The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics

National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement

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Schisms, Solidarities, and Social Worlds

Social movements may be viewed as collective enterprises to establish new orders of life.

Herbert Blumer, “Collective Behaviour”

A short history of lesbian and gay life in Britain in the post-World War II period can be depicted as six sedimented layers. Each emerges anew but leaves its continuing traces. The foundation layer—the 1950s and the 1960s—includes some press scandals and notorious spy and court cases involving homosexuals such as Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, Peter Wildeblood, Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, and John Gielgud (Hyde 1970); a major government commission recommending (limited) decriminalization of male homosexuality (Wolfenden Report 1957); a campaigning pressure group (the Homosexual Law Reform Society set up in 1958); a law to enact the proposed changes (the 1967 Sexual Offences Act); and a proliferation of gay and lesbian bars (Gray 1992). The year 1970 marked the arrival of the next layer: the much more radical Gay Liberation Front (GLF). This increased gay visibility, as many people came out of their closets, and political debates moved from liberal and apologetic to radical and critical. But the GLF was short-lived. It was paralleled by the emergence of second-wave feminism, and by 1973 most of the lesbians had left the Gay Movement. A third layer thus appeared around this time: the growth of a lesbian feminist movement and, along with it, the quiet expansion of a host of new gay and lesbian institutions—self-help groups like Friend and Switchboard, media forms like the Gay News, larger and more extravagant clubs like Heaven and Bang’s, and campaigning organizations like the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE). It also marked the emergence of a more masculinist look among gay men—the clone zone—which coincided with a period generally sensed as marking a decline in the good fortune of the Movement (Palmer 1993: 34). A fourth layer was ushered in with AIDS circa 1983. Less concerned with gay politics per se, it heralded a proliferation of new and more
professional groupings, often with government backing—the Terrence Higgins Trust in the forefront. For a short while other matters of gay and lesbian life settled into the background. But in 1987 a fifth layer appeared: with the introduction of the Conservative government’s internationally notorious Clause (later Section) 28 to outlaw the “promotion of homosexuality” in local government, a renewed activism returned. Seen by some as the British equivalent of Stonewall in a period commonly sensed to be a backlash, men and women started to work together, and briefly there was a very clear repoliticization of the movement (Annetts and Thompson 1992: chap. 18). A sixth sediment appeared in the late 1980s: the simultaneous queering of the younger gay and lesbian world along with a significant commercialization of the “scene.” More or less corresponding to a new generation of gays and lesbians, this continues today. Significant widespread acceptance was symbolized in 1997 by out gay MPs (members of Parliament), an out gay cabinet minister, and an out Elton John singing at Princess Diana’s funeral.

Because this description of layers is clearly oversimplified, what follows is an attempt to highlight some of the critical developments in more detail. My aim is to chart the workings of a movement (hereafter Movement) in Britain during this period. Centrally, I have two images to help me see this Movement, both drawn from a symbolic interactionist theory: social worlds and schisms. The Movement must be seen as a highly fluid, emergent series of overlapping social worlds that make competing claims for change and employ diverse dramatic strategies to accomplish their goals. These worlds have differing styles, agendas, political rationales, goals, and organizational forms. And they are characterized centrally by schism, change, fluidity, weak hierarchical structures, little formal organization, minimal resources, ambiguous frames, and claims-making activities.

Wolfenden, Thatcherism, and the Wider Context of the Movement

Lesbian and gay social movements ebb, flow, and mesh with the ongoing political, religious, economic, and cultural institutions. To trace the ongoing emergence of the Movement in Britain within the sociocultural history of modern Britain would take several books. Some have already started this task (Durham 1991; Jeffery-Poulter 1991) but two key themes need clarifying: the Wolfenden Report of 1957, which has proceeded throughout the second half of the twentieth century to redefine the relation between public and private moralities in the United Kingdom; and Thatcherism, which may be seen as the defining ideology of Britain in the late twentieth century, providing a laissez-faire approach to economics that fostered consumerism, while creating a moral climate of traditional family values against which all was to be judged.

The Wolfenden Enquiry was set up by the Conservative Party in the aftermath of several “homosexual scandals” and is linked to the Butler Reforms of the 1950s, which addressed (liberally) the death penalty, prostitution, obscenity, gambling, and suicide (Hall 1980; NDC 1980). It is the key to understanding the creation of moral discourse in postwar Britain—the backdrop to both early legal changes and later social activism—for the Wolfenden Report laid out a framework of regulation yet tolerance, a public space controlled by the law and a private space that is not the law’s business. Thus, while condemning any public flaunting of the law, it was to permit a private world of consensual homosexual acts permitted by Parliament (though its arguments were largely based on a model of homosexuality that sees it as a fixed “condition,” a position generally known as “essentialism,” which has continued to dominate all debates). Wolfenden was concerned with defining the role of the law in relation to sexuality “to preserve public order and decency, to protect the citizen from what is offensive and injurious, and to provide safeguards against the exploitation and corruption of others,” while recognizing that “it is not the function of the law to interfere in the private lives of citizens, or to seek to enforce any particular patterns of behaviour.” (Wolfenden, cited in Mort 1980: 39). Turning Wolfenden into law was a project for much of the 1960s, culminating in legislation during Labour Home Secretary Roy Jenkins’s period of office. A renowned liberal democrat, Jenkins wanted a clear limit to the state’s intervention in personal life, seeking to “create a climate of opinion which is favourable to gaiety, tolerance and beauty and unfavourable to puritan . . . . to petty minded disapproval, to hypocrisy and to a dreary ugly pattern of life” (from The Labour Case, quoted in Hall, 1980). In a strategy formulated by Wolfenden and largely carried through by Jenkins, homosexuality became decriminalized in major respects in 1967. It was a process that Hall has called the legislation of morality or “Wolfenden’s double taxonomy”: “toward stricter penalty and control, toward greater freedom and leniency: together the two elements in a single strategy” (Hall 1980: 14). In many respects it might be seen as one precondition for the emergence of a more widespread Movement.

The second major shaping influence, from the late 1970s onward, was the Conservative Thatcher government. As a major right-wing government, it dominated the background of the gay Movement between the years 1979 and 1997 and was marked by economic conservatism, religious moralism, and a very strong profamily agenda (Abbott and Wallace
political lesbianism and sexual deconstruction, the 1980's saw a renewed interest in affirming gay identity, developing political alliances, particularly between men and women and working within the state" (1994: 23). Thus, throughout the 1980's, activism switched largely to urban, Labour-controlled councils across Britain. Against a national backdrop of increasing conservatism and the ideology of the family, successful campaigns were launched at the level of the local state, setting up initiatives for change in local government—most especially in the Greater London Council (GLC), Manchester, Nottingham, and Southampton City councils, and the London Boroughs of Camden, Haringey, Islington, and Lambeth. Lampooned as the Loony Left, these groupings can be credited with many achievements: setting up centers (such as the London Lesbian and Gay Centre), establishing equal opportunity posts, and supporting campaigns around "positive images." It was at this local government level where, for a while, successes became possible.

The later period—from the mid 1980's onward—was also a time of consumer growth. The power of the market, which Thatcher advocated, generated—perhaps ironically—a network of new economic institutions around lesbian and gay life: the rise of the so-called Pink Pound. Criticized as they are by some wings of the Movement (for example, Edge 1995 and Field 1995), these new economic forms give a cohesion and unity to much of the lesbian and gay world, fostering a lifestyle rather than a lifestyle politics.

**The Lesbian and Gay Movement as Social Worlds**

Having set the scene, just what is the Lesbian and Gay Movement in Britain? Rather than seeing it narrowly as a specific named political movement, it is more helpful to see it as a broadly based overlapping cluster of arenas of collective activity lodged in social worlds in which change is accomplished: some of it is overtly political, and some of it is economic (the Pink Economy), but much of it is cultural. Not wholly unified and sometimes deeply schismatic, the modern Movement is composed of explicitly political groups alongside broader self-help organizations, subcultures and "scenes," media networks, rallies, and intellectual workers. Increasingly, it is also becoming connected to the Internet. While the main focus of this chapter is the political groupings, it helps to situate this discussion in a wider framework of social worlds.

First is the explicitly political social world, which may be roughly divided into two. There are the liberal and assimilationist voluntary pressure groups: often formally structured; usually middle class, male, and
...even elitist; and primarily concerned with claims over rights and legal change (the Homosexual Law Reform Society, the Albany Trust, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, and Stonewall, as well as groups affiliated with the three major political parties and organized religions, such as the Gay Christian Movement). And there are the less formal, grassroots-based, and challenging radical activist collectives: the Gay Liberation Front, Radical Feminism, Outrage, and AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). This is the classic divide of all gay movements—between those who seek legal change through lobbying and those who believe in a much more radical stance (Marotta 1981). But the radicalism comes in many forms, and these groupings are a prime focus later in this chapter.

Second is the much more amorphous world of communities and scenes. Unlike many social movements that cannot be said to constitute communities, the Movement cannot really be comprehended without being seen as a cultural form, a social world in which members sense an affinity with each other through sexuality, language, values, and common institutions such as bars and the media. There was certainly quite a widespread bar scene in Britain throughout the 1960s and even earlier (Westwood 1960; Hauser 1962), but a growth in alternatives to the bar scene began during the 1970s, along with rapid commercialization from the 1980s onward. Although it may seem odd to view as a social movement the development of mass discos such as Bangs in the 1970s and Heaven in the 1980s, or the 1990s street life in Soho around Compton Street or in Manchester’s “village,” they are certainly large-scale collective behaviors that have constituted social change in quite dramatic ways (Whittle 1994). Initially, they were largely male centered, but a growth in both the lesbian and bisexual scenes followed. Some might even argue that the “scene” has done more to liberate lesbian and gay lives than any of the more overt political movements. Alongside an elaborate bar scene, there also exists a network of organizations; in 1996 in London, for instance, you could find gay groups for the Welsh, Cypriots, black people, Asians, and Jewish people (Kosher Gays); gay groups for badminton, squash, Lycra cycling, windsurfing, football, bridge, swimming, and sailing; gay groups for artists, accountants and businesspeople, chamber choirs members, pagans and occultists, teenagers, those under twenty-five (Forbidden Fruits), and those over forty and fifty. And in the midst of all this were the cyberqueers.

Closely allied is the spread of gay and lesbian media. From virtual invisibility in all media save a few sensational and negative tabloid presentations in the 1960s (Pearce 1981) and a small array of early, largely unsuccessful, magazines (the staid Man and Society of the Albany Trust, the CHE news magazine, Lunch, and the glossy but short-lived bisexual periodical Jeremy), came a period of experimentation (Gay News started publishing as a radical collective in June 1972 but became increasingly “professional” with a circulation of twenty thousand by 1976; Gay Scotland started in 1973 and had a circulation of two thousand by 1983). By the 1980s there was a well-established market for gay readers (Gay News merged with Gay Times in 1983 when it had a readership of around fifty thousand), and a “free press” distributed through bars and meeting places became available in most large cities (initially Capital Gay, followed by the Pink Paper and Boyz). By the 1990s a very confident journalistic world existed; glossy, glitzy, and nowhere near as directly political as its predecessors: Diva, Attitude, Phase became mouthpieces of a new-style Movement. And closely allied was the development of a broader lesbian and gay media culture. For instance, gay publishing houses such as Gay Men’s Press start to appear in the late 1970s. And there is now significant greater presence in other media, including television: Channel 4 started the first gay film series, In the Pink, for eight weeks in September 1986; Out on Tuesday started in 1989, gaining an audience of over a million. Gay Times is the current TV journal for lesbian and gays found on the British Broadcasting Corporation’s (BBC) Channel 2 (Burston and Richardson 1995). Likewise, the popular culture and film industries have become more and more visibly gay. Many people get involved in the production of these media events, and a lot more are consumers of them. There are large celebratory gay entertainment gatherings—such as the Annual Stonewall Equality Pride held in the large Albert Hall and attracting upward of six thousand people—along with celebrities and political support. All this media work is crucial to the public life of the Movement—it gives it a visibility, a liveliness, and a mode of communication that many less successful movements simply do not have. And it has changed out of all recognition in the past twenty years (Howes 1993).

There are also self-help social worlds. From small counseling agencies—such as the Albany Trust, staffed by one professional counselor—which were formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a web of support systems has grown: FRIEND (Fellowship for the Relief of the Isolated and Emotionally in Need and Distress, CHE’s counseling arm) was formed in 1971; Icebreakers (a more radical support group, which rejected professional counselors) was formed in 1973; and the London Gay Switchboard, which was founded in 1974 (receiving some twenty thousand calls in its first year and over a million calls in the next ten years), led to the establishment of a nationwide service of help lines. By the 1990s there were over a hundred such lines, many sponsored by local authorities and employing professional support. Since the advent of AIDS, there has also...
been a proliferation of HIV supports and scores of specialist support
groups—some twenty-five HIV groups in London alone in 1996. This vol-
untary sector has become increasingly professionalized (Babuscio 1976),
establishing, for instance, police liaison committees (something that the
early Gay Liberation Movement would scarcely have believed, or wished
to be, possible).

Then there is the more academic wing of the Movement—the ivory
closet of lesbian and gay studies, a social world that has gathered its own
momentum through books and conferences. From the earliest days of the
Albany Trust, leaflets and books that put forward an analysis of the les-
bian and gay experience have been produced alongside analyses of the
homophobia and heterosexism that challenge the Movement. Such intel-
lectual work is crucial to the claims-making activities of any social
movement. And although there were relatively few people doing this
work in the 1970s (often in small groups, such as those that produced
With Downcast Gays, the Gay Left journal, and Homosexuality and
Anti-Psychiatry), by the 1980s, a steady stream of gay and lesbian acad-
emics started to appear, holding their own conferences, writing their own
library of books, and teaching their own courses (Plummer 1992; Wilton
1995; Medhurst and Munt 1997).

Yet another crucial world in the Movement consists of the Gay Pride
Marches, the huge symbolic rallying events of the Movement. Although
they generally occur only once a year, they play an enormously signif-
cant and powerful symbolic role. When the marches commenced in London in
1972, they attracted only a small devoted political crowd of about two
thousand people. Throughout the 1980s, they grew exponentially. (The
1988 Section 28 march is regarded as a landmark event in size and polit-
cal involvement.) In the 1990s the attendance at annual marches, com-
bined with a festival, now has become enormous—estimates of a quarter
of a million are not uncommon. But the nature of the rally has also
changed: what was essentially a political and campaign-oriented rally is
now largely expressive of a lifestyle commitment. It is much more com-
mercialized. The rallies also perform a global function, uniting cultures,
as in the 1992 EuroPride. There are many allied symbolic events, such as
the Brighton Pride, Pride West, Pride Scotland, Pride Arts Festivals, the
Gay Film Festivals, SM Pride, It's Queer Up North, and Candlelight
Memorials.9

Finally, a new social movement world is emerging around the Internet.
There are signs, especially among the young, that the web has become an
increasingly important way of communicating and that some of this com-
munication is focused on political issues. A 1995 issue of Gay Times listed
a wide variety of web sites, many linked to the scene but quite a few linked
to political activity (Digital Diversity, Europride 96, Gay Men Fighting
AIDS; L and G Lawyers, Pride, Stonewall, the Pink Practice—and many
other groups were listed as having web sites).10

Contested Claims in the Lesbian and Gay
Movement: Arenas of Schism and Solidarity

It is my argument that to maintain vitality, all successful social move-
ments must remain in conflict and struggle. Once conflict ceases, move-
ments are prone to co-optation by the dominant order, becoming institu-
tionalized or even ceasing to function. They need to be moved on through
contestation, schism, and conflict: without these, they become static,
wither, and often die.

The strength of the Lesbian and Gay Movement in Britain can usefully
be seen through the eyes of these schisms. One cluster of schisms is ex-
ternal: there has to be a powerful sense of something being wrong, of
change that is needed, and of adversaries. There is a public drama in
which certain marker events become symbolic of potential (and actual)
change. In general, the last three decades of the twentieth century have
seen an increasing mainstreaming of the issues here. But other schisms
(and this is sometimes also neglected) are internal to the Movement: they
establish contrasting arenas of action between people within gay worlds,
help mark out boundaries between them, give the Movement an inner dy-
namic for change, and perpetually remind the participants that the Move-
ment is far from homogeneous or consensual. It is actually inappropriate
to see one Lesbian and Gay Movement: it never has been a single entity.
From its earliest days, the U.K. Movement has been involved in endless
schisms and conflicts.

The Enemy Out There: Outer Schisms

The Movement may be depicted as engaging in a ceaseless stream of small
episodic conflicts, organized campaigns that generally focus on rights and
civil liberties, and much longer-term struggles whereby heterosexuality
and heterosexism, the gender roles they endorse, and the families they sus-
tain become the major symbolic enemy. I deal with only the first two here.

Episodic conflicts include such things as the Law Lords finding Inter-
national Times guilty of “conspiracy to corrupt public morals” for pub-
lishing contact ads for gay men (1972) and the Gay News Blasphemy
Trial, which led to the Gay News Defence Fund (1977). These are quite
short-lived conflicts: they galvanize and are important symbolically, es-
specially in quiet times, but they fade. Campaigns mobilize for longer pe-
riods of time. They include the long-running campaigns to correct the
many weaknesses of the Wolfenden legislation—changing the law in Scotland and Northern Ireland (the 1967 Sexual Offences Act was extended to Scotland in 1980 and to Northern Ireland in 1982) and changing the age of consent (in 1981 the Criminal Law Revision Committee recommended reduction to age eighteen, an amendment that was made in 1994, by which time the favored age for campaigners was sixteen rather than eighteen; Stonewall played a key role, and there were mass demonstrations)—as well as the positive images campaigns, sex education debates (Epstein 1994), and the like. The list is long.

There were, however, two galvanizing campaigns during the 1980s that require special attention. The first dominated the earlier years of this period and centered on AIDS. The campaigns around HIV and AIDS rescued a slumbering gay Movement from the late 1970s and—in the midst of great tragedy—served to revitalize and reactivate the Movement. Significantly, this happened initially through the Terrence Higgins Trust, which was established in 1982 (by friends of the first British gay man to die of AIDS) and received its first government grant of thirty-five thousand pounds in 1985. (A brief account can be found in King 1993: 208–16). It became a leading campaign body, but it also signposted a different style of gay politics—one that moved from the informal radical styles of the past to a style that was more professional, more informed, certainly angry but always responsible, and very capable of working with government and other professionals as part of the AIDS industry. The gay Movement was becoming professional: people wore suits and ties, started being trained, and even got paid for their work! Although Terrence Higgins was to become the leading movement, many others were spawned: Scottish AIDS Monitor, National AIDS Trust, Crusaid, Body Positive, Positively Women, Blacklines, Frontliners, Mainliners, Project Sigma, London Lighthouse.

All of this mirrors the development of AIDS generally. A leading historian of HIV, Virginia Berridge, suggests that AIDS policy in Britain has moved through four main phases. Between 1981 and 1986 there was a policy from below, heavily shaped by the gay community's own response. The period from 1986 to 1987 brought a type of wartime emergency, when very considerable activity (not least the five-million-pound leaflet blitz on all households in Britain and the notorious iceberg imagery of the slogan Don't Die of Ignorance). The years 1987 to 1989 brought "normalization and "professionalization," leading to the 1990s, when "AIDS is potentially at one and the same time being mainstreamed and marginalized" (Berridge 1996: 8) Progressively, AIDS work moved out into the statutory bodies and the voluntary bodies: sometimes this meant an active support for local lesbian and gay organizations, switchboards, and the like (often it did not). A central concern here becomes just how marginal gays can become to AIDS/HIV work: in many bodies the work gets taken over as a wider heterosexual issue. And this, in turn, has led to a frequent struggle between those who seek to highlight the centrality of AIDS to gay life and those who see it as a much broader problem (what has sometimes been called the degaying and regaying of AIDS debates (King 1993: 5).

The second key campaigning issue was against Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1988). Initially proposed by Dame Jill Knight and the Earl of Hawksbury, and lost because of a general election, Clause 28 was finally introduced by David Wilshire and became Section 28 of the Local Government Act on 24 May 1988.11 Its key provisions stipulated that a Local authority shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or teach the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship. But it recognized the need for education that might prevent the spread of disease. It is generally seen as a very poor law: the language is highly ambiguous; it is directed at local authorities only; and the third clause, which is linked to HIV and sex education, leaves many possibilities open. To date it has not been put into effect (although it has encouraged self-censorship and fear). Yet it also had a remarkable symbolic value, signposting a "moral civil war" (Weeks 1995:9). Not just an attack on homosexuals, Section 28 provided a rallying cry over many issues, uniting the liberal humanist lobby in opposition. As David Evans notes, it links to "local authority power; the teaching profession; sex education; childhood innocence and suggestibility; the sanctity of the family and illness of plague dimensions; all galvanised under the banner threat of permissiveness" (1993: 125). But it was also a rallying cry for the gay Movement, and movements need symbolic marker events or they lose their momentum. Apart from several major public demonstrations against the bill (in Manchester a crowd of thirteen to twenty thousand; in London, some thirty thousand protested), there were some significant shifts in tactical style. Most notably, there were irate abseiling lesbians on ropes in the House of Lords, shouting, "Lesbians are angry" and the invasion of the Six O’Clock News (Carter 1992: chap. 17). The battle over Clause 28 is yet to be fully documented (but see Colvin and Hawksley 1989; Thomas and Costigan 1990; and Carabine 1995: chap. 4). It is generally seen as a "watershed in the struggle for gay equality" (Jeffery-Poulter 1991: 234) and as "the coming age of the gay and lesbian movement."12 It must surely be one of the ironies of lesbian and gay politics in Britain, as elsewhere, that the very moment when lesbians and gays were seemingly most under attack, a revitalized and strengthened Movement emerges. Section 28 was simultaneously one of the most severe attacks on gay rights since
the founding of GLF in 1970 and the precipitator of the next activist generation. The newly elected Labour government of 1997 seems committed to its abolition (as well as to the lowering of the age of consent to sixteen).

The Enemy Within: Internal Schisms
A feature of social movement analysis that is often ignored but that, at least in the lesbian and gay case in Britain, seems crucially important is internal schisms. Maybe because in actuality there is little to hold lesbians and gays together—the category is an invented one mobilized through a collective-identity politics—differences did, do, and will always abound. These differences generate considerable internal conflict, but they keep the Movement alive and give it the dynamism for it to sustain growth and change. Schisms, as I try to capture below, may lead to solidarity.

“We’re just like you” / “Fuck you in the face!” : Assimilationists and Transgressors
As we have seen, the classic split is between liberals and radicals.\textsuperscript{13} The liberal wing of the Movement has a clear focus on rights and “respectability.” There have been changes in these groups—the first ones were small and closeted; the more recent ones are, like Stonewall, much more visible, more out, and bigger. But their central strategy has been that of pressure groups campaigning for change. Usually small, always middle class and “respectable,” they have worked within a framework of minority rights, their central claim being “equality before the law.”

The old law reform movement—the Homosexual Law Reform Society (HLRS)—embodied this position initially. It continued throughout the 1970s as the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. Formed in 1969 in the north of England as the surviving group from the law reform lobby, it changed its name in 1971 and maintained a central commitment to law reform (launching a new draft bill in 1975). In 1970 there were five hundred members in fifteen local groups; by 1972 twenty-eight hundred members in sixty groups (Weeks 1990: 210). For much of the 1970s, its annual conference was a major symbolic rally. By 1980 it had over four thousand individual members and over a hundred groups (Marshall 1980: 77–84). In the same year, it split into two groups—one for campaigning and grassroots change (see Grass Roots 1982) and one for social needs and counseling.

Another lobbying group, Stonewall, appeared in the mid-1980s and became the major organization for the 1990s. After the campaigns around the notorious Clause 28, the slick, well-organized, and much more professional campaign group of Stonewall (and the associated Iris Trust Charity) was set up in May 1989. It is characterized by assimilation, a focus on law, the use of celebrities (Ian McKellen, Michael Cashman), professional lobbying, drafting equality bills, and the like. Ian McKellen states, “Our aim will be to identify in what ways the law should be changed . . . and to provide people who can function well in the media, people who can argue for the changes that need to happen. We are keen to get people who are gay and lesbian in the mainstream of society, who are not out, to come out. If they know there’s an organisation like this that is well respected . . . they are far more likely to come out and help in raising money and offering expertise” (quoted in Jeffery-Poulter 1991: 246). Stonewall produced a draft Homosexual Equality Bill in 1990,\textsuperscript{14} and it played a major role in the campaigns to lower the age of consent. Its 1993 leaflet, “The Case for Change: Arguments for an Equal Age of Consent,” helped establish the terms of this debate: equality before the law, equal rights, the right to privacy, and gayness assumed to be a condition established in the early years of life and hence no threat. Reformist movements have inevitably taken the essentialist side of the constructionist/essentialist debate.\textsuperscript{15} Hence they both believe and argue that homosexuals are born not made and that since no one can help their sexual orientation, the law has no place in its regulation. (In contrast, constructionists usually see homosexuality as much more linked to a choice—often political—and make different arguments that put them on the more radical edge of the Movement.) And along with Stonewall came a string of important pressure groups working for change: the Lesbian and Gay Police Association, the Lesbian and Gay Lawyer’s Association, the Lesbian and Gay Christian movement, and Rank Outsiders (the gays in the military group). Even the Conservative Party developed a more active campaigning group: TORCHE (Tory Campaign for Homosexual Equality).\textsuperscript{16}

By contrast, the radical revolutionary wing of the Movement has little concern for “respectability” and assimilation. Its foundation in Britain was the (relatively) short-lived Gay Liberation Front, which Simon Watney (1980: 65) has called “the most important movement for homosexuals that Britain has known,” and more recently it has seen groups like ACT UP, Outrage, and various queer groups develop. The radical wing has little interest in being “respectable” or “professional,” or even in prioritizing legal changes. Instead, it adopts a much more militantly confrontational approach: seeking widespread revolutionary social change—a restructuring of gender, family, and the whole society, not simply acceptance or equality before the law.

The GLF was the first radical group in Britain. From a meeting in the basement of the LSE on 13 October 1970, which nineteen people attended—one woman, the rest gay men—it led rapidly to larger and larger
meetings, marches, and protests. In these earliest days it was a Movement largely about personal liberation and consciousness-raising. It had no formal leadership, and indeed any attempt to impose structure or leadership on its growing amorphous mass was swiftly rejected. Perhaps because of this, along with the proliferation of schisms and conflicts, it was to be very short-lived. But it was nevertheless overwhelmingly important: it was the founding of the Movement in Britain; and it was significant in making gayness “come out.” It was never to go back in again. GLF was the first and most triumphal of the radical wings of the social movements. It achieved many things: a manifesto (summer 1971), original critiques, the first demonstration (against the film Boys in the Band) and a torchlight demonstration in Highbury Fields, the first noncommercial dances (initially at the LSE in December 1970 and then at Kensington Town Hall), a proliferation of such publications as With Downcast Gays and Homosexuality and Anti-Psychiatry), a film (John Shane’s Come Together), and a broadsheet (Come Together). Slogans and badges were everywhere (eight thousand badges were sold by GLF in the first year). But, above all, it raised public awareness of homosexuality in a way that simply had not happened before, and it brought “coming out” as a major political process to the forefront. It was largely middle class and overwhelmingly male (Weeks 1990: 191) suggests a ratio of five men to each woman). Despite its many successes, it was to be short-lived. As the scale of the meetings grew and grew, so did the scale of the conflicts within. There were many: reformers versus radicals, women versus men, socialists versus libertarians. In Watney’s account (1980: 67), possibly the major early split to occur was between the “actionists” (the organized Leninist members) and the “lifestyle” linked to the alternative society of the time; it was not long before this blossomed into the other full-scale conflict of the history of the gay Movement—a split between the radical drag queens and the “straights.” As Watney says, “The situation was extremely confusing, half the leadership of GLF appeared to be Maoists at one meeting and Radical Drag Queens at the next” (1980: 70; see also Power 1995).

Since the arrival of the Gay Liberation Front in 1970, there have always been small groupings making radically transgressive claims through dramatic performances. Their agendas seek total societal change, and the Movement uses slogans, street marches, and street theater as its central tools. It is directly confrontational—in your face. These worlds have never been especially large (even in the early meetings of GLF in London, numbers probably never topped five hundred), and its existence has often been precarious: because it is always antihierarchical and rejects organization, it lacks the resources to mobilize consistently and for long periods. It has to keep rediscovering itself.

By the late 1980s, however, radical gay politics was back on the agenda in a big way. Shepherd and Wallis, writing at the time, comment, “Whereas GLF politics adopted the stance of a romantic Big Refusal, the new generation is marked by an angry and radical/revolutionary desire for change. GLF burst forth in a period of relative economic stability and social and political liberalism: present struggles grapple within a period of intense political reaction” (1989: 19). This was written seconds away from the arrival of Queer Politics, which entered around 1988—almost the same time as in the United States. A leaflet circulating in 1991 put it bluntly, “Queer means to fuck with gender. There are straight queers, bi queers, tranny queers, lez queers, SM queers, fisting queers in every single stree: in this apathetic country of ours . . . Each time the word ‘queer’ is used it defines a strategy, an attitude, a reference to other identities and a new self understanding. (And queer can be qualified as ‘more queer’, ‘queer’, or ‘queerest’ as the naming develops into a more complex process of identification”) (quoted in Smyth 1991: 17, 20). ACT UP was to hold its first meetings in January 1989 (modeled on U.S. meetings after two U.S. activists, Rae Bos and Rob Archer, came to speak of their experiences); Outrage would have its first public meeting at the London Lesbian and Gay Centre in May 1990; and a range of smaller, often short-lived, groups appeared with names like PUSSY (Perverts Undermining State Scrutiny), Subversive, Street Queers, Queer Power Now, and Homocult, an anonymous group of dykes and faggots who produced their own manifesto and ran a club called Scum. There were new clubs, such as Queer Nation in London and Flesh in Manchester, and new magazines (and zines) like the Brighton-based A Queer Tribe. Queer Internetworks appeared. And with all this came queer theory too: a Lesbian and Gay Studies Conference at Essex University in December 1990 gave it prominence, and another conference was held at York University in 1992 (Bristow and Wilson 1993). A Manchester-based cell captures the new imagery (from Alan Sinfield, “What’s in a Name?” quoted in Mort 1994: 210):

HOMOSEXULTURE
Our language is perversion
Corruption Reclaiming Acting
Changing Surviving subverting
Evolving Life
HETEROTRASH
Their language is conserving
Stagnating Lingering Death
QUEER
Love Yourself
Even though the term "queer" arrived early in Britain, it has never been as widespread and visible as it has been in the United States.

**Gender Wars: Radical Lesbian Feminists and Their Enemies.**

Absolutely crucial to any understanding of the Gay Movement in Britain is the schism over gender: from the very outset the relationships between the women's movement, the lesbian movement, and the gay male movement have been hotly contested. In 1972, for instance, lesbians split away from the GLF, accusing it of "gender fucking" and a misogynistic gay ghetto sexuality. But throughout its short history, there has been an ongoing series of rifts. At the 1980 Women's Liberation Movement and Men conference in London, one lesbian remarked, "I will no longer work with gay men. There is no way, absolutely no way, in which our interest can be said to be the same. Gay men, perhaps more than any other men, ally themselves with the activities and products of sexism. More than any other men they choose to act and construe themselves, and each other, in ways dominated by phallocentric ideologies and activities" (quoted in Stanley 1982: 211-12). Her arguments highlight the deeply misogynist attitude of gay men, causing women's issues to be ignored, erased, and marginalized. The most prominent spokesperson in Britain for this position was Sheila Jeffreys (1990), who now lives in Australia. She advocated a very distinctive separatist lesbian feminist identity based on radical feminist lesbianism, which was both angry at and despairing of the male patriarchal preoccupation with sex, fucking, sadomasochism (SM), pornography, and cruising. The splits are a recurrent feature of the politics of the British Movement. In 1985 a symbolic marker event was the attempt by Lesbians against Sadomasochism (LASM) to ban SM supporters from the newly established London Lesbian and Gay Centre. A vitriolic battle ensued—and LASM lost. One lesbian feminist describes the vote:

> The Centre was packed with several hundred people, 40 per cent of whom were women. The s-m dykes sat in the front row of the hall, completely surrounded by gay men, whilst the feminists clustered in the middle. The s-m contingent said nothing. They didn't have to given that at every opportunity liberal apologists and gay men sprang to their defence, to roars of approval. Whenever a lesbian feminist managed to get a word in she was met with jeers and verbal abuse. After the vote was taken, the men and s-m dykes had won, even though the majority of the women present voted against the motion. It was devastating. The Centre ended up a men's club, to which women were admitted if they toed the line. (Reeves and Wingfield 1996: 62-63)

Like the other schisms, such feminist splits regularly repeat themselves. This is not surprising, since feminists' very analysis of the nature of lesbianism and women's oppression is at odds with that of most gay men, proponents of other shades of feminism, and many lesbians. Most recently, in a telling collection (Harne and Miller 1996), radical lesbian feminists have suggested that virtually every recent development in Britain—from groups, such as Women against Censorship and lesbian SM groups, through bisexualities, lipstick lesbians, lesbian and gay studies, media representation, and all the queer representations—has been part of a backlash against lesbian feminist analyses. But for still other lesbians, these very developments may be seen as progressive and liberating.

**Class Wars: The Ideal (Pomo) Homo and the Working Class**

Many of the Movement founders had a strong connection to a Marxist-style politics that has been abhorrent to numerous others. As in many other countries, the radical wing of gay politics was clearly Left inspired—just as much feminist politics was. Gay Marxist discussion groups were common in the early days of the GLF, often Leninist with a strong base in class politics. By 1974 Gay Left had been formed to consistently pose socialist questions of the gay Movement. And by Autumn 1975 it was producing its own journal, *Gay Left*, whose mission statement described it as seeking to "contribute towards a Marxist analysis of homosexual oppression...to encourage...an understanding of the links between the struggle against sexual oppression and the struggle for socialism." Its success was relatively short-lived, but other groups continued in its wake. Most notable has been the strong presence of the Socialist Worker's Party (SWP) at most rallies and campaigns throughout the entire period under discussion.

But all of this has been decidedly on the fringe. For, in distinct contrast, a much stronger trend has been pushing in the opposite direction: a trend that completely accepts the capitalist market ethos, a preoccupation with gay consumerism and a massive commercialization of the entire gay and lesbian scene. Left critics remain, but they are swamped in a world of Gay Lifestyle Events (the Ideal Homo), Gay Business Organisations, Boyz Culture, and Lipstick Lesbians. To look at the 150-page, glossy, full-color catalogue of Gay Pride '96 is to enter an apolitical world of clubbing, Calvin Kleins, Mr Gay Britain, designer beers, body piercing, kitchen styles, dream houses, gay holidays, gay marriages, theme parties, suntan products, gyms for the body beautiful, antiques, flash cars, Internet, financial services, dance, video and media of all forms—and all this sandwiched between ads for Beneton, Eyeworks, Virgin Vodka, Mercury, Buffalo Boots, and American Express. Later in the year, the megastore Virgin produced its own 50-page designer catalogue for gays: *Crash, Bang, Walllop!*

The social movement that was once the Gay Liberation Front has indeed changed. But the critical voices still shout out in condemnation, and
not just the Left but also lesbian feminists. As Chris Woods remarks in his analysis, “The politically active in the community have been marginalised in the interest of profit” (1995: 45; see also Field 1995). It has led—currently as I write this—to the antigay movement within the Movement (Simpson 1996). A schismatic paradox indeed!

The March of Differences

There were many other splits and schisms in the Lesbian and Gay Movement, too many for me to deal with them all. For instance, in 1972 the “radical faeries” helped foster a split, putting transgender conflict firmly on the agenda. In 1973, pedophiles were roundly condemned in CHE and Gay News, leading them to create their own controversial and excluded organizations, such as PAL (Paedophile Action for Liberation) and PIE (Paedophile Information Exchange). This was a shrewd action on the part of the Movement, because these groups subsequently became a major target of public attack (Plummer 1981: 113–32). Likewise, differences centered on SM were commonly discussed, like the one (raised above) at the London Lesbian and Gay Centre in 1985. Operation Spanner in 1992 involved police arrest of a group of gay sadomasochists, who were subsequently found guilty and imprisoned (an appeal made to the European Court of Human Rights was lost). Ironically this increased the visibility of sadomasochism, and possibly its practice, and deepened a further schism (Thompson 1994; Healy 1996). And then there has been the pornography schism—a constant symbol of dispute (the London lesbian and gay bookstore, Gay’s the Word, refused to stock gay pornography until recently). Bisexuality has become a challenging issue of late (Eadie 1993; Wilkinson 1996: 75–89). The Lesbian and Gay Movement in Britain—as elsewhere—is the umbrella movement for a myriad of sex wars.

Another split occurred in the early 1980s when race became an increasingly recognized issue. Starting notably within the lesbian and women’s movement, the Gay Movement slowly started to take these concerns seriously. Yet although a black gay group first appeared in London in 1981 (Weeks 1990: 236), gay photographer Sunil Gupta noted in 1987 that you could walk into Gay’s the Word bookstore and not find a general black section, never mind a specific awareness of culture and ethnicity. Gupta complained, “There is no specifically Black/Brown gay space” (1989: 164).

Closely allied were generational splits: even in the early days of GLF, there was always a noticeable tendency for the younger and older not to get on well. But taking root from the late 1980s onward, several issues served to clarify generational boundaries. Despised largely by older gay men and women, the word “queer” from 1988 on became a marker for “transgressive youth.” It captured a new generation’s energy and pro-

vided a strategy for radically transcending categories. It was a key symbolic marker event. As Frank Mort says, “Gay politics has been cast as flabby and reformist; the period of comfortable, middle aged men holding to a tired 1970’s sexual agenda which has now lost its way. It is queer which now signifies youth, style and vibrancy and expresses the strongest dissatisfactions with an equal rights politics of inclusion, obsessed with piecemeal gains” (1994: 204). But it was more than just “queer.” The changing nature of the scene was quite pronounced: more commercialism for sure but also a youthful world that appeared more at ease with itself. Noticeably, some lesbians and gays seemed to be coming together more: “Sex between gay men and lesbians is also coming out of the closet... Now people talk openly of their opposite-sex-same-sexuality lovers and at the party after the s-m Pride March a gay man and a lesbian had sex on the dance floor, but it wasn’t heterosexuality. You can tell” (Graham McKerrow, quoted in Eadie 1993: 150). Such were the emerging internal schismatic tendencies in the middle of the 1990s (Sinfield 1998).

Using the imagery of worlds and schisms, this chapter has tried to capture something of the dynamism of the Lesbian and Gay Movement in Britain since the late 1960s against the moral background of Wolfenden and Thatcherism. More than anything else, my goal has been to show that there is no Movement; rather, there are many social worlds in tension with each other. Differences and conflicts actually serve to animate the Movement.

Implicitly, I also suggest that the Movement has been a success story. The changes that have occurred over some thirty years have helped homosexual life in Britain move from a crime, a sickness, and something deeply enshrusted in stigma to a phenomenon that, in some forms at least, is well on the way to being integrated and accepted. There have even been arguments that now, with a new Labour government, there is little left for the Movement to do, that most of the battles have been won. Of course, this may well be overly optimistic—and not least to those radical, transgressive queers who see no victory in integration. For them, the battles have only started. But that is only part of the continuing schism. Without it, the political wings of the Lesbian and Gay Movement may well collapse, leaving the Movement as communities, as media, as self-help, as cyberworlds, but not as overt politics.

Notes

1. Throughout the account that follows, I draw heavily from a symbolic interactionist frame of social movement analysis, which has recently been clearly discussed as harboring five themes: emergence, symbolization, cognitive and

2. Throughout my analysis I employ Herbert Blumer’s (1939) very broad definition of a social movement (cited in the epigraph), in which many sectors—pressure groups, self-help groups, communities and social worlds, media—may all be seen as part of the Lesbian and Gay Social Movement. For others, a more narrow political focus may be central, but to me this just does not do justice to the workings of the movement.


4. All of these terms have been carefully chosen because they reflect large bodies of writing that deal with social movements. Thus, resource mobilization theory is suggested by McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1988), claims making is suggested by Spector and Kitsuse (1987), and frame is suggested by Snow and Davis (1995). I do not follow any one of these theories but find merit in each. I have also found useful the idea that “social movements can be described as dramas in which protagonists and antagonists compete to affect audiences’ different interpretations of power in a variety of domains, including those pertaining to religious, political, economic or life style arrangements” (Benford and Hunt 1992: 86).

5. The so-called essentialist/constructionist debate has been an intellectual backdrop to many of the struggles in the United Kingdom. See the early statements in Plummer 1981a.

6. Infamous might better describe the campaign, which backfired. Many in Major’s government were subsequently exposed as living morally dubious private lives, and the accusation of a “sleaze” government was then made.

7. See the listings in any issue of Gay Times, from which these examples were culled.

8. For a brief discussion of the history of the early gay magazines, see Weeks 1990: 218–23.

9. The following are estimates of Gay Pride attendance:

First (?): Lesbian and Gay March in London, 1972 2,000
1984 1,000 (Gay Times, no. 72 [August 1994]: 18)
1985 7,500 (Capital Gay, 11 July 1986, 12)

Lesbian Strength March, 1988 4,000 (Gay Times [July 1988]: 22)
1988 29,000 (Gay Times, no. 119 [August 1988]: 12)
1989 20,000 (Gay Times, no. 131 [August 1989]: 10)
1990 38,000 (Gay Times, no. 143 [August 1990]: 8)

Manchester Liberation, 1991 10,000 (Gay Times, no. 152 [May 1991]: 17)
1991 45,000 (Gay Times, no. 153 [August 1991]: 13)

EuroPride, 1992 100,000 (Gay Times, no. 167 [August 1992]: 12)
1995 200,000 (Gay Times [February 1996]: 22)


11. Its key provisions stipulated:

28–1 A Local authority shall not
(a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality
(b) promote the teaching in a maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship
(3) Nothing in subsection (1) above shall be taken to prohibit the doing of anything for the purpose of treating or preventing the spread of disease.
(Colvin and Hawksley 1989, 1)


13. Important early U.S. studies (Marotta 1981; Echols 1989), which are very sensitive to these early schisms and conflicts, are worth a careful review.

14. See the summary by Peter Ashman, Gay Times (July 1990): 18–19.

15. As the Sunday Times observed, “The remarkable aspect of the debate is that no senior figure has come forward to rally these dissident views” (29 January 1994, 7). The Telegraph, Express, Mail, Star, and Sun all opposed equality but favored age eighteen (the Telegraph went for age twenty-one). A National Opinion Poll of 751 electors showed that 44 percent favored age twenty-one, 35 percent favored age eighteen, and only 13 percent favored age sixteen (Sunday Times, 20 February 1994, 1). See Wilson 1995 for some accounts of all this, and see Waite 1995 for an important analysis of essentialism/constructionism in this debate.

16. A note on political parties may be helpful: Formally, the British political system is dominated by three major political parties and a cluster of alternative political groupings. The Liberal Party, always a distinct minority, has for its entire thirty-year existence been the least problematic grouping; always at each stage in support of lesbian and gay rights and consistently voting for progay legislation. It has had its own scandals (not least surrounding Jeremy Thorpe, its leader in 1976), but it has consistently provided a backdrop of support for the gay movement. By contrast, the Conservative Party—which has been the ruling party from 1970 to 1974 and from 1979 to 1997—has overwhelmingly been the antigay party: it has generally fostered a climate of homonegativity, discrimination, and heterosexism. It has been the prime framor of the context in which the Movement has worked and has often established the very struggles to which the Movement has had to respond. It is the party that championed Section 28; it is the party that resisted changes in the age of consent; it was the party of law and order; and it was the party of the family and of a concern with “back to basics.” But that said, there have been interesting exceptions: Conservatives who have come out as gay and left the party (Matthew Parris), conservatives who have overtly championed gay causes (Edwina Currie, who was a leading figure in the 1994 age of consent debate, favoring age sixteen), gay Conservatives who have developed a Conservative Campaign for Homosexual Equality, and many Conservatives who have voted for gay rights in Parliament. It is quite wrong to posit, therefore, as some writers do, a Conservative Party conspiracy against gays, although the general hostility of the party certainly serves as a major mover of activism (Smith 1994; Woods 1995).
The Labour Party has had possibly the most mixed response. It was the party that facilitated the passage of the Sexual Offences Act in 1967—with Roy Jenkins as home secretary in a period of rapid liberalizing legislation—and it is the party that came to develop a quite radical approach to same-sex relations during the 1980s, notably in a number of local authorities that set up gay units, education programs, equal opportunities, and nondiscrimination policies. The most famous of these was the campaign by the Greater London Council (run down and closed by the Tory Party in 1986), which donated around three-quarters of a million pounds in 1983 to set up a London Lesbian and Gay Centre and produced a major document in 1985 (just before its demise) called “Changing the World: A Labour Charter for Gay and Lesbian Rights” (Greater London Council 1985). Here is a far-reaching document that goes though many issues—media images, queer bashing, youth problems, education, religion, work, leisure, domestic relations, health, disability, aging, adoption and fostering, law, and immigration. It produced, in the end, no less than 142 recommendations for change. And then it went out of business.


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