* was run out of the DOB's birthplace and national headquarters, San Francisco. Moreover, their location was also the hometown of power couple Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon who acted as frequent guest writers in *Sisters* and whose self-portraits were featured twice as the magazine's cover page.⁴⁸ With such strong ties to DOB's home city and Martin and Lyon, it comes as no surprise that *Sisters* desired to match *The Ladder* as closely as possible. In this way, the magazine holds an important place in a post-*Ladder* period and in the creation of a Lesbian identity, as *Sisters* continued the DOB legacy. *Sisters* illustrates a way in which the lesbian homophile movement interacted with women's liberation and remained important, even during the heyday of radical political movements.

Focus: A Journal for Gay Women (1969-1983)

On the east coast of the United States, the Boston DOB chapter, similar to the editors of *Sisters*, understood a need for lesbian voices. Their chapter newsletter, originally titled *Maiden Voyage*, (later renamed *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women*) began in 1969 as a mimeographed forum typically eight pages long with an even mix of political news, essays, poetry, and event calendars. Like *Sisters*, the *Maiden Voyage* newsletter saw DOB as the "bridge between the Women's Lib and the male homophile movement," as a space specifically designed for the Lesbian who was inevitably stuck between these two key social and political movements.⁴⁹ According to Boston DOB, the Lesbian was unconcerned, on the one hand, with abortion rights, access to birth control, and motherly duties, or, on the other hand, gaining the sexual freedoms

⁴⁸ For articles featuring Del Martin and/or Phyllis Lyon see, *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 1 no. 8 (August 1971); *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 1 no. 2 (December 1970); *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 1 no. 1 (November 1970); *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 2 no. 6 (June 1971); *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* (August 1973); *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* 2 no. 7 (July 1971); *Sisters: By and For Lesbians* (February 1973). For the drawings of Martin and Lyon as the featured *Sisters* cover images see, August 1973 and February 1974.

⁴⁹ Candi McGonagle, "DOB- Voice of the Lesbian," *Maiden Voyage*, 1. No. 7 (June-July 1970): 1-2.

demanded by gay men. Instead she wanted “her rights as a Lesbian... the rights she wants are not women’s rights, not rights as a homosexual. She is a Lesbian, a woman unique, with a desire for unique rights,” and therefore the Lesbian could belong to no single movement.⁵⁰

Because of the elusive nature of the Lesbian, *Maiden Voyage*, like *Sisters*, understood the necessity of DOB working with both the women and gay movements, as there were unique gains to be made on each side. In order for these gains to come to fruition, however, support for the DOB was needed as it was “the voice and strength of the Lesbian in heterosexual society.”⁵¹ In both cases, *Maiden Voyage* and *Sisters* paid tribute to the founding mothers of the DOB and their original magazine *The Ladder* by continuing to align themselves with DOB philosophy. At the start of every issue, *Maiden Voyage* made sure to clarify that their publication was a part of the DOB organization. How the two publications chose to demonstrate this commitment however differed. *Sisters* maintained the status quo by continuing to provide Lesbians with a safe middle ground with regard to politics, while *Maiden Voyage* over time, began to exert a more activist role.

In February of 1970 *Maiden Voyage* was renamed *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women*. The content grew in size as it transitioned from a newsletter to a fully formed lesbian magazine. Importantly, along with the chapter’s new title, other changes began to take shape. In the beginning, under the old title *Maiden Voyage*, DOB Boston resembled *The Ladder* and *Sisters*. It included poems, essays, and news segments and appeared to have no clear agenda other than to provide lesbian women of the New England area with a social outlet, entertainment, and updates on upcoming events. After 1970, however, the publication moved in a more journalistic direction. *Focus* began to favor political articles over literary elements and instead provided

⁵⁰ Ibid, 1.

⁵¹ Ibid, 2.

coverage of current events in Boston, around the country, and around the world as they related to gay and lesbian issues.⁵² Also included in this new turn toward political writing were directories of gay groups meeting in the Boston and New England area, along with a page of referrals for legal and health-related issues that offered lesbians a safe place to conduct their affairs.⁵³

In many ways, *Focus* resembled the heyday of Barbara Gittings' editorial run with *The Ladder*. Like Gittings, who preferred more politically oriented news segments over literary components, *Focus*, too, gave special attention to court cases and raising consciousness for gay rights in the New England area and beyond.⁵⁴ Another major difference between *Focus*, *Sisters*, and *The Ladder*, lay in the letter to the editor and reader's response sections of the three magazines. *Sisters* and *The Ladder* were keenly focused on the individual Lesbian, assisting her through life changes and encouraging self-love. In turn, the reader's response sections took a similar approach as readers asked for advice and revealed personal information. In contrast, the response letters portion of *Focus* was more politically inclined. Readers wrote to report on new organizations forming in the area or to promote their activist opinions and alert DOB on breaking news.⁵⁵ These differences in approach are representative of the DOB's factionalized identity that

⁵² For examples of gay news from around the country and world see, "Boston Scene" & "National Gay Scene," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (September 1972): 10; "Gay News Around the Country," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (April 1973): 4; "Around Boston/ Around the Country," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (October 1972): 9; "Around Boston / Around the Country," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (November 1972): 5.

⁵³ See, "DOB Referrals," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (Summer 1972): 15; "Legal and Health Referrals," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (January 1973): 7; "A Few Referrals," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (March, 1973): 1; "New England gay groups directories," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (April 1973): 9.

⁵⁴ For examples of a growing political turn see, *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (December 1971) issue; "What's Up Politically with Gays in Boston?" & "Candidate for State Legislature Are Asked About Gay Rights," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (September 1972); "Support Gay Bills," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (April 1973): 6; "The Case of the Seattle Lesbian Mothers," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (May 1973): 6; "Discrimination Bills Defeated in Massachusetts," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (June 1973): 7; "Gay Discrimination Bills-- They're Back in the Committee Again," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (April 1973): 6.

⁵⁵ For examples see, "Letters to Focus," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (November 1972): 9; "Letters to Focus," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (June 1973): 2; "Letters to Focus," *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (July 1973): 3.

began to take shape in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a result of the growing feminist movement.

Feminism gave women the chance to be multi-issue activists. New organizations and publications tailored to unique and alternative lifestyles and political beliefs, began cropping up, giving women the opportunity to seek out an expanding array of social connections.⁵⁶ This heavily impacted the DOB and its publications. Women seeking particular connections in line with their beliefs could do so under the umbrella of DOB. As *Focus* promoted on the first page of nearly every issue, “DOB provides safeguards for those wishing to work quietly within the organization, planning the social programs, writing, staffing the office, etc. For those able to be more open, there is educational and political activism.”⁵⁷ Embedded within this new age of intersectional activism, however, were the perceived deep-rooted differences between west and east coast DOB chapters. Shirley Willer understood these differences as the “fighters versus philosophers.” Willer noted that the east coast, especially New York where she resided and worked as chapter president, was “a much more aggressive place than California.”⁵⁸ The priorities of the two coasts, according to Willer, “were not the same. I wanted to fight... they [Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon] wanted to talk [everyone] to death.”⁵⁹ Willer’s assessment provides insight into how *Focus* deviated from *The Ladder* model. East coast DOB chapters were “fighters,” or “social action people,” more involved with gay liberation and mix gendered organizations as opposed to the more philosophically inclined west coast.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ For more on the dearth of publications coming out of this period see, Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America*. (Boston: Faber and Faber, Inc., 1995).

⁵⁷ “About Boston DOB,” *Focus*, September, 1972, 1

⁵⁸ Manuela Soares, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Shirley Willer, Tape 2 of 2, July 11, 1987,” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Focus provided DOB Lesbians who preferred a more militant form of activism with a specific outlet that lasted until 1973. Documented by *Focus* in their fifth anniversary issue in the article titled “Thru the Ages with Boston DOB,” they write, “the need for regular DOB coverage of up-to-date news and schedules of gay events was taken over by the *Gay Community News*... hence, *Focus* does not concentrate as much on news as it used to.”⁶¹ After 1973, poetry and personal essays slowly reappeared in the magazine’s content. However, the *Gay Community News* and articles promoting political activism remained of equal importance.⁶² *Sisters* and *Focus* combined represent two alternative approaches for reaching the same shared goal, which is, the positive promotion of the DOB Lesbian in society. *Sisters* took the path most reflective of *The Ladder*’s early years under Martin and Lyon which emphasized self-acceptance and the promotion of a healthy, happy, normal lesbian. *Focus*, on the other hand, honed in on the latter period of *The Ladder* which sought out current events and engaged with political discourse to further the promotion of a normal lesbian by fighting to her rights. Both chapters and publications worked under the DOB title to accomplish this. As for the final publication, *The Lesbian Tide*, the same cannot be said.

The Lesbian Tide (1971-1980)

Jeanne Cordova, Los Angeles DOB chapter president and later the founding editor of *The Lesbian Tide*, documented October 3, 1970 as her “political birthday” as it was the first time she attended a DOB meeting. For Cordova, DOB gave her a larger sense of herself, a greater sense of

⁶¹ “Thru the Ages with Boston DOB,” *Focus*, December 1974, 4.

⁶² See January 1975 issue of *Focus* for cartoons promoting the *Gay Community News*. For more on political activism after 1973 see, “Gay Speaker Looks at the I.Q. Question,” *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (January 1975): 13; “Have you Been Discriminated Against?” & “More News and Notes,” & “Gay Legislation ‘75,” *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (February 1975); “More News and Notes,” *Focus: A Journal for Gay Women* (March 1975): 2.

belonging and of her ability to become a “professional lesbian,” as she described it, and the chance to be an activist who could be open about her sexuality while working to better the world.⁶³ All of these opportunities offered by the DOB made her a passionate proponent of the organization. Mere months after she joined the L.A. chapter, Cordova was elected president. Cordova’s experiences working within the L.A. chapter and her work on the chapter’s newsletter that later became *The Lesbian Tide* illustrate a more strained relationship between DOB Lesbians and lesbian feminists. Unlike *Sisters* and *Focus* who advocated harmony between liberation and homophile movements and remained united with the DOB, *The Lesbian Tide* in 1972 broke from the DOB organization in a disagreement over political and social issues and began publishing as an independent periodical.

Before this stage, however, Cordova, a newly elected DOB chapter president attempted to spark conversation and friendship between the two groups by means of a dance at the DOB center she helped form in L.A. that same year. Intrigued by the tenacity of lesbian feminism’s strong political and ideological stances, and influenced by a new lover heavily involved in the feminist movement, Cordova immersed herself in lesbian feminism and assumed the same would happen within her DOB constituency once they were introduced. The dance, however, became known as the first of many “casualties” and failures to bridge the gap between the two groups. Cordova explained that as the lesbian feminists entered the DOB center that night in 1970, the “two worlds looked at each other and didn’t understand anything about each other.”⁶⁴ Cordova understood the DOB in L.A. as “the old gays,” a crowd in between working and middle-class statuses who were typically conservative, reliant on butch-femme dynamics, and less political. In

⁶³ Manuela Soares, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Jean Cordova, Tape 1 of 1, October 27, 1988,” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

contrast, lesbian feminists championed radical political activism and actively sought to desexualize their relationships and clothing.⁶⁵ Tension between Cordova, her fellow DOB officers, who together became more politically enamored of lesbian feminism and leftist ideology, and the rest of the DOB constituency, increased. As Cordova understood it, “there existed a top-down ideological break” over time.⁶⁶ The result of these differences led to Cordova’s demotion to the role of editor of the chapter newsletter. She and the rest of the officers who agreed with her politics moved into their new roles without complaint as, ironically, in a move to quell the radical voice of Cordova by revoking her presidential influences, the L.A. DOB constituency gave Cordova the immortal power of print.

In the first issue under her editorship, Cordova and her team added *The Lesbian Tide* to the newsletter’s original title, *The L.A. DOB Chapter Newsletter*. They also dutifully remained tied to the DOB organization, keeping intact the original DOB description: “a non-political, non-profit organization, which has as its goal, the actualization of personal pride in the lesbian.”⁶⁷ The early issues of *Lesbian Tide* were in a “fly by the seat of your pants” style, as Cordova and her team worked to provide women with a “smorgasbord” of topics that included calendars of events happening in both DOB and lesbian feminist circles, news, and poetry.⁶⁸ Over time, however, *The Lesbian Tide* began to incorporate more lesbian feminist content into the magazine. From the first issue in August 1971, the *Tide* included lesbian feminist meetings alongside the DOB calendar of events and incorporated “Woman of the Month” or “Herstory”

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *The Lesbian Tide* 1 no. 1 (August 1971).

⁶⁸ “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Jean Cordova, Tape 1 of 1, October 27, 1988,”

segments in which lesbian feminist activists were profiled.⁶⁹ This resulted in the DOB chapter voting Cordova, her team, and *The Lesbian Tide* out. By January 1972, the *Tide* had officially split with DOB and had become a “non-group affiliated, independent magazine.”⁷⁰ In March of that same year, the magazine editors finally declared themselves, specifically, as an “independent lesbian/ feminist magazine.”⁷¹

The notion of radicalism causing a rift within DOB was not new to the organization since around the same time Barbara Grier and Rite Laporte, desiring a more stylish, feminist literary journal, had divorced *The Ladder* from the DOB. *The Lesbian Tide* fought for a more serious political presence and after the March 1972 issue eliminated all literary elements. From that point on, *The Lesbian Tide* became the “bible of lesbian feminism,” as they were, according to historian Rodger Streitmatter, the “first news outlet in history to adopt an editorial policy of lesbian primacy... regardless of the topic covered, the *Tide* not only focused on the lesbian angle but also limited its sources to lesbians, rejecting any information that had come from either straight people or gay men.”⁷² In setting this high standard of lesbian journalism, *The Lesbian Tide* promoted all aspects of the growing lesbian culture that dominated in the mid to late 1970s. Women’s festivals, women’s music companies, women’s bookstores, coffeehouses, and publishing houses were all editorialized and supported by the *Tide*.⁷³ Alongside these editorials were articles such as “Radical Consciousness” in which lesbians were encouraged to test how

⁶⁹ For examples of lesbian feminist ideology creeping into early edition of the L.A. DOB newsletter see, “Herstory,” & “Coffee House,” in *The Lesbian Tide* 1 no. 2 (September 1971); “N.O.W Votes Yes on Lesbians,” *The Lesbian Tide* 1 no. 3 (October 1971).

⁷⁰ *The Lesbian Tide* 1 no. 6 (January 1972).

⁷¹ *The Lesbian Tide* 1 no. 8 (March 1972).

⁷² Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 160-161.

⁷³ For more background information on lesbian and women’s culture see, Faderman. *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 1991, especially chapter nine, “Lesbian Nation.” For more on women’s music, see *The Lesbian Tide* 4 no. 4 (November-December 1974).

much their consciousnesses had been raised by the influence of lesbian feminism.⁷⁴ Although they separated from the DOB organization, *The Lesbian Tide* was nonetheless indebted to the work of the DOB before them and the early militant work of Boston DOB, a chapter Cordova followed more closely than the San Francisco crowd.⁷⁵ This is evident by the *Tide*'s inclusion of "Crosscurrents," a segment toward the end of every issue that, like *Focus*, touched on current political and cultural events happening locally and nationally.

For *The Lesbian Tide*, the dual oppression of women and lesbians could only be improved if lesbians gave themselves over to feminism. Unlike *Sisters* and *Focus* who sought to continue cultivating a Lesbian identity under DOB, the *Tide* saw only separation from the gay old guard as the solution. The *Tide*'s interpretation of DOB was constructed in a post Stonewall era, in an era immersed in radicalism and characterized by the accessibility of a wide range of organizations, philosophies, and potential lovers. Importantly, the *Tide* took the Lesbian identity to a more radical interpretation that was certainly articulated by readers of *The Ladder* but never actualized. DOB from the beginning was committed to articulating the understood distinction of the Lesbian as both a homosexual and a woman.

An example of the Lesbian identity promoted by DOB that *The Lesbian Tide* took to a more radical conclusion comes from activist and longtime contributor to several DOB publications, Martha Shelley's reader response. In a 1969 edition of *The Ladder* Shelley provides an example of how DOB, even before "The Woman-Identified Woman" and *The Lesbian Tide* was distributed and widely read, was committed to seeing the Lesbian as an individual powerfully removed from male oppression. For Shelley, Lesbians were "a body of women independent of [men's] domination, willing to compete with them on an equal basis— not

⁷⁴ "Radical Consciousness," *The Lesbian Tide* 4 no. 2 (September 1974):8-9.

⁷⁵ "LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Jean Cordova, Tape 1 of 1, October 27, 1988,"

willing to reduce ourselves to the lowest common denominator so that every living male can feel himself superior to us.” This view very much aligned her with the Radicalesbian philosophy that identified men and heterosexuality as the primary oppressors of women.⁷⁶ Also apparent in her letter was the idea that lesbianism was a political choice. As she wrote, “the erotic choice of women for their own sex is only one aspect of the situation. More important is the fact that we represent an alternate way of life for women. The erotic choice of one’s own sex is open at all times, in all civilizations. The choice of independence is particularly politically important for women in our culture.”⁷⁷ This political assertion aligns DOB Lesbians with elements of the *Tide*’s lesbian feminist ideology, one that “saw lesbian feminism as a logical step in the evolution of every liberated woman, a political imperative for any woman committed to the advancement of her gender.”⁷⁸ For *The Lesbian Tide*, lesbian feminism offered the only solution for how the Lesbian identity should progress in a period ruled by flux and diversification.

Conclusion

Lesbian feminism stirred a myriad of responses from the DOB Lesbian. She stood her ground and continued to be a force for the average lesbian. She diverted slightly from the middle path to a white knuckled form of militancy geared toward gay rights. Or, she ran head first into absolute lesbian feminism, leaving her DOB card at the door. Regardless of these responses, DOB continued to matter and provide lesbians a voice amidst the roaring seas of change. But unlike the early DOB days, united by a national organization and a single lesbian magazine, the DOB in the 1970s saw an increase in localized and diverse lesbian social and political activity.

⁷⁶ Martha Shelley, “Reader’s Response,” *The Ladder* 13 no. 7 (April-May 1969): 43.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 43.

⁷⁸ Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 160.

Each of the DOB newsletters pulled together elements of *The Ladder* most useful to them in their local chapter. *Sisters*, *Focus*, and *The Lesbian Tide* picked up where the national DOB and *Ladder* left off by preserving elements of the Lesbian identity for new generations.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

“What it [DOB] really wanted was to make all lesbians in America lead happy, productive, positive lives. To not be addicted to anything particularly except being good kids and be happy. It doesn’t sound like a radical agenda but if you really think about it, it was a terribly radical agenda... It was the beginning of a world that said you really can do something besides live in the bars.”

—Barbara Grier, 1992 interview

Judith Schwarz was not a *Ladder* editor, nor did she write in to the publication or any other DOB chapter magazine. She was not an officer or president. Schwarz was simply a member. She attended meetings, dances, rap sessions, and worked occasionally at the DOB office sorting through and organizing the lesbian book collection. And through DOB she became heavily involved in the feminist movement, later becoming a key founder to the Lesbian Herstory Archives alongside Joan Nestle. Because of this, Judith Schwarz’s 1992 interview on her experiences as a DOB member while seated at the kitchen table of the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York offers a unique and multifaceted understanding of the lesbian identity.

A poignant example of this is Schwarz’s vivid memory of visiting the DOB office in San Francisco for the first time in 1964 and meeting Del Martin. Described as “big and burly as all get out and really dykey” with short black hair pushed back at the sides, Schwarz found Martin incredibly beautiful with a strong and powerful face that for her, reflecting back to this period from the advantage point of 1992, was an incredible awakening.¹ Schwarz explains:

¹ Manuela Soares, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Judith Schwarz and Joan Nestle, Tape 1 of 1, November 14, 1992,” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*.

“I was turned on inside to know that there were women out there like that. That was always the [type of] woman I was attracted to. [I was attracted to] that powerful image of a woman [who could] take care of herself... I realize now that what I thought was butchy is really something about the lesbian, the independent woman, the woman independent of man [and the] structures of our society. [And that with that independence] we are okay, we can live our lives nicely outside the realm of that stuff [i.e. dependence, patriarchy, isolation, sadness].”²

Schwarz’s reflections are significant because they illustrate the kind of woman that DOB sought to cull from the frightened and ashamed women who appeared at the DOB office doorsteps or the home of Martin and Lyon.³ A powerful and strong willed woman, confident in her lesbian identity, could change the attitudes and perspectives of others thus setting off a chain reaction toward social change, if at first she accepted herself.

How this DOB Lesbian identity came to fruition is riddled with class, racial, and generational politics. Every accomplishment came with a slant, an otherwise missed opportunity for intersectionality regardless of how inclusive and welcoming the DOB strove to present itself as for all its chapters. That said, in short, DOB ultimately accomplished its goal. Women found solace in the speaking events, holiday parties, Gab and Javas, rap sessions, and the publications, all varying types of activity that before DOB never existed for the lesbian woman. Suddenly, women had access to other women, access to new forms of self expression and activism. In other cases, the mere knowledge of the organization was enough to give women comfort. And women were comforted and provided opportunities to engage with DOB in any way they deemed fit. Radical activism could be as simple as sliding a copy of *The Ladder* between workers at shift change, attending a DOB meeting, or even acknowledging to oneself that they were in fact a lesbian without despair because she had the Daughters of Bilitis to lead by example as an

² Ibid.

³ For stories related to the kinds of women Martin and Lyon helped, along with biographies of Martin and Lyon, and the DOB see, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, *Lesbian/Woman* (The University of Michigan: Volcano Press, 1972).

organization dedicated to widening the horizons of lesbians beyond the neon signs of bar doors. This was indeed a radical new mindset that should be placed in constant conversation with lesbian feminism and the liberation movements of the 1970s. DOB did not disappear in this period, they merely diversified and fragmented against the surplus of social clubs and activist groups that steered lesbians into new directions according to personal interests. But before such diversification could take place there needed to be a second lesbian identity from the bar scene around which women could organize and believe in.

Although not a member of DOB, Joan Nestle, a notable champion of preserving the history of butch/fem bar culture, expressed the richness of DOB by addressing her own lesbian experiences of the 1950s and early 1960s. “It’s very hard to conceive of how we didn’t see ourselves as history,” she said, “We saw ourselves as deviants... [We never thought we would] be taken seriously in intellectual history or social history. We were in the gutter... there’s been a revolution for women like ourselves... DOB started it.”⁴ In recounting the class history surrounding separate spheres ideology to showcase the middle class roots of DOB and by analyzing the contents and editorial phases of *The Ladder*, *Sisters*, *Focus*, and *The Lesbian Tide*, DOB appears as an organization hellbent on hope. Hellbent to change the system by inspiring one lesbian at a time.

⁴ Manuela Soares, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Judith Schwarz and Joan Nestle, Tape 1 of 1, November 14, 1992,” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*.

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