Rutgers University

"The Typewriter and the Fountain Pen:"

Lesbian Discourse in The Ladder

1956 - 1968

Senior History Honors Seminar

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Introduction

In February, 1960, a small, obscure monthly journal entitled The Ladder, published by a little known organization mysteriously named The Daughters of Bilitis, printed a letter from an anguished subscriber in Minnesota named "Niki." Niki's words conveyed the pain and alienation of living as a lesbian in the 1950's and 60's in America:

> "As I try to write I find it difficult because of never having even breathed this type of existence to acquaintances, friends or family....I, like most others, live two lives, one for the benefit of the public and the other for myself....we live in a sort of make believe world, a secret, exciting world, but a bit frightening, too....When the Ladder comes to my door once a month I live in that secret world for approximately 20 to 25 minutes while I read every word and marvel at the work that is being done to alleviate the pain of falseness that most of us endure just for the sake of not being called queer."[1]

Niki may have felt alone, but she was not alone in her feelings of isolation and marginality, and in the fragmentation and tenuousness she attached to her identity as a lesbian. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of American women shared that burden: the lack of community, the absence of validation.

Today, in the 1990's, we recognize that the parameters of living as lesbians in America have widened considerably. In spite of the backlash from both the AIDS epidemic and the gains of the 70's and 80's, in spite of institutionalized homophobia and legalized discrimination, a more integrated and positive identity within the many communities that make up the lesbian world is available to most lesbians today. While

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[1] "Readers Respond," The Ladder 4 (February 1960): 23-24.

lesbian and gay scholars, like those of other minority groups, have retraced the general contours of the past, more time could be spent examining details of the road map, the geography that has led from there to here. There is still much to be learned: about how identities and communities are constructed, about the resistance to oppression, about the whys, hows, and even ifs of women's alliances with men, about how political tasks were defined, about what was and is possible and necessary for the future. The Ladder was a bridge over the American lesbian/gay landscape from there to here, not just for Niki and countless other women, but also for those who cross back; its pages are a rich repository of lives and lessons.

Statement of Thesis

Scholars of lesbian/gay history acknowledge the importance of World War II to the emergence of both a homosexual identity and the formation of homosexual communities.[2] Homosexual men entered a post-war world in which opportunities for sexual and social contacts had already been well-established by the beginning of the twentieth century. Although discrimination and persecution was intense, male ownership of the physical public space had laid a context within which cross-class relationships developed. This was not the case for lesbian women. While discrete social networks were evident pre-World War II, the economic and social restrictions on women, along with the invisibility of women within the homosexual world combined to keep the lesbian population small,

[2] See, for example, Allan Berube, Coming Out Under Fire, The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two, (New York: Penguin Books, 1991) and John Costello, Virtue Under Fire, How World War II Changed our Social and Sexual Attitudes, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984).

isolated and hidden. Though working class lesbians fought for public space and visibility, their numbers were small, and the costs paid by these women may have been seen as too high by the majority of lesbians. Gay men and lesbians faced some of the same issues after the war, and on those, could find political common ground. But in crucial areas, such as economic opportunities, gender roles and expectations, lack of access to public physical space, lack of voice, and the subsuming of women under the medical model of male homosexuality, lesbian women were presented with a different set of political priorities than were gay men.

As the only formal lesbian organization until the 1970's, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) was faced with a formidable set of political tasks. Though middle-class in origin and reaching relatively few lesbians, it was still able to make an important contribution to the political foundation of the lesbian/gay rights movement. Its journal, The Ladder, is a valuable repository of the responses of middle class lesbians to the historic tasks of the time. While most scholars of the lesbian/gay movement have made evaluations of DOB, only one, Rose Weitz, has examined The Ladder in a detailed manner.[3] Weitz' approach, however, presents several problems. For one, Weitz does not probe deeply enough into what she calls DOB's "accomodationism." While she does recognize that this was part of the strategy to integrate lesbians into the dominant society, it was also part of what

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[3] Weitz, Rose, "From Accommodation to Rebellion, the Politicization of Lesbianism," Woman-Identified Woman, eds. Datry, Trudy and Sandee Potter (Palo Alto: Mayfield Publishing, 1984) 233-247.

Lillian Faderman calls "something of a class war"[4] over identity. Secondly, she minimizes the feminist content of the early years, which I believe is considerably less rare than she has characterized it. In addition, her conclusions about The Ladder from the period of 1956 to 1966 are far too general. Finally, because she sees The Ladder as just the newsletter of the Daughters of Bilitis, she underplays the fascinating contradictions, debates and ambiguities in its pages.

Other scholarly deficiencies in evaluating DOB and The Ladder are related to a lack of recognition of the key differences between the political situations and political tasks facing gay men and lesbians. This has led to incomplete evaluations of DOB. John D'Emilio, as one example, acknowledges that public space has historically belonged to men, yet he does not take this further and explore what happened when lesbians approached the task of claiming public space for themselves. Could they overcome the stigmatization of the female presence in bars? Would men, even gay men, passively concede to women and lesbians equal access to public space?[5] Would a large portion of lesbians choose private alternatives to the public space of the bars rather than face confrontations with gay men or the hostile public?

Because he fails to consider questions like these, D'Emilio makes the sweeping statement that "[o]f all the changes set in motion by the war, the spread of the gay bar

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[4] Faderman Lillian, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America (New York: Penguin Books, 1991) 181.

[5] The parallel socializing that took place in bars with both lesbian and gay male patrons has historically been uneasy and uneven. Lesbians have always had to contend for space in male-dominated bars, and have faced official and unofficial discrimination and discouragement by owners and male patrons alike.

contained the greatest potential for shaping the consciousness of homosexuals and lesbians."[6] With somewhere around only 30 lesbian bars in the entire country (by his own estimation) as late as 1963,[7] versus a lesbian population of perhaps millions in both rural and urban areas, this glorification of the role of gay bars is exaggerated, to say the least. D'Emilio makes a second mistake by consistently equating DOB with the Mattachine Society in an almost knee-jerk fashion, seeing it, (as many did), as a kind of "ladies auxiliary." D'Emilio is highly critical of the Mattachine Foundation because of its retreat from its progressive beginnings; he views this as a betrayal of the homophile movement and its constituency. Thus, his constant use of the term "Mattachine and DOB" results in an evaluation of DOB that is implicitly critical and dismissive.

Other historians, while acknowledging the contributions of DOB, have not probed beyond the surface represented by the well-known outlines of the development of the organization. The overwhelming number of references to The Ladder are cited to prove a particular point, are often taken out of context, and do not address the ambiguities in this large body of data. For example, the many quotes from The Ladder concerning feminine dress and behavior usually serve to buttress scholarly observations about DOB's opposition to butch-femme roles. In reality, the covers, short stories, and letters from readers point to an ambivalence and tacit acceptance of a moderate butch-femme influence that is ignored by these scholars. Yet, it is just these factors of ambivalence and

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[6] John D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970, The University of Chicago Press (Chicago, 1983), 32.

[7] D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities, 98.

ambiguity that make The Ladder so difficult to pigeonhole.

It is my intent to begin to remedy the neglect of this unique publication. In my paper, I will discuss the major elements of the political content of The Ladder, concentrating in the period before the emergence of lesbian-feminism and the Stonewall Rebellion, and to examine how, and why, particular political strategies were chosen to meet the political objectives facing lesbians from the 1950's until 1969. For purposes of organization, I have separated the content of The Ladder into four stages. Of course, some issues show continuity from stage to stage, particularly the question of identity, but these four stages do correspond to real shifts in the magazine's viewpoint. I will place the discussion of these stages within the context of the class represented by the magazine: the middle class.

The first stage, "Building Identity and Community" (1956-1962), was characterized by a cautious response to the political tasks that faced the maturing post-war lesbian population. The first and most important objective was to define and differentiate lesbian identity, especially given the context of the medical model of homosexuality. The second task was the attempt to build a national lesbian community, especially by reaching out to isolated lesbians through The Ladder. Other topics center around the response to state oppression of lesbians and gay men, as well as the articulation of a general political goal: integration into society.

During the second stage, "Response to Militancy" (1962-1966), the focus of The Ladder shifted from cooperation with the establishment to confrontation, reflecting the influence of the Black Civil Rights Movement. The new editor of The Ladder, Barbara

Gittings, was an officer of the DOB New York Chapter, and along with her lover, Kay Tobin, had extensive ties to the more militant Mattachine Society of the District of Columbia.[8] During this time, the magazine reflected this militancy. Criticisms of the state and society were raised by movement activists, and pushed even further by other contributors of The Ladder. Activists advocated adopting more confrontational tactics, such as picketing. The status of homosexuality began to be increasingly defined as that of an oppressed minority. Psychiatry and the homophile movement's cooperation with research studies became the subjects of intensified attacks. Activists began to appropriate to themselves the title of "experts" on homosexuality. Surprisingly little content during this stage seems to have originated from the National DOB office in San Francisco; instead it reflected an East Coast orientation, with contributions from New York intellectuals and male homosexuals, and revolutionary new covers by Tobin that brought lesbians out of the shadows. At the same time, though feminist content dramatically increased, The Ladder firmly maintained its ties to the male-dominated homophile movement, especially the East Coast wing. Because of their advocacy of more militant tactics, Gittings and Tobin maintained a somewhat adversarial relationship with DOB.

The third stage, "Drifting Towards Feminism" (October, 1966-August, 1968), began with the dismissal of Barbara Gittings as editor. During this period, the national DOB very obviously reasserted its control over the content of the magazine. Apparently, important shifts within the organization had been developing during Gittings' editorial stint, because

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[8] Barbara Gittings' name was listed on the masthead, but for all intents, Kay Tobin was co-editor and influenced the content and course of the magazine in partnership with Gittings. Interview with Barbara Gittings, December 16, 1993.

an editorial in the October 1966 issue announced that The Ladder's editorial policy would change. "To date emphasis has been on the Lesbian's role in the homophile movement. Her identity as a woman in our society has not yet been explored in depth." [9] Beginning with this issue, it would be.

Under new editor Helen Sanders, the coverage of the feminist movement increased, as a result not only of this announcement, but also because of the DOB leadership's interest and participation in feminist organizations such as NOW. Lesbian contributions to feminism were highlighted and a nascent view of lesbianism as a refined form of feminism began to emerge. Concurrent with this was the beginning of withdrawal from the homophile movement. Previously, friction within the movement between lesbians and gay men was only occasionally referred to. Now criticisms were aired openly, and The Ladder's coverage of the homophile movement, and of gay male issues, became sporadic.

Unfortunately, the Daughters of Bilitis apparently did not have the resources to execute its feminist agenda effectively, or to publish the magazine with a consistent format. It seems as though Sanders was granted little autonomy. Discontinuity prevailed, and the magazine drifted. This ended when Barbara Grier became editor of The Ladder in September, 1968. Grier's intense personal commitment to The Ladder resulted in an expanded magazine. Contributions to the infant lesbian and feminist culture increased as The Ladder featured poetry, prose, criticism and feminist propaganda and theory from writers of such stature as novelist Jane Rule and activist Rita Mae Brown. In the

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[9] "Another Rung...," The Ladder 11 (October 1966): 24.

August/September, 1969 Ladder, articles by respected DOB leaders Del Martin and Rita Laporte explained DOB's withdrawal from the North American Council of Homophile Organizations. By the end of 1969, The Ladder had moved away from its alliance with the homophile movement, and closer to becoming a feminist publication.

By the early 70's, a radical brand of feminism began to dominate The Ladder, and therefore, I have called this stage "The Emergence of the Lesbian-feminist Ladder" (1968-1972). I will not be examining this last period to the same extent as the other three for several reasons. First, the emergence of lesbian-feminism marked the end of the traditional emphasis on cooperation with men and on civil rights, and involved an entirely new set of lesbian leaders. Secondly, the Stonewall Rebellion of 1969, along with the emergence of lesbian-feminism, was a pivotal era during which the entire lesbian/gay movement changed dramatically. The injection of the politics of liberation into the movement led to a redefinition of its political tasks. Both of these events marked the end of the old homophile movement, and lie outside my topic. In addition, editor Grier broke with DOB in August, 1970, and continued publishing The Ladder independently. Therefore, I will be looking at The Ladder from 1969 to 1972 only briefly, primarily to give an overview for the sake of continuity.

In my examination of The Ladder, I will look at the years 1956-1968 to answer the following questions. What were the key political tasks of the post-war period for lesbians? What can we learn about lesbians' attempts to construct their own social and sexual identities and to build "Community"/communities? What set of issues did middle-class women of this period define as actionable, and what strategies were advocated and

adopted? What was the feminist content of the early lesbian movement? How did lesbians work with gay males in the homophile movement, what contradictions arose between them, how were they resolved? Hidden within the larger body of women, how did lesbians deal with the gender roles and expectations of the 50's and 60's? What were the effects of the changes of the 60's upon the particular political vision and strategy of the women represented in and by The Ladder?

Chapter One

Stage 1: Building an Identity and Community

(October, 1956 - January, 1963)

Prior to World War II, except for professional women such as educators, and some working class women, the vast majority of American women lived lives dependent on and defined by their relationships with men. The lack of sustaining employment for women, the Depression, social restrictions on women's mobility, the physical ownership of public space by men all served to limit opportunities for autonomy for women. However, the United States' involvement in World War II radically transformed many aspects of women's lives. For the first time, millions of women participated in activities that had substantial effects on their independence. Not the least of these was their employment in previously defined "men's jobs," which benefitted them not only economically, but contributed to building confidence and a higher sense of self-esteem, as well.

World War II was also a key period in the development of lesbian and gay communities and identity. John D'Emilio believes that the sex-segregation of women wartime workers "may or may not have affected the erotic focus of women with a long history of heterosexuality. But, by expanding the social space in which women predominated, the war opened possibilities for lesbians to meet at the same time that it protect all-female environments from the taint of deviance." [1] Relaxed sexual attitudes and

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[1] D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities, 29.

widespread sexual experimentation both in and out of the military was another result of the war. In addition, the war saw the temporary suspension of the acute persecution of homosexuals in the military, even though the incidence of homosexual activity rose under the stresses of combat and the wartime crisis. Also important were institutionally endorsed (though temporary) changes in gender roles and expectations. Population shifts and the breakup of families combined with the factors mentioned above, and intersected at the end of the war with the emergence of hundreds of thousands of men and women who had not only the inclination, but for the first time, the opportunity, to live their personal lives outside the context of heterosexuality. Little wonder that post-war communities of lesbians and gay men mushroomed, especially in port cities such as New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco. The population of San Francisco, for example, grew by 125,000 between 1940 and 1950. [2]

The economic and social opportunities offered by employment in war industries to women who were, or became, lesbians were certainly mirrored by those offered in the Women's Army Corps. Physical affection between women was common and tolerated, which "made it difficult...to tell exactly when such close friendships became 'strange' or 'queer.'" [3] "Butch" women were tolerated in the military, and what is more, lesbians were disproportionately attracted by the chance to learn male jobs such motor mechanics, and

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[2] "Gay Politics and Community in San Francisco Since World War II," in Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past, eds. Chauncey, George, Jr., Martin Duberman, and Martha Vicinus (New York: New American Library, 1989) 459.

[3] Berube, Allan, Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two (New York: Penguin Books, 1991) 43.

by the uniform of jacket and tie. In addition, the officers of the WAC were taught to treat lesbian relationships not with confrontation, but with "guidance, counseling, supervision..." [4] and were warned not to "'indulg[e] in witch hunting and speculation...you must approach the problem with an attitude of fairness...to assure no one is accused unjustly.'" [5]

Ironically, the anti-homosexual witch hunts and mass discharges that took place at the end of the war were also important to the formation of lesbian communities. Between 1947 and the early 1950's, "the rate of discharge for homosexuals more than tripled the wartime rate"[6] of about 1,000 per year. Moreover, no doubt influenced by societal pressures on women to retreat to domesticity and subordinate roles, military authorities discharged and persecuted a larger percentage of lesbians than gay men. This designation and separation of lesbians by the military as "undesirable" and "criminal" helped to crystallize lesbian identification. And, because discharged lesbians lost all veterans' benefits and opportunities for government employment, it sparked a sense of injustice that was a contributing factor to the formation of homophile groups and the movement. The topic was still alive in 1957, as evidenced by reports in the June 1957 Ladder on Congressional subcommittee hearings to reverse undesirable discharges, [7]

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[4] Berube, Allan, Coming Out Under Fire, 50.

[5] Berube, Allan and John D'Emilio, "The Military and Lesbians During the McCarthy Years," in Signs, The Journal of Women in Culture and Society 9 (Winter, 1984) 761.

[6] Berube, Coming Out, 262.

[7] "Move Afoot to Review Undesirable Discharges," The Ladder 1 (June 1957): 18.

and in the December issue in an article on employment problems, [8] as well as in other issues of the magazine. Furthermore, lesbians discharged in these purges often recall them as key factors in their decisions not to return to their home towns after separation from the military.

The world to which these women returned was rapidly becoming quite a different one than that of war time, as their stateside sisters had already experienced. The enormous anxiety generated by the atomic bomb and the new Cold War, by economic uncertainty and by the tremendous social and demographic dislocations of the war was played out in many arenas, including the political and domestic. Politically, a well-engineered hysteria capitalized on the fears of a population seeking to ground itself after two decades of Depression, war, tragedy and social upheaval. This hysteria was aimed at rooting out a supposedly vast hidden network of internal subversives, and expressed itself in attacks on members of the Establishment and on progressive and radical forces alike. Purges of radical union officers, abusive and fraudulent persecutions of radicals and communists and their organizations, were accompanied by the spectacle of lifelong Establishment figures leaving the State Department in disgrace. McCarthy and others used such vehicles as Congressional hearings, legislation, surveillance, loyalty oaths, registration of subversives, mass firings, trials of figures like the Rosenbergs, and many other tactics to reinforce both the fears within the country and their own power. It is important to remember that, as each of these offensives increased in intensity and

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[8] "Bread and Butter Tips: Homosexuals Can Get Jobs - And Keep Them!," The Ladder 2 (December 1957): 17.

widened in scope, they also narrowed in on individuals. Millions of people were affected, thousands of lives were ruined.

Linked inextricably with "subversives" were homosexuals. This was the result of several factors. First, wartime sexual experimentation and increasing medical interest in homosexuality stimulated the formation of homosexual identity and focused public attention on homosexuals. People realized that homosexuals, just like Communists, could be friends, coworkers and neighbors. Secondly, homosexual government employees were believed to be vulnerable to blackmail by Communists or the Soviet Union. Homosexuals were accused of actively attempting to undermine the American way of life. Third, with the rise in the number of gay bars and the beginnings of communities in even smaller cities, homosexual visibility increased.

The individual effects of the persecution of lesbians and gay men took several forms. Thousands of men and women were dismissed and blacklisted from government employment of any type. Thousands of names were recorded on government lists maintained by the military, the FBI and state and local governments. Legislation was introduced to create a national registration of homosexuals, and loyalty oaths were expanded to include moral standards. President Dwight Eisenhower banned homosexuals from any government employment, including defense industries, in April of 1953, which eventually affected 12 million workers. Sexual psychopath laws required that any person identified as a homosexual register with local governments upon his/her arrival in a new town. Illegal raids on gay bars and the entrapment and arbitrary arrests of homosexuals exploded in intensity, and laws forbidding the wearing of the clothes of the opposite sex

became widespread.

The pervasiveness of this persecution created a climate in which just being homosexual felt illegal and personally dangerous. When Harry Hay and others began to organize a group, the Mattachine Society, for homosexual men in 1950, they met in secret under extraordinary precautionary conditions: "[w]hen an occasional guest was invited, it was a standard security process for him to meet a Mattachine member at some public landmark, then to be driven around for a few blocks before being taken to the meeting place....[T]hey tried not to use the same location too many times. Blinds were always drawn....When people left the meetings, they kept their voices down." [9]

In addition, lesbians faced dangers of another kind. As women, they were subject to the same enormous pressures being brought to bear on all women as the United States re-formed itself socially after the war. The reassertion of male power within the home generated intense pressure on women to return to traditional gender roles and submissive domesticity. The expansion of independence and gender roles for women during the war had created an anxiety that was closely linked with the fears of the Cold War and internal subversion. As Elaine Tyler May points out, "[t]he independence of wartime women gave rise to fears of female sexuality as a dangerous force on the loose....if such erotic force were unleashed within the nation (rather than against its enemies), the results could presumably be disastrous." [10] According to May, female

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[9] Timmons, Stuart, The Trouble with Harry Hay, Founder of the Modern Gay Movement (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1990), 146.

[10] May, Elaine Tyler, Homeward Bound, American Families in the Cold War Era (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1988) 69.

sexuality and independence, like the Soviet bloc, had to be contained.

Lesbians defied the return of subservient gender roles in at least three ways. First, they remained economically autonomous, threatening male supremacy in the jobs marketplace. Second, they were self-identified, not other-identified as someone's wife, sister or daughter. Third, and most importantly, because their sexuality was focused on other women, rather than on reproducing the workforce and reinforcing heterosexuality, it was not only seen as, but actually was, a deviant, subversive erotic imperative. Women couples were now visible as never before, both because of their sheer increase in numbers and because of the public's new awareness of homosexuality. They symbolized a living threat to the post-war subordination of women and the push to return to traditional gender roles. And those lesbians who were married epitomized the bogeyman of 1950's, subversion from within: subversion of the family, the first and last line of defense of the besieged American way of life.

It was in this climate that the early homosexual rights movement, known by the sanitized term, "the homophile movement," began. The first group was the male-dominated Mattachine Society, which was founded in 1950 by former communists. It was based on the principles of mass organization of homosexuals, the definition of homosexuals as an oppressed minority, and it was patterned after the structure and secrecy of the Communist Party. Mattachine was the subject of an internal coup by Cold War conservatives in 1952, which, in the process, rejected the founding principles and structure. It became a self-help group concentrating on social matters, and upon respectability and conformity. An additional organization, ONE, Inc. split off from

Mattachine in 1954.

In October, 1955, these two groups were joined by a San Francisco lesbian organization named the Daughters of Bilitis. The initial aim of the founders of DOB was to provide a social alternative to gay bars, which were subject to widespread harassment by the police and other state authorities. However, the organization quickly expanded its goals to include education of lesbians and the public, participation in research studies run by qualified professionals, and reformation of the penal code. Other goals were the sponsorship of public discussions, and maintaining a library of relevant fiction and non-fiction. Most important, however, was the integration of lesbians into society. DOB's aim was to assist "the variant...to enable her to understand herself and make her adjustment to society in all its social, civic and economic implications."[11]

In October, 1956, DOB began to publish and distribute a monthly newsletter/magazine, The Ladder. But the views and activities of this local group quickly became a small factor in the journal as the cultural offerings and physical scope of the magazine increased. By October, 1958, president Del Martin acknowledged the change: "The Ladder has grown in two years' time from a mimeographed newsletter to a 28-page magazine that is drawing worldwide attention."[12] The last "Calendar of Events" for the San Francisco DOB appeared in June, 1959.

As only the second publication aimed at addressing the problems and concerns

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[11] "Daughters of Bilitis--Purpose," The Ladder 1 (December 1956): 1.

[12] "Now We Are Three," The Ladder 3 (October 1958) 5.

of lesbians,[13] The Ladder filled a huge vacuum. It was a crucial vehicle through which Lesbians could reduce their own isolation, read Lesbian fiction and poetry, and find out about the activities of the early gay civil rights movement. For some, like Niki, the Minnesotan quoted earlier, it was simply the only link they had with other women who identified themselves as Lesbians. Within a year, The Ladder became a nationally read publication, with single copies circulated widely within friendship circles.[14] By the end of Stage Two, it had become more influential than the organization it represented.

Most previous scholars of lesbian/gay history have viewed The Ladder as basically the printed representative of the Daughters of Bilitis. This is not accurate or realistic. The viewpoints expressed in The Ladder originated from four major sources. The first source was, of course, DOB, whose philosophy dominated to an extent that shifted depending on various factors. During Stage Two, for example, coverage of DOB's views and activities was relatively minor. The second source of material for The Ladder was the homophile movement. The Ladder reported on the conventions and meetings of the movement, and published position papers, debates and letters from leaders such as Frank Kameny, Harry Hay, Sten Russell and many others.

The third source of The Ladder's content was those outside the movement, and included contributions from correspondents throughout the world, prominent sociologists and psychotherapists, and literary figures such as Marion Zimmer Bradley. The Ladder

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[13] Another newsletter, Vice Versa, was published in June, 1947, and nine issues of 10 copies each were circulated in the Los Angeles area.

[14] Barbara Gittings, editor of The Ladder, estimated that each copy reached from six to ten readers. Interview with Gittings, December 16, 1993.

also contained such odds and ends as handwriting analysts, short fashion blurbs and an article on the history of male cross-dressing in the theater. Contributors wrote editorials and news briefs ("Cross Currents"). A popular standby was the "Lesbiana" book review column written by voracious reader Barbara Grier, which began appearing in March 1957 and continued for the Ladder's entire sixteen year history.[15]

The last, and possibly the most important, source of contributions was the readers of the magazine, who wrote essays, poetry, short stories, personal narratives, or simply letters to "Readers Respond". It would be hard to overestimate the importance of these contributions, because they consistently reveal the complex set of views and feelings that readers had. In addition, the profound impact that The Ladder made on an individual basis is reflected in such letters as one from "N.M" of Baltimore who wrote that "[m]y parents have been reading each issue and it has helped our relationship in many ways."[16] Many readers considered The Ladder their personal forum for dialogue about subjects of deep concern to them. For example, in an obviously autobiographical article, Nancy Osbourne painfully revealed that a married lesbian may be "doomed to keep her secret rather than risk shocking and upsetting [her husband's] faith in her and the harmony of her home."[17] This article sparked an extensive series of responses in the form of essays, short stories and letters about the subject. Readers became involved in the ideas, views, issues and official proceedings of DOB and the homophile movement, which reflected

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[15] Grier contributed dozens of articles under several pseudonyms: B.G., Marilyn Barrow, Gene Damon, Vern Niven, and Lennox Strang (Strong).

[16] N.M., "Readers Respond," The Ladder 2 (October, 1957) 29.

[17] "One Facet of Fear," The Ladder 1 (June 1957) 7.

both their interest in the movement, and a desire to affect its philosophy and outcome, even when they felt they were unable to become involved personally. Letter after letter thanks DOB and The Ladder for their work in "the Cause."

These four major sources of The Ladder's material, DOB, homophile activists, outside contributors, and readers, reveal that the magazine was far more than the newsletter of the Daughters of Bilitis. For the purpose of this paper, I have called these sources the magazine's "affinity group." Looked upon as a collective construct of this affinity group, the portrait of The Ladder that emerges does not have the hard and well-defined edges that previous scholars have drawn. Views are often vague and ambivalent, and challenged by readers and writers on all sides of a question. Changes in editorial direction and policy are hailed and condemned, and submissions reflect an intensity not seen in other publications.

For the most part, the contributions and positions do, however, represent the views of a distinct class, the middle class. A survey done in 1959 by The Ladder reveals the readership to be economically secure (with a median yearly income of $4,200 vs. a national median income of $3,097), well-educated (46% were college graduates, 16% reported post-graduate work), professionals (38%) and homeowners (29%). Over 28% were or had been married to men. The survey also reveals that readers are "almost entirely Caucasian."[18] Data from subsequent years, in the form of articles and letters focusing on employment in the professions and "pink collar" occupations, and on discrimination in insurance, mortgages, and income tax reveals that the middle class

[18] "Some Facts About Lesbians," The Ladder 3 (September 1959) 4-26.

make up does not change. It is crucial to keep this class context in mind when interpreting The Ladder.

The two main political task for lesbians at this time were the construction of identity and the attempt to build community. These tasks differed from those of gay men. John D'Emilio's Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities is to date the definitive history of the homophile movement. As previously mentioned, D'Emilio is highly critical of both DOB and Mattachine. He is much more friendly toward the Society for Individual Rights, a San Francisco group based in the gay bars, because he sees SIR as the organization that responded most effectively to the political tasks of the movement. But there are some problems with this. First, because he does not differentiate between the postwar political tasks facing lesbians and those facing gay men, D'Emilio's equation of DOB and The Ladder (lesbian leadership) with the Mattachine Society (gay male leadership) is faulty. Secondly, D'Emilio uses the terms "group identity" and "gay community" to include both lesbians and gay men; information obtained from The Ladder reveals that lesbian identity and lesbian community were defined by some lesbians as being very different and even separate from gay male identity and community. Lastly, by viewing SIR as the leadership organization of the homophile movement, D'Emilio overlooks its exclusion of women. He does not recognize that SIR's sexism,[19] its bar-based origins and its concentration on male issues such as VD prevention effectively excluded the great majority of lesbians.

It is precisely because D'Emilio does not distinguish between the political tasks

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[19] See comments in Sweet, Roxanna Beryl Thayer, Political and Social Action in Homophile Organizations, University of California, Berkeley dissertation, 1969, p. 92, and in The Ladder 11 (June 1967) p. 23.

facing lesbians and those facing gay men that he chooses SIR as the leading homophile organization. SIR did offer vigorous leadership around the main political task facing gay men in this period: resistance to overwhelming, institutionalized state oppression and persecution of gay male sexuality. Masses of data, including literally hundreds of items in The Ladder reveal that this is the main political task facing gay men during this period. In contrast, most of the manifestations of this persecution, with the exception of those based around the gay bar, did not affect the majority of lesbians. And, in fact, some gay men roundly resented lesbians; they perceived them as privileged and exempt from the same intensity of persecution.

Another area in which lesbians and gay men differed was in the relative development of the subcultures in which they lived. For men, the existence of bars, clubs, baths, secret societies, drag balls, houses of male prostitution and public cruising areas in most large cities is well-documented by the turn of the century. This is attributable to male control over public space, especially after dark, the economic and political status enjoyed by men, cross-class sexual and social activity, as well as a variable pool of new and temporary sexual partners, such as married men and travelers, who availed themselves of the opportunity for gay sexual experiences as they wished.

A third difference was that the public gay male subculture as well as identity was organized around gay male sexuality to a major extent. One comparison will illustrate the differences between the genders. In October, 1955, Allan Ginsberg's reading of the poem "Howl" at the Black Cat ignited a social movement, the beat generation. D'Emilio describes how the poem, a celebratory "description of gay male sexuality as joyous,

delightful, and indeed even holy,"[20] "sent the packed crowd into a frenzy."[21] By contrast, over four years later, The Ladder ran a breezy, witty review of several movies, which used terms like "dyke," and referred to drawings of butch women in The Ladder as the "butchnik pix in Bilitiscope." The writer relished watching the actresses in one movie "hug each other in their nightgowns and disport themselves in the lake ala buffniks!" and topped her article off with the comment that, at one film, "local lezdom was out in full force to see this splendid lezfilm."[22] One month later, "An Anonymous Sister" wrote that these were terms that "nauseated me and caused me to blush for my fellow-readers....if nothing else, expressions such as...'lezdom'...'lezfilm' are just plain bad taste....Do you want The Ladder to grow and be accepted? Do you want to act out the stereotype in the mind of John Q. Public? It is up to you - and me."[23]

Lesbians were at least ten years away from celebrating uncensored expressions of lesbian sexuality, and no other article with similar expressions and the same overt interest in sexuality was published in The Ladder for many years. Barbara Grier offers an much different vision of lesbian identity to celebrate: "[t]hat juxtaposition of love and friendship, the way in which lesbians love mentally....a kind of love/friendship ideal...", an identity in which sex and friendship are not separate.[24] All of these differences, the

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[20] D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, 177.

[21] D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, 181.

[22] Ermayne, Laurajean, "The Sapphic Cinema," The Ladder 4 (April 1960), 5-9.

[23] "Readers Respond," The Ladder 4 (May, 1960) 23.

[24] Damon, Gene, "Readers Respond," The Ladder 9 (December 1964), 26.

different political tasks facing lesbians and gay men, the differences in the development of lesbian and gay male subcultures, and the differences in the organizing factors in lesbian and gay male identities and subcultures are crucial to understanding the political direction of The Ladder in Stage One.

The most important task facing lesbians during this time was defining the identity of "the Lesbian." In fact, the very use of the capital "L" by The Ladder affinity group signals that the lesbian was seen as an object from which meaning could be extracted, as well as a target for acting upon. She was almost a disembodied, universal creature whose identity is impossible to quantify. She was Everylesbian. As Del Martin stated in the first issue of The Ladder, "the Lesbian is a very elusive creature. She burrows underground in her fear of identification. She is cautious in her associations. Current modes in hair style and casual attire have enabled her to camouflage her existence. She claims she does not need help. And she will not risk her tight little fist of security to aid those who do."[25] A reader adds that "[b]eing a Lesbian is a delicately balanced condition, which very few understand, including some Lesbians themselves."[26] Covers during this stage reinforced this reality, often picturing women silhouetted and in shadow.

What is identity? Didn't a lesbian identity already exist? After all, psychiatrists, sociologists and legislators had already defined homosexuals as psychopaths, victims of normal development gone haywire, criminals, men in women's bodies, and women in

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[25] Martin, Del, "President's Message," The Ladder 1 (October 1956), 6.

[26] Wallace, Jay, "Readers Respond," The Ladder 4 (August 1960) 23.

men's bodies (the "inversion" theory),[27] ad nauseam. But extensive scholarly research in the area of identity formation[28] reveals that identity is a combination of inputs: social, political and sexual, and itthat results from personal and group "conversations" about these inputs. Rather than being fixed, identity is fluid, and can be altered. Furthermore, as Margaret Jackson has shown in her work on early feminists, there can be a conscious effort to "construct alternative models" of sexual identity for personal and political reasons.[29] Jeffrey Weeks believes that the efforts by sexual minorities to construct an identity "cannot be explained as an effect of a peculiar personal obsession with sex. It has to be seen, more accurately, as a powerful resistance to the organizing principle of traditional sexual attitudes."[30] Lastly, Jonathan Ned Katz believes that heterosexuality, the norm against which all sexuality and sexual identity is measured, was itself a conscious and collective construction.[31]

Judging from the content, it is obvious that the Ladder's affinity group also saw identity formation as a political, social and personal task during this period. The evidence

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[27] The medical model of inversion posited by Kraft-Ebbing had some meaning for lesbians because it was popularized by The Great Lesbian Novel: The Well of Loneliness by Radclyffe Hall. Hall's heroine, Stephen Gordon, was a classic invert, and a major heroine among lesbian readers, a great many of whom either identified with Stephen Gordon, or wanted to meet someone just like her!

[28] See, for example, Jeffrey Weeks, Shane Phelan, Jonathan Ned Katz.

[29] Jackson, Margaret, "'Facts of Life' or the eroticization of women's oppression? Sexology and the social construction of heterosexuality," in Caplan, Pat, ed. The Cultural Construction of Sexuality (London: Tavistock Publications: 1987) 55.

[30] Weeks, Jeffrey, "Questions of identity," in Caplan, Cultural Construction, 42.

[31] Katz, Jonathan Ned, "The Invention of Heterosexuality," in Socialist Review 20 (January-March 1990) 7-34.

can be found in several places: in personal narrative and in "Readers Respond," in a series called "Why am I a Lesbian?", in responses to psychoanalytical theories about the origins of homosexuality, and in an extensive debate about the "butch-femme" phenomena that predominated among working class lesbians. It is by examining the richness of this content that we can begin to fill in the shadowy outline on The Ladder cover.

First of all, in defining their identity, 1950's lesbians struggled under the definitions of the sexologists and psychoanalysts, definitions that were a product of contemporary social mores and morals. Homosexual identity was defined along a continuum of illness: at the very least, it was a product of arrested development, at the very worst, homosexuals were labeled as psychotic, psychopathic and seriously disturbed. Not only were the emotions, minds and psyches of lesbians and gay men invaded by medical "experts", with alien meanings substituted for personal ones, their bodies were physically "colonized," as well. In studies such as Henry George's in the 1930's, the homosexual body was divided into "zones of study," [32] and breasts, genitals and other sexual organs were measured, photographed and the results recorded permanently.

Lesbians were doubly burdened by the "sickness" definition of homosexuality. First of all, lesbians were already seen as deficient women. Secondly, the psychiatrists' definition of homosexuality was based on studying gay men, and this, then, was turned inside out to fit women in a tortuous and bizarre fashion. For example, because

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[32] Terry, Jennifer, "Will We Know One if we See One? Constitutional, Anthropomorphic, and Gynecological Studies of Homosexual Bodies," Panel at Ninth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, June 12, 1993.

homosexual men were supposedly the products of weak fathers and seductive, domineering mothers, lesbians, then, had to be the products of weak mothers and authoritarian, seductive fathers.

It would be wrong from our perspective to dismiss the medical model of homosexuality dominant in the 50's as being a subject for amusement today, though some of the statements could provoke laughter. The medical model had very real and painful effects on lesbians as individuals. The reality of their individual romantic lives and loves were negated by such widely-accepted statements as this one from psychoanalyst Edmund Bergler: "Lesbians unconsciously repeat-and no hint of this reaches consciousness-a conflict which is in essence the fantasy of the *masochistically mistreated child and the cruel, denying mother.*"[33] (Italics are the author's.)

Therefore, it is logical that one of the main concerns about the lesbian identity was focused around the issue of health: Are we sick? Are we healthy? Are we born this way? How do we feel about what the experts say? The "sickness" theory burdened every lesbian, from those in DOB to readers in Idaho and Florida, and it was the common context in which the parameters of the discussion were set. During Stage One there was frequent coverage in The Ladder of meetings at which medical experts spoke, reviews of books, articles, radio and TV shows, and even some contributions by these experts themselves. Most of these people promoted views that were openly hostile to, or at the very least, patronizing and dismissive of, lesbian existence and experiences. But, as

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[33] Bergler, Edmund, M.D., Kinsey's Myth of Female Sexuality: The Medical Facts (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1954) 143.

harmful as these views were, they did give lesbians a theory, a beginning point, a set of meanings with which they could begin to define their own identities.

DOB more often than not took a neutral position on the views of these hostile experts, and often presented them without comment or rebuttal. There were several reasons for this. First, as an organization that spent much time helping lesbians with problems such as alcoholism, past attempts at suicide, low self-esteem, DOB was seeing many women who were emotionally disturbed. In addition, DOB chose, for strategic reasons, to avoid alienating the psychotherapeutic profession. In this, DOB was not alone; the rest of the movement did not begin confronting the experts either until the early 1960's.

Whatever the reasons, the lack of critical editorial comments had the unwonted effect of making DOB seem as though it was implicitly endorsing damaging and hateful points of view. There are many examples in Stage One. One of the most glaring is the constant use of the undefined terms "homophile problem" or "homosexual problem." These terms imply that it is homophiles or homosexuals themselves who are the problem. In addition some information is often insulting and had no basis in fact. For example, in a DOB report on a December, 1956 meeting, the speaker, a male psychotherapist, offered the opinion that

> the true biological function of the female is to have children, and that by denying themselves this function the Lesbian is unfulfilled, and is hampering her health and happiness. The basic problem....is to find out why you are shying away from sexual relations with men. In other words, the problem is not why you like women, but why you

don't like men.[34]

This not only ignored the very real experiences of Ladder readers who were mothers, but also implied that lesbians were unhealthy, deficient women. In addition, it based lesbian identity on the rejection of men and male sexual relations. Yet, six months later, DOB's "Calendar of Events" listed a talk by this same speaker. DOB had invited him to address the topic "Is a Homophile Marriage Possible?" and commented that "[t]hose of you who didn't get a chance to take Mr. Vaerlen to task after his lecture in December will have a second whack at him. Get your ammunition ready and come and hear this stimulating and controversial speaker."[35] The amused tone used to refer to the controversy of the first speech has the effect of muting and denying the anger of those listeners who took issue with Vaerlen.

A few further examples should suffice to illustrate DOB 's neutral attitude toward expert views. In January, 1959, an article began with the statement that "[t]he lack of therapeutic care available to homosexuals...was scored by law enforcement officials...last month." One might assume that this therapeutic care would be directed at alleviating the psychic pain resulting from the intense persecution of homosexuals. Instead, it is a preventative measure, because "homosexuality often leads to more violent crimes including homicide." The article closes with the speaker quoted as "stress[ing] the 'urgency and necessity' of establishing clinics where homosexuals can be treated individually or in groups and said therapy should be made compulsory." Again, this article

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[34] "Third Discussion on Fear," The Ladder 1 (January 1957) 5.

[35] "Calendar of Events," The Ladder 1 (June 1957) 9.

is offered with no comment or rebuttal.[36] In the same issue, Dr. Benjamin Karpman explains that when "normal sexual drives" are repressed, "the sexual energy overflows into all sorts of channels creating social disorganization and psychopathology." Among these channels can be found "the prostitute, the alcoholic, the homosexual, the neurotic, the psychotic, the psychopath, the gambler, and those involved in desertion, divorce, suicide."[37]

The third example concerns notoriously anti-homosexual psychologist and author, Albert Ellis. In a lecture in New York on homosexuality and creativity, Ellis stated that, because "homosexuals in our culture are almost invariably neurotic or psychotic...no so-called normal group of homosexuals is to be found anywhere." Furthermore, Ellis believes that homosexuals are less, not more creative than heterosexuals, because, "as seriously disturbed persons," they are so self-absorbed and self-hating, they find it hard to concentrate on solving artistic problems. Additionally, they are "the most imitative, most conventional and most acceptance-demanding people in our ultra-conforming culture." Not only is this lecture is presented without comment, even worse, it is called "a thoughtful, provocative and lucid paper summarizing [Ellis'] pioneer research in the relationship of sex deviation to creativity."[38]

The last example, and the most bizarre, again concerns Dr. Karpman. At a Mattachine panel which is termed "a star-studded program of speakers," Karpman "drew

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[36] "Officials Urge Compulsory Care of Sexual Deviates," The Ladder 3 (January 1959) 14.

[37] "Attitudes on Sex Cause Crimes," The Ladder 3 (January, 1959) 15.

[38] "Homosexuality and Creativity," The Ladder 3 (February 1959) 7.

liberally from his long professional experience to illustrate unconscious homosexuality expressed in such diverse forms as transvestism, alcoholism, fetishism, paranoia and war." He also explained that as a result of his study of "numerous cases of Lesbianism," he had discovered that "'...children are not born perverted,'" and that "'homosexuality should be considered a childhood disease!'" Then, hopelessly echoing 18th century medical confusion about female bodies, Karpman goes on to explain that "in the future more research activity will be directed to the study of the female pelvis. 'The female pelvis is a remarkable thing where dynamic activities such as menstruation and ovulation are constantly occurring. The menstruation may be light, it may be irregular, it may be infrequent, but no female homosexual can escape it."

By offering such articles as the ones cited above, in neutral tones, with no rebuttal or comment, and by using such approval-laden terms such as "star-studded," "stimulating," and "pioneer," and even by presenting controversy in humorous tones, the result must have been confusing to the reader. At worst, DOB's neutral attitude was a silent endorsement of the views presented within, at its least, perplexion as to where DOB actually stood. This was unfortunate. As the only political organization for lesbians, as well as the publisher of the only Lesbian magazine, DOB was invested by readers with a significant amount of expertise and leadership, and was regarded with an attitude of respect that gave extra weight to its opinions. D.M., for example, writes that she is "hopeful. Hopeful because at last there is a non-profit corporation [DOB] which prints the true story of Lesbianism."[39]

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[39] D.M., "Readers Respond," The Ladder 2 (December 1957) 25.

It would, however, be unfair and inaccurate to say that DOB offered no criticism at all of the medical condemnation of lesbianism and homosexuality. Other articles show that they could train their guns on a nemesis such as Edmund Bergler when they wanted to, and DOB did offer alternative views such as those of Dr. Blanche Baker, Dr. Evelyn Hooker, and Dr. Lee Steiner, all of whom advocated self-acceptance, and expressed tolerance and compassion for the besieged homosexual. The Ladder also regularly printed articles attributing the problems of lesbianism to rejection by society, rather than to any mental illness. For example, in a February 1957 article, Alice LaVere, a personal adjustment counselor, maintained that "the Lesbian suffers more from the feeling of being unwanted and shunned than from any illness," and condemned shock treatments, lobotomies and hormone therapy directed at "curing" homosexuality.[40] And, in 1959, DOB exhorted lesbians to overcome the fear and "dread of detection" resulting from the raid on a popular bar, Kelly's, in which 65 women were arrested, with an invitation to "[e]xamine the facts. The Lesbian is a woman endowed with all the attributes of any other woman....Her only difference lies in her choice of a love partner."

Faced with negative coverage of homosexuality in both The Ladder and in the popular press, it is not surprising that Ladder readers and contributors took various positions on the healthiness of the lesbian identity. These ranged from complete rejection of to acceptance of some portion of the medical model of illness. However, the majority of writers agreed on a key point: that lesbianism has a natural origin. Most believed that Nature shapes identity, homosexual or heterosexual. However, some readers did agree

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[40] "Psychotherapy vs. Public Opinion," The Ladder 1 (February 1957) 9.

with the inversion theory, the notion that lesbians were men in women's bodies. In July, 1960, Georgina Lloyd writes that "I belong to the twilight world - the world of the 'third sex,' neither normal woman or normal man - a world unexplored like a little-known, far-off planet hanging in the darkness of space." Though Georgina had tried, through marriage, children, social clubs, psychiatrists and doctors, "I have never been able to cure myself of being what I am - a masculine soul, with masculine desires, in a feminine body."[41] Two months later, reader Jay Wallace of New York adds her "hearty and sincere 'Amen!'." Importantly, though, Wallace removes the taint of abnormality from Georgina's explanation: her puzzling duality is, however, a natural condition. Wallace explains that there are two kinds of lesbians: imitation, "acquired" lesbians as opposed to the "real, genuine, authentic Lesbians," (such as Georgina and herself). These genuine lesbians are products of Nature, and as such, even if they are men in women's bodies, "the true Lesbian should not even consider the 'why' of it. It is enough that it is. She does not know the answer to 'why?', and she cares less. She is a Lesbian, and she enjoys being sincerely what she is. Why? Who cares 'why?'"[42]

Most others of the affinity group, however, vehemently repudiated any portion of the sickness theory. For example, in April, 1957, Carol Hales offers a spirited rebuttal of Bergler's virulent anti-homosexual classic Homosexuality: A Disease or Way of Life. She lambastes Bergler because, "[i]nstead of offering comfort to the homosexual, as is the noble purpose of many of our high ranking psychiatrists, Dr. Bergler seems to specialize

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[41] Lloyd, Georgina and Joy O.I. Spoczynska, The Ladder 4 (June 1960) 7-14.

[42] Wallace, Jay, "Readers Respond," The Ladder 4 (August 1960) 22-24.

in flaying them." She sees Bergler as attempting to block the progress homosexuals are making "to secure acceptance and understanding," but, she exults, "this book *cannot delay the march to progress."* (Italics are the author's.) Hales, too, believes that "[r]eal homosexuals already know that in accord with Nature's own pattern, *homosexuality is RIGHT for homosexuals!"*[43] (Italics are the author's.) In a similar but more moderate vein, F.J. of Chicago earnestly recommends that a research study be done to counteract the "supposedly scientific writing by psychoanalysts like Edmund Bergler and Frank Caprio." F.J. believes that such a study would prove the lie about the "lurid picture" being painted by such professionals.[44] A few months later, in another article, Hales declares that Nature is a force of the Almighty as she reaches for a tone of moral fervor. She urges her readers to accept their homosexuality: "Don't curse Nature for placing you at what you may wrongfully consider a cruel disadvantage. Look closely at all the facts and bless Nature for the advantages she has given you. Yes, I said *ADVANTAGES*....most important of all, realize that the immortal spirit within you was given to you by God..."[45] (Emphasis is the author's) Coincidentally or not, The Ladder's cover that month pictured a young androgynous woman removing a mask of her face with one tear edging out of the right eye. She is looking up, off into the distance.

That readers were impatient with the neutral presentation of the medical model in The Ladder is reflected in several letters. A California correspondent writes in the October

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[43] "Accept the Challenge!" The Ladder 1 (April 1957) 12.

[44] F.J., "Readers Respond," The Ladder 2 (December 1957) 24.

[45] Hales, Carol, "You," The Ladder 2 (October 1957) 16-17.

1961 issue that, as a reader for over a year, "on numerous occasions I have been dismayed by the frequency with which homosexuality and bisexuality are referred to as abnormal, as a quirk, or as a deviation. I feel these concepts are inaccurate and harmful." Her comparison of homosexuality with left-handedness or skin color indicates her belief that one's sexuality is natural.

The dangers of repressing one's true, God-given nature are detailed in a thoughtful article that reviews several books on the subject. Succumbing to social pressure can result in self-destructive behaviors like alcoholism and prostitution, or can lead a woman into a miserable heterosexual marriage. The writers adopt an objective, scholarly, even scientific tone similar to previously published Ladder articles that gave the opposite point of view. They recommend counseling so that those with repressed lesbian tendencies can stop "destroying themselves." In a turnabout statement on science that mirrors the "cure" claims of the psychiatric profession, they state, "In many cases a disturbed repressed individual can be helped to the point where an easy and satisfactory adjustment to overt Lesbianism is made." The consequence of such an adjustment is that "many socially non-productive and destructive people can be turned into useful citizens."[46]

In a further refinement, lesbianism is given a magical and secret component by Barbara Grier who writes: "We, all of us, You and I, have a wonderful kind of magic within ourselves, and our lives and loves show it." She speaks of the recognition lesbians share in a crowded room of strangers, and says she regards as a blessing "[t]he exquisite pain

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[46] Damon, Gene and Lee Stuart, "The Repressed Lesbian," The Ladder 3 (November 1958) 18-21.

of holding hands when you know it must be a secret. 'To kiss in a shadow' has real advantages, even merits."[47] Her images evoke a kind of thrilling, secret sisterhood. The attraction of secrecy and adventure is highlighted by Jo Allyn, as well, who writes in the poem, "Strangers,"

> I walk alone the San Francisco streets,...
> And know my peculiar pleasure.
> There is beauty in bracing the opposite-rushing crowd,
> Adventure is the not-knowing and in
> Looking upon narrow unfamiliar streets,
> Passing unknown dimly perceived doors
> Leading to adventures unsavored...[48]

For at least one reader, the lesbian identity had another component: the conscious or unconscious rejection of female gender roles. In answer to the question, "Why am I a Lesbian," one woman gives a reply that could have come out the of 1970's. She believes that

> "a...likely factor leading to lesbianism would be the protest against domination by the male and the inability of the lesbian to emulate the female role as set forth by society. There would seem to be a withdrawal from the heterosexual market-place of glamour and emphasis placed rather upon the independence of the individual and the development of the full personality."[49]

If the main component of this new, group-defined identity was that it was Nature- and God-given, a second important component was that lesbian identity was not focused on or constructed around sex. Frank references to sex by DOB or readers were

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[47] B.G., "Essay on a Lesbian," The Ladder 2 (November 1957) 20-21.

[48] Allyn, Jo, "Strangers," The Ladder 1 (December 1956) 7.

[49] "Why Am I a Lesbian?" The Ladder 4 (June, 1960) 24.

infrequent. The lack of overt sexual references in The Ladder during this period is not surprising, given the very real fear of censorship and persecution by the postal authorities. However, it does not signal a disapproval of sex. Sexuality was not viewed as wrong or sinful. On the contrary, an overall approval of sexual expression was communicated in several, less-threatening, ways. Many articles stressed the importance of expressing sexual feelings, and related the dangers of repression. Additionally, other contributions were critical of the overall repressive sexual climate of the United States. Also, many direct references to sex were presented in articles by outside experts, who felt far freer to participate in such concrete discussions.[50] Still, as accepting as the general Ladder tone was concerning sex, lesbian identity was not defined in terms of physical acts. Rather, it was based in a blend of spiritual, emotional and personal ingredients. For some, it was an almost mystical experience. For all, it was inextricably connected to a primary relationship.

Most of what we can learn about how the sexual component of lesbian identity was viewed can be found in the short stories and poetry of the magazine. Examples that reinforce this appear in almost every issue. First of all, it is not sexual attraction that brings two women together. Often, it is the immediate, thrilling recognition between two women, even in such neutral settings as work or on the street, that stimulates the first attraction. This may seem incongruent with the isolation frequently expressed by Ladder readers during this time, but, according to Barbara Grier, it was often the way lesbians

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[50] See, for examples, The Ladder, July, 1957, p. 16, August, 1957, p. 7, October, 1957, p. 23, and November, 1960, p. 10.

of the 50's and early 60's knew one another. Grier explained that "90% of women, walking down the street, never met one another's eyes." Often, lesbians were the women who did. Thus, immediate and mutual recognition was a reality during this time period.[51] Furthermore, this mutual recognition often contains the promise of a fulfilling, permanent relationship within the first exchange of words or looks between two women. Jo Allyn, for example, links recognition, relationships, and conversation in a poem, as she asks:

> Shall we pass each other
> Nameless in the night?
> Perhaps within a sheltering door
> Rain will lend us conversation
> And we will find a new world
> Together in the rain.[52]

Indeed, in the story "The Gay Party," it is a conversation about mutual values and the desire for a permanent relationship, that brings two strangers together at a party. Jan, who had given up the gay life because it seemed so hollow, remembers only "'the fights, the money spent, the lack of sleep, the feeling of drifting, of going nowhere.'" She meets Kay, who earnestly argues that a "real home" is not "asking too much in a gay life." Kay shares with Jan her dream of finding someone with whom "to make a gay marriage work." After only a few minutes' conversation and one brief touch of their hands, they leave the party together. They are not headed for a night of passion, but rather, more talk. Jan tells Kay, "'I want to talk to you for hours, maybe days.'" It is the communicated hope of building a permanent relationship that sparks the women's attraction.[53]

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[51] Interview with Barbara Grier, January 2, 1994.

[52] Allyn, Jo, "Rain," The Ladder 1 (February 1957) 13.

[53] Berkeley, Bev, "The Gay Party," The Ladder 3 (June 1959) 8-12.

In another story, which takes place in Paris, Vicki often observes an unnamed woman who walks through the city alone. When they finally meet, "they spoke of Paris, and of the coming Spring; they spoke little, yet each knew she had found understanding. Neither would ever again walk alone in the night....The streets of Paris had brought them together..." Interestingly, though both women are Americans, they speak in French. One conclusion could be that lesbian love speaks a different language.[54]

It is often a handshake, or even just the sight of another woman's "strong, yet sensitive hands,"[55] that sparks this attraction. Marcia is on the verge of marriage to boring, dependable Don when she meets his cousin Enid. Her first glimpse of Enid is her fingers, "caressing the soft fur" of Marcia's dog, who instinctively recognizes her as a friend. The two women exchange only two sentences, (Marcia's consists of just the word, "Hello"), but "the warm, sure clasp of [Enid's] offered hand" and "the twinkle in the eyes....assured [Marcia] that here was a happiness which would last....still holding the hand, [she] led her new friend into the house."[56]

Often it is just a smile that connects two women permanently. Marion, a woman in her late 50's, is about to give up the lesbian life to move to Texas and live with her son and his family. As she prepares to leave, she discards the symbols of her sexuality: red high heels, "a low-cut gown, some black lace underwear, a pale blue diaphanous nightgown," for the symbols of her life as a grandmother: "comfortable shoes,

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[54] Vernon, Alice, "On the Eve of Spring," The Ladder 1, (September, 1957) 20.

[55] LaSalle, Frances, "The Clasping Hand," The Ladder 1 (May 1957) 15.

[56] LaSalle, Frances, 15.

slippers...house dresses." Her friend Connie accuses Marion of deliberately choosing the "'old granny part to play, ignoring the juicy role of Lesbian." Marion, though, is tired of "'being alone, of waiting, of watching other couples. Being an old granny won't be half as difficult.'" However, just one smile from Connie's sister, Jo, fills the room with "warmth...a depth, a beauty, a feeling that was almost intangible..." which makes Marion "feel glowing inside, excited and joyously alive...." Later that evening, Marion "compo[ses] a letter, writing rapidly, joyously..." to her son and his wife, declining their invitation to come and live with them. She will however, visit, and would "love to bring along a friend of mine. She's wonderful, and I'm sure you'll like her." We can assume that after the letter, she retrieves the black underwear and see-through negligee.[57]

In addition, these intangible glances and touches of the hand are often mystical, unexplainable occurrences. In the story of Marcia and Enid, Enid's handclasp and honest, lively eyes brought a undefinable, unexplained knowledge to Marcia: "As suddenly as that, she knew. And even more than that she knew. For intuition, which sometimes draws breath from the occult, assured her that here was a happiness which would last..."[58]

Once a lesbian relationship is established, the importance of sex is pictured as transitory and secondary. In a paean to her loved one, one writer links her lover's hands and mouth to emotions, not sex. Her hands are "graceful...paint colorful pictures in the air...the fingers slim and warm with meaning...fingers that twine about yours..." These hands are not a prelude to sexual activity, but rather to a key to "sincere friendship that

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[57] Wallace, Jay, "Locust-Years," The Ladder 5 (December 1960) 9-19.

[58] LaSalle, Frances, 15.

flows through me when the grip is close and true...."[59]

Moreover, in a relationship of long duration, there is "another kind of love" which goes beyond sex, which Jan and Lesley have discovered in a story of the same name. When Pat tries to lure Jan away from Lesley through a kiss, Jan explains that, although she did have "'a physical response ... it [has] nothing to do with love.'" She explains to Pat that, years before, she and Lesley had become bored with material things and mutual interests seemed lacking. They decided to find out what "love really was beyond mere physical attraction." Through reading and discussion, they learned that "'it is spiritual love and through it you learn to know the essence of your loved one....the real essence of the individual as she actually is.'" It is "'a love that encompasses the heart, mind, body and soul...our other kind of love - real love.'" With this explanation, Jan convinces Pat to overcome the boredom and sameness of her present relationship, to search beyond transitory physical feelings. [60]

The same theme is repeated in story of Myra and Lee. After ten years together, they have given up sex. They have separate beds, and their last attempt at sex had been a "mistake, a vain attempt to recapture what was lost." Myra believes that Lee has sought out a new lover in Alice Norman, and is trying to recapture the passion of their early years. Myra is despondent over Lee's friendship with Alice, until a conversation with Alice reveals that Lee talks only of Myra and the things they share: vacations, concerts, their life together. Alice is well aware of the lack of sex in the women's relationship, and

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[59] Schmolke, Elva Ann, "i love her," The Ladder 2 (January 1958) 14.

[60] Williams, Gail, "Another Kind of Love," The Ladder 4 (January 1960) 11-15.

thought she could fulfill that part of Lee's life. She now realizes that "'women need more than one kind of fulfillment..." and tells Myra that "...you don't have to worry. You are important to her. The most important thing in the world.'"[61] Myra realizes that her life with Lee will never seem uncertain again.

These stories and poems were written by readers of The Ladder. Thus, the common linking of sex with friendship, mutual interests, mutual recognition, and spiritual fulfillment had its basis in reality. These stories can also be seen as part of an implicit attempt by lesbians to differentiate themselves from homosexual men. The Ladder contains few criticisms of gay male sexuality during this stage, probably because DOB's alliance with men in the homophile movement would have made that impolitic. But inferences about the differences between lesbian and gay male sexuality can be and probably were drawn from the many articles in The Ladder about entrapment, public sex, and venereal disease, all of which had no personal relevance for lesbians.

A final component of the emerging lesbian identity that I wish to discuss here is the extensive debate documented in The Ladder over the butch-femme dynamic. This debate was heated, ambiguous, and complicated, because it was based on both group and individual perceptions and identification. The butch-femme phenomena had personal meaning for individuals because it was connected to visibility, physical danger, frank sexuality, ties to bars, social nonconformity and gender roles, and it was also profoundly influenced by class.

First of all, it is very important to understand just what "butch-femme" in the mid-

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[61] Shotwell, Jody, "Love is Not Love," The Ladder 3 (April 1959) 8-23.

20th century (approximately 1920-1970) meant. The term is complex, and is embedded with many layers of meaning, yet it is impossible to understand lesbian experiences or lesbian history without understanding butch-femme. First, the identity of butch was probably descended from the phenomena of "passing women," women who lived as men for economic and personal reasons. Second, both identities, butch and femme, were assumed identities. The degree to which either identity was assumed depended on individual motivation and individual comfort levels. For some women, it was an integral part of their makeup; for others, it was a choice made for social or sexual reasons. Third, butch-femme also signaled sexual roles, as well as social roles and was based in the social life of gay bars. Fourth, and most importantly, it was based in the working class. Fifth, butch-femme was a key part of the lesbian identity for at least twenty-five years before DOB or The Ladder even came along. Last, butch-femme was part of a particular political response aimed at building working class lesbian visibility and community. In an alternate way, DOB and The Ladder were advocating, twenty years later, a different political response, one, however, that was based in middle class experiences and expectations. Though DOB was a tiny organization, the views expressed by DOB and The Ladder affinity group represented a much larger constituency: the post-war lesbian population that was part of the growing middle class.

In a way, it is misleading to say that butch-femme itself was the battleground over identity. Because femmes were invisible as lesbians unless they were in the company of their butch lovers, it was really the butch lesbian who was the symbol and the target of the middle-class attack. Beebo Brinker, heroine/anti-heroine of Ann Bannon's most

famous works is the archetypical butch: a hard-drinking, physically aggressive, world-weary, promiscuous, cross-dressing, short-haired, husky-voiced woman who lives in the bars at night, and works at a man's job during the day so she can wear pants. One of Beebo's lovers, Laura, tried to forget her, but

> that face, that damned face of Beebo's, strong and handsome and hard with too much living,....a weird, wonderful panic grabbed her throat at the thought of Beebo....the handsome features that used to fire Laura's imagination and make her tingle; the tired eyes, blue and brilliant and somehow a little sick of it all...except when they focused on Laura.[62]

The popularity of Bannon's Beebo, not only in the 50's, but also today, indicates just how potent an image the butch was (and is) for lesbians.

What was it about the butch lesbian that was the basis for conflict? This letter from N.R. of California highlights most of the elements that the affinity group found objectionable:

> It's obvious that Miss Aldrich's[63] main objection is the picture of the Lesbian we are showing the world - the irresponsible, argyled, slacked, short-haired female carpenter who is too ignorant to realize that she, too, must live in this society; that she, too, is obligated to hold down a job to support herself; that she has a certain responsibility to her fellow Lesbians and to society, as well as to herself.
>
> ....A full-fledged, honest-to-God Lesbian can hold down a responsible position, can wear skirts reasonably comfortably and gracefully, can wear her hair long, and can do a million and one things any other

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[62] Bannon, Ann, Women in the Shadows, (Tallahassee: Naiad Press, 1983) 117-121.

[63] Ann Aldrich wrote several books that were highly critical of both The Ladder and of DOB, as well as containing stereotypical presentations of lesbians and the lesbian subculture that were viewed as hostile by The Ladder.

> female can do in this society - with ease and poise, too; that's the greatest blessing!
>
> In short, if we homosexuals want to feel integrated into society, we in turn must offer something useful and desirable to accept.[64]

It is important to emphasize that N.R.'s and similar comments were not mere observations, but were active attacks aimed at either diminishing the appeal of the butch, or disenfranchising her claim on any part of the lesbian identity.

The first thing that N.R. objects to is the butch's physical image. This physical image had consequences that were seen as negative, or for concrete reasons, actually were negative. One very real consequence was that, to be physically identifiable as a lesbian was a dangerous proposition. Lesbians were routinely beaten and harassed by the police and by members of the public. Rape, especially of butch women, was common. Police arrests were based on (sometimes nonexistent) laws about wearing clothes of the opposite sex. Davis' and Kennedy's work documents many instances of women being attacked, both in public and in the bars. Often these fights were necessary to protect their femme girlfriends as in this story of "Sandy's":

> Well, you had to be strong - roll with the punches....Most of the time you got all your punches for the fem anyhow....all she would have to say [is] 'No,' when he [a straight man] said, 'Let's go, I'll get you away from this.' He was so rejected by this 'no' that he would boom, go to you. You would naturally get up and fight the guy...And we'd knock them on their ass....And that's how we kept our women. They cared for us, but you don't think for a minute that they would have stayed

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[64] N.R., "Readers Respond," The Ladder 5 (April 1961) 25.

with us too long if we stood there or just were silent.[65]

Another consequence of the butch image was that women who did not "dress the part" had problems finding and holding the professional and pink collar jobs that spelled security for middle class women. In a 1960 short story, Jimmie, a butch who bartends at a gay bar, dreams of a job in "a quiet and peaceful place, as far removed from a nightclub as possible." The author describes the world of the bar as a lesbian trap: Jimmie "was kept running, always running to do the bidding of girls, girls, girls." Yet, the sweatshop-like world of the bar was the only place where Jimmie "didn't have to wear stockings or heels or paint her face with goo....Long ago, she had determined never to go where feminine fripperies were part of a job requirement. Sticking to the rule had kept her in the lower income brackets..." After being rejected for a job in a florist's, Jimmie learns her lesson: "getting a toehold in the outside world was difficult on your own terms."[66] Here, the butch's refusal to conform to gender roles is pictured as sentencing one to not only permanently substandard income levels, but to imprisonment within the lesbian subculture, as well. For Jimmie, individualism equals marginalization.

A third objection, real or imaginary, to the physical appearance of butches was that the affinity group felt that butch women reinforced stereotypes that victimized all lesbians. Society's victimization of the whole because of the actions of the few was practically excused by some members of the affinity group. In a 1961 letter, J.M. of Ohio links butch

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[65] Davis, Madeline and Liz Lupovsky Kennedy, Boots of Leather, 181.

[66] Lawson, Jacqueline, "Pipe Dream," The Ladder 4 (March 1960) 12-13.

attire ("masquerades") with the persecution of the majority: "some of the gay people claim to hate men; yet they cut their hair short, put on men's clothing and strut around thinking that their attire can change their sex. No wonder we are treated as such when every day is like Hallowe'en!"[67] This view is supported by a more moderate piece in the May 1957 Ladder which analyzes the effects of stereotypical behavior by an outgroup. The writer believes that, although lesbians adopt "rough blue jeans and jackets" as "a pseudo-armor to protect the vulnerable feelings inside," these symbols not only fail as protection, but bring discrimination down and wreak havoc upon the entire group. This the author calls "the tyranny of the minorities."[68] Thus, The physical image of the butch comes under attack for several real or imagined reasons: it is dangerous, it marginalizes lesbians economically and socially, it reinforces stereotypes, and though it may be an individual choice or statement, it victimizes all lesbians.

A second area that the letter writer, N.R., explored in her attack on butches was their refusal to conform to female gender roles. Although ordinary lesbians were already considered to be deficient (although predatory) women, butch women presented an even more active challenge to these gender roles. During the ultra-conforming 50's and early 60's, this was quite threatening to their more compliant sisters, who were afraid that the consequences of the butch's visibility would spiral outward, resulting in their own expulsion from society, as well. Exposure was so threatening that N.R. actually characterizes her own conformity as "a blessing." There were very real connections

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[67] J.M., "Readers Respond," The Ladder 5 (June 1961) 25.

[68] Stephens, Barbara, "A Plea for Integration," The Ladder 1 (May 1957) 17.

between conforming in outward appearance, manner of dress and the rejection of gender roles. The following letter from July, 1957 reveals that these connections were operational not only for butch women, but for other women as well:

> I consider myself (and my roommate also considers herself) a mild transvestite - that is, we wear slacks almost always on our off-work hours....We consider dresses, high heels and stocking holders the most uncomfortable contraptions men have invented to restrict the movements of women so they cannot walk very far, lift many things, or sit with their legs apart in warm weather.[69]

Similarly, Barbara Stephens takes this a bit further. She explains that "[i]n this day of the glorified pin-up girl there are some people yet who would rather be rated on their character and intellect than on hypertrophied anatomy....it is understandable why many would rather be persons than bodies." Stephens maintains that the reason why many lesbians wear less feminine clothes is as a defensive strategy to avoid being seen as objects.[70]

To sum up, the Ladder attack on the butch lesbian and her relation to lesbian identity was based on the values and experiences of the middle class lesbian. First, the physical image of the butch was rejected for one more suitable to the economic and social status of The Ladder's affinity group. Secondly, although these women may have criticized gender roles and expectations, and although their lives as lesbians actually challenged these roles, they also believed that conforming to certain of their aspects them was necessary to overcome the negative stereotypes held by the experts and by

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[69] A.C., "Readers Respond," The Ladder 1 (July 1957) 27.

[70] Stephens, Barbara, "Transvestism-A Cross-Cultural Survey," The Ladder 1 (June 1957) 13.

society. Third, they viewed butch lesbians as anti-social; they gave society "nothing useful and desirable to accept," and the unfortunate result of this anti-social behavior by the butch lesbian was the rejection by society of all lesbians.

Leading the Ladder campaign against the butch image was DOB. Included in its "Statement of Purpose" for many years was the aim "to enable the variant to understand herself and make her adjustment to society....by advocating a mode of behavior and dress acceptable to society."[71] There were practical as well as political reasons for this, and given the context of the lack of safety in the bars, the amount of women who came to DOB with serious personal problems, and the terrible isolation and lack of self-esteem of many lesbians, this aim was not as conservative as it seems from a distance of over thirty years. For DOB, butch and femme was a very personal matter, as this early article by President D. Griffin illustrates:

> Our organization...has converted a few to remembering that 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 in society, but only if they wish to make it so. They now do.
>
> I quote from one of our 'changelings'. 'I find that because I am wearing women's slacks and letting my hair grow long I am getting a wider variety of friends and I have neighbors instead of people next door. I no longer have the feeling that everyone is watching me.'[72]

But neither DOB or the readers of The Ladder were completely able to eliminate butch-femme from the lesbian identity, nor was the condemnation universal. Covers, short

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[71] "Daughters of Bilitis-Purpose," The Ladder 1 (December 1956) 1.

[72] Griffin, D. "The President's Message," The Ladder 1 (November 1956) 3.

stories, and readers' letters, all less self-conscious forms of communication than editorials and formal articles, indicate an ambivalence in attitude, and reveal that the butch-femme phenomena was deeply imbedded in lesbian identity. Covers are especially striking. When one woman is pictured on a cover, she almost always has short hair, is androgynous-looking and often has a bold or forthright look on her face. When couples are pictured, one woman is always taller and usually short-haired; the smaller woman may be wearing a skirt and has longer hair. Even more interesting, non-human drawings carry through the theme as well. For example, the November, 1961 cover is a drawing of two cats, side by side; one is bigger, with straight whiskers, the other smaller with curled whiskers and even eyelashes. The "butch" cat's tail protectively encircles the "femme" cat's body.

Short stories, too, exhibit the sexual power of the butch image in the lesbian world. Many of the protagonists are butch women with names like Lou or Charlie.[73] In most of the stories, one woman is usually butch, and furthermore, is described in a positive way. For example, when Marion, the woman who was going to live with her son, meets Jo, she sees a "tall, masculine woman with...short, iron-grey hair." In her presence, Marion immediately feels "joyously alive and yet, at the same time, something that was deep and comforting and strong."

Direct statements from readers also soften the attack on the butch identity and reveal positive, accepting attitudes. For example, B.S. asks: "What scientific basis is there for a society to uphold certain idiosyncrasies of dress and manner and to condemn

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[73] Including one written by Del Martin, vocal critic of butch-femme.

others?"[74] One reader even calls butch-femme "just a game - I know I'm a girl and secretly I'm much, much weaker emotionally than my feminine looking other half. Oh, it's a big secret and you'd never guess in any one evening but the 'steely glint' in the 'Butch's' eye is put on - like makeup."[75]

By reviewing the content of these first six years, we can see that the first important task of the post-war middle-class lesbian population was the construction of an identity that was more relevant, socially acceptable, and palatable to their own personal and group experiences. Though there are other components to the identity that they sought to build, the main three are identified above. First, lesbianism was natural and God-given, and as such, needed to be expressed for optimum emotional health. Second, the basic attraction and affinity of lesbians was based, not on mere sexual attraction, but on such emotional intangibles as mutual recognition, the sharing of mutual spiritual and personal values and on a sometimes mystical connection. Third, the butch-femme dynamic was not only rejected, but attacked by most of the affinity group, who offered an alternate image of the socially respectable lesbian, which was seen as a safer and more personally relevant image. Yet even this rejection was fuzzy, and revealed an ambivalence that was fairly broad in scope.

If lesbian identity was a pressing concern, so too was the second important political task facing the post-war, middle-class lesbian population, building a community. Although working class bar culture existed, Ladder women were searching for a

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[74] B.S., "Readers Respond," The Ladder 1 (July 1957) 28.

[75] G.D., "Readers Respond," The Ladder 6 (September 1962) 25.

community they found more to be personally compatible. But, as the experiences of the 1970's and later have shown, "the lesbian community" is an elusive entity. Because of racism, ethnocentrism, and class discrimination, it has been impossible to build one lesbian community. A more accurate term is "lesbian communities." In the discussion of "community" that follows, it is important to realize that the vision of community of DOB and The Ladder affinity group was profoundly influenced by race, ethnicity and class, though they intended it to be a community for all.

The dream of a lesbian community was driven by DOB's vision of an alternative to the bars. In the 50's and 60's, DOB's chapters grew nationally. Despite this, however, DOB never reached more than a few hundred women. Because of the oppressive climate, the invisibility of lesbians, and DOB's strategy of self-help, but most significantly, because of the general political fragmentation, an organizational approach to building community had limited success. Many lesbians, like J.M. of Cleveland, were afraid to "Come out of hiding": "What a delicious invitation, but oh, so impractical. I should lose my job, a marvelous heterosexual roommate, and all chance of finding work...." For J.M. and women like her, a newsletter seemed more appropriate: "there is one effective weapon we, who must fight from a hiding place, still have - the fountain pen and the typewriter."[76] A publication was a more acceptable alternative to a public organization because it was less visible, it was confidential, it was private. Furthermore, it was able to reach into the hinterlands and give a voice, literal or symbolic, to isolated, hidden individuals. The very term, "fountain pen and typewriter," indicates the dual nature of The Ladder: it was both

[76] J.M., "Readers Respond," The Ladder 1 (November 1956) 14.

a vehicle for giving individuals a voice, and for gathering, combining and universalizing these disparate voices.

From the very beginning, DOB intended The Ladder to be the national voice of lesbians. In only the third issue, DOB addresses the "amount of anxiety...created, apparently, by the widespread mailing list of The Ladder....We have literally badgered and bullied everyone we know for names of friends who might be interested in The Ladder....How about sending us the names of your friends?"[77] Early letters from such locations as Port Orchard, Washington, Peace Dale, Rhode Island, Battle Creek, Michigan all indicate that DOB aimed at a national audience.[78]

The ultimate reason for breaking down the isolation expressed by lesbians from all over the country was the construction of a lesbian community. There were several ingredients in The Ladder that combined to do this. First was, of course, "Readers Respond." Second was a review of national news sent in from readers, combined in a column called "Cross Currents." Third was ongoing review of literature with lesbian content, a column entitled "Lesbiana," written for fifteen years by Barbara Grier. Fourth was a focus during this time on isolated lesbians, particularly on married lesbians and lesbian mothers. Last was the extensive documentation of lesbian lives and experiences, invaluable in reducing invisibility and validating lesbian existence.

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[77] "Where Did We get Your Name?," The Ladder 1 (February 1957) 12.

[78] There is some anecdotal evidence that DOB made up some of the letters in the early issues, for just this reason: to show evidence of a national audience. Whether genuine or manufactured, these letters illustrate the same point, the desire for a national audience.

The first ingredient, contributions from readers, had meaning on several levels. Letters allowed readers to share their own, very personal, experiences, and to add their views on issues facing lesbians and the homophile movement. Although the reduction of isolation has been addressed throughout this paper, the value of offering this forum cannot be stressed enough. Secondly, contributions of news from various parts of the country were important in identifying common issues, building consciousness about these issues, reducing invisibility, providing education about lesbian life, identifying common enemies, and giving lesbians a national context in which to view their lives.

Along with providing lesbians with a forum in which to begin to universalize their individual experiences, The Ladder began very early on to focus on the second ingredient, which was exposing lesbians to fiction with lesbian content, especially fiction targeted at lesbian audiences. Lesbian invisibility within the category of homosexuality was almost total. The following story of Billie Tallmij's relates a common experience for lesbians of this time period: "After reading The Well [of Loneliness] I decided that if this was what I was, then I needed to know what one was supposed to do in this sort of business. The problem was finding information....The only thing you could get was Krafft-Ebbing, which is not something to teethe your newfound identity on."[79] Linking lesbian readers with relevant reading materials helped to reduce this information gap.

The Ladder's reviews of fiction were one avenue that helped to promote lesbian visibility, and took several forms. One important initiative was its advertisement and

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[79] Tallmij, Billie, "The Teacher," Making History: The struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights 1945-1990: An Oral History (New York: HarperCollins, 1992.) 71.

promotion of a pioneer work of bibliography, Jeannette H. Foster's Sex Variant Women in Literature. Foster, a former librarian at the Kinsey Institute, had compiled reviews of over 300 works with lesbian content, spanning a 2,000 year time period. She summarized each work and evaluated it from a social as well as a literary point of view. In a review by novelist Marion Zimmer Bradley, who would later publish a yearly review of lesbian literature in conjunction with Barbara Grier, Bradley states that the book is "a major milestone....As far as I know, except for a few privately circulated leaflets in mimeograph, it is the first work of its kind...."[80] The Ladder offered Foster's book for sale, as well as Bradley's and Grier's yearly review.

Another important feature was the monthly literature review, "Lesbiana." Written by Grier for most of the magazine's seventeen years, it not only identified works with lesbian content, but undoubtedly stimulated demand for such works as well. Because the content of some works, especially the paperback dreadfuls, as they were known, was often stereotyped and negative, this column was invaluable in identifying positive works and reinforcing the notion that the lesbian identity was a healthy, natural one. Particularly noteworthy books were reviewed in length. Her succinct summaries of plots validate lesbian life whether or not an individual read each book; they revealed that lesbians lived and loved in a wide variety of geographical and professional settings, in every social and economic class, as well as in every conceivable age group and marital configuration.

Through reviews and in "Lesbiana," Grier also helped to define and build shared values of the new community. She was consistently sex-positive, steering readers away

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[80] Bradley, Marion Zimmer, "Review," The Ladder 1 (May 1957) 8-10.

from novels by reviews such as this one: "A sensational expose story with one chapter devoted to overt lesbian action between a society girl and a street wanton. Not very good."[81] On the other hand Grier promoted such classics as Edge of Twilight by Paula Christian, assuring readers that it "ends in very complete fulfillment for both women. Quite well written, fast moving, happy ending." [82] In this sense, Grier's promotion of the good over the bad built an audience for lesbian-positive novels. Good lesbian literature was being deliberately written to counter such negative works as those of Ann Aldrich, and to offer society a more positive view of lesbians, as Paula Christian tells us:

> I would be very embarrassed to have to tell my parents that I am a Lesbian and have only Miss Aldrich's books to show them as representative of the Lesbian way of life.
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> Which brings me to my own approach to E of T [Edge of Twilight]....I am so very sick of this breast-beating, bead-counting undertone in current lesbian novels that I wanted to try to write a novel which didn't attempt to say why, only what is without sounding like a cluster of emotionally disturbed or retarded teen-agers huddling against the snowballs of society.[83]

The effort to document literature with lesbian content may have made a contribution to stimulating supply and demand. In her annual review of literature for 1962, Grier notes that "the quantity of Lesbian titles is so overwhelming that no brief report can begin to discuss them all."[84] Further, in reviewing 1963 literature (a list of well over 250

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[81] Damon, Gene, "Lesbiana," The Ladder 2 (June 1958) 17.

[82] Damon, Gene, "Lesbiana," The Ladder 3 (February 1959) 19.

[83] Christian, Paula, "Another Author Heard From...," The Ladder 5 (February 1961) 19.

[84] Damon, Gene, "Lesbian Literature in 1962," The Ladder 7 (January 1963) 6.

titles), she asserts that "[a] complete integration has been achieved from a literary viewpoint and almost no genre of writing fails to offer examples of the existence of an accepted homosexuality."[85]

One last way in which The Ladder contributed to building community was by documenting its activities and history in a detailed and thoughtful fashion. It provided information to both new and older lesbians, individually and as a group, it offered a forum in which to discuss, accept, or reject certain values of the new community, and it helped build links between community leaders. And, as a published document, it continued to provide this same information, encouragement and examples of lesbian culture to newcomers.

We have talked about two important political tasks facing lesbians in the 50's and early 60's: identity formation and community building. Now I would like to turn to issues and activities more usually associated with the term "political." These issues can be divided into three areas, those which affected both lesbians and gay men, those which affected only gay men, and those which affected lesbians only (already discussed at length above). For the most part, discussion of these first two sets of issues reflects DOB's agenda and that of the homophile movement. In this sense, The Ladder was less of a mutual discourse, and more of an educational tool of the Daughters of Bilitis.

As an important partner in the homophile movement, one of DOB's aims was to educate Ladder readers about the discrimination and oppression that homosexuals faced, and to offer strategies to counter this oppression. DOB supported initiatives aimed at

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[85] Damon, Gene, "Lesbian Literature in 1963," The Ladder 8 (February 1964) 12.

combatting each particular issue, as well as an overall general strategy, both for the movement and for lesbians as a whole. Let us first examine the issues, and then turn to a discussion of the general strategy.

Many of the issues emphasized in The Ladder had repercussions for male homosexuals only. Entrapment, for example, did not really affect lesbians. When lesbians were arrested, it was usually as part of a raid on a bar, or because of bogus cross-dressing laws. Entrapment of male homosexuals was a more widespread problem, one that was linked to public cruising for sex. Another problem facing gay men was that, if identified as homosexual, they were subject to registration as "sexual psychopaths." These laws, effective in 21 states and the District of Columbia, provided for the indefinite confinement to mental institutions of homosexual men, even when they were not convicted of a crime.[86] The sexual practices of male homosexuals were also under attack during this period. Sodomy was punishable by harsh prison terms, up to life in some states. Even non-sexual associations were the cause of persecution, as in the notorious Boise, Idaho police witchhunt, in which 1,400 men were called in for questioning during a 15 month period in 1955-56.[87] And certainly, the majority of arrests in gay bars were of men, if, for no other reason, they made up the majority of bar-goers.

DOB actively lent its support to these issues in the pages of The Ladder for several reasons. The primary reason was because the homophile movement needed to present a united front during this period. The movement was tiny; activists had to stick

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[86] Berube, Allan, Coming Out under Fire, 258.

[87] D'Emilio, John, Sexual Politics, 51.

together. The leadership was still in the process of identifying the battleground, as well as gaining seasoning and sophistication. In addition, lesbians were still linked with male homosexuals in their own minds, and by society and other institutions as well. Differentiation between the two groups had barely begun. For example, the word "homosexual" (sometimes coupled with the pronoun "he") is regularly used in The Ladder in the place of "lesbian," and often the fact that it means "lesbian" has to be inferred from the context. This linking of men and women was reinforced by the fact that lesbians and gay men socialized together, mingling in bars, and using one another for "dates" when a heterosexual look was required for family or work events. For these reasons, DOB fought hard for male-only issues. The general movement's strategy to fight most of these issues was based on education, and upon legislative reform, particularly reform based on the Model Penal Code. Extensive reporting about the English Wolfenden Report, and the failed attempt by the Parliament to make homosexual acts legal, implied that such an effort in the U.S. would be a good idea. Many articles called for the revision of "Puritanical" and out-moded sex laws which were believed to be the basis of discrimination against homosexuals.[88]

The second set of issues that DOB addressed in The Ladder were issues affecting both men and women. These were issues such as discrimination in obtaining home-owner's insurance, in obtaining mortgages, and in filing taxes, concerns about employment in general, and security problems in particular jobs like teaching or government employment, and military discharges. For most of these issues, DOB could

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[88] See, for example, "On Changing Sex Laws," The Ladder 5 (October 1960) 13-18.

do little more than offer The Ladder as a forum for discussion of these issues.

The discussion of employment problems is a good example of why. In March, 1957, a DOB panel discussion concluded that "the only thing a homosexual has to fear when looking for a job is whether his or her ability matches the job applied for - the problem of homosexuality per se does not enter the employment picture."[89] This rosy picture was countered a few issues later by a reader in Washington, D.C. who gave several examples of homosexuals' loss of employment, and who concluded that "the average employer, whether government or private business, prefers not to hire or retain homosexuals on account of the prevailing mores and the stigma which attaches to the employer because of the presence of homosexuals."[90] Many other letters from readers also expressed fear of discovery on the job, and later articles gave further employment advice. Despite all of this discussion, nothing much changes on this subject, as evidenced by an article in April 1962, during which a California Employment official offers the opinion that "the major difficulties homosexuals have in obtaining employment stemmed from their instability, of never being satisfied with a position and flying from job to job."[91]

The example of the employment issue illustrates why the only leadership that DOB can offer around these concerns is the opportunity to air the issue. Discrimination against lesbians and gay men was institutionalized, and no extensive, effective critique either of society or of the role of homophobia had been formulated or adopted yet by either the

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[89] "Job Hunting Doesn't Need to be a Problem," The Ladder 5 (March 1957) 5.

[90] B.D.H., "Readers Respond," The Ladder 1 (May 1957) 23.

[91] "Employment for the Social Variant," The Ladder 6 (April 1962) 12.

homophile movement or DOB. In addition, most of these issues addressed individual situations that were highly variable, which clouded the issue. Third, a key strategy would have been to call for "civil rights" for homosexuals. Yet just such a call had been rejected by DOB as "ludicrous" in January, 1961. An editorial called a proposed "Homosexual Bill of Rights" "unnecessary, irrelevant and likely to set the homophile movement back into oblivion."[92] Thus, the strategy employed for dealing with this second set of issues was, at this time, limited to discussion and education.

One area in which DOB demonstrated aggressive leadership, however, was in its defense of gay bars. Despite DOB's reputation of being opposed to bars, the organization was able to separate its subjective feelings from its obligation to defend the public space of its constituency. For example, in early 1960, DOB attempted to open a dialogue with Mayor George Christopher about police harassment at gay bars. In the August issue, Del Martin lambasted the mayor for campaigning on a platform to crack down on gay bars, and she followed up by criticizing the chief of police in the October issue. Finally, in September, 1961, Martin again raked Christopher over the coals for a raid in which 89 men and 14 women were arrested for "visiting a disorderly house," and finally threw over her hitherto conciliatory approach: "The San Francisco Bay Area has been the scene of 'harassment' of gay bars all too long. Efforts...to meet with public authorities to find an equitable solution to the problem have been to no avail. It is time to take a stand."[93]

In addition, The Ladder regularly published articles about the current status of legal

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[92] Martin, Del, "How Far Out Can We Go?" The Ladder 5 (January 1961) 4.

[93] Martin, Del, "Flash," The Ladder 5 (September 1961) 25.

challenges to bars, which educated its readers about their right to socialize in public places. Furthermore, DOB published "What to do in Case of Arrest" twice, and other articles about legal rights. In addition, DOB made it clear that the legal right to associate in gay bars also meant that there was nothing illegal in joining an organization like DOB. An article such as "Attorney Stresses Nothing to Fear in Joining Daughters of Bilitis" indicates that for some, there was a fear that belonging to a homosexual organization was illegal. The spirited and consistent defense of gay bars finally paid off years later, when San Francisco learned to accept its large lesbian and gay population.

DOB dealt with many of the above issues with particular strategies, such as offering pages of The Ladder as a consciousness-raising tool. But it also advocated a general strategy to confront oppression that guided its tactics in specific situations. This strategy has been termed accomodationist and conservative by some scholars, which may seem to be the case from the advantage of thirty years. There were several elements to this strategy. The first was support for the long term goal of the homophile movement: acceptance by and integration into society. The assumption behind this goal was that society was basically sound, that lesbians and gay men would naturally like to assume their rightful positions within society, and that separating one's self from it was anti-social, in any case. Florence Conrad, long time Director of Research for DOB and a conservative apologist for social institutions, linked society with the accomplishments of the civilized. Some lesbians and gay men, she said "feel in some sense a part of that society which condemns us....Those of whom I speak have imbibed from early youth a feeling for their society and its strivings, a certain reverence for the best it has done,

thought, and said, and a desire to keep up its work."[94]

Such a goal also appealed to The Ladder's affinity group, who wished to claim or expand some of the privileges of their class status, yet were unable to do so because of discrimination. This felt particularly irksome to them, because they didn't want to be seen as all that different. The group made frequent claims that the only difference between lesbians and heterosexuals was in one's choice of "love object."[95] Secondly, they believed, as Conrad said, that they were "decent, useful citizens..."[96] However, as much as they wanted to be seen as similar to heterosexuals, society did not view them this way, and in fact, rejected them. The affinity group believed that this rejection was based in ignorance. As J.M. from Washington put it, "There is far too much drivel and misinformation and sensationalism being published now, and too little on the subject that is fair and impartial....There are too many kinds of homosexuals for them to be classified as a 'type'....The very fact that they [writers and psychologists] lump all homosexuals together betrays their poverty of experience."[97] Because society could not see the "many kinds of homosexuals," they saw only those who were stereotypical in dress and manner, thus it was these few who were responsible for society's rejection of the many.

To counter the "drivel," it was necessary to employ the second element of the strategy, education of the public and of individual lesbians. The education of individual

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[94] Conrad, Florence, "In Defense of `Defense,'" The Ladder 4 (August 1960) 12.

[95] For example, "On `Growing Up,'" The Ladder 1 (August 1957) 6.

[96] Conrad, Florence, The Ladder 4 (August 1960) 13.

[97] J.M. "Readers Respond," The Ladder 1 (February 1957) 14-15.

lesbians involved not only encouraging them to conform in their personal appearance and social habits, but also attempts to convince them that they had an obligation to their sisters and to society. Defiance of social conventions was believed to incite and intensify society's prejudice against the individual and the entire group. This contains an interesting contradiction. While pressuring stereotypical lesbians to conform and preaching integration into society, the women of The Ladder were attempting to strengthen their own positions as individuals, that is, individual members of the upwardly mobile, security-minded, unitized middle class. And, ironically, as alienated these middle-class lesbians felt toward their more stereotypical sisters, they felt their futures were inextricably shackled to the actions of these despised women.

The second group targeted for education was the public, and this effort had two facets. First, DOB and other groups cooperated in research studies of "ordinary" lesbians and gay men to counter the overwhelming amount of research that used subjects who were usually either therapy patients, prison inmates, or confined to mental institutions. Proponents of cooperation with research studies believed that psychiatrists and other researchers were capable of objectively studying "ordinary" homosexuals without reflecting the biases or mores of contemporary society. In addition to participation in research studies, the movement also emphasized forming alliances with sociologists, criminologists, psychologists, psychiatrists and others who influenced public opinion. The homophile movement relied on their professional allies to educate the public about homosexuality for them. This is what I call the "alliance/reliance" strategy. This strategy was probably the major reason that The Ladder published so many negative articles from

professionals with little or no comment during this early period. DOB wanted to be seen as reasonable and cooperative, to shed the anti-social lesbian image.

The third element of this general strategy was conformity. Those who did not conform were blamed for condemning the entire group to outcast status. L.L. of New Jersey asks: "Do we take pride in those of our sisters who have lost their self-respect and who are constantly the subject of ridicule and who have established themselves as the emblem of our 'ism?' I think not. I hope not! I pray not!" L.L. goes on to charge stereotypical lesbians with a lack of pride and self-respect,and with irresponsibility to both society and to their "sisters." She ends by predicting that, unless lesbians "conform to the basic standards of womanhood, dressing and behaving like women," they cannot look to society for acceptance or even tolerance.[98]

This overall political strategy was by no means universally acclaimed by The ladder affinity group; dissenting voices were heard. Some contributors urged lesbians to be proud of their differences, and criticized conformance to social norms. Furthermore, as this stage of The Ladder drew to a close, some leaders of the homophile movement were beginning to push a more critical analysis of society, and to advocate a more activist agenda and more confrontational set of tactics. These militants also argued that the movement should reject participation in research studies. It is as the movement became more militant that the editorship of The Ladder was transferred from the DOB headquarters in San Francisco to the East Coast and to activist Barbara Gittings. Gittings assumed leadership of a magazine that for six years had done much to move the cause

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[98] L.L., "Readers Respond," The Ladder 7 (October 1962) 24-25.

of lesbianism forward: it had provided a forum for the discussion and debate of issues, for education of individuals, for the beginnings of a lesbian community, and for the formation of a lesbian identity. After six years, The Ladder was already established as a lesbian forum, and equally important, as a powerful symbol, not only for lesbians, but for the homophile movement as well.

Chapter 2

Stage Two: Response to Militancy

(February, 1962 - August, 1966)

As the early to mid-60's unfolded, Americans became involved, some very personally, in a transformational struggle led by African-Americans to defeat racial segregation and discrimination. Lunch counter sit-ins, Freedom Rides and voter education projects, all aimed at defeating Jim Crow in the South, gathered widespread support among white Americans in the rest of the nation. They responded well to the civil disobedience tactics of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and hundreds of thousands of Americans demonstrated their approval by their participation in the famous 1963 March on Washington. Strong support to end discrimination (in the South) resulted in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

But historic demonstrations and the passage of a few pieces of popular legislation barely dented the surface of the problems of racism, poverty and the urban ghettoization of African-Americans. The early popularity of the Civil Rights Movement faded as the demands of the movement grew. The conflict between the needs and rights of African-Americans and the few concessions granted by the ruling elite exposed the deep roots of institutionalized racism. Militant confrontationism, calls for "Black Power," the removal of whites from CORE and from SNCC, all signaled that the end of African-American patience was approaching. The assassinations of Malcolm X (1965) and Dr. Martin Luther King (1968), the urban riots of 1966-67, reinforced the shift from the tactics of civil

disobedience to those of confrontation.

Meanwhile, organizations such as SDS initiated a new radical political tradition, one which would replace the weak and politically discredited Old Left. These New Left groups were peopled by the generation that was born during and after World War II, (as were the militant organizations of the Civil Rights Movement). This new generation was on the verge of initiating wrenching social dislocations that would (temporarily) set the culture and moral values of the country spinning. Their refusal to fight the war in Vietnam would cause deep divisions in the country. This generation, raised on such cultural pap as "The Mickey Mouse Club," and cowboy movies that presented genocide as nostalgic entertainment, were inspired by the growing militancy of African-Americans.

It was in this climate of the growing militancy of both the Civil Rights Movement and the white student movement, that some leaders of the homophile movement began to call for more militant response. Encouraged by the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, they wanted to win some of their own. And, as the other movements of the country were moving towards mass participation, the homophile movement was ready, in some quarters at least, to begin building one of their own. Other events created an urgency that reinforced this desire for change. On New Year's Eve, 1964 in San Francisco, the arrest of heterosexual attendees at masquerade ball fundraiser raised local consciousness about arbitrary police harassment of lesbians and gay men. In 1964, a mass-oriented organization, the Society for Individual Rights (SIR) was founded in San Francisco to conduct voter registration drives, run candidate nights, and form a community center. In 1965, DOB, along with other progressive organizations, formed the

Citizen's Alert, a hotline organization to monitor and respond to incidents of police brutality. So, the homophile movement, too, was taking some tentative steps toward building mass organizations of lesbians and gay men, as well as employing more confrontational tactics. And, as in the case of the Civil Rights and white student movements, it would be the next generation who would push that militancy to the limits necessary to achieve positive results.

It was in this pivotal climate that, in February, 1963, Barbara Gittings took over the editorship of The Ladder, a "temporary position" that lasted for two-and-a-half years. The founder of the New York Chapter of DOB in 1958, Gittings' early experiences with self-definition had launched her in the direction of a life combining activism and literature. As a freshman at Northwestern in 1949, a whispering campaign about Gittings had motivated her to find out about homosexuality. She spent most of that year searching every library in the area for information about homosexuality. "Homosexuality was a mystery as far as I was concerned, and solving that mystery became a consuming desire."[1] When Gittings discovered that the available information was overwhelmingly negative, it awakened in her a lifelong goal: to reverse that negative image by offering lesbians healthy alternatives. She also developed a passion for finding and collecting novels and non-fiction works about homosexuality. Since 1970, she has been active in the American Library Association, contributing to pioneering items such as a "Gay Bibliography," and working on the Lesbian and Gay Task Force.

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[1] Perry, Rev. Troy D., and Thomas L.P. Swicegood, Profiles in Gay and Lesbian Courage, (New York: St. Martin's Pres, 1992) 155.

Some of the things that Gittings and her lover, Kay Tobin, tried to accomplish with The Ladder were not really new, but they were more focused, and certainly more conscious, than in Stage One. Gittings had the ability to concentrate on a political agenda systematically and singlemindedly. She recognized early on that the power of the editor lay in choosing the content.[2] The years of her editorship proved significant for the magazine in several ways. First, Gittings and Tobin gave The Ladder a more lesbian-positive look that was reflected both on the inside and outside of the magazine. A new series entitled "Living Propaganda," interviews with open lesbians, an increased level of sophistication in fiction, non-fiction and poetry, and more direct references to sex all served to reinforce a healthy lesbian identity and to expand the boundaries of the lesbian world and experience. Ironically, at the same time as Gittings and Tobin focused efforts on improving lesbian self-esteem, they also boosted the number of contributions from male writers, who had been a relatively minor presence in the first stage of The Ladder. This reflected Gittings' belief that homosexual identification and shared oppression were unifying factors that crossed gender lines.

Second, Gittings and Tobin focused the content of the magazine more closely on political matters, particularly on an internal battle taking place within the homophile movement, a battle for control as well as over strategy and tactics. The white-hot debate over what role participation in research projects should play within the movement challenged the alliance/reliance strategy. It also had significant implications for the lesbian and homosexual psyche, since militants were identifying homosexuals as "an oppressed

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[2] Interview with Gittings.

minority" for the first time. Ironically enough, the favorable coverage that they gave to this political controversy put the two women in alliance with the men of the movement, and in direct conflict with the positions taken by DOB headquarters in San Francisco. The debate was accompanied by intensified criticisms of society, and was part of a general increase in the coverage of contemporary political issues. The expanding political consciousness of The Ladder's audience is also exhibited by the many contributions from the affinity group that drew upon the experiences of of the Civil Rights Movement.

A final feature of this stage was that the oppression of women was covered more extensively, and in a new way. In Weitz' essay on The Ladder, she found "only vague glimmerings of a feminist consciousness" prior to 1969.[3] What I found to be the case is quite different. Though the entries in Stage One are few, there was a consciousness about women's oppression from the first issue. Most contributions with feminist content are in the form of letters from readers, or are part of articles about the homophile movement written by DOB. During Stage Two, feminist letters from readers and statements from DOB continued, but they were supplemented by formal articles and relevant book reviews. More importantly, these submissions had an analytical, rather than observational, basis. Theories about women's oppression were usually missing from the content in Stage One. In all there are twenty-six separate entries during Stage Two, six of which are pieces with substantial analytical content. There are twelve items that are either letters from readers or asides within the body of an article on a different subject.

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[3] Weitz, Rose, "From Accommodation to Rebellion: The Politicization of Lesbianism," in Woman-Identified-Woman, Datry, Trudy and Sandee Potters, eds., 237.

There are three book reviews, and five articles or comments that indicate a growing feminist consciousness.

An intriguing question raised by Stage Two, and the final aspect that I want to discuss, is the relative influence of both DOB and The Ladder, and the relationship between the two. By the end of their tenure, Gittings' and Tobin's efforts to enhance the magazine's image and circulation, built on top of the already solid previous six years of publication, seems to have left the journal in the position of being much more effective and influential nationally than the organization that founded it. The Gittings-Tobin era clearly demonstrates the power of the independent editor to shape the political content and direction of a small magazine. Subsequent years of The Ladder also indicate that the presence or absence of an effective, autonomous editor continued to have a direct relationship to the relevance and substance of its content. The clear conclusion is that the journal had become an entity with an independent existence. During the examination of the content during this stage, certain ideas and trends begin to emerge that are identifiably forerunners of much later ideas, for example, political theories such as lesbian-feminism, or early indications of such concepts as "Gay Pride." I will also try to point these out as we go along.

The first aspect of Stage Two that I want to discuss is the reinforcement of the lesbian-positive identity emerging from Stage One. Gittings and Tobin set out to improve the both image and prestige of The Ladder, as well as to help readers to understand that "lesbians were healthy, happy, wholesome human beings."[4] Most obvious was the change

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[4] Interview with Barbara Gittings.

in the covers. Beginning in 1964, covers featured photos of actual lesbians, in profile or full-face. Previously, the only photos of lesbians on the cover of the magazine had been women photographed from the back or in shadow. The first photo was of Ger, a long-time correspondent from Indonesia; no American woman could be found who was willing to be photographed.[5] However, these covers proved so popular that by the end of Gittings' term as editor, two years after Ger appeared, there was a waiting list of women who wanted to be photographed for The Ladder cover.

The effect that these covers had must have been profound. They moved lesbians out of the "make-believe world" and "twi-light world of the third sex" into a world in which lesbians walked hand-in hand through the streets of Manhattan and San Francisco, sat on a college lawn reading, and posed in front of a self-portrait done in oils. The covers fortified the identity of healthiness and worth that lesbians had worked so hard to build during Stage One. They are also an indication that the political strategy and tactic of "coming out of the closet" found expression much earlier than the college-based gay liberation movement of the 1970's. As a result of Gittings' efforts to place the magazine for sale at newsstands and in book stores on the East Coast, The Ladder itself came out of the closet. By adding the words, "A Lesbian Review" in big letters to the title, Gittings and Tobin hoped to draw prospective buyers out, as well.

Another feature of the new covers linked lesbianism with the dignity and pride of womanhood. Photos of sculptures and paintings of women foreshadowed the efforts by 1970's feminists to direct women's attention to women's art. By printing such photos on

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[5] Interview with Barbara Gittings.

the cover of a lesbian magazine, the message was that lesbians should consider their womanhood as a further aspect of lesbian identification.

The changes in the covers were accompanied by positive, proud messages in the content of the magazine, as well. Confidence replaced the isolated questioning of Stage One. One of the most important features consisted of a series of eight articles entitled "Living Propaganda." "Living Propaganda" articles were quiet celebrations of a very personal lesbianism, as well as articulations of how to achieve the political goal of integration into society. They consisted of stories of how non-stereotypical lesbians had revealed themselves in some way to others, demonstrations that living, breathing lesbians were just like everyone else except for their choice of "love object." The series was aimed at encouraging other lesbians to follow their example. Since it was believed that the behavior of individual lesbians were responsible for the way in which the entire group was perceived and treated, the authors wanted ordinary lesbians to counter the "negative" image of the more stereotypical lesbian. Other aims of the series were to reinforce self-pride and self-identification, alleviate fears of discovery, and to demonstrate the positive benefits that accrue from living, and telling, the truth. The message of "Living Propaganda" was also repeated in other articles, in readers' letters, and was reinforced by interviews with open lesbians.

In the series' introductory essay, Barbara Grier explains that, even if the movement was able to right injustices through legal victories, this wouldn't be enough to lessen prejudice against homosexuals. "Indeed," she says, "it would undoubtedly increase it

somewhat, just as the recent legal strides for Negroes have created much hostility."[6] Rather, it is on the personal level that the battle to end discrimination will be won. If society's image of homosexuals is that "every male homosexual is a limp-wristed faggot and every female homosexual a stomping bull-dike,"[7] legal victories are useless. Thus, the obligation of each individual to the members of the group takes on a very personal significance, and provides additional insight into the level of hostility with which butch lesbians were viewed by many of the Ladder affinity group.

Grier goes on to talk about her own work experience, in which all of her co-workers are aware that she is a lesbian and in a long-term romantic partnership with another woman. Through many years of contact, she notes that her lesbianism has become part of daily work life, that she and her lover are invited to office parties, that co-workers ask her questions about her life, and that she is even the subject of affectionate teasing from office friends.

All this has had excellent results, both for her, and for other homosexuals. For herself, it has bolstered her own self-esteem; her co-workers see that "I am not ashamed; somehow they feel that therefore I have nothing to be ashamed of." In addition, "there is a healthy atmosphere when you can be part of the scene as you really are, not as some pretender."[8] But the benefits extend beyond individual ones. Her honesty and pride have helped to dispel prejudice among those who have worked with her. She feels that they

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[6] Barrow, Marilyn, "Living Propaganda," The Ladder 8 (November 1963) 4.

[7] Barrow, 4.

[8] Barrow, 6.

have now had "one fairly uneventful and reasonably pleasant work experience with that taboo creature, the Lesbian!....I am...sure that this will have made them less quick to judge, more understanding in their attitude."[9] Finally, Grier offers her experiences as a bit of a roadmap for other lesbians. She has not openly announced her lesbianism, but she does not deny it either. To recommend across-the-board announcements would have been far too threatening for most lesbians; her article offers these women a compromise route, and enumerates the benefits to both them and to their sisters. Grier gets more explicit several months later, and tells readers how it's done in a sort of step-by-step essay, the essence of which is to practice a "deliberate lack of subterfuge."[10] She offers a final motivation for being honest: it promotes personal integration of all the aspects of one's life, which strengthens and preserves lesbian partnerships and builds peace of mind.

The twin messages of "Living Propaganda," the chance to affect one's own personal well-being and to advance the lesbian cause, struck a chord in "Mrs. B," whose own article in January of 1965 supported both aims. Mrs. B. had decided, the previous year, to leave her marriage of eighteen years "after a long, desperate attempt to keep [it] together" though it "was stifling to both parties." During this process, she was open and honest with the attorneys, clergy, family, and friends who were involved, as well as with her husband and his family. This decision brought her personal happiness, not only because she was finally able live with the woman she loved, but because her honesty did

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[9] Barrow, 6.

[10] Barrow, Marilyn, "Living Propaganda," The Ladder 8 (February, 1964) 21.

not harm her effort to win custody of her four children. But the main emphasis of her article was a ringing call for all lesbians to apply "Living Propaganda" in their daily lives during the coming year, "seeking opportunities to show our best and real selves which we hide far too often." Her article also reinforced the notion that lesbians are exactly like heterosexuals; those to whom she revealed her lesbianism had one common response: "'But she is so good, a good mother, a good housekeeper, a good woman,'"[11] surely the consummate description of the all-American middle-class woman.

These two examples are from women who differ widely in terms of personal experience. Barbara Grier is a woman who had acknowledged her lesbianism very early in life; she has never been heterosexually married, and did not struggle with feelings of inferiority or low self-esteem because she was a lesbian. She had many lesbian friends and a personally integrated lesbian life. Mrs. B., on the other hand, had eighteen years of an unhappy, dual existence, and had spent most of her adult life as a mother and wife. The fact that these two women were offered to Ladder readers as examples of what courage and honesty mean to individuals and to the group, implied that the fruits of openness were available to women in widely disparate situations.

The message of "Living Propaganda" was echoed in other articles. In one particularly eloquent example, a mother of two daughters asks fellow readers if they are wearing a mask, if they are part of what she calls "The Silent Ones." Endorsing a campaign of "each one tell one," she believes that honesty is firmly based in Christianity, in acceptance of God's love, indeed, is part of a complete relationship with God. Not only

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[11] Mrs. B., "Living Propaganda," The Ladder 9 (January 1965) 14.

would lesbians be helping themselves through living honestly, but they have a Christian obligation to help others of their group less fortunate, presumably the mixed-up kids, bar-goers and stereotyped lesbians so often referred to in the pages of the magazine. She urges: "Let us bring to a halt this un-Christlike attitude toward those of our group who so urgently need help. If we fail them, what justifies our own existence?"[12]

The issues of the individual's responsibility to the group, the importance of presenting positive images to society, and the benefits that accrue with both respectability and honesty were not manifestations of middle-class conformity. Rather, they articulated a particular political and personal strategy. Most importantly, they were squarely based on individual experiences. The following statements by J.B. of California show that they resonate in her own life:

> I wish I'd had The Ladder about ten years ago, when I was floating around looking for the story-book life. It might have helped me avoid a few of the hairpin turns I ran into. But some of us learn the hard way. I was lucky; someone sat me down and explained to me what I was doing to myself, to say nothing of the rest of gay society. I was degrading myself and spoiling my chances for the relationship I wanted so badly....

As a result of this talk, J.B. makes major changes in her approach to her lesbianism:

> After quite a ribbing about the new hair-do and the absence of boys' pants and shirts, I found that most people looked at me as though I belonged to society....Result: I look better feel better, have a better job, and I'm much happier. And - I had something to offer when SHE came along. Now here are two more representatives for the understanding of gay life.[13]

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[12] Rose Marie of Portland, "Plea to the Silent Ones," The Ladder 8 (December 1963) 12.

[13] J.B., "Readers Respond," The Ladder 8 (March 1964) 26.

J.B.'s letter illustrates the convergence of a political strategy with the experiences of an individual lesbian; her story, and others like it, add legitimacy to the strategy. Thus, the effort to continue to build a positive lesbian identity is a complicated mixture of politics, individual and group responsibilities, along with a resurfacing of the butch-femme debate. It also illustrates the continuing lack of criticism of society by supporting the goal of integration into society.

The personal determination and single-mindedness of Barbara Gittings is also evident when we turn to a discussion of the second feature of Stage Two: the debate between the militants and the less activist forces within the homophile movement, of which DOB was one.[14] Gittings' intellectual affinity to the East Coast homophile movement, and her ties to Washington, D.C. Mattachine activist, Franklin Kameny, in particular, are revealed by the way in which she used her power as editor to steer the debate over strategy and tactics in a particular direction, a direction that was contrary to policies at DOB headquarters in San Francisco.

That she was allowed to push her position as far as she did, by printing pictures of demonstrators picketing the Civil Service Commission in Washington, for example, is curious. It suggests that the DOB organizational structure was relatively weak in regard to The Ladder. For one thing, there was apparently no editorial board to set the general

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[14] I prefer not to use the term "conservative" in connection with these people, since certainly the very existence of the homophile movement signifies a challenge to existing gender roles, social mores, and institutionalized oppression and harassment of lesbians and gay men. The word "conservative" implies a consistent political approach and strategy that does not really portray groups like DOB accurately, even though they may seem conservative to us today.

direction and oversee final copy, as is often the case in a small magazine or political journal. It is also possible that some at national headquarters secretly sympathized with Gittings' positions. Gittings' home was in Philadelphia. Since she had to submit all copy to San Francisco, where the magazine was actually published, presumably DOB could have censored any covers or articles with which they disagreed. For whatever reason, she was not censored, though the relationship was an uneasy one. She explained that she was "given a free hand, but there was always a cloud over me, as if they didn't like what I would put in it."[15]

The debate within the movement took place on two levels. On one level, it was a debate over who would control the direction of the movement, mostly male activists on one side, or the more traditional forces, such as DOB and Mattachine San Francisco on the other. Trouble had surfaced in the pages of The Ladder as early as January 1961, when Del Martin announced DOB's opposition to a "Homosexual Bill of Rights."[16] This "Bill" was to be the subject of ONE, Inc.'s 1961 Midwinter Education Institute. In an editorial, Martin laid out the position of those who would continue to support the alliance/reliance strategy and its traditional goal, integration into society:

> In place of the proposed 'constitutional convention,'...ONE might more valuably apply their time and efforts to drafting a statement of the purposes and goals of the homophile movement....
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> In the suggested 'statement of purpose' any reference to 'rights'

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[15] Interview with Barbara Gittings.

[16] Martin was not alone; Hal Call of Mattachine asked at the ONE Midwinter Institute, "Do we have a right to ask for rights?...and if so, should we ask carefully and dispassionately, requesting no special license."

> should be based on the general principle that homosexuals are entitled to exactly the same rights - no more and no less - as other persons....The statement should recognize the primary importance of long range education, both of the homosexuals themselves and of the public....The statement must devote as much space to spelling out the obligations of homosexuals to society as it does to describing society's obligations to the homosexual.

To bolster her argument, Martin evoked the memory of a beloved psychiatrist, recently deceased, who had been very helpful to the movement. This was a reminder to other leaders that aggressive approaches may turn off their friends in high places:

> Isn't it about time we stopped being cry babies?...We would remind our friends of ONE... of the words of...Dr. Blanche Baker: 'I doubt if the homosexual can be accepted in society until he learns to clear himself from the hate, prejudice and intolerance within himself. He must know himself and balance his own unruly nature before he can expect many others to understand him.'[17]

In a article two months later, Martin again warns that such positions as calling for civil rights could cause the experts to become distrustful of the movement in general. She notes that homophile organizations "must be aware of the repercussions of their words and deeds upon others. And this applies to our friends in professional circles. If we take action which may be considered off beat, we are certainly placing them in an awkward position, to say the least."[18] Another reason "off beat actions" were so threatening is that DOB and Mattachine were afraid that other professionals would close ranks behind any besieged colleagues, abandoning the homophile movement which had so carefully cultivated their support.

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[17] Martin, Del, "Editorial: How Far Out Can We Go?" The Ladder 5 (January 1961) 4-5.

[18] Martin, Del, "Editorial: Fear or Lack of Trust?" The Ladder 5 (March 1961) 7.

The fight over the Bill of Rights can also be seen as a fight for the legitimacy of the movement. The first words of the Preamble of the Bill are significant: "We who represent the homosexual minority..."[19] These words indicate that activists now saw no reason to rely on others to front for them to either the public or the government. With these words, they drew the line between themselves and DOB, which felt that it did not and could not claim to represent a constituency larger than its own membership. Martin and others diminished the scope of the movement with statements like: "[I]t is...assumed that these [homophile] organizations represent the homosexual at large,...they are really a minority within a minority."[20]

Though the effort to write the Bill failed, the proposition to scrap the alliance/reliance strategy continued to gain steam. Weighing in on this side of the battle were those who proposed adopting the strategy of calling for, and fighting for, civil rights. This strategy was very obviously based on that of the Civil Rights Movement, and it relied on confrontational democratic tactics such as picketing. In addition, at ONE's 1962 Midwinter Institute, Ed Slater publicly challenged the presence of the experts within the movement, stating that "homosexuals must answer the questions about homosexuality because scientists have not done so..." Slater was "skeptical of the worth of scientists in this field because they came out of school steeped in traditional attitudes." He went on to say that "[w]e feel that we are the experts. We recognize no other authority in the field

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[19] "Homosexual Bill of Rights...", 10.

[20] Martin, Del, "Editorial: Fear or Lack of Trust?" 7.

of homosexuality."[21] Slater's position was similar to that of African-American militants who agitated against the presence of whites in groups such as CORE and SNCC.

Gittings used her position as editor to focus attention on this wider controversy. Though the debate within the movement had been reported in The Ladder prior to Gittings, it is doubtful whether DOB would have initiated, and to a certain extent, created, what became an all-out war of words between the two camps. Following its past pattern, DOB would have reported the debate through its own editorial filter, delivering to the reader coverage that was effectively third hand. Gittings went right to the source; Kameny's views were delivered to the reader first hand. There is one instance in which DOB did attempt to water down coverage. Gittings had arranged to cover a debate between the two positions at the 1964 ECHO conference, and was required to carbon copy DOB headquarters on all correspondence between herself and conference reporters. At the last minute, a letter from DOB to Gittings asked her not to cover the debate.[22] However, an article in the February-March 1965 issue did just that in spite of DOB's opposition. This coverage presented both sides of the debate, and thus, a more accurate view of the movement to Ladder readers.

Considering the historical context, exposing the readers to these more militant views was long overdue. Lesbians, like other Americans, had witnessed Freedom Rides, sit-ins, and picketing, and had witnessed the uncovering of institutionalized racism, all of which effectively indicted American society and government. Many of them were already

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[21] Russell, Sten, "Ten Years of History," The Ladder 6 (March, 1962) 6-7.

[22] Interview with Barbara Gittings.

making the connection between the oppression of African-Americans and the oppression of lesbian and gay Americans. Moreover, this debate was also a result of the accumulating history of the movement itself. Over ten years of consciousness raising, including seven years in the pages of The Ladder, had made a solid contribution to building a positive lesbian identity and a tentative national community. Many of its readers must have been growing impatient with the cautious leadership.

The first stage upon which this struggle over strategy and for control was played out was in the discussion of the role that research projects should play within the movement. In May, 1965, what Gittings called Franklin Kameny's "opening blast" against research [23] was published in The Ladder. But prior to this, careful groundwork was laid in a series of articles and letters that were much more highly critical of professionals than in Stage One. For example, this letter from a reader in 1963 shows frustration with the neutral tone taken toward the experts:

> [T]oo often The Ladder is largely a forum for views hostile to lesbians--with no rebuttal from persons trained to detect the fallacies involved. Many psychologists and psychiatrists, consciously or unconsciously reflecting the prejudices of society, distort data in the socially approved direction...[24]

Previously, as we have seen, with the exception of the views of anti-homosexual extremists such as Edmund Bergler, most reports of speeches, books, and appearances before homophile organizations were delivered without comment. Now, the tone changed from one of neutrality, and even gratitude at being taken seriously, to a critical, even

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[23] Interview with Gittings.

[24] "A Well-wisher, Kentucky," "Readers Respond," The Ladder 7 (June, 1963) 26.

contemptuous one. Remember, for example, in Stage One, how an unscientific and biased paper by Albert Ellis had been termed a "thoughtful, provocative and lucid paper." Now, a talk by Ellis is subjected to a scathing commentary in the November, 1963 issue of The Ladder. His "interminable" speech is said to be:

> riddled with sex, copulation, and the physical aspects of the homosexual union. His language is deplorable, and his entire attitude was one of condescension and facetiousness. He talked down to the audience as if they were semi-literate barbarians. His tone was "I'm doing you a favor."

Furthermore, the reporter comments that, later in the program, "Dr. Ellis again rose to the podium, and proceeded to be more odious and ludicrous (where possible) than he had been previously."[25] Then, in December, The Ladder reported on a small guerrilla action against Ellis. When Ellis stated, in a speech before a homophile organization, that exclusively homosexual men were psychopaths, "the following retort was made by one of the guests, 'Any homosexual who would come to you for treatment, Dr. Ellis, would *have* to be a psychopath."[26] (Italics are the author's.) A final example, and there are many others, of the change in the tone of reporting prior to Kameny's "opening blast" is an item in the February-March, 1965 Ladder. A lecture at New York's Cooper Union on "Homosexuality, A Disease," was not only picketed by one woman and three men, but the four activists demanded and were granted ten minutes' rebuttal time. Furthermore, "[a]pplause for the challenger topped applause for the lecturer, who appeared stunned for a moment by the reaction of the audience...." He added that "it was quite a surprise

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[25] Seeley, J., "Ellis and the Chestnuts," The Ladder 8 (November 1963) 13.

[26] Shotwell, Jody, "ECHO Convention 1963," The Ladder 8 (December, 1963) 9-10.

to be picketed, and to receive such a rebuttal, at his first public lecture." This item illustrates that the business-as-usual attacks on homosexuality by psychiatrists, (a bread-and-butter staple of their livelihood and professional standing), would no longer go unchallenged. It also illustrates that lesbians and gay men were indeed becoming "the experts," and were well on their way to developing a critical analysis of the medical model, a model which was given tacit support by social institutions such as Cooper Union. Finally, it indicates that the alliance/reliance strategy was doomed.

As mentioned before, Gittings and DOB were on opposite sides of the fence on both the struggle for control and on the debate over strategy. This tension is illustrated by an interesting contrast between the different approaches of Gittings and DOB that occurs in the December, 1964 issue. Gittings rips to shreds a New York Academy of Medicine report on homosexuality, calling it "shoddy work" and a "flimsy document." She makes easy work of exposing errors in logic, terms its research "cursory," and its conclusions "an uncritical grab-bag." She concludes that

> [t]he report is a reminder of the sly, desperate trend to enforce conformity by a 'sick[']label for anything deviant. The doctors of this medical group, in prescribing heterosexuality simply because it is 'normal,' are practicing moral manipulation in the guise of scientific healing.[27]

Appearing right after Gittings' editorial was a letter from DOB to the originators of the report. In contrast to Gittings, DOB adopted a respectful, deferential tone. Although it challenged a few of the conclusions of the report, DOB presented itself not as a representative group of lesbians who knew better, but rather, as citizens concerned

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[27] Gittings, Barbara, "Editorial," The Ladder 8 (August 1964) 4-5.

mainly with "the public's right to know" the methods used to arrive at these conclusions. (Meanwhile, the public probably cared less.) The letter also denied that DOB did, or ever would, "depict homosexuality as a 'desirable, noble, preferable way of life' without regard to the individual and the circumstance." And, far from being "the experts" on homosexuality, DOB believed "[i]t would be presumptuous for the D.O.B. or any group of laymen to claim that we had answers to questions that divide the 'experts.'" Rather, DOB was writing this letter because "the public [should] be kept accurately and fully informed as to the state of professional opinion on this subject, medical and other, and as to the underpinnings for these opinions."[28] Sadly, contrary to its long history of advocacy, DOB portrayed itself as neither representative nor proud of lesbians, almost as little more than disinterested bystanders.

Thus, by the time of Kameny's "opening blast" in May, 1965, the groundwork challenging the usefulness of the alliance/reliance strategy had already been laid. In this issue, Gittings presented a long article by Franklin Kameny entitled "Does Research into Homosexuality Matter?" In it, Kameny aimed to derail the current thinking of the homophile movement by effectively calling for the severing of cooperative ties between the movement and professionals. In fact, his very challenge weakened these ties. First, he calls for an end to neutrality in the psychiatric controversy over whether or not, or in what ways, homosexuals are sick. He says that homosexuals have become "a mere passive battlefield across which conflicting 'authorities' fight their intellectual battles." As

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[28] "DOB's Formal Letter to the New York Academy of Medicine," The Ladder 8 (August 1964) 5-6.

the experts on homosexuality, it is imperative that the movement take the position that homosexuality is not a disease. Secondly, he urges the movement to "argue for our RIGHT to be homosexuals, to remain homosexuals, and to live as homosexuals." Third, he claims that, by participating in any discussions on psychological questions such as the origin of homosexuality, or by helping professionals decide whether homosexuals are psychopaths or merely neurotic, the movement is cooperating in the demoralization of its own constituency. Such questions, he says, have no place in a political movement: "The Negro is not engrossed in questions about the origins of his skin color, nor the Jew in questions of the possibility of his conversion to Christianity." Fourth, he warns that by continued reliance upon experts, homophile organizations are relinquishing the leadership of the movement and the direction which it will take. Finally, the entire article is based on an almost religious call for militancy:

> We ARE right; those who oppose us are both factually and morally wrong. We are the true authorities on homosexuality, whether we are accepted as such or not. We must DEMAND our rights, boldly, not beg cringingly for mere privileges, and not be satisfied with crumbs tossed to us.[29]

Kameny's inflammatory article was answered by Florence Conrad, Research Director of DOB. Conrad was an interesting woman who took the alliance/reliance strategy to its most conservative extreme. For example, in his book, The Lesbian in

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[29] Kameny, Franklin E., "Does Research into Homosexuality Matter?" The Ladder 9 (May 1965) 14-20.

America, Donald Webster Cory, the author,[30] used the terms "sick" and "disturbed" to describe lesbians. In her review of this book, Conrad spends most of it trying to discern exactly what Cory means by the words "sick" and "disturbed." At one point, she states that, if only a general agreement on the definition of these words could be reached, it would contribute more to softening the harmful attitudes that society has towards homosexuality than any other factor. Conrad is also sympathetic to the idea of "change" (cure), though she felt that, if a lesbian had examined her conscience, and decided not to "change", she needed to then "fortify herself" against social pressure to "change." But, lesbians who are a "menace or burden to society" should definitely be pressured to "change."[31]

In addition, Conrad had great faith in the scientific method and in the objectivity of scientists. She believed that certain types of research, such as that aimed at predicting homosexuality, were inherently interesting and valid, even if only on an intellectual level. In one article she enumerated all the risks of supporting research, from the possibility of its being incompetent, biased or misinterpreted, to the loss of civil liberties. But she blithely dismissed these risks with the opinion that "life is full of risks, and some fruits of the tree of knowledge *may* prove bitter....We have to take our chances..." (Italics are the

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[30] Cory was a pseudonym for Edward Sagarin, a homosexual author and sociologist, who believed that one aim of the movement ought to be the promotion of homosexual "cures." As Cory, Sagarin was revered by early activists as the "Father of the Homophile Movement." Later, after he lost an internal struggle for control of the New York Mattachine Society, he proved to be a severe critic of the movement's direction and a staunch defender of the medical sickness model.

[31] Conrad, Florence, "Review of The Lesbian in America," The Ladder 9 (October 1964) 4-6.

author's.) Although all of the "risks" that Conrad enumerated had already surfaced by this time, she remained a major apologist for professional research into homosexuality. Though very thoughtful and sincere, and a careful writer, her ideas were naive and unfortunately devoid of political analysis.

It is Conrad who leads the charge against abandoning the alliance/reliance strategy. In her July/August article answering Kameny, she asks rhetorically if the movement should take a position on whether or not homosexuality is sick, and comments: "This has already been done by one segment of that movement, unfortunately."[32] She believed that the question cannot be decided by homosexuals themselves; she believes this is tantamount to deciding it "by vote." Furthermore, she does not believe the opinions ("votes") of homosexuals on this question will be given any credence by "opinion-makers," "the literate citizen," or the "scientific Establishment." Then, she returns to her belief that defining the word "sick" is crucial to gains for the movement. For example, she explains that if "sick" means "neurotic," this would make homosexuals no different from most other Americans. There would then be no basis for job discrimination, lack of civil rights, etc. Implied in this logic is the belief that discrimination would automatically disappear. Finally, she comes out strongly for the alliance/reliance strategy and declares emphatically that the role of the movement is to influence the "experts" to "ACT MORE RESPONSIBLY IN THE FUTURE THAN THEY HAVE ACTED IN THE PAST, BY ATTEMPTING

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[32] Mattachine Society, D.C. had already taken the position that homosexuality was not a sickness.

THEMSELVES TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC."[33] (Emphasis is Conrad's.) It is telling that Conrad is given a free rein by DOB, because her position on this issue was extreme, even by DOB standards. The difference between Conrad and DOB is that DOB's defense of research was prompted by strategic considerations, while Conrad's was based on a belief in the inherent truth of science. The fact that Conrad was allowed to go to such extremes is a sign that DOB may have been organizationally compartmentalized.

The battle between Conrad and Kameny goes back and forth for a few more issues, along with additional contributions by Gittings, further articles critical of professionals, and some well-placed examples of their hostile and biased opinions, (such as that of the psychiatrist who compared the homophile movement with the KKK and the Nazis in a speech before a male homosexual social organization). The statements of professionals who disagreed with the sickness model were increasingly introduced into the magazine, as a counterpoint to the hostile professionals who continued to be invited to speak at DOB conventions and other homophile group meetings. But in the end, their discussions did have the characteristic flavor of professionals fighting their intellectual battles over the bodies of homosexuals, just as Kameny had said.

That The Ladder covered this debate is logical, though the extent to which it was covered, as well as the tone, would have probably been much different with an editor other than Gittings. But there are several curious contradictions that surface because of this debate. The first is obvious: most of the discussion about research and professionals

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[33] Conrad, Florence, "Research is Here to Stay," The Ladder 9 (July/August 1965) 15-21.

was about male homosexuality. Why, then, was DOB, a lesbian organization, so entrenched in its position of supporting the alliance/reliance strategy? Why was DOB so staunchly invested in maintaining the status quo research into male homosexuality? One reason could be that since DOB did not have as much to lose as male homosexuals did, they may have decided that the risks of confrontation outweighed the benefits. In addition, it could be that problems with males in the homophile movement were already brewing; DOB's lack of a confrontational stance could indicate a decline in their enthusiastic support of male issues. The controversy, however, put DOB in a curious position: Gittings, the editor of their magazine, was clearly in alliance with their (mostly male) opponents.

What is more, The Ladder was also printing sophisticated political analyses that went far beyond Kameny's, whose arguments, after all, were based primarily on questions of strategy. For example, in an article about the connection between sex and violence, Brigid Brophy criticized psychiatry as a form of violence against lesbians and gay men. Brophy questioned why psychiatrists were more willing to try to cure homosexuals than professional soldiers or sport hunters. Another example that science and professionals were beginning to be seen as less than admirable was a hilarious spoof on research studies called "The Bosom Theory of Masculinity-Femininity in Lesbianism." [34] An interesting feature of this article is that the author, Rita Laporte, claims she received her scientific training in a ketchup factory, an interesting, (though probably unconscious), allusion to the universities that churned out trained professionals at an unprecedented

[34] Laporte, Rita, The Ladder 9 (April 1965) 16-18.

rate after WWII.

The fact that the political analysis by lesbians in The Ladder was moving beyond that of male activists like Kameny, is a foreshadowing of the radical lesbian critique that would eventually grow up around feminism. For example, an article by "L.E.E." offers a highly evolved analysis of the persecution of homosexuals, in which she compares heterosexuals and psychiatrists to the government of South Africa, accusing them of propping up an apartheid-like, "heterosexual supremacist" society. One particularly striking point that L.E.E. makes is that homosexual persecution is aimed at shoring up declining gender roles. She feels that psychotherapists, in an attempt to derail the "sexual revolution" and to consolidate their positions as respectable scientists, are leading a "rear guard action on male and female identity, and homosexuals have been casualties in this last-ditch action."[35]

The debate over research had profound implications for lesbian and gay identity. At stake was who would continue to define identity, lesbians and gays themselves, the experts, or both. In Stage One, much progress was made in exploring and building a healthy lesbian identity through such vehicles as short stories and personal narratives. The negative views of experts were printed without much comment. In Stage Two, the effort to build a healthy lesbian identity moved out of short stories and articles of self-exploration, and into polemics and confrontation of these experts. This is a sign that the positive identity built so carefully in the previous years now resonated within individuals themselves. Though experts would continue to define lesbian and gay identity, their

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[35] L.E.E., "The Heterosexual Obsession," The Ladder 9 (April 1965) 10-15.

subjects were beginning to care less. A final point: by proclaiming themselves "the experts," and by beginning to criticize the heterosexual imperative, activists set the stage for raising the slogan, "Gay Pride."

We can now turn to the second major way in which the battle over strategy and for control was played out, which was in a controversy over the adoption of picketing as a tactic. Needless to say, an organization supporting the alliance/reliance strategy would shrink from confrontational actions like picketing. The call to use picketing had its basis in the successes of the Civil Rights movement. Comparisons between homosexuals and African-Americans had increased during Stage Two. For example, when a psychiatrist suggested during a talk to a homophile group that "homosexuals' feelings of discrimination are exaggerated," a listener replied that "those remarks sounded suspiciously like arguments we have been hearing for years from the segregationist South about the Negro."[36] As the 1960's wore on, such references and comparisons became so frequent that one cannot pick up an issue of The Ladder without happening upon at least a few. They were also symptomatic of the general politicization of The Ladder during this time. In Stage One, few comments about current events appeared; in Stage Two, they proliferated.

Although the subject of picketing was introduced in the August 1963 issue, actual demonstrations did not occur until July and August of 1965. In all, there were several occasions on which homophile activists picketed. The Civil Service Commission, the White House, Independence Hall in Philadelphia, and the U.N. were all sites of early

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[36] Shotwell, Jody, "Faith and Fury," The Ladder 9 (May, 1965) 21.

protests. At these demonstrations, activists raised the call for civil rights for homosexuals. Leaflets calling for civil rights were passed out to bystanders. One leaflet was based on the classic use of the Declaration of Independence to appeal to the reader's patriotism, and to exploit his/her emotional loyalty for the concepts of "liberty" and "freedom." The demonstrators wore conservative clothes, the men in suits and ties, the women in dresses and heels. Among the demonstrators were Kay Tobin and Barbara Gittings. The October, 1965 Ladder cover had a picture of one demonstration; three men, including a minister, and one woman were shown picketing the Civil Service Commission. Coverage in the media was surprisingly good. For those who witnessed the protest, this may have been the first time they had ever seen non-stereotypical homosexuals. A psychotherapist commented that when he saw the picture of the picketers on the Ladder cover, it "made a tremendously favorable impression on me, in that here are excellent models of Americans protesting..."[37]

Though the stories and pictures of these demonstrations are fascinating, what is even more interesting is the reaction to the picketing. Though Gittings calls for reactions, pro and con, to the demonstrations, there is very little from Ladder readers. The fact that readers had written so positively about the Civil Rights Movement implies that they either supported it, or felt it was a logical step for the movement. Curiously, there is no reaction from DOB at all; this, in the pages of their own magazine. Reading The Ladder, it would be difficult to find out how DOB felt about these demonstrations, though some guesses could be made by thinking its strategy through to a logical conclusion. Furthermore, a

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[37] "Picketing: The Pros and the Cons," The Ladder 10 (May 1965) 18.

discerning reader might conclude from reading her carefully worded invitation for other opinions that Gittings was in a very delicate position. But, for most readers of the magazine, DOB's reaction was literally unreadable.

It is only by reviewing the history of the movement that DOB's position is revealed. D'Emilio, for example, writes about a sequence of events in which DOB's opposition to picketing culminated in San Francisco headquarters ordering the New York chapter to resign from an umbrella organization, the East Coast Homophile Organizations. Subsequently, DOB headquarters rejected a plea from the New York chapter to "revise its present non-participatory policy and adopt a full-scale progressive program of direct action..."[38] If DOB opposed picketing, the question is why did they not push for this position in their own magazine? They were aggressive enough in defending the alliance/reliance strategy and providing justification for research. It seems obvious from the history that its opposition to picketing was just as vehement.

One possible explanation is that the heterosexual friends of the movement did not view picketing as being as threatening to their status within the movement as they did the attacks on psychiatry and research. For example, Rev. Ted McIlvenna, a prime ally of the San Francisco movement, endorsed picketing as an acceptable tactic for the movement.[39] Secondly, some of them had utilized picketing themselves, in one notable example, when a religious leader in San Francisco lost his church position because of his membership

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[38] D'Emilio, 172.

[39] "Picketing: The Pros and Cons," The Ladder 10 (May 1966) 17.

in the Committee on Religion and the Homosexual.[40] Therefore, the absence of any outcry by its readership, and the desire not to offend its allies may have prompted DOB to remain silent in the pages of The Ladder, while it pushed its opposition organizationally.

Another possible explanation could be that DOB was in a relatively weaker position than its own magazine. Politically, DOB was defending a bankrupt strategy, and was spending a good deal of political capital on that defense, to boot. In the absence of strategic leadership from DOB, Gittings and Tobin were effectively filling the gap. Using her position as editor, Gittings managed to focus the magazine in a more progressive political direction, raising the controversial issues which would prove pivotal for the movement. In addition, she built the prestige and circulation of the magazine, as well as an alliance with disenchanted East Coast gay male activists. Politically, both Gittings and The Ladder were in much stronger positions than was DOB.

It may also be that DOB's internal resources were stretched thin. DOB was quite involved during this period in a number of local problems in San Francisco, and may not have been able to turn its attention to retaining or regaining control of the magazine. In any case, in spite of its national affiliates, DOB was a local organization concentrating on local problems and individual self-help. It may be that it was not strong enough to also operate nationally and to "run" The Ladder, in which case The Ladder ran itself, or rather, the editor did.

The last political characteristic of The Ladder during Stage Two that I want to

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[40] See "A Brief of Injustices," The Ladder 10 (November 1965) 4-7.

Martin and other DOB leaders also believed that it was crucial for lesbians to maintain a separate, women-only organization within the homophile movement. They knew that without it, the contributions of and opportunities for lesbians would have been sharply curtailed by gay men. Further, they emphasized that such an organization offered lesbians a vehicle by which to participate in the ultimate "emancipation of women."[43]

Aside from these two statements from DOB, most of the remaining feminist content in Stage One was the result of personal observation, or appeared as asides in articles that were focused on some other issue. For example, in a letter by Lorraine Hansberry devoted to discussing the pitfalls of trying to mold outward appearances to society's liking, she comments that "[w]omen, like other oppressed groups...have particularly had to pay a price for the intellectual impoverishment that the second class status imposed upon us for centuries created and sustained."[44] In another article written by a psychologist on the technique used by a marriage counselor, the therapist makes short work of the idea that penis envy was a cause of frigidity. Rather, she blames the rigid, boring gender roles that are impossible for women to fill. She reinforces this by discussing a recent study which had shown that most household chores could be done by anyone with an I.Q. of 60.[45]

By contrast with Stage One, the amount of feminist content in Stage Two is significantly larger. There are two factors which influence this feminist content. The first

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[43] "Mattachine Breaks Through the Conspiracy of Silence," The Ladder 4 (October 1959) 19.

[44] L.H.N., "Readers Respond," The Ladder 1 (May 1957) 26.

[45] Steiner, Lee R. "The Homosexual as seen by the Marriage Counselor," The Ladder 3 (February 1961) 15.

discuss is the remarkable increase in the feminist content. Gittings did not set out to deliberately do this; rather it was a consequence of Kay Tobin's solicitation of contributions from among her connections in the intellectual community of New York City.[41] Judging from the results, feminism was in the air.

There was a limited amount of feminist content in the magazine during the First Stage. It is not surprising that lesbians did not concentrate on their identity as women during this period. Instead, the Ladder affinity group was preoccupied with defining lesbian identity and decreasing isolation, and was operating within the context of the strict and enforced gender roles of the late 1950's and early 60's. That they began to integrate womanhood into their lesbianism during the mid-60's is evidence that lesbian identity formation had made excellent progress, as well as a reflection of the changing historical context.

Yet, there are a few early examples of an interest in feminism. In fact, in the premier issue of The Ladder, Del Martin encourages lesbians to join the homophile struggle by invoking the legacy of past feminists:

> Women have taken a beating through the centuries. It has been only in this 20th, through the courageous crusade of the Suffragettes and the influx of women into the business world, that woman has become an independent entity, an individual with the right to vote and the right to a job and economic security. But it took women with foresight and determination to attain this heritage which is now ours.[42]

In conjunction with this call for lesbians to assume the mantle of First Wave feminists,

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[41] Interview with Barbara Gittings.

[42] Martin, Del, "President's Message," The Ladder 1 (October 1956) 7.

factor was based on linking the lesbian's sexual identity to her identity as woman. This dual identity inspired many writers to make a radical association between the rejection of gender roles and the existence of lesbianism. The second factor is the evolution of an analysis of the oppression of women, one in which male supremacy is defined as the source of that oppression. These two factors lay the groundwork for the much more concentrated and sophisticated focus on feminism in Stage Four.

In articles that discuss the first factor, the lesbian's identity as woman, her relationship to gender roles is seen as problematic. Writer after writer links lesbianism, either by conscious choice or unconscious bent, with the criticism and rejection of these roles. Obviously, gender roles are of immense interest to lesbians. In the first place, the lesbian historical experience is rooted in the phenomena of passing women, who assumed male gender roles to access male power. Secondly, lesbians were repeatedly attacked because they challenged gender roles in a basic way: lesbians' lives were based on and centered around women, not men. These attacks ranged along a wide spectrum. For example, the medical model repeatedly nullified the lesbian's female identity by promoting such concepts as inversion, or by perpetuating myths such as the one that lesbians were possessed of large clitorises. In addition, lesbians' woman-centered lives reinforced this non-conformity on a highly personal level. "E.N.", for example, attempted to cure herself of her love for Lynn through therapy; to counter her psychiatrist's diagnosis of "penis envy," she began dating men. She continued to see Lynn throughout this, however, which eventually led her to reject both men and the roles that went with them:

> Only when I was with her did I feel fully myself. I didn't have to pretend to be interested in things that bored me, to act coy, to laugh

> at bad jokes or subtly flatter her. We respected one another....This was not true of my relations with men. I felt bored and burdened by the apparent necessity to turn myself into the kind of object that aroused their sexual interest."[46]

The failure to conform to gender roles meant that lesbianism was seen as a threat to society. Ironically, however, at the same time she was pictured as completely unnatural, the lesbian was also portrayed as having the power to draw "normal" women into her web. Once her evil web had snared enough women, society was in trouble. The implication was that the lesbian was a superwoman, albeit an evil one. For example, reporter Jess Stearn, author of a book about lesbians, The Grapevine, fears a growth of lesbianism: "'[I]f this goes ahead and keeps going, I don't know what's going to happen to the American family."

This linking of lesbianism with the rejection of gender roles was not new. From the early years of The Ladder, interpretations of lesbian origins often included criticisms of gender roles. For example, in the very first article with feminist content in Stage Two, a review of The Feminine Mystique, "Nola," the reviewer, points out that Betty Friedan's analysis stops short of serious challenge. Now, Friedan's audience is the middle class, educated woman, which corresponds nicely with the readership of The Ladder. Yet, the limits of Friedan's analysis is questioned by the reviewer, (incidentally demonstrating the historic lesbian role of continually pushing the limits of middle class feminism):

> The question Mrs. Friedan does not raise...is whether or not female homosexuality may rise from social...causes. Is it possible that some women turn to homosexuality as an escape from being cast into a

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[46] E.N., "Why I Became a Lesbian," The Ladder (July/August 1965) 11.

> social stereotype which degrades their individuality and limits their activity at the point where it may begin to make an impact on the world outside the home?[47]

Nola's criticism of Friedan is repeated two years later by another anonymous writer who contemptuously dismisses her for offering no substantive opposition to the socialization of women, or deep analysis of the roots of woman's oppression. Friedan, she says, is "merely proposing a slight loosening of the tight bonds on those innumerable women, who cowed and brainwashed, duly marry and breed and run neat homes and buy tons of Tide, yet are not saved."[48] In contrast, "Anonymous" offers an extensive comparison between the lot of American women and that of slaves.

Friedan is not the only middle class feminist who comes in for attack. Eve Merriam is pictured as being too afraid to openly challenge the male power structure. The reviewer of her book accuses her of donning the very gender roles she criticizes in order to diffuse the potency of her argument. Instead of "giving us an idea of the kinds of changes she believes are needed, Mrs. Merriam utters little cries and incantations as she waves her parasol around this volcanic area." This sort of "sweet soprano voice" is not what is needed, rather a forthright call for radical changes is more to the point.[49] Though exactly what these changes are, are not spelled out in this particular article, they soon will be.

A 1964 research study conducted with DOB's cooperation also suggests a

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[47] Nola, "Book Review: The Feminine Mystique," The Ladder 7 (March 1963) 10.

[48] "Anonymous," "I Hate Women - A Diatribe by an Unreconstructed Feminist," The Ladder 9 (March 1965) 8.

[49] Nola, "Book Review: After Nora Slammed the Door - by Eve Merriam," The Ladder 8 (August 1964) 25.

connection between the rejection of gender roles and lesbianism. Two hundred lesbians and eighty heterosexual women answered a questionnaire about early family experiences. The study is in itself a great example of how researchers use findings to support a pre-identified conclusion. As a result of his study, this particular expert was planning to expand his research on the relationship between childhood rape and lesbian sexual orientation, which was (and is) one of the classic theories about the cause of lesbianism. Focusing in on the less than six percentage point difference between the number of lesbians who had been raped during childhood (32.4%) and heterosexual women who had been (26%), he professes himself "astonished," presumably at this huge discrepancy. He unfortunately misses a far more interesting point: in answer to the question, "Would you like to be a man?", 42% of the lesbians answered "yes in some degree," while only 19% of the heterosexual women answered yes. Immediately following this item is the comment that "[s]ome lesbians claimed they would rather be a man because of the advantages, privileges, and opportunities men have in society."[50] Exactly what the relationship was between the lesbian "yes" answers, their sexuality, and their awareness of the more privileged position of males is left unprobed.

These examples illustrate that an important component of the feminist content in Stage Two was the synthesis of sexuality and rejection of gender roles. A second factor that distinguished the feminist content of this stage is the developing analysis of male supremacy. If heterosexual middle class feminists are seen as being too afraid to go

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[50] Tobin, Kay, "DOB Third National Convention - Report Round-up: Part Two," The Ladder 8 (August 1964) 11-13.

beyond the criticism of gender roles by exposing and condemning the source of women's oppression, lesbians are not. There are several major articles in Stage Two which name men as the oppressors, and which define the systematic oppression of women to be the result of male supremacy. The first is a review of symposium entitled "The Potential of Woman," about which the reviewer dryly notes, "21 men and 13 women were involved - can one imagine more women than men being invited to participate in a symposium about men?" The reviewer makes several critical points that the panelists missed. First, because women are defined by their relation to men, society systematically squashes any effort by women to expand their identities beyond that of wife and mother. Second, given that the lot of women is "starkly miserable," the panelists propose only a few superficial solutions. Third, the reason no imaginative or radical solutions are proposed is that the panelists fear to "provoke male wrath" by curtailing the privileges accorded to males from childhood on. While the author implies that male supremacy is institutionalized, she does not detail how.[51]

The author of the next article, "I Hate Women," does. She explains that while she loves the "smooth silky soft warm feminine attributes, physical and spiritual" of women, (after all, she is a lesbian), it is the 1965 model of the American woman she hates: the woman who has been shaped, coaxed and forced into the submissive roles of mother, wife, and consumer. This woman "shows no spark of rebellion," and this is what the author despises. Her analysis of women's oppression includes comparisons with both the

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[51] "Dr. D.R.," "The Potential of Woman - Book Review," The Ladder 8 (July 1964) 4-6.

Nazis and with the old slave masters of the South. Women are taught to "keep repeating the heterosexual equivalent of 'Yassuh, yassuh' to any idiocy put forth by the male." Men are in this "master group," not because they are superior; the author makes it clear they are not. Rather, it is because men need subordinate, "processed " women to perform "society's slob jobs." The author goes on to analyze how this processing takes place, and discusses the roles of advertising, educators, psychiatrists, and politicians in "brainwashing" women to be good women; these brainwashed women are such distorted versions of the real thing that the author calls them "female impersonator[s]."

This author also points to the special relationship between gender roles and lesbians. She believes that "lesbians are practically the only people who cop out of this farce." Furthermore, she links lesbianism to the First Wave of feminism, and sees lesbians as a regenerating force; they are "waiting out the dark ages, keeping a little lamp of dissent lit underground until a new era comes in." One intriguing section of the article seems prophetic, when she talks about the baby boomer generation that is beginning to reach adulthood. She believes that the population explosion is a consequence of rigid gender roles, and, that, along with a coming global environmental crisis, it will shock the baby boomers and "the propaganda machine" into calling a halt to the rigid socialization of women. Though this will benefit some women more than others, the author leaves unanswered any questions about what this will mean to male supremacy.[52]

In another article, a short review of the book, The Dangerous Sex, the reviewers

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[52] "I Hate Women - A Diatribe by an Unreconstructed Feminist," The Ladder 9 (February/March 1965) 7-11.

are two psychologists who look beyond 1960's America. For them, the oppression of women has global parameters as well as historical roots. They probe into deeper reasons for male supremacy beyond the desire for power. Along with the book's author, they believe it has its origin in "man's almost universal fear of women." It is this fear that has fostered aggression, war and violence. They, too, believe society is in a precarious position. They conclude the review with the hope that women will become conscious of the fact that they have bought into the anti-woman propaganda. By believing in their own inferiority, women are not unlike "a few Jews in Nazi Germany [who] agreed with the opinion of the aggressors about themselves."[53]

Accompanying these analyses are articles which discuss the nuts and bolts of the institutionalized oppression propping up the system of male supremacy. One article on the law explains that the law is made for men, and women are incidental and extraneous, viewed legally only in their relationships to men. Another article explains that looking at the ways in which marriage is socially coerced in other cultures may give some insight into similar coercion in our own society. Other articles discuss the role that education plays in introducing and reinforcing gender roles in children.

The feminist emphasis in Stage Two was greeted enthusiastically by at least some readers. One reader, Mrs. J.I., believed that, because lesbians were uniquely positioned to communicate independence and self-fulfillment to heterosexual women:

> the biggest contribution a lesbian magazine can now make to both lesbians and society in general is to explore the murky area of the

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[53] Kronhausen, Phyllis and Eberhard, "The Dangerous Sex - Book Review," The Ladder 10 (December, 1965) 25-26.

> feminine identity and the changed and changing relations between the sexes in our time. [54]

Though Mrs. J.I. is joined by others who appreciate the new Ladder, one male reader is alarmed: "As a man reading your magazine, I sometimes shake my head. I seem to detect a strong tendency to equate lesbianism with revolt of the oppressed half of mankind against the oppressors." This reader expresses fear that this revolt will separate lesbians and gay men into two separate groups, facing one another across a broken barrier of past unity. His warning is a prophetic one; by the early 1970's, much of the movement will have split along gender lines.

The two and one-half years of Gittings' editorship were important ones for The Ladder. By the end of Stage Two, the magazine had been the subject of many changes. The concerted effort to enhance the positive image of the publication was a successful one. In an official thank you to Gittings and Tobin, DOB recognized that "what began as an amateurish newsletter has emerged a truly professional magazine."[55] The parallel effort to support and build upon the positive image of lesbianism was also successful. Through articles like the "Living Propaganda" series, The Ladder not only celebrated the fact that lesbians were proud and honest women, it reinforced notions of individual and group responsibility, as well as the generally accepted strategic goal of seeking integration into society.

Secondly, the coverage of the controversy over strategy and control was not only

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[54] Mrs. J.I., "Readers Respond," The Ladder 8 (June 1965) 25.

[55] "Tribute," The Ladder 10 (September 1966) 14.

a continuation of The Ladder's documentation of the homophile movement, it also helped shape the direction of the movement and influenced both readers and activists alike. Without Gittings' skillful use of her editorial power, the debates over research and over picketing would have probably been presented in a far different, probably weaker, light. These debates exposed simmering contradictions within the movement. Though more militant than other positions within the movement, the somewhat limited analysis offered by leaders like Frank Kameny would, in just a few years, be supplanted by a growing radical and feminist consciousness among lesbians. Meanwhile, by advocating a break with the experts, these debates pushed the movement farther out of the closet and closer to "Gay Pride."

The third major element of Stage Two, the growing interest in feminism, was seemingly not the result of any conscious effort on Gittings' part, but nevertheless, emerges as a major factor. The feminist content skipped a simple recounting of grievances and went directly to analysis and criticism, some of it quite radical in nature. In Stage Three, we will see that The Ladder takes a step back, and attempts to build mass support for the issues of the middle-class feminist movement. Meanwhile, Tobin's connections in New York intellectual circles provided Ladder readers with cutting edge feminist theory for a few years.

In addition, this stage exposes many of the contradictions developing within the movement, including those of gender and those resulting from such limited strategies as the one of alliance/reliance. The contradiction between gay men and lesbians was, naturally the most significant one, and some of the content in Stage Two hints at the

coming break.

Finally, what Stage Two says about the Daughters of Bilitis, and their relationship to their own magazine is fascinating. Politically, the magazine had more capital than did the organization. It was also more effective on a national scale than was DOB. Evidence from the coverage of the debates within the homophile movement implies that DOB did not have complete control of The Ladder. Organizationally, it seems that DOB was preoccupied and short on resources, which enhanced the power of the editor. Stage Three will demonstrate what happened under an editor without the kind of focused vision of Barbara Gittings or the extensive intellectual contacts of Kay Tobin. Further examination in Stage Four will confirm this, when we look at The Ladder under Barbara Grier, who was possibly an even more strong-willed and determined editor than Barbara Gittings.

Chapter 3

Stage Three: Drifting towards Feminism

(September, 1966 - September, 1968)

Stage Three was a trying time for The Ladder. The political direction of the country's social movements was being increasingly defined by the experiences and actions of the generation born during and after World War II. The cautious policies and strategies of the homophile movement, indeed the movement itself, were on the verge of extinction. Most of what John D'Emilio calls the Old Guard leaders would be brushed aside by the end of the decade as Gay Liberationists and Lesbian-feminists usurped their places and widened the parameters of the debate and the struggle. With the arrogance of the young, the new leaders frequently dismissed the contributions and groundwork laid by their elders, and attempted to leave them behind in the dust of militant and radical confrontationism and revolutionary posturing. During this time, The Ladder reflected the coming storm of change; it seemed suspended between two points of view, two movements, two generations. If anything defines this stage, it is the lack of direction and focus of the journal. As editor Helen Sanders comments through her cat, Ben, in January, 1968, "Some of the Old Daughters are becoming difficult. They are bored with the past and afraid of the future."[1] This interlude of uncertainty began with DOB's dismissal of Barbara Gittings as editor of The Ladder, and it ended when Barbara Grier assumed

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[1] "What is a New Year? by Ben Cat," The Ladder 12 (January 1968), 14.

responsibility for it in September, 1968.

Barbara Grier characterized the termination of Barbara Gitting's editorship of The Ladder as a matter of DOB "taking it back from her."[2] Judging from what we looked at in Chapter Two, Grier's characterization seems pretty accurate. After the uneasy relationship DOB had with Gittings, it took no chances this time. Long-time DOB loyalist and insider Helen Sanders was appointed as editor.[3] Sanders was a former officer of DOB who had been associated with The Ladder since December, 1956. Even so, it appears that she was not given the same range of editorial autonomy as was Gittings. Comments made in a column "written" by Sanders' cat[4] indicate that she sometimes chafed under the tighter rein held on this editor of The Ladder. While Sanders had a droll sense of humor and a strong work ethic, these attributes were not enough to compensate for her lack of autonomy. The appointment of Barbara Grier as editor of poetry and fiction nine months later served to further undercut Sanders' power.

In addition, though DOB had regained control of The Ladder, this had an unexpected consequence. One would think that this would mean that DOB could now set and execute an agenda without interference from a contentious editor. DOB leaders did

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[2] Interview with Barbara Grier.

[3] Pseudonym of Helen Sandoz.

[4] Entitled "The Pre-Posthumous Memoirs of Ben Cat," this column revealed Sanders' opinions and contained comments about current affairs. It is interesting to the extent that it reveals much about the makeup of the San Francisco headquarters of DOB. While amusing, it sometimes seems out of touch with The Ladder traditions, as well as with society at large. Though the magazine had often printed whimsical items, as well as such charming eclecticisms as "Homosexuality and Doodles," it had a mostly serious format. The cat column, then, as the only consistent feature of this stage, thus stands out as a bit of an oddity.

attempt to do this. But despite Del Martin's announced intention to disengage The Ladder from concentrating on the homophile movement and to turn to a new focus, feminism, the execution of this agenda was mostly ineffective. Significant feminist content appeared in only a few issues, while at the same time, the rapid decline in coverage of the homophile movement left a political and ideological void. These two factors, along with an editor without power or control, combined to set the magazine on a seemingly rudderless "drift towards feminism."

There were further factors which exacerbated this lack of direction. Although DOB did not give Sanders a free hand with The Ladder, it did not seem to have the internal resources to concentrate on it, either. This reinforces a point made in the last chapter, that the power of both The Ladder and its editor had outstripped that of its founder, DOB. The organization was in a bind. Because of its conflicts with Gittings, it was apparently reluctant to give editorial autonomy to even a loyalist like Sanders. Yet it was too preoccupied with local issues to concentrate on The Ladder. Reviewing the content of the first few issues in Stage Three reveals this to be the case. In the September, 1966 issue, over eight pages of twenty-six were dedicated to the activities of the San Francisco homophile movement, in October, over fourteen pages, in November, over ten pages. DOB was very busy: there were local crises with the police and other government officials, a dispute with local male leaders, attendance at some local conferences, and the planning and execution of their own biannual convention. With the resources of DOB occupied, and without a strong, autonomous editor, The Ladder was unable to set a steady course.

The result was two years of highly uneven and inconsistent content mix. For example, during the first year, short stories virtually disappeared. In the first seven issues of Stage Three, only one short story appeared. Then, for seven issues after that, the serialization of a novelette dominated the pages of The Ladder, and only some poetry and a few other articles made up the remaining content of these issues. Short stories had always been one of the magazine's most popular features; even readers who complained of their amateurish themes and simplistic plots obviously read them, and missed them. As "MSF" put it, "[T]he magazine has become wholly unobjectionable and hardly interesting anymore. I'm one who disliked the corny poetry and silly fiction but now regret that there is nothing left to laugh at."[5] Later, at other times, just to confuse things further, short stories and poetry, along with the "cat column," made up the bulk of the content of the magazine. In fact, the cat column and "Lesbiana" were the only consistent features during Stage Two.

Another manifestation of discontinuity was that The Ladder forced a disruption in letters from readers. In February 1967, Sanders announced that "Readers Respond" would no longer print complimentary letters. She made it clear that this was DOB's policy, not hers. DOB felt that letters "which condemn are more useful for the stirring of interest in our problems and our efforts for improvements."[6] This statement in itself implies a lack of focus. The result was that, for several months towards the end of Sanders' term, "Readers Respond" disappeared, and so did the stimulating Ladder discourse between

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[5] MSF, "Readers Respond," The Ladder 9 (April, 1967) 9.

[6] Sanders, Helen, "Readers Respond," The Ladder 11, (February 1967) 20.

readers and writers. The result of the temporary elimination of short stories and "Readers Respond" was that the opportunity for readers to make important contributions to shaping identity, building community and discussing important issues simply vanished for a significant period of time.

Accompanying this lack of continuity was an obvious lack of direction. Examples of this void can be found by reviewing the coverage of the homophile movement and of homosexuality in general. Statements by Martin and others now revealed a shift in DOB's attitude toward the movement, an attitude that drastically reversed the relationship of The Ladder to the movement from that of Stages One and Two. During those stages, coverage of the movement had taken for granted that lesbians were passionately interested in the activities and debates of a movement of which they were an important part. Now, articles in The Ladder pictured it as mainly concerned with male issues, the support of which no longer interested lesbians deeply. For the first time, the bitter differences that had developed between lesbian and gay male leaders were exposed. (Curiously, while it now became obvious that things between DOB and rest of the movement had not been harmonious for quite some time, no hint of this had appeared during Gittings' tenure.)

This growing estrangement resulted in a shrinking of the coverage of movement activities. The most obvious change was the abrupt decline in interest in the issues of male homosexuals. Secondly, the bulk of the coverage that did appear was mostly concerned with local San Francisco events. A particular area of interest was the effort to expand and consolidate the relationships local leaders were building with the

representatives of various religions, a further extension of the alliance/reliance strategy. Accompanying this constriction from national to local coverage was a reduction in the depth of that coverage, as well.

The problem with this shift from coverage of the homophile movement was that the void that was created was not filled by continuing reports of DOB activities. After the first few months of Stage Three, there was really very little coverage of DOB in The Ladder. Often the only references to DOB were casual references in the cat column. Secondly, the lack of coverage of homosexuality as a general topic was not replaced by supplementary coverage of lesbianism. This was a more significant void. Although previous coverage of the general topic of homosexuality was mostly about male homosexuality, it did provide newcomers to The Ladder and to lesbianism with a more positive view than that presented in the general media. With this coverage greatly reduced, articles about lesbianism and the lesbian experience could have compensated. During this stage, however, many issues contained only a few articles about lesbianism. In some issues, only "Lesbiana" and biographical articles about lesbian foremothers continued to keep a lesbian presence.

All of these factors combined to expose the lack of direction of the magazine as painfully obvious. The absence of a powerful, autonomous editor, the growing estrangement from the movement, the disappearance of interest in male homosexuality without a compensating expansion of lesbian coverage, along with DOB's lack of resources to execute the Ladder's new feminist agenda, all added up to a magazine dangerously lacking an identity.

Despite this drift, there are two major political initiatives from this stage that are identifiable enough to discuss. The first is the conscious move towards feminism. The second is the growing estrangement between DOB and the male groups of the homophile movement. These two initiatives laid the groundwork for the manifestation of the philosophy and strategy of lesbian-feminism that begins in Stage Three and emerges in Stage Four. Lesbian-feminism had several links to the ideas and content in the first three stages of The Ladder; therefore, I would also like to briefly discuss this phenomena. These three political initiatives are closely related. Not only can they be seen to be tightly intertwined from an historical vantage point, they were also consciously related in Ladder articles published during Stage Four.

The first political initiative that I wish to discuss is the decision to concentrate on feminism. This new focus for DOB and The Ladder obviously had been developing during Gittings' tenure, because only two months after Gittings was dismissed, The Ladder announced a new direction:

> To date emphasis has been on the Lesbian's role in the homophile movement. Her identity as a woman in our society has not yet been explored in depth. It is often stated in explaining "Who is a Lesbian?" that she is a human being first, a woman secondly and a Lesbian only thirdly. The third aspect has been expounded at length. Now it is time to step up THE LADDER to the second rung...[7]

To a certain extent, this new editorial direction coincided with calls from readers for less coverage of the homophile movement. For example, Ann from Virginia writes that she and her friends are fed up with "the emphasis on the homophile movement, with men

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[7] Martin, Del, "Another Rung," The Ladder 11 (October 1966) 24.

writing about what men say at meetings....Most of us are proud as hell to be women and to be living in a woman's world....Of all women we are the proudest of our sex. This should be reflected in THE LADDER...."[8]

On the other hand, Martin's statement that The Ladder had not examined the lesbian's identity as woman is puzzling, considering the amount of feminist content in Stage Two, content, moreover, that was linked consistently with lesbianism. But perhaps it was the radical analysis of woman's status in Stage Two which DOB felt needed to be remedied. This is a more likely explanation, because The Ladder's feminist coverage in Stage Three exhibits yet another shrinking of parameters. The radical nature of feminist analysis in Stage Two was replaced in Stage Three by the more moderate theoretical views of the middle-class feminist movement, whose political strategy was based on liberal reformism.

The Ladder's consciously stated intention to focus on feminism was most likely attractive to the affinity group,[9] and for several reasons. First, the group had been making connections from the beginning between lesbian sexuality and a personal rejection of gender roles. Furthermore, this was seen as a source of pride, pride that had probably served to counteract some of the hostility aimed at them by a society threatened by this very rejection. Now lesbians were being joined by masses of heterosexual women in the condemnation of these gender roles. These reinforcements on the gender role front

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[8] Ann, "Readers Respond," The Ladder 11 (December 1966) 28.

[9] Because "Readers Respond" was missing during this stage, the reactions of readers must be inferred from previous articles and letters from Stages One and Two, as well as from those in Stage Four.

provided lesbians with fresh justifications for their life choices. And, with lesbian leaders such as Del Martin now providing seasoned leadership to straight women, lesbianism gained further credibility, and later received a measure of acceptance by the movement.

Secondly, the reforms of the middle class women's movement, equal pay, equal opportunity, equal credit, etc., fit in well with their own personal goals, as well as with their personal experiences of institutionalized discrimination. And, for professional women, the women's movement provided a network of contacts and support, as well.

Third, many of them were disenchanted with men and with the homophile movement. By this time, lesbians had been successful in separating lesbian identity from gay male identity sexually, spiritually, socially, and psychologically, (at least among themselves). Like "Ann," these women were proud to be lesbians, and were disgusted with such gay male issues as public sex, the need for VD education, and the like.

In addition, the feminist movement offered an appealing alternative to the homophile movement for those whose political consciousness had been raised, either through The Ladder, through DOB, or through observing or participating in the social and political movements of the 1960's. The feminist movement was new, with no unpleasant history of conflict. It had the potential to become a mass movement and was exciting and dynamic. Its leaders and role models were women, and the feeling of "sisterhood" served to (temporarily) gloss over differences. In contrast, the old homophile movement was small, and had a history of few identifiable or obvious gains. It was stodgy, and was on a path to decline as a result of both the challenges of its own militants, as well from unflattering comparisons with the mass movements of the 60's. For example, while the

homophile movement was debating the role of research, African-American militants were raising the call for "Black Power." Furthermore, the political opportunities the homophile movement did offer, either in the identified issues or in positions of leadership, belonged primarily to men. Finally, but most significantly, the women's movement was about women, and love of women, after all, was the center of the lesbian experience and reason for being. For a complex variety of reasons, then, feminism was a natural for middle-class lesbians.

But just what kind of feminism? How would the "step up to the second rung of THE LADDER" play itself out? The specifics are spelled out in two articles, one by DOB National President Shirley Willer and one by Del Martin. In the first, Willer is careful to separate lesbian issues from those of male homosexuals and from the homophile movement itself:

> The particular problems of the male homosexual include police harassment, unequal law enforcement, legal proscription of sexual practices....The problems of importance to the Lesbian are job security, career advancement and family relationships.[10]

Willer goes on to say that a further difference is one of core self-identification. She believes that lesbians or gay men are doing themselves a disfavor by defining themselves as a "unique minority." She believes that such a definition effectively nailed the homosexual as a "unique problem," and was socially exclusionary. Adopting such an identity was a threat to the primary goal of integration into society. In contrast, feminist aims such as job security and career advancement were designed to facilitate economic

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[10] Willer, Shirley, "What Concrete Steps can be Taken to Further the Homophile Movement?" The Ladder 11 (November 1966) 17-18.

integration into society, and were especially attractive to the Ladder affinity group who, even as lesbians, had one foot in the door already by virtue of their class standing. However, the contradiction inherent in Willer's logic is that the price that lesbians would probably have to pay in order to maintain any economic gains, would be to remain in the closet.

Del Martin's editorial in the June 1967 Ladder elaborates on Willer's definition of the issues. In addition to employment issues, Martin adds equal educational opportunities, voter education, and tax reform for single persons. She also quotes from a lengthy NOW statement of purpose in which a broad list of institutions are targeted for reform, from the government to the church to the legal system. As Martin's and Willer's statements make clear, the feminism that they meant The Ladder to pursue was middle class feminism. And, until the ideology of lesbian feminism begins to emerge late in Stage Three, the issues of middle class feminism were those that were highlighted in the magazine.

The first step in The ladder's campaign was a single-minded effort to raise the consciousness of its readers by explaining the issues. Given Willer's and Martin's articles, it is not surprising that economic issues were given major play. An article in the February, 1967 issue examined the implications of economic discrimination for women. These included tax inequities, insurance problems, the lack of career advancement, unequal pay scales, lack of training and more. The writer, Dorothy Lyle, examined and then demolished the common reasons for the economic discrimination against women. She was quick to note that most of them were based on the assumption that all women are heterosexual, that is, they had husbands to support them, and their primary roles in

society were those of wife and mother. Most lesbians, she says, fall outside of this category. The unspoken conclusion was that lesbians were almost "super victims" of economic discrimination against women. Not surprisingly, Lyle's piece concentrates on examining the inequities in professional jobs such as teaching, librarianship, and executive business careers. Additional articles attempt to further raise the economic consciousness of lesbians. Shorter pieces about gender-based job classifications, the Equal Pay Act and Civil Rights Act, the amount of sex discrimination complaints being filed, etc., added emphasis to major articles such as Lyle's.

A second area of concentration was the political process. For example, Del Martin urged lesbians to join the League of Women Voters. Other articles criticized then Gov. Edmund Brown's refusal to appoint a woman to a particular judgeship that had traditionally belonged to a woman. The December, 1966 issue featured a piece about liberal Democratic Congresswoman Edith Green of Oregon, calling her "brilliant" for her views on the "hidden dissuaders" that keep girls and women from aspiring to professional careers.[11] An article in April, 1967 detailed the unsuccessful effort of three Congresswomen to use the House Gym, and to have a woman's dressing room installed. The article calls for the election of more women: "We suggest that a greater number of women be elected to the House and then they might get some action. Surely this has to be the smallest known minority. Even the Whooping Crane which has had much attention from Congress far out-numbers women in Congress."[12]

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[11] "Cross Currents and miscellany," The ladder 11 (December 1966) 16.

[12] "Cross Currents," The Ladder 11 (April 1967) 29.

All of these articles suggest that the lesbian's best bet for defeating discrimination was to focus on her identity as woman. This approach was a logical extension of DOB's "exactly like heterosexuals" philosophy. What Martin and others were now saying was that lesbians would be more successful fighting discrimination by forming alliances with other women, even heterosexual women, than they would be by allying with the misogynist males of the homophile movement.

By contrasting this approach to feminism with the approach in Stage Two, we can see that Stage Three represented a retreat. Stage Three analysis did not call for radical or revolutionary changes to either political or economic institutions as did Stage Two. The new concentration on economic discrimination implied that, with some adjustments, extensive though they might be, women could take their rightful places in the world. For example, adding more women to the political and legal systems was just such an adjustment, to ensure that women received representation that at least matched that given to endangered species.

Furthermore, the biological role of woman needed a readjustment, as well. In an article in February, 1967, Del Martin looked at the biological basis of discrimination at length, sharply criticizing the fact that the purpose of socialization and gender roles was to condition women to biological roles. She sees women as being shackled to the roles of wife and mother:

> It is indeed time that woman not only envisioned herself as a whole person, but that she be regarded in our society as a human being and not just as a slot machine composed of a vagina, uterus and breasts to be pumped and pulled first by a male operator and nine

months later by the jack pot that drops from the slot.[13]

This is a powerful statement, to be sure, one which is reinforced in by Martin's statement that "[w]e live in a sick society...." Yet, the premise that discrimination is based on biology still does not reach as deeply into causation as the analysis advanced during Stage Two. We can recall that Stage Two analysis skipped economic or biological motivation, and found discrimination to be rooted in male hatred of women, in male power and violence, in male fear of women. Society was not just "sick," it was irretrievably bankrupt at its core, epitomized by comparisons with slavery and apartheid. Stage Three analysis represented a retreat to a more moderate, less threatening approach to feminism.

It is also important to note here that the embrace of feminism was by no means complete. Some women emphasized the primacy of the their identification as lesbians, and did not want to abandon the self-defined status of being an oppressed minority. No less a person than DOB's National Recording Secretary, longtime activist Meredith Grey, warned, (prophetically as it turned out), that Martin's recommendation to join NOW might land lesbians in hostile territory:

> Lesbians are a minority....because of the lesbian's preference for a member of her own sex as a love object. This preference has yet to find approval by any considerable segment of society....In general, our sick society does not have the ability to tolerate harmless differences such as homosexuality. Therefore, before sending in my $5.00 to Miss Friedan's group, I would require some token of good faith that they would accept my sisters as happily as they should accept my money. Let us not hasten to join a majority to do evil.[14]

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[13] Martin, Del, "Her Infinite Variety, A Review of a Review," The Ladder 11 (February 1967) 7.

[14] Grey, Meredith, "Readers Respond," The Ladder 11 (August 1967) 20.

Grey points out that lesbians are accepted by the homophile movement, and in spite of unsavory issues such as public sex and the misogyny of some male homosexuals, this, not feminism, is the lesbian's natural political home.

I would like to make two final points on the focus on feminism during Stage Three. First, in spite of this newly declared focus on feminism, intense coverage of the issues and of the movement lasted only six issues, with most of the coverage coming in the February and March issues in 1967. After these two issues, coverage drops off steeply, with most issues for the next two years featuring only one or two articles on feminism or discrimination against women. This general absence of feminist content, despite stated intentions, is further evidence of the unfocused editorial policy and overall lack of direction.

Secondly, it is very telling that it is only now, during a discussion of the oppression of women, that society is finally defined by DOB leadership as "sick." During the previous twelve years of its history, The Ladder had published mountains of condemnations and recriminations of homosexuality by representatives of religious, psychiatric and government institutions. It had featured reports of hundreds of discriminatory incidents, and it had shown that hatred and oppression of homosexuals was systemic. Yet, during this entire time, no DOB leader had ever defined society as "sick." Society was always portrayed as that attractive place "out there" which lesbians could join if they fulfilled their obligations as decent citizens. Thus, it is significant that it is only as the focus turned to discrimination based on gender, that society was defined as "sick." This may seem surprising, yet it indicates just how compelling the identity of woman was seen to be.

Secondly, the tardiness of this diagnosis also demonstrates how politically alienated DOB leaders were from the males of the movement. When the subject was the cause and identity of male homosexuality, for example, they were perfectly willing to leave the outcome in the hands of society's experts.

The Ladder's tentative, very limited move to embrace feminism was accompanied by fading support for the homophile movement, demonstrated by openly combative statements by DOB leaders and by an abrupt decrease in coverage of the movement's activities. The political anchor of The Ladder throughout its history had been the homophile movement. Now, as coverage waned, and hostility increased, the journal truly was drifting, tied to no movement.

Looking back, the break with the homophile movement is not really surprising. There had been hazy indications throughout the years that the alliance was an uneasy one for both men and women. In addition, there had been bitter clashes between DOB and the other, mostly male, organizations over issues such as the Homosexual Bill of Rights and the role of research. There seemed to exist a certain level of mutual distrust. Gay men resented lesbians, and did not believe that lesbians suffered from the same intensity of discrimination that they did. Additionally, men dominated the movement, not only in terms of numbers, but also in terms of issues, and exhibited various forms of misogynistic behavior. In the years of the 50's and early 60's, when no movement could afford to be splintered, and with lesbianism still intertwined with male homosexuality on several levels, DOB had little choice but to loyally support the male-focused movement. But, as the movements of the mid-60's gained momentum, and other political

opportunities presented themselves, the uneasy alliance between lesbians and gay men began to disintegrate. Given the new focus on feminism, and a lack of feminist consciousness among gay male leaders, the break was inevitable.

This was supported by The Ladder's readers. Most readers who were not activists had always been generally neutral or unenthusiastic about the movement's activities, preferring to view DOB and The Ladder as toiling for the lesbian "Cause," rather than for a movement focused on men. They were always much more interested in short stories, articles about one another's lives, and poetry than they were in the political activities and meetings of the homophile movement. Readers voiced persistent complaints about the focus on male issues. The one exception was the intense interest in the causes and healthiness of homosexuality, one of the main areas in which the interests of lesbians and those of gay men intersected. Early on, rank-and-file lesbians had separated themselves from certain political issues relevant to male homosexuals, especially public sex and the perceived promiscuity and lack of commitment of gay males. Lesbians had constructed an alternative identity to that of male homosexuals. Thus, it is not surprising that the rejection of the homophile movement was supported by The Ladder readership.

Just how persistent, and consistent, the problems were between men and women in the movement is demonstrated in two statements made by Del Martin eleven years apart. In 1959, she defended the existence of DOB in a speech before the Mattachine Society, and raised the gender issues that eventually split the homophile movement:

> [A]t every one of these conventions I attend, I find I must defend the Daughters of Bilitis as a separate and distinct women's organization. First of all, what do you men know about Lesbians? In all your programs...you speak of the male homosexual and follow this with -

> oh, yes, and incidentally there are female homosexuals too...and...this should apply to them as well....[Q]uite obviously neither organization [Mattachine or ONE] has recognized the fact that Lesbians are *women* and that this 20th century is the era of emancipation of women. Lesbians are not satisfied to be auxiliary members or second class homosexuals.[15] (Italics are the authors.)

Her article eleven years later bidding an angry goodbye to the homophile movement indicates that little has changed. It has an almost deja vu quality:

> We suggested that their [the male homophile organizations'] programs and their publications were not inclusive of or relevant to women. They decried the segregationist organizations which we represented, but would not address themselves to the underlying reason for the existence of separate women's organizations - that the female homosexual faces sex discrimination not only in the heterosexual world, but within the homophile movement.[16]

Despite the fact that little progress was made over the years in the fundamental relations between men and women, DOB seemed anxious through Stages One and Two to maintain good relationships with the rest of the homophile movement. When DOB did have political differences with men, it went to great lengths to mend fences. For example, DOB clashed very bitterly with ONE and others over the necessity for a "Homosexual Bill of Rights." This struggle took place in the beginning of 1961. DOB quickly acknowledged that opposition to the Bill of Rights had been perceived as "a strictly female viewpoint," and referred to the controversy as "ye olde `Battle of the Sexes.'"[17] It is no coincidence that, several months later, in May, DOB opened the pages of The Ladder to men in a

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[15] "Mattachine Breaks Through the conspiracy of Silence," The Ladder 4 (October 1959) 19.

[16] Martin, Del, "If That's All There Is," The Ladder 15 (December/January 1970-71) 4.

[17] "Masculine Viewpoint: It's `Bill' Again," The Ladder 5 (May 1961) 24.

special column called "Masculine Viewpoint." And, in October, national President Jaye Bell announced that DOB programs would be expanded to meet the needs of male homosexuals as well as those of lesbians:

> We are re-opening our public discussion groups, planning Gab 'n' Javas periodically to include the male homosexual, and are now increasing the social functions which they may attend....we are now running a special "Masculine Viewpoint" section in which we more than ever welcome opinions from our male readers.[18]

These two events signaled DOB's intention to maintain the unity of the movement in spite of differences over specific tactics.

Yet despite these attempts to appease their gay male counterparts, and despite the many years of consistent support of male issues in The Ladder, male attitudes toward lesbians don't seem to change much. For example, the issue of "lesbian privilege" was consistently raised by the men in the movement. In reviewing the Bill of Rights brouhaha for The Ladder, Dorr Legg of ONE called the disruptive behavior of the Daughters of Bilitis at the 1961 Midwinter Institute "in extremely bad taste." (One can almost hear the word "unladylike" on the tip of his tongue.) Moreover, he characterized DOB and lesbians as conservative, ignorant and privileged:

> Thoughtful observers...have tried to understand what causes might underlie the sincere opposition of most of the women attending....Was it...that the Daughters of Bilitis, its membership restricted exclusively to women, was so narrowly focussed (sic) an in-group that its members could not be expected to understandingly concern themselves with the general problem of homosexuality?
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> Or was it that Lesbians, by virtue of their own infrequent personal

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[18] Bell, Jaye, "DOB Anniversary Message from the President," The Ladder 6 (October 1961) 9.

> contact with the brutal realities of the denial of rights the male homosexual so continuously experiences, were but a step ahead of heterosexuals in their comprehension of what the problems are?
>
> Was it, even, that Lesbians have been so brain-washed by...their own favored social and legal status that they would resist to the hilt their brother-homosexuals, fearing lest some disturbance of the *status quo* might endanger their own relatively peaceful pursuits?[19]
>
> (Italics are the author's.)

Legg's statement was bound to antagonize lesbian readers. Not only does he distort the reality of DOB's history, but he also tries to negate lesbian experience on several levels. First, he ignores DOB's past and present work on behalf of male homosexuals. Further, because they have been bad girls, he is quick to exclude lesbians from the general category and community of homosexuality, placing them outside, just "a step ahead of [the dreaded] heterosexuals." Not only that, though he attacks DOB for being an exclusively woman's group, he exhibits a convenient lack of awareness about the de facto male exclusivity of the other homophile organization that made them virtual "in-groups." And, because he had no understanding of gender roles, he saw lesbians as privileged beings, implicitly allying himself with heterosexual men by echoing the contemporary mythical view that women held the "real" power in society. Weighing DOB's opposition to the Bill of Rights against its years of loyalty reveals that Legg's support for lesbians and lesbian activists was tenuous and easily threatened.

That this attitude of mistrust is a persistent one can be seen by similar statements made several years later. Roxanna Thayer Sweet, who studied San Francisco homophile

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[19] "Masculine Viewpoint: It's `Bill' Again," 26.

organizations in the late 1960's, found that most gay men "were bitter, and vocal in their bitterness, toward members of the Daughters of Bilitis. Many verbalized resentment because women did not have to face the risks and problems that men had to face..."[20] One male activist told Sweet that:

> 'The national chapter -- I have never quite figured out just what their function is, except to veto every progressive measure that anyone else wants to do....going back through the Ladder, I noticed that originally the Daughters of Bilitis opposed every program to start with that has been initiated. From VD...campaigns right down the line.'[21]

That his evaluation is faulty is almost beside the point. His statements are evidence of a deep distrust of both lesbians and DOB. Furthermore, they demonstrate that many saw DOB as a conservative brake on progressive political trends in the movement. To a certain extent, DOB itself also believed that this was the case. Sweet also interviewed DOB members who told her "that the function of the women in this organization was to keep the men from `going off half-cocked.'"[22] [23]

Just in case the men did go off half-cocked, DOB was now inclined more and more to maintain its distance. In explaining DOB's decision to withdraw from ECHO over its

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[20] Sweet, Roxanna B. Thayer, "Political and Social Action in Homophile Organizations," University of California, Berkeley, 1968. 93-94.

[21] Sweet, Roxanna Thayer, 96.

[22] Sweet, Roxanna Thayer, 95.

[23] In their book, Lesbian/Woman, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon reveal that the relationship of DOB to the men in the movement was tainted by an air of infiltration: "[T]he DOBs always had another 'hidden agenda' in mind: to find out what the male-oriented groups were up to. This was important because DOB felt a responsibility to temper the more rash or 'far-out' tactics of male organizations." Lyon, Phyllis and Del Martin, 248.

policy on picketing, Sweet says that "one of the unofficial but actual leaders of [DOB] stated with some feeling that her groups and female homosexuals in general were seen by society as being `respectable -- homosexual, yes -- but respectable.'"[24]

Yet, in spite of the mistrust and lack of regard that some male homophile leaders had for lesbians, gay men often used DOB to enhance their respectability in the eyes of government officials, professionals, and members of the general public. In an address to the Mattachine Society, DOB president Shirley Willer indicates that the role of the lesbian

> has been one of mediator between the male homosexual and society. The recent DOB Convention was such a gesture. The reason we were able to get the public officials there was because we are women, because we offered no threat....They did not expect to be challenged on the issues of male homosexuality.[25]

Another commentator put an interesting spin on Willer's observation, noting that "[t]he fact that the recent DOB Convention proved to be more of a battle for the rights of men than women establishes that the Lesbian has as much sense of nurture and motherhood as any woman."[26]

But by the middle 60's, this "sense of nurture" was wearing thin. DOB no longer was willing to ignore the lack of regard, mistrust, lack of lesbian visibility and open misogyny of the men in the movement. Activists such as Willer, Martin and LaPorte began to raise women's issues within the movement and to challenge their status as

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[24] Sweet, Roxanna Thayer, 95.

[25] Willer, Shirley, "What Concrete Steps can be Taken to further the Homophile Movement?" The Ladder 11 (November 1966) 18.

[26] "Cross Currents and Miscellany," The Ladder 11 (November 1966) 30

"second class homosexuals." Willer, for example, believed that the goals of the homophile movement were limited, and by contrast, "although the Lesbian joins the male homosexual in areas of immediate and common concern, she is at the same time preparing for a longer struggle, waged on a broader base with the widest possible participation of the rank and file Lesbian." Willer recounts the long history of support of gay men, ("with reservations," she assures us), but explains that this has been a one-way street:

> There has been little evidence however, that the male homosexual has any intention of making common cause with us. We suspect that should the male homosexual achieve his particular objectives...he might possibly become a more adamant foe of women's rights than the heterosexual male has ever been. (I would guess that a preponderance of male homosexuals would believe their ultimate goal achieved if the laws relating to sodomy were removed and a male homosexual were appointed chief of police.)[27]

Later, Willer proposed that the movement concentrate on only those issues which equally affect both men and women, and that consensus-building be adopted as a basis for decision making. She wanted to scrap the democratic process which had effectively handed power over to the dominant sex throughout the history of the homophile movement.

All the requests and warnings issued by Willer and others proved futile. The outcome of two women's rights workshops that took place in July 1967 reveals much about how women were treated within the movement, and why they left. The workshops were part of a preliminary planning conference for NACHO (North American Council of

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[27] Willer, Shirley, "What Concrete Steps...? 18.

Homophile Organizations), a national coalition. Not surprisingly, two women's rights workshops were dominated by the views of the men present, the women remaining fairly silent because, as The Ladder's reporter Sten Russell put it, "[n]ow and then a woman might get a word in edgewise, but it was a fairly difficult undertaking." The men revealed blatant ignorance about lesbian and women's issues, and were defensive and patronizing. One participant tellingly reinforced Willer's suspicions about where the ultimate loyalties of male homosexuals would be placed. He condemned Betty Friedan's Feminine Mystique, using the words: "She hates, she emasculates. She did more harm than good." His words link male power and masculinity, which is threatened by calls for the end of the oppression of women. Though some male participants eventually seemed to understand what the women tried to communicate, the environment was hostile and confrontational. Russell finally challenged the males present to give her "one good reason why DOB shouldn't just pull out of the homophile movement? Since, after 12 years, we're still largely invisible, used only for promoting male homophile problems to the public, why shouldn't we pull out and work only for women's and Lesbian's rights in society?"[28]

Apparently, no "good reason" surfaced, while at the same time, further insults built the momentum toward withdrawal from the movement. By 1969, National President Rita LaPorte reported DOB's withdrawal from NACHO, citing lesbian invisibility and male dominance. She described how DOB was asked to endorse yet another statement about the homophile movement that excluded lesbians. Laporte then paraphrases a prominent,

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[28] Russell, Sten, "Woman's Work is Never Done...by anyone but women," The Ladder 11 (July, 1967) 10-13.

but unnamed, male NACHO leader who justified the exclusion with the words: "'it is indeed a man's world isn't it? Always has been and I dare say always will be - in the nature of things, you know....After all somebody has to assume authority and it might just as well be the male.'"[29] For Laporte and DOB, this was the last straw.

In the article announcing the break with NACHO, Laporte offers a description of the role that lesbians had played in the homophile movement. In it, she draws two interesting comparisons, comparisons which reveal that role to have been a subservient one. In the first place, she says, neither she, nor any other lesbian, should have to "tak[e] orders from a male boss" any longer, because that is "something I will do only for pay..." Then she analyzes the reasons why heterosexual women cooperate with their own oppression: they are married to men and have thus repudiated their natural independence and loyalty to their own gender. Why should lesbians emulate their heterosexual sisters and enter into a virtual state of marriage to homosexual men by "allowing DOB to become an adjunct, a `wife' to the male homophile community..."? Laporte here offers a preview of two of the basic tenets of lesbian-feminism. The first is that the primary contradiction in the world is between men and women, not between classes or between homo- and heterosexual. Secondly, she indicts the institution of heterosexuality as being the basis of women's alienation from their own identity.

The position of lesbians in the homophile movement was by no means a unique phenomena. By the beginning of the 1970's, their experiences began to be mirrored by

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[29] Laporte, Rita, "Of What Use NACHO?" The Ladder 13 (August/September 1969) 18.

those of lesbians in the Gay Liberation Movement. Instances of discrimination and invisibility were repeats of those experienced by the activists of the old homophile movement. Some of the points of contention were even the same. For example, lesbians and gay men still had disagreements over sex. While lesbians in the 50's and early 60's disassociated themselves from phenomena such as tearoom sex,[30] seeing such experiences as alien to women, activists of the 70's condemned the gay liberation position that all sex is equal ("if it feels good, do it") as being non-political and antithetical to feminist criticism of heterosexuality.

The relationship between lesbians and gay men, and the relationship between male and female activists in the homophile movement are both metaphors for lesbian location in society, a location that was based on invisibility. In the movement, lesbians were continually, and to a certain extent, deliberately made invisible. This invisibility consisted of the discounting of their numerous contributions by male homosexuals, and the devaluation or dismissal of lesbian issues. Gay men practiced tokenism and exploited the gender conditioning that led lesbians to take on "nurturing" and protective roles. Males reinforced their own domination of the movement by using their sheer numbers to define the actionable issues, and excused this dominance by imputing it to nature. When pressed even slightly, they quickly fell back on male biases and male privilege, and exhibited the same fears that heterosexual men did when faced with women trying to build personal or group power.

In addition, the position of lesbians within the general category and community of

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[30] Sex in public restrooms.

homosexuality is a second metaphor of invisibility. Lesbian efforts to build identity were virtually ignored by gay males, who continued to see lesbians as just a sub-set of their own group, (if they even thought of them at all, which is the implication of Laporte's statements). The lesbian's identity as woman, and her subjection to gender-based discrimination was ignored by gay men, who continued to view her as privileged. Furthermore, though lesbians had long tolerated being seen as appendages to male homosexuals, their slightest move towards independence seemed to provoke males to threats of exclusion from the homosexual community.

If lesbians' relationships with gay males as individuals and as activists were based on invisibility, so, too, was lesbian location in society. Aside from the popular stereotypes, she did not exist. This invisibility was based on the same premises: the denial of a separate identity, the exercise of male power over women, and a fear of women that transcended male choice of sexual objects. It was also based on the prevailing social denigration of women. Lesbians were women, and it was that fact which defined their location in society. A member of the Board of Directors of SIR (Society for Individual Rights) demonstrated that the hostility toward lesbians existed on a highly visceral level in a statement he made to Roxanna Thayer Sweet. This individual exhibited not only a lack of understanding of gender roles and a blindness toward the class nature of the movement, but a deeply ingrained misogynist attitude, (ironically revealed in his attempt to appear liberal):

> `[Homosexuals are] so narrow-minded, it makes me sick....I have been proud to see people's minds opened up because we have a basic concept of equality. And, people who would not tolerate a Negro; men who could not stand a "fish" [Here Sweet inserts in

> brackets: "[woman]"], because of their involvement in SIR had to learn to accept these individuals.'[31]

The withdrawal of DOB energy from the male homophile movement, coupled with the emergence of feminism as a more attractive banner around which to organize, coincided with the appearance of a new activist ideology, lesbian-feminism. Lesbian-feminism, the third political trend of Stage Three, did not spring solely from the experiences of the white, middle-class New Left radicals usually associated with it. There are links between these women and their foremothers who toiled in the old homophile movement. Though it is true that many of the ideas of lesbian-feminism bore no resemblance to the ideas of previous years, there are a few aspects that show a definite tie between the two generations of activists. The first is the connection between lesbianism and the rejection of traditional gender roles. The second is that The Ladder had, for many years, documented the history of lesbian individuals and couples, mostly in the form of short biographies of famous women. These biographies were an early manifestation of what would become a key lesbian-feminist concept, Adrienne Rich's theory of the "lesbian continuum." The third link was a link between leaders. This came to fruition during the final stage, Stage Four, in which there was an editorial connection between the old homophile leaders and the new lesbian-feminist theoreticians. Longtime activists such as Rita Laporte and Barbara Grier, coming from a historical position that was deeply experiential, provided a forum in The Ladder for new-comers like Martha Shelley and Rita Mae Brown who forged this new theory out of the passion of the

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[31] Sweet, 92.

women's liberation movement.

In order to discuss the final political trend in third stage of The Ladder, and to explore some of its links to The Ladder, it is necessary to briefly define lesbian-feminism. Lesbian-feminism was a political theory created by radical women, many of whom had experience in the Civil Rights Movement or in the New Left. It was, in part, a critique both of the middle class women's movement, and of male-led movements such as Gay Liberation. Much of its early theory contains socialist terminology, and draws comparisons with global political struggles. Yet its theory was also based on highly personal experiences, and was expected to be practiced in every aspect of the individual lesbian-feminist's life.

The basic principle was that the primary contradiction throughout history and the world was between men and women. As Ginny Berson of the Furies collective put it, "Sexism is the root of all other oppressions, and Lesbian and woman oppression will not end by smashing capitalism, racism and imperialism."[32] Lesbian-feminists believed that male supremacy was based on hatred of women, and had been systematized in patriarchal control of society and all its institutions. The institution of heterosexuality was seen as a key cornerstone of male supremacy because it coopted individual women, keeping them male-identified and isolated from other women. Radical women believed that the identity of "lesbian" was a deliberate political choice, aimed at resisting the patriarchy, and smashing sexism. Lesbianism was thus defined as a personal and political

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[32] Berson, Ginny, "The Furies," Lesbianism and the Women's Movement, Bunch, Charlotte and Nancy Myron, eds. (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975) 18.

act, not a sexual identity. Lesbianism was based on anger and revolt, not on lust or love. Accompanying these main principles were criticisms of monogamy, of butch-femme roles, and of what Rita Mae Brown called the "old gay women" or the "women of the pre-woman-identified era."[33] The evolution of lesbian-feminism had a strong cultural component, particularly evidenced by the rapid building of an alternative subculture in the 1970's.

The strongest link between The Ladder and lesbian-feminism is found around the rejection and criticism of rigid gender roles. In Chapter Two, we met one woman who chose the natural independence and egalitarianism of lesbianism over the boring, trite games necessary to maintain relationships with men. The following statement by Rita Mae Brown echoes those feelings:

> Lesbianism also offers you the freedom to be yourself. It offers you potential equal relationships with your sisters. It offers escape from the silly, stupid, harmful games that men and women play, having the nerve to call them `relationships.'[34]

Lesbian-feminists went beyond their earlier sisters' rejection of gender roles, because they believed that any rejection of gender roles led to the necessity of choosing to identify oneself as a lesbian.

A second connection can be found in the continuing documentation of lesbian history throughout the years of The Ladder's existence, particularly biographies of such

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[33] Brown, Rita Mae, "Living With Other Women," Lesbianism and the Women's Movement, 64.

[34] Brown, Rita Mae, "The Shape of Things to Come," Lesbianism and the Women's Movement, 72.

women as Renee Vivien and Hester Stanhope. Additionally, reviews of mainstream biographies often extracted the subject's romantic attachments with women for special focus. Most of these articles were written by Barbara Grier under various pseudonyms. There were at least fifteen of these published in The Ladder prior to the emergence of lesbian-feminism, a reflection of Grier's desire to show that lesbians did have a history.[35] These articles were also a further means of reducing isolation, demonstrating that lesbians constituted a group, and were not just individuals with isolated experiences and rare longings. These representations stressed the emotional and romantic connections between women, rather than sexual identifications, although the sex-positive Grier did not shy away from pointing out the erotic components. They can be linked to Adrienne Rich's theory of the "lesbian continuum," a concept that takes the definition of lesbianism as an individual, physical experience, and expands it to include a myriad of female-female relationships, whether traditionally defined as erotic or not. In Rich's scheme, this includes "female friendship and comradeship." Rich places the lesbian continuum within a political context, accusing the patriarchy and "compulsory heterosexuality" for negating women's primary identifications with one other.[36] Rich's theoretical work was the foundation for further scholarly work on this theme, most notably Lillian Faderman's work on romantic friendships. Thus, Grier's early biographies and articles on lesbian history for The Ladder were beginning points on a line that led to the exploration of a whole area of history long

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[35] Interview with Grier.

[36] Rich, Adrienne, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980), 631-60.

ignored or suppressed.

One further link between the two groups was the construction of a lesbian culture. Even though The Ladder reached only a small percentage of American lesbians, it was crucial to maintaining continuity, providing documentation of the past, identifying role models, stressing shared values, and uniting readers on the one aspect of their identities they could not read about in libraries, their lesbianism. Similarly, one of the most noticeable contributions of lesbian-feminism has been the building of an alternative women's culture, consisting of a wide range of expressions, from the popular growth of women's history to the founding of feminist institutions, cultural and economic.

Lesbian-feminism had profound effects on the future of The Ladder, some of which will be discussed in Stage Four. On an immediate level, we have seen that the magazine lacked a focus during this Third Stage. Though DOB had announced its intention to develop the magazine's feminist content, it had not followed through with any sort of consistent or credible leadership. DOB and The Ladder's increasingly formal break with the old homophile movement created a vacuum in content, direction, and leadership. The emergence of lesbian-feminism, first as one tendency among many in the new feminist movement, then as the dominant lesbian tendency, came to fill this gap. In many ways, lesbian-feminism was a natural fit for the ideas and self-identity of The Ladder's affinity group. Thus, it is lesbian-feminism that would shape the future of The Ladder.

My detailed examination of The Ladder ends here, with the hand-off of the editorship of the now twelve-year-old publication to Barbara Grier in September of 1968. Despite two years of an unfocused existence, as well as a severe constriction of the

discourse between readers and writers, The Ladder did have a different identity than it did two years previously. It was in the processing of getting a divorce from the homophile movement, and meanwhile, it was set on a new course towards feminism. Lesbian identification had been refocused away from male homosexuality and toward a concentration on women. The Ladder had survived a time during which DOB, "afraid of the future," had virtually set the magazine adrift. Despite this, it was in the right place in the right time. It was now poised to offer a platform for new developments in lesbian culture, identity and ideology. It was still a respected publication that would offer leadership during the key transition period between the old homophile movement and the new "lesbian community." Most importantly, it survived for the individuals who continued to depend on it so very much.

Stage Four: The Path to Lesbian-Feminism

(September, 1968 - September, 1972)

Consistent with past experience, the appointment of a new editor for The Ladder resulted in a new direction for the magazine. The drift of Stage Three was halted upon Barbara Grier's assumption of the editorship. She made highly visible, immediate changes to both form and content. The direction in which Grier took The Ladder went far beyond the old homophile movement in the scope of its content, editorial direction, ideology, and identified political challenges. The excitement of the unfolding feminist movement increased its readership three-fold by 1972. Moreover, this excitement is communicated throughout Stage Four, as new ideas, new leaders, new arenas of political action bubbled through to the surface. As The Ladder expanded in professionalism, credibility and leadership during Stage Four, there were few hints that it had just four more years of life left. While much of revival of The Ladder was due to the infectiously radical political climate, the energy and drive of its new editor was also much in evidence and contributed to its growing influence.

Barbara Grier had been associated with the magazine since the November, 1957 issue, in which she published a fairly subtle short story and an essay that communicated her independence as a thinker, and her pride and joy at being a lesbian. Grier's interest in lesbian literature and in providing a foundation for the lesbian community through the printed word has been a lifelong one. Of her years working on The Ladder, Grier says,

"'I felt that my duty, my function, was to find every scrap of anything relevant to lesbians and to report on it. I took that as a life function.'"[37] After her long association with The Ladder, Grier and her partner, Donna J. McBride, founded and continue to operate Naiad Press, in Tallahassee, Florida, arguably the most successful lesbian or feminist press in the United States. In 1992, Grier and McBride donated their entire collection of lesbian and gay related materials to the San Francisco Public Library, where it will be housed in a state-of-the-art facility, and be made available world-wide to scholars of lesbian and gay history.

Grier's drive and determination are evident throughout her long association with The Ladder. In addition to her monthly literature review "Lesbiana"[38] and her lengthy book reviews, she contributed more than fifty-five essays, short stories, biographies and letters to The Ladder under four pseudonyms and under her initials in the years before she became editor. Although she was never formally associated with DOB, nor did she desire to be,[39] she had a strong personal commitment to its magazine. Her essay in the August, 1968 issue recounting the history of The Ladder ends with the words, "I for one, will do all I personally can to make sure THE LADDER will always exist."[40]

As editor, Grier expressed her own convictions where appropriate, but made plenty

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[37] Brandt, Kate, Happy Endings: Lesbian Writers Talk About Their Lives and Work, (Tallahassee: 1993) 102.

[38] Grier once estimated that she read "several hundred" novels a year in order to produce "Lesbiana."

[39] Interview with Barbara Grier.

[40] Damon, Gene, "Rung by Rung," The Ladder 12 (August 1968) 6.

of room for differing opinions, as well as for a freer flow of information in the much expanded "Cross Currents" news digest. Changes to the format of the magazine consisted of an additional twelve pages per issue, as well as a smaller type font to accommodate an expansion of content. The new Ladder featured professional fiction and poetry, provocative articles about the social movements and changes of the time, and a return to coverage of the activities of the homophile movement and Gay Liberation. Reprints from underground newspapers and discussions of contemporary social and political movements proliferated, indicating that the magazine was attracting a new type of reader. "Readers Respond" was reinstated, and was more lively and varied in content then ever. Feminist content became increasingly radical, as the focus of the Ladder shifted from the middle class feminist movement to that of lesbian-feminism. With its provocative articles and renewed input from readers, The Ladder's tradition of being the collective construction of its affinity group was restored. These changes were so sudden, and yet were executed so smoothly, that it seemed as though Grier had had a vision for The Ladder for some time.

I would like to briefly summarize the political trends of this last stage of The Ladder. The most obvious one was the move away from a middle class feminist orientation and towards lesbian-feminism. There were many contributions from such lesbian-feminists as Martha Shelley, who argued that homosexuality was inextricably linked with prevailing notions of gender identity, and as such is a cultural construct.[41]

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[41] Shelley, Martha, "Homosexuality and Sexual Identity," The Ladder 12 (August 1968) 6.

These and other seminal articles such as "The Woman-Identified Woman" came to dominate the feminist content of the magazine. Other key concepts of lesbian-feminist ideology were introduced in The Ladder. For example, an article entitled "Is Heterosexuality `Normal'" argues that heterosexuality is the result of a male projection of the notion of natural polarity onto the universe.[42] Another writer explains that the oppression of women stems from man's lack of an additional X chromosome, resulting in male envy of the biological functions of which women are capable. It is also during this Stage that Rita Laporte introduced the concept of "homophobia." In a letter to Playboy, (previously an ally of the homophile movement), she accuses heterosexual men of being "in the grip of phobic reactions to heterosexuals...this is a serious neurotic symptom suffered by heterosexuals."[43]

As the lesbian-feminist content increased, so did the criticism of the middle class women's movement. Particularly of interest was the ongoing controversy about the presence and role of lesbians in NOW, and the pressure brought to bear on them to pass as straight within the movement. Middle class feminism suffered from the exposure of its lesbian phobia, which included outright attacks and lesbian baiting.

The continued concentration on feminism made the break from the homophile movement an ideological as well as an organizational one. An article by James Colton in the September 1968 issue, whose basic assertion was that "we are born this way,"

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[42] Anderson, Marty, "Is Heterosexuality `Normal'," The Ladder 13 (June/July 1969) 4-7.

[43] Laporte, Rita, "Letter to Editor of Playboy," The Ladder 13 (June/July 1969) 43.

inspired spirited disagreement from the affinity group, disagreement that was all over the political spectrum. This controversy illustrates the growing divide between the ideas of the homophile movement and those of lesbian-feminism. Lesbianism was not the same as male homosexuality, lesbians argued; lesbianism was a political response, not a biology-based condition. An angry letter from Franklin Kameny criticized the The Ladder's increasing separation of lesbians from male homosexuals and the movement: "You seem to forget that the Lesbian IS, after all, a homosexual, first and foremost, - subject to *all* - yes, all - of the problems of the male homosexual and with *no* special problems as a Lesbian." (Italics are the author's.) Kameny is "dismayed" by the lesbian identification with feminism; he feels this political synthesis spells doom for both the homophile and feminist movements.

The prevailing political climate of radical critiques and the call for change seized The Ladder affinity group, as well. Debates were common over the place of lesbians and gay men within the group of oppressed minorities, as well as the place of the Gay Liberation and lesbian-feminist movements within the general structure of contemporary political movements. Criticism and defense of the Black Panthers and of Eldridge Cleaver's anti-homosexual and anti-woman positions indicate that readers were increasingly being drawn from activists and others familiar with the social and political movements of the time.

Another trend during Stage Four was The Ladder's continued assistance in building a women's culture. Biographies served to acquaint contemporary lesbians with their foremothers. Short stories and poetry, some explicitly erotic, of a much more

sophisticated and professional caliber, transmitted spiritual values and nurtured a growing pride in womanhood and lesbianism. In the August/September issue of 1969, The Ladder presented the first English translation of the erotic poems of lesbian Renee Vivien. Articles about women-only dances and conferences helped to build alternative social and cultural structures. And, an article by historian Vern Bullough delineated some of the basic principles of women's history. He drew examples from centuries of historical data to illustrate that the portrayal of women in history was structured to facilitate the continuing oppression of women.

The Ladder seemed to gain strength as it developed. It was highlighting the issues facing its readers and placing them in a context of contemporary political and social movements and struggles. It was taking a lead in outlining the new ideology of lesbian-feminism. It had revived the discourse that had faltered during Stage Three. Subscriptions were at an all-time high. With the rapid expansion of lesbian communities nationwide as thousands of young feminists embraced lesbianism, it may have seemed to its readers that it could go on forever. However, in the August/September issue of 1972 Barbara Grier abruptly announced that "[t]his is the last issue of THE LADDER. After 16 complete years of publication, there are to be no more issues. Many women reading this editorial will be upset, many will be sorry. None of you will be as sorry as we are to have to take this step."[44] The tone of her editorial is both angry, practical and sad.

Perhaps part of the reason for the demise of The Ladder lay in the break that took place in summer of 1970, at which time Grier and Rita Laporte, then national president

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[44] Damon, Gene, "Editorial," The Ladder 16 (August/September 1972) 3.

of DOB, seized control of the magazine and began publishing it independently from its founder. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon give one explanation for this break, basing it in ideological differences: "Gene Damon [Grier] and Rita Laporte felt strongly that DOB should align itself solely with the women's movement. They felt that the homophile movement was too male oriented and that the Lesbian's salvation lay in working for equal rights for women."[45] The rift between DOB and their editor and national president may have contributed to the demise of the magazine two years later. But another factor may well have been that The Ladder was suspended between two generations, generations with different priorities and experiences. And, the fact that very few radical publications survived the turbulent years of the 70's must have also played a role in its demise. The death of The Ladder must be the result of many factors; these reasons are, however, beyond the scope of this paper. What is important is this: The Ladder, which began its life as a twelve page, mimeographed newsletter that was mailed to a handful of lesbians, managed to touch the lives of thousands for sixteen years in a variety of unique, and in the final analysis, inestimable ways.

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[45] Lyon, Phyllis and Del Martin, Lesbian/Woman, 276.

Conclusion:

Sixteen Years of Discourse

In October, 1968, the Daughters of Bilitis printed a plea for monetary contributions in order to continue publishing The Ladder. The plea struck a somber note:

> THE LADDER NEEDS MONEY IF IT IS TO CONTINUE BEING PUBLISHED. THE LADDER has been many things to many people these past twelve years. We know that it can be a much better magazine, and reach many more people in the future, if we have a future....
>
> If THE LADDER dies, we believe that with it will die hope for attaining any form of civil rights for Lesbian women in this century.
>
> If THE LADDER dies, the permanent record of our years of work in behalf of the Lesbians of the world comes to an end, and in a sense, we lose our place in the records of the future....
>
> If THE LADDER DIES.....[46]

DOB's statement had many implications. The first was a realistic appraisal of the importance of The Ladder to its readers. This importance should not be underestimated, because in 1968, it remained the only national publication written by lesbians, directed at lesbians, and concerned with their lives, their feelings, their place in society. The second implication of DOB's statement was that, without The Ladder, lesbians would have no political guidebook, no voice with which to formulate political strategies and tactics. Without The Ladder, DOB seemed to say, there simply would be no force fighting

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[46] "Publish or Perish," The Ladder 13 (October/November 1968) 33.

for lesbians. The third implication was that the death of The Ladder would mean its death as a historical document. Along with this would come the disappearance of its readers and contributors, their pain and their joy, as their loves, their lives and their experiences receded into the nether world that had claimed them before The Ladder existed.

The statement, and its implications, are powerful ones. Yet, DOB was not being consciously histrionic, or using hyperbole just to raise money. The Ladder was just as valuable as DOB said it was: to its readers and contributors, to the lesbian and gay civil rights movement, and as a unique historical document. The Ladder has been defunct for over twenty years now, yet it still hasn't lost its value. And, with a new generation of scholars studying lesbian and gay history, its value should increase. Why?

In the first place, this magazine made an extensive positive impact on its audience. Its contributions cannot help but be reflected in the lives and experiences of the thousands of individuals who valued it and looked forward to its arrival in their mail boxes all over the country and the world. These contributions were many. The Ladder helped to build a positive lesbian identity during a time when alienation and fragmentation were factors in the lives of a large number of lesbians. In the 1950's and 60's, this magazine provided a vehicle through which a shared group identity could be fashioned from the experiences and lives of thousands of isolated individuals.

Secondly, The Ladder helped to build a tentative national community for middle class lesbians. This was not a physical community, and in addition, it could not represent all lesbians because of problems that continue to haunt lesbian "communities" today: racism, ethnocentrism, class discrimination. Yet the limited community it did help to build

was a very valuable one; it was a community of shared values, common issues, and a shared political and personal context in which one could view one's individual life. The Ladder bolstered this community by beginning to build a lesbian culture, to introduce its readers to its history by identifying a lesbian past, and by providing a forum for fine lesbian writers and poets.

Both the positive lesbian identity and the shared community of values that The Ladder helped to build resonated within individual lesbians and their social groups. Further, the legacy of a positive identity and shared community was one that was passed down to newcomers, much in the same way that The Ladder was. Not only did the formation of a positive identity contribute to the emergence of a mass lesbian and gay rights movement in the late 1960's and early 1970's, lesbian culture today has many of its roots in The Ladder.

Third, this magazine helped to build a movement. Leaders from the era of DOB and The Ladder still appear as important figures today. Women such as Barbara Gittings, Barbara Grier, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon continue to be active in the movement, and are respected leaders whose contributions did not end when The Ladder did. The magazine also provided a forum for the debates and tendencies within the movement, reflecting trends all across the political spectrum. The national mass movements of the late 60's and early 70's also influenced The Ladder, affecting its content and attracting new readers to this venerable publication. The militancy of this period raised the level of activism in the homophile movement, and caused it to abandon cautious strategies such as the alliance/reliance strategy. The radicalization of the magazine and its readership

helped to induct The Ladder into the national political context of change.

The magazine also made valuable contributions to feminism. It provided a voice for the emergence of lesbian-feminism, feminist theory, and brought news of the feminist movement to its readers in a concentrated and radicalized form. And leaders such as Rita Laporte, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon were key figures in the early defeat of the concept of the "Lavender Menace" in middle class organizations such as NOW.

Lastly, as a historical document, The Ladder has more than proven its very lasting value. The fact that little work has been done to date on this treasure of the past is a shame. This paper must only be the beginning of the examination of this magazine. So much more can be learned; the questions that remain are many. Some of them are questions that beg for answers. For example, was there a linear progression in philosophy from the very beginning of The Ladder's years to that of the end? Certainly, lesbian-feminism's roots in the New Left, and the search for identity in Stage One, had similar class roots. Can a philosophical relationship between the two be traced in the pages of The Ladder? Then there is the question of the relationships between men and women in the homophile movement, as well as comparisons to the contemporary lesbian and gay rights movement. There seems to be a historical relationship here. What are its parameters?

Lastly, the class conflicts played out in the attacks on the butch-femme phenomena found expression in lesbian-feminism, as well as in later tendencies in the lesbian movement. What relationships exist between the attacks on butch-femme in these two eras? All three of these questions could prove fascinating for the historian, and The

Ladder would be a crucial document for research into these questions.

These questions, and the questions that I have explored in my paper, would have been very difficult to discuss without The Ladder. Because this magazine represents the collective construction of a group of passionately involved contributors, it serves as a priceless repository of middle class lesbian discourse. It communicates the feelings and experiences of 1950's, 60's and 70's lesbians in a way that oral histories, organizational records, and interviews cannot. Memories changes, people edit themselves, participants die or disappear before they can be interviewed. But the words on the pages of The Ladder already exist, they cannot be changed. Their meanings are there as well, waiting for other scholars to search them out.

In late 1972 a friend lent me a stack of about fifteen issues of this unique publication. Her small collection of thin magazines fascinated me. The Ladder had already gone out of existence when I saw my first copy; yet there was a sense of history, a feeling that there was a wealth of stories which could be rediscovered, if only one knew where to find other issues. When I saw a half-price sale of the hardbound reprinted set in a Barnes and Noble catalog around ten years ago, I remembered that small stack of magazines I had read so long ago. I didn't hesitate a minute, but sent in my check immediately. I had no idea when I opened the cover of the first volume that some day I would be studying The Ladder in a formal manner. I only knew that I held in my hands a perfect chance to discover these missing voices, to hear what my foremothers had to say. It is this promise, the promise of a connection with a hidden past, that is at the core of The Ladder's fascination for me.

Appendix

Editors of The Ladder

Under the auspices of The Daughters of Bilitis

October, 1956 to June, 1960	Phyllis Lyon
July, 1960 to January, 1963	Del Martin
February, 1963 to August, 1966	Barbara Gittings
September, 1966	Del Martin and Phyllis Lyons (Acting Editors)
October, 1966	Del Martin
November, 1966 to August, 1968	Helen Sanders
September, 1968 to June/July, 1970	Barbara Grier

As an independent lesbian publication:

August/September, 1970 to August/September, 1972	Barbara Grier

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