Divisions in a House Undivided: Towards an Understanding of the Relationship between the Women's Movement and Lesbian AIDS Activism

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACT UP	AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power
ACT UP/NY WC	ACT UP/New York's Women's Caucus
ACTG	AIDS Clinical Trials Group
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
APHA	American Public Health Association
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
CHP	Community Health Project
DOB	Daughters of Bilitis
DPC	Domestic Policy Council
FWHC	Feminist Women's Health Centers
GAA	Gay Activists Alliance
GCN	*Gay Community News*
GLF	Gay Liberation Front
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
LFL	Lesbian Feminist Liberation
LLC	Lesbian Liberation Committee
MMWR	Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report
NIH	National Institutes of Health
NOW	National Organization for Women
T&D	Treatment & Data
TAG	Treatment Action Group
WAN	Women's AIDS Network
WHAM!	Women's Health Action and Mobilization
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

Politicising the Personal, Personalising the Political

On July 3, 1981, Lawrence K. Altman reported for *The New York Times* that "a rare and often rapidly fatal form of cancer" had been observed in forty-one homosexual men.[1] Three months later, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) officially declared the mysterious illness an epidemic, using the term AIDS for the first time in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) of September 1982.[2] After this moment, it would take three more years for President Ronald Reagan to attend a Domestic Policy Council (DPC) meeting with AIDS on the agenda. AIDS, at that point, had become part of the zeitgeist of the 1980s. In the middle of the decennium, as Dennis Altman notes in his 1987 book *AIDS in the Mind of America*, AIDS may thus have "entered the popular consciousness," yet the way in which the topic was treated in society highlighted the preconceptions that clung to it.[3]

Lesbians working in AIDS activism were often not welcomed in the gay liberation movement nor the women's movement due to the sexism and homophobia "latent in the research and societal reaction."[4] "The feminist movement at large has yet to take on AIDS as a women's health issue," remarked Cindy Patton in a June 1984 issue of *Gay Community News* (*GCN*).[5] Patton, the then managing editor, proclaimed her dismay in the steely titled piece "Illness as a Weapon." Taking after Susan Sontag's 1978 *Illness as a Metaphor*, Patton challenged the portrayal or the lack thereof of those who experienced the AIDS epidemic first-hand. Patton believed that meaningful activism during the AIDS epidemic would only be

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[1]Lawrence K. Altman, "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals," *The New York Times*, 3 July 1981, 20, The New York Times Archives.
[2]"Current Trends Update on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) - United States" (Centers for Disease Control, 24 September 1982).
[3]Dennis Altman, *AIDS in the Mind of America* (Garden City: Anchor, 1987), 19.
[4]Cindy Patton, "Heterosexual AIDS Panic: A Queer Paradigm," *Gay Community News* 12, no. 29, 9 February 1985, 5, Bromfield Street Educational Foundation Records, Northeastern University Library.
[5]Cindy Patton, "Illness as a Weapon," *Gay Community News* 11, no. 49, 30 June 1984, 5, Bromfield Street Educational Foundation Records, Northeastern University Library.

achieved if the activism was to be translated "into a political agenda of cultural health, a coalition of parts working together," targeting the women's health movement in particular.[6]

Prior to the outbreak of the epidemic, the women's health movement as a whole was not yet widely acknowledging that issues such as access to birth control and abortions were also relevant for lesbian-identified women. As Finn Enke notes in *Finding the Movement*, "the establishment of service-oriented clinics contributed to heteronormative bias within the nascent feminist health movement."[7] The consequent establishment of Feminist Women's Health Centers (FWHC) in the early 1970s is thus an example of lesbian women attempting to overturn this heteronormative bias. While the examination of the inner workings of these facilities goes beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to note that lesbian women were thus contributing to developing "a broader concept of 'women's health'" in the years leading up to the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic.[8] Lesbian women played a vital role in making women's healthcare more accessible, yet this work was rarely being acknowledged. As the epidemic started to unfold, lesbian women felt unsupported and underrepresented due to the lack of a united approach coming from the women's movement.

During the late 1970s – the early years of the epidemic – the women's health movement was thus still experiencing a sense of "it's not political until it's personal."[9] This fracture between lesbian activism and the women's movement finds its root in the late 1960s when lesbians were canvassing to get their concerns introduced to the National Organization for Women (NOW). This seemingly apparent move was quickly met with a wave of backlash. Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique* and then national president of

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[6]Ibid.
[7]Finn Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 200.
[8]Cindy Patton, "Taking Control: Women, Sex, and AIDS," *Gay Community News* 11, no. 9, 17 September 1983, 5, Bromfield Street Educational Foundation Records, Northeastern University Library.
[9]Bob Andrews and Cindy Patton, "Talking About AIDS," *Gay Community News* 10, no. 47, 18 June 1983, 6, Bromfield Street Educational Foundation Records, Northeastern University Library.

NOW, considered lesbian visibility to be a "lavender menace," making it explicit that lesbian women were not to be included into the women's movement.[10]

This process of explicitly rendering a subgroup as the Other on the basis of identity politics is a central idea of this thesis. By observing the currents with regard to the process of othering on the basis of gender and sexuality through a feminist framework, this thesis adds a new perspective on the theorisation of the AIDS epidemic. As this thesis shows, the epidemic changed the ways in which lesbian women, straight women, and gay men were positioning themselves vis-à-vis each other. It answers the question of how this othering influenced the ways in which the women's movement and the gay and lesbian activist movements were in continuous conversation and conflict with each other, looking at the mediations and rifts between genders and sexualities. This thesis shows how AIDS, during the early 1980s, helped unite the women's movement, becoming a catalyst for the issues that were to be addressed as belonging on the agenda of women's health.

What this thesis also shows and therefore adds to the existing scholarship, however, is the fragmentation that again found its way into the movements in the late 1980s. In drawing attention to the currents in collaborative activism, this thesis aims to show how both movements have been in conversation with each other over the decades. It colours in the grey areas of collaboration between the movements, using the archival material produced by several organisations to survey that which did and at times did not work together. This thesis thereby adds to the historiography of late 20th century activism, understanding activists as having multifaceted identities, and meeting the demands of history. The three chapters thus show the currents in collaboration between these two movements. The first chapter deals with the period from the late 1960s until the early 1980s and looks at the fragmentation between

[10]Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 233.

lesbian feminist activists and the women's movement. The second chapter focuses on the 1980s and considers the converging motions of the two movements. The third chapter finally looks at the diversions that found their way back into the movements in the 1990s.

In focusing mainly on newspaper articles, self-published books, and ego-documentation, this thesis explores how a productive form of political activism and rhetoric was established by all groups, continuously influencing each other. As a case study, this thesis looks at the rise and fall of several grassroots political groups and organisations such as the Radicalesbians, Women's AIDS Network (WAN), ACT UP/New York's Women's Caucus (ACT UP/NY WC) and the Lesbian Avengers. These groups were all active and present at the crossroads of both the LGBTQ+ activist movement and the women's movement, thereby making them suitable case studies for observing how these movements came together in the women's health movement. In this thesis, these movements are read as being in conversation with each other, sometimes in harmony, other times not.

As Lilian Faderman states in *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, lesbian newspapers proliferated starting in the 1970s.[11] There was a sentiment that they "must control the words written about them" at a time when the community often faced a case of wrongful representation, causing the lesbian press to flourish in this era.[12] In looking at materials produced by these activist groups and individuals themselves, the difference in sentiments can be clearly observed. This thesis furthermore uses ego-documents and oral histories to supplement the newspaper articles and self-published books. These sources add depth to the historical narrative written here, complementing the account with nuanced and emotional perspectives. In contrast with newspaper reporting on the issue, the ego-documents used here give a voice to the otherwise voiceless. The documents were written by people who had a

[11]Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1991), 195.
[12]Ibid.

personal investment in the issue, and these sources are thus relevant for a thesis of this subject matter. Whereas mainstream newspaper reporting generally did not have an angle of personal interest, the ego-documents used here do, making them apt material to consider. What needs to be acknowledged, however, is the potential subjectivity at play when using these materials. This will therefore be taken into consideration in the Conclusion.

As Paula Treichler and Catherine Warren argue in Nancy L. Roth and Katie Hogan's 1998 *Gendered Epidemic: Representations of Women in the Age of AIDS*, "many early women AIDS activists were brought up short when they encountered the same mantra from their feminist and lesbian colleagues that gay men had long been hearing: it's your problem, not ours."[13] When looking at the conceptualisation of the AIDS epidemic in its early years, this tenet of separation is thus not entirely surprising. The perception of the epidemic was furthermore influenced greatly by a case of misrepresentation. Both by governmental institutions and by the public at large, AIDS was considered a "gay disease."[14] As a result, people often distanced themselves from the epidemic both as possible victims as well as potential allies. During these vital early years, the AIDS epidemic was thus not considered to be part of what Emma Day in her book *In Her Hands: Women's Fight Against AIDS in the United States* terms "a global women's health agenda."[15] How, then, can the shift towards collaboration of these movements in the following two decades be explained?

In order to understand this shift, it is important to also understand the trends in scholarship on the topic. When attempting to dissect the traditional from the revisionist historiography of the AIDS epidemic, the issue of intersectionality takes centre stage. While the concept itself was not introduced until the 1990s, it understandably already existed in the

[13]Nancy L. Roth and Katie Hogan, eds., *Gendered Epidemic: Representations of Women in the Age of AIDS* (New York City: Routledge, 1998), 130.
[14]Patton, "Illness as a Weapon," 5.
[15]Emma Day, *In Her Hands: Women's Fight against AIDS in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023), 198.

minds of some subgroups of society such as trans people of colour prior to that shift. Scholarship of the late 1980s such as the aforementioned work by Dennis Altman, however, approaches the topic from an either/or perspective. When looking at the history of women in the epidemic, lesbian-specific questions were often disregarded, and vice versa.

This either/or distinction slowly became a both/and relation over the course of the 1990s, with feminist scholarship expanding the historical narrative. Additionally, feminist scholarship of the 1990s started to condemn the sentiment that the AIDS epidemic was a crisis only affecting gay men, a belief that was present within academia as well as daily U.S. life.[16] This belief, argues sociologist Nancy E. Stoller in her 1998 book *Lessons from the Damned: Queers, Whores, and Junkies Respond to AIDS*, was detrimental to the positioning of women within the epidemic, contributing to a history of "unrelenting marginalization."[17] Stoller notes that while women in general were often already erased from the narrative, lesbian women "fared even worse."[18] Revisionist narratives were being written, and the alliances that had formed between the women's movement and lesbians working in AIDS activism were studied increasingly. Ulrike Boehmer in her 2000 *The Personal and the Political: Women's Activism in Response to the Breast Cancer and AIDS Epidemics* for example explicitly outlines this connection.[19]

In her 2015 monograph titled *Mobilizing New York: AIDS, Antipoverty, and Feminist Activism*, Tamar W. Carroll acknowledges that there was a similar awareness of gay and lesbian issues being interlinked "despite the conflicts that often arose within gay and lesbian groups over prioritizing men and women's differing interests."[20] Carroll argues that activist

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[16]Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics*, Politics and Culture in Modern America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 193.
[17]Nancy E. Stoller, *Lessons from the Damned: Queers, Whores, and Junkies Respond to AIDS* (New York City: Routledge, 1998), 11.
[18]Ibid, 15.
[19]Ulrike Boehmer, *The Personal and the Political: Women's Activism in Response to the Breast Cancer and AIDS Epidemics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 138.
[20]Tamar W. Carroll, *Mobilizing New York: AIDS, Antipoverty, and Feminist Activism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 136.

groups often did not have a singular identity, and the interrelated nature of the identities present was often what made these groups able to attain certain goals. "Just as AIDS activism had brought gay men and lesbians together after political and social divisions in the 1970s," Carroll continues, "women's health activism helped unite straight feminists and lesbians after frequent lesbian-baiting from critics of feminism and many instances of homophobic responses within the women's movement during the same years."[21]

While scholarship from the 1990s was thus already calling for an increased cooperation of "the lessons learned from the women's health movement of the 1960s and 1970s," it took the better part of the next two decades for scholarship to observe where and how this was happening.[22] Carroll hereby provides one of the first accounts of linking all three groups, and therefore provides an important starting point for this thesis. Carroll, however, focuses on how two specific organisations have influenced and helped each other, more than how the theoretical and practical strategies of the women's health movement as a whole influenced and were influenced by lesbians working in AIDS activism.

As Jennifer Brier notes in her 2011 monograph *Infectious Ideas: U.S. Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis*, a community approach to knowledge became possible in the late 1980s thanks to "the legacy of the feminist health movement of the 1970s, which argued that women should be able to participate in their own health care."[23] Day observes a similar development in *In Her Hands*, noting how AIDS activist groups increasingly "used the skills and knowledge learned from other progressive causes to mobilize effectively" in the late 1980s.[24] The ACT UP/NY's WC in particular can be seen to draw on the "tradition of intersectional feminist health-care movements."[25] As Day argues, the ACT UP/NY's WC

[21]Ibid, 182.
[22]Stoller, *Lessons from the Damned*, 151.
[23]Jennifer Brier, *Infectious Ideas: U.S. Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 14.
[24]Day, *In Her Hands*, 11.
[25]Ibid, 16.

increasingly used a "joint strategy" learned from the women's health movement, "combining direct-action activism, media attention, and litigation."[26] In chapter six of *Lessons from the Damned*, titled "Foucault in the Streets: New York City Act(s) UP," Stoller analyses the position the activist political group ACT UP took up in the epidemic more broadly. In particular, she emphasises the representational "issues of identity" that the group faced in its early years.[27] Its queer culture, notes Stoller, "is a key to both its appeal to its members and its lack of appeal to others."[28]

It is important to understand the position of ACT UP as a whole in order to situate the place of the Women's Caucus in the epidemic. While it is indeed true that ACT UP was a group made up predominantly of white, gay, cisgender men, this should not override the fact that lesbian women were, in fact, playing a vital role in this organisation. As Carroll for instance emphasises in chapter five titled "Turn Anger, Fear, Grief into Action: ACT UP New York," the ACT UP/NY's WC became an important community within the organisation "due to the political sophistication of its lesbian members who had participated in multiple social justice movements." [29] This notion, being the understanding that the lesbian women active in ACT UP/NY's WC and similar organisations were in a position to "[draw] on their previous activist experience," will as aforementioned form a central idea in the argument of this thesis.[30] As Brier echoes in *Infectious Ideas*, lesbian women "took a leading role in the [ACT UP] Women's Caucus from the very beginning"[31] and were thus able to illustrate how "addressing AIDS without understanding the larger political and economic context in which the disease had emerged would not help all people with AIDS equally."[32] As Day also notes,

[26]Ibid, 33.
[27]Stoller, *Lessons from the Damned*, 133.
[28]Ibid.
[29]Carroll, *Mobilizing New York*, 145.
[30]Ibid, 150.
[31]Brier, *Infectious Ideas*, 171.
[32]Ibid, 157.

the strategies used by ACT UP/NY's WC "signified their efforts to reframe AIDS as an intersectional women's health issue."[33] Lesbian women brought the understanding of intersectionality into the conversation about AIDS, and were thus able to broaden the scope of, the response to, and the conceptualisation of the epidemic.

Identity politics and the conversation surrounding intersectionality has always taken up a central position within activist groups. This is due to the fact that "activism waged from an intersectional perspective," argues Day, "has the power to challenge the terms on which the state responds."[34] This emphasis on an intersectional approach can, for some scholars, lead to the formation instead of the destruction of new boundaries. Benita Roth in her 1998 article titled "Feminist Boundaries in the Feminist-Friendly Organization" for example uses the case of ACT UP/LA's Women's Caucus to explain how boundary-making strategies contributed to the process of "reinscribing gender difference."[35] While it is true that internal gender dynamics within AIDS activist organisations complicated as the feminist sentiment grew, it must also not be forgotten that this, in turn, had its function too. By situating themselves as explicitly female within a male-dominated organisation, the Women's Caucuses were able to mobilise both themselves *and* the gay men with whom they were working effectively by "bringing their political experiences to AIDS work."[36] Like Carroll also notes, "differences of identity need not prevent the formation of coalitions."[37]

The strategies employed by the Women's Caucus and aligned groups, however, immediately raises the issue of exclusionary politics. Lesbian-feminist identity rhetoric of the 1970s is now read as transphobic, and lesbian women and transgender women had animosity within the LGBTQ+ movement as well. Healthcare accessibility for trans people was and

[33]Day, *In Her Hands*, 107.
[34]Ibid, 208-9.
[35]Benita Roth, "Feminist Boundaries in the Feminist-Friendly Organization: The Women's Caucus of ACT UP/LA," *Gender and Society* 12, no. 2 (1998): 134.
[36]Brier, *Infectious Ideas*, 43.
[37]Carroll, *Mobilizing New York*, 190.

remains a complex issue, something which ought to not be overlooked when exploring the relationship between the women's movement and the LGBTQ+ movement.

In terms of involvement, lesbian women were taking up a double role in the epidemic, having both a personal and political investment. This role of simultaneous personal and political activism is one that, asserts Boehmer, ultimately starts to link the women's health movement to the lesbians working in AIDS activism in the early 1980s.[38] As Sandra Morgen states in her 2002 monograph *Into Our Own Hands: The Women's Health Movement in the United States, 1969-1990*, "women's health activism had never subsided since the early days of the [AIDS activist] movement, but new challenges during the 1980s fueled renewed activism."[39] Creating an "accepting queer community" in both movements, argues also Carroll, proved essential to ACT UP/NY's WC precisely due to the lessons learned by the women's health movement.[40] ACT UP/NY's WC had an approach based "explicitly on gay liberation and implicitly on feminism," something which had, in turn, consequences for its positioning within the organisation.[41] In observing the Split in ACT UP/NY and the creation of new activist groups as part of the same history as the unification of the women's movement and lesbian activism during the 1980s, this thesis adds to existing scholarship on the issue.

"Feminists," according to Treichler and Warren, "would be largely silent in those critical first few years."[42] The shift from this early 'it's your problem, not ours' approach came, according to them, partly as a result of a restructuring and re-examination of "feminisms, plural, and lesbianisms, plural."[43] Treichler and Warren envisioned that once the

[38]Boehmer, *The Personal and the Political*, 138.
[39]Sandra Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands: The Women's Health Movement in the United States, 1969-1990* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 205.
[40]Carroll, *Mobilizing New York*, 174.
[41]Brier, *Infectious Ideas*, 13.
[42]Roth and Hogan, *Gendered Epidemic*, 113.
[43]Ibid, 130.

category of the "woman-identified 'we'" was broken open, the role of lesbian women during the epidemic would move out of the margins.[44] This overriding of the Radicalesbian notion of "The Woman-Identified Woman" proved a gateway into observing the lesbians working in AIDS activist movements and the women's movement as interconnected. "The attempt to invoke feminism and queer theory together," notes also John Nguyet Erni in the same collection, "meant recalling the ambivalence of solidarity" that was present in the first years of the epidemic.[45] With her social historical contribution to the history of the epidemic, Stoller is furthermore able to outline the power relationships that were projected onto and working inside of the response to the crisis: "the power relations within each group, among the groups, and between the groups and the dominant institutions are replayed (repeatedly) in the struggle against the epidemic."[46] With the power of hindsight, it seems as though Stoller here anticipates another replaying of power dynamics, leading to the diversions of the movements in the 1990s.

In these currents, the tool of rhetoric which all groups utilised is an important instrument. They shaped a new rhetoric of resistance as a counter-narrative to the federal policy making and society's rhetoric of innocence and neglect. This thesis theorises the AIDS epidemic through a feminist framework in order to explore how the dismantling of otherness led to a productive form of political activism during the AIDS epidemic in the women's movement and lesbian AIDS activism. It furthermore considers how, in some regard, new borders were put into place in the 1990s, albeit not from a place of conflict.

The construction and reappropriation of an I/We divide is relevant in order to understand where the members saw themselves fit in the larger political landscape of the U.S. from the 1970s until the 1990s. "When a new narrative is constructed, told, heard by an

[44]Ibid, 134.
[45]Ibid, 6.
[46]Stoller, *Lessons from the Damned*, 1.

audience and understood," states Stoller, "a new community, identity, and discourse are being created."[47] In order to analyse this rhetoric, the materials that these groups as a collective and members individually have published will be the central primary source material of this thesis. By looking at materials that they themselves produced, their positioning and consecutive deconstruction of othering in their view will be explored. Rhetoric is shaped by the one that produces it, making it a powerful tool for activist movements.

A critical distinction made here is that between ego-documents and other public forms of expressions. While the materials produced for activist actions and the books and informational leaflets the organisations published were intended to convince, this is not fully the case for ego-documents. These materials were often not meant to be persuasive, and the rhetoric thus has to be considered differently. This is therefore taken into account when analysing the primary source material.

In using these primary materials, this thesis will explore the ways in which the women's movement and the lesbians working in AIDS activism were connected throughout three stages of the epidemic as outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO). These periods, restates Mirko D. Grmek in his 1990 work *History of AIDS*, cover the early period of silence in the 1970s, the period of initial discovery during the 1980s, and the shift to worldwide mobilization from the early 1990s onwards.[48]

Over the course of three chapters, this thesis will illustrate how both the women's movement and the lesbians working in AIDS activism came to a point of mutualist symbiosis. Both movements were able to reshape their identities and their access to knowledge, as well as their knowledge production, through their meeting ground in the work of the women's health movement. This thesis adds to existing scholarship by observing what

[47]Ibid, 9-10.
[48]Mirko D. Grmek, *History of AIDS: Emergence and Origin of a Modern Pandemic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 183.

happened after this unification. Through analysis of the selected archival material previously outlined, a chronological historical analysis will take shape that illustrates that two splintered movements were able to come together to work together, attaining united goals. Importantly, this thesis also draws attention to the partial downfall of the collaboration, painting a multifaceted history.

The first chapter, titled "Women's Liberation is a Lesbian Plot," looks at the period prior to the outbreak of the epidemic, spanning from the late 1960s until the early 1980s. Through understanding the feminist separatist movement as a counter narrative to lesbian exclusion in the women's movement as a whole, the difficult early years of the two movements become clear. In seeing the women's health movement as a place where these divisions were being overcome in the 1980s, this chapter situates both movements at a place of unification prior to the outbreak of the epidemic. The constructive strategies of the burgeoning feminist women's health movement during the 1970s and 1980s helped unite women across all sexual identities. The chapter is bookended by Ronald Reagan's Republican government's first public response to HIV/AIDS, catapulting AIDS into the lives of the American people and garnering a response from both lesbian activists and the women's movement.

The second chapter, titled "Do Not Underestimate the Level of Anger That Lives Here," focuses on the period of initial discovery during the 1980s and AIDS activism's concurrent move from a grassroots response to service organisation.[49] The establishment of the ACT UP/NY's WC in 1988 counters the argument that there was a decline in feminist activism during this era, and instead illustrates how "feminist insights and methodologies were incorporated into other social justice movements of the era."[50] This chapter considers

[49]Boehmer, *The Personal and the Political*, 20.
[50]Carroll, *Mobilizing New York*, 138.

the height of collaboration between the women's movement and the LGBTQ+ movement on issues regarding women's health, exploring the demonstrations by several political groups and its effects.

The third and final chapter, titled "The Centre Cannot Hold," observes the worldwide mobilisation from the early 1990s onwards. The effective reframing of AIDS as "an intersectional women's health issue" that is explored in this chapter will be linked back to the period discussed in the first chapter, charting how a sense of separation again entered both movements.[51] In exploring what groups grew out of the prior two decades of collaboration, this chapter adds a new perspective on the conceptualisation of the epidemic. It illustrates how both movements still exposed the issue of access to healthcare as an ultimately political act, yet, to some extent, separated again to value what they as individuals knew "to be true of their bodies."[52]

In theorising the AIDS epidemic through a feminist framework, this thesis thus explores the question of how the dismantling of the Other led to a productive form of political activism during the AIDS epidemic, whether together or apart. Through focusing on newspaper articles and self-published books, this thesis explores the ways in which the strategies used by lesbian AIDS activists and the women's movement were constructive. It contributes to the notion that AIDS was rightly to be addressed as belonging on the agenda of women's health, owed in part to the burgeoning feminist movement.

[51]Day, *In Her Hands*, 107.
[52]Amy Hamilton, "Women in A.I.D.S. Activism," *Off Our Backs* 21, no. 10 (1991): 5.

Note on Terminology

While the strict bordering of lesbian women as opposing straight women seems to create friction within a 21st century framework, this thesis adheres to these terms in order to maintain the identity markers of the primary source material. Nevertheless, where appropriate and relevant these terms will be challenged to provide a contemporary perspective on the topic.

In addition, not all of those active in the Women's Caucuses of LGBTQ+ political groups such as ACT UP identified as lesbian women. However, seeing as this thesis explores the collaboration in the women's health movement between lesbian AIDS activism and the women's movement, I focus on those members who did explicitly consider their activism to be lesbian and women centred. In doing so, however, I wish not to erase the other members who contributed greatly to the fight against HIV/AIDS from the narrative. Similarly, it should also be considered that there were lesbian women active in the women's health movement who were not out or did not position themselves as working on explicitly "lesbian issues."[53]

[53]The Lesbian & Gay Activist History Project, "A His & Herstory of Queer Activism," 1989, 38, Box 203, Folder 3, ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York Public Library, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.

Chapter One

Women's Liberation is a Lesbian Plot

"This newsletter we hope will be a force in uniting the women in working for the common goal of greater personal and social acceptance and understanding," read the first issue of *The Ladder* in 1956.[54] In that year, *The Ladder* sprang up as the monthly publication and main form of communication for the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), an organisation which was founded as "a private social group to give middle-class lesbians an alternative to the gay bar scene."[55] Despite the DOB being an organisation that catered to lesbian women, its militant rhetoric illustrated that so-called lesbian concerns were of a higher priority than issues facing women at large, emphasising there was a clear order of priority in terms of self-identity. In a June 1967 issue of *The Ladder*, Del Martin, founding member of DOB, noted how lesbians were, first and foremost, women, and the DOB should therefore prioritise the involvement with the women's movement over involvement with gay men: "The Lesbian, after all, is first of all a woman."[56]

While Martin may have strived for this, lesbians were not readily welcomed in the women's movement during these years. In a response to Martin in *The Ladder*, activist Meredith Grey rightfully remarked that "Miss Friedan's group" would not "accept my sisters as happily as it would my money."[57] Grey here referred to NOW, of which Betty Friedan was then president, anticipating the rise in tensions between lesbian and straight feminists that would contribute to the fragmentation of the movement in later years. As Lillian Faderman

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[54]Del Martin, "Introduction," *The Ladder* 1, no. 1, October 1956, 3, *The Ladder*: A Lesbian Review, 1956-1972: An Interpretation and Document Archive, Alexander Street.
[55]Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 121.
[56]Del Martin, "The Lesbian's Majority Status," *The Ladder* 11, no. 8, June 1967, 23, San Francisco Bay Area Gay and Lesbian Serial Collection, University of California, Berkeley.
[57]Meredith Grey, "Readers Respond," *The Ladder* 11, no. 10, August 1967, 20, San Francisco Bay Area Gay and Lesbian Serial Collection, University of California, Berkeley.

also notes, "although lesbian-feminists saw themselves as feminist rather than gay, they did not enjoy an unalloyed welcome in the women's movement."[58]

Similarly, the position of lesbians in gay activist organisations such as the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was strained. In her essay "If That's All There Is," published in the January 1970 issue of *The Ladder*, Martin initiated the process of shaping lesbian identity to oppose gay identity. In the opening paragraphs, Martin noted how she has "been forced to the realization that I have no brothers in the homophile movement."[59] She continued the essay with voicing her concerns about being marginalised within the gay liberation movement, drawing attention to the minimisation of lesbian concerns and saying "goodbye to the wasteful, meaningless verbiage of empty resolutions made by hollow men of self-proclaimed privilege."[60] A break from the gay liberation movement was needed, according to Martin, to fully satisfy the needs of lesbians within the movement. She offered up the category of 'lesbian' as an alternative for 'gay' liberation, bidding adieu to the men within the movement; "You're in the big leagues now, and we're both playing for big stakes. They didn't turn out to be the same."[61] As Carroll notes, the "political and social divisions in the 1970s" caused gay men and lesbians to move away from each other in activist circles.[62] Combined with the fracture from the women's movement, the position of lesbians in society in the early 1970s was unstable, and in dire need of reconceptualization.

This fragmentation within both the women's movement and the gay liberation movement and the way in which lesbians sought to revise this is at the core of this first chapter. This chapter shows that lesbian women were re-evaluating their position in a way that did not always prove successful. Through rhetorically analysing and historically situating

[58]Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, 173.
[59]Del Martin, "If That's All There Is," *The Ladder* 15, no. 3/4, January 1970, 4, San Francisco Bay Area Gay and Lesbian Serial Collection, University of California, Berkeley.
[60]Ibid.
[61]Ibid, 6.
[62]Carroll, *Mobilizing New York*, 182.

their writings, this chapter is able to outline this trajectory. This chapter then demonstrates that an increased involvement with body politics within both movements eventually contributed to another trend of reassessment of lesbian women within the movement, creating a second 'wave' of self-identification. Along with a changing tradition of self-identification, the movements were able to find each other in the health crises of the early 80s, moving away from the othering and strict boundary-making that had been prevalent in the 70s.

In the first issue of the newspaper *Come Out!*, published by GLF, activist author Martha Shelley recounted a protest of the 1968 Miss America Pageant. In her retelling of the events, a discussion of the resistance to lesbian participation in the women's movement takes up a central role. Shelley recounted how 'lesbian' was used against the protestors by the opponents, its use as a slur thereby contributing to the stigmatisation of the term. Society, according to Shelley, had instilled in straight women the idea "to despise and fear the lesbian as a perverted, diseased creature."[63] In her article, however, Shelley attempted to contest the stigmatisation, as Zein Murib notes.[64] Shelley asserted that while she has met "many feminists who were not lesbians," she had, on the other hand, "never met a lesbian who was not a feminist."[65] For Murib, Shelley used this fallacious *modus ponens* to recast 'lesbian' to directly mean 'feminist,' absorbing the prior into the latter identity and reframing "lesbian identity as a central aspect of feminist identity in the face of growing resistance."[66] When taken at face value, however, Shelley seemed to simply state how most lesbians also identify as feminists, illustrating the growing feminist resistance within the lesbian community.

This point remains central in further lesbian activism of the early 1970s. Activist efforts during this time attempted to establish a commonplace association between lesbian

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[63]Martha Shelley, "Stepin Fetchit Woman," *Come Out!* 1, no. 1, November 1969, 7, The *Come Out!* Newspaper Archive, 1969-1972, *OutHistory*.
[64]Zein Murib, "Feminism Is the Theory, Lesbianism Is the Practice," in *Terms of Exclusion: Rightful Citizenship Claims and the Construction of LGBT Political Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 74.
[65]Shelley, "Stepin Fetchit Woman," 7.
[66]Murib, "Feminism Is the Theory, Lesbianism Is the Practice," 74.

identity and the women's movement as a whole. One target of this activism was NOW and its president Friedan, author of the 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* and so-called opposition leader against lesbian participation in the movement. After voicing her opinion that lesbian women were "'divisionary' in the pursuit of feminist goals," urging them to "stay in the movement's closet" so as not to "turn off Middle America women," a branch of GLF members set out to resist against Friedan's derogatory rhetoric.[67] This branch, later renamed the Radicalesbians, initially formed as a counterculture to the prevailing sexism in GLF, wishing to carve out a space for themselves in the movement. Additionally, the group wished to challenge the heterosexism of heterosexual feminists, an issue that arose "from increasing frustration with NOW and other women's liberation groups being unwilling to address Lesbian issues."[68]

The Radicalesbians had clear ideas about the influence of heterosexual feminism on the women's liberation movement, stating that "women in the movement have in most cases gone to great lengths to avoid discussion and confrontation with the issue of lesbianism. … They are hostile, evasive, or try to incorporate it into some 'broader issue.'"[69] "The Woman-Identified Woman," their ten-paragraph manifesto, was openly read for the first time at the 1970 Congress to Unite Women, when the Radicalesbians brought the subject of lesbianism to the Congress through "transcending the established format."[70] The action was titled the Lavender Menace, a reference to and means to reclaim Friedan's derogatory comment to lesbian presence in the women's movement. The women's underground newspaper RAT narrativized the event as follows:

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[67]Laurie Johnston, "Mrs. Friedan's Essay Irks Feminists," *The New York Times*, 8 March 1973, 5, The New York Times Archives.
[68]The Lesbian & Gay Activist History Project, "A His & Herstory of Queer Activism," 38.
[69]Radicalesbians, "The Woman Identified Woman," 1970, 2, Women's Liberation Movement Print Culture, *Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA) Archives*.
[70]"Women's Liberation Is a Lesbian Plot!" *RAT* 3, n. 6, 8-21 May 1970, 12, GI Press Collection, 1964-1977, Wisconsin Historical Society.

> On May 1st, at 7:15 P.M. about 300 women were quietly sitting in the auditorium of intermediate school 70 waiting for the Congress to Unite Women to come to order. … Seventeen of the Radicalesbians wore lavender t-shirts with LAVENDER MENACE stencilled across the front. These women were the first wave of action and the ones who took over the auditorium. The second wave of the action was vocal support from about twenty sisters who hid their true lavender selves and blended into the audience.[71]

Commenting on their own action in a 1970 issue of *Come Out!*, the Radicalesbians stated that "for the first time since women's liberation began, the subject of lesbianism was brought into the open."[72] In reclaiming Friedan's 'Lavender Menace' as their own political identity, the Radicalesbians were able to reframe their identity and started reconstructing their new identity as inherently political.

This was an important element of lesbian feminism in the early 1970s more generally, as Charlotte Bunch also noted in the lesbian separatist newspaper *The Furies*. According to Bunch, "the relationships between men and women are essentially political."[73] Seeing as lesbians actively rejected these relationships and "chose women," they were "defying the established political system;" an inherently political act.[74] Bunch furthermore stated that "Lesbians must become feminists and fight against women oppression, just as feminists must become Lesbians if they hope to end male supremacy."[75] This notion, later defined as lesbian separatism, was at the heart of the lesbian feminist movement. This idea is further defined by historian Alice Echols in *Daring to be Bad* as a complete separation of women from men.[76]

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[71]Ibid.
[72]Radicalesbians, "The Lavender Menace Strikes," *Come Out!* 1, no. 4, June-July 1970, 14, The *Come Out!* Newspaper Archive, 1969-1972. *OutHistory*.
[73]Charlotte Bunch, "Lesbians in Revolt," *The Furies* 1, January 1972, 8, Women's Liberation Movement Print Culture, Duke University Libraries.
[74]Ibid.
[75]Ibid.
[76]Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*, Thirtieth Anniversary Edition, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 218.

Lesbian feminism, in the eyes of early supporters such as Martin, was meant to unite the women's movement. Through the construction of lesbian separatism, however, lesbian feminism came to represent a rupture with the broader feminist movement.

In a 1971 issue of *The Village Voice*, Vivian Gornick remarked that this idea of lesbian separatism "is power politics – nothing more, nothing less."[77] With their manifesto, the Radicalesbians tried to redefine 'lesbian.' They attempted to separate 'lesbian' from its connotations of sexuality, instead reframing 'lesbian' as the embodiment of 'woman.' According to the Radicalesbians, 'lesbian' as a sexual identity was only meaningful in a patriarchal context, and the label was "the condition which keeps women within the confines of the feminine role."[78] "Lesbian," they noted, "is one of the sexual categories by which men have divided up humanity."[79] Women had to come together to act against this oppression, regardless of their sexuality, and instead bound together by their gender. In a report on a workshop given by the Radicalesbians in New York City in 1970, Arlene Kisner noted in *Come Out!* that "labels would be meaningless."[80] From now on, they would have to "redefine [themselves] as human beings without them and examine why certain labels (i.e., Lesbian) are so threatening to women."[81] At the same time, however, Kisner stated that it had to be "resolved that women's liberation is a lesbian plot."[82]

This contradiction shows a recurring linguistic strategy that the Radicalesbians were using to reframe lesbian identity. They drew attention to the similarities on the grounds of gender and were thereby able to override the exclusion of lesbians from the women's movement in terms of sexuality. At the same time, they continued to drive a wedge between

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[77]Vivian Gornick, "In Any Terms She Shall Choose," *The Village Voice*, 18 March 1971, 8, *Google News*.
[78]Radicalesbians, "The Woman Identified Woman," 2.
[79]Ibid.
[80]Arlene Kisner, "Women Coming Together With Women," *Come Out!* 1, no. 4, June-July 1970, 14, The *Come Out!* Newspaper Archive, 1969-1972, *OutHistory*.
[81]Ibid.
[82]Ibid.

lesbian women and gay men in employing this rhetoric, elevating the category – or label – of 'woman.'

As Murib notes, 'woman' was now the "predominant feature" of lesbian feminist identity, functioning anti-intersectionally as opposed to building bridges.[83] In addition, it is important to note that the rhetoric employed by the Radicalesbians furthermore excluded transgender women who identified as lesbians. This contributed to the trans-exclusive feminist thinking that was often prevalent in these lesbian separatist circles, as can also be seen through feminist Robin Morgan's keynote address at the West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference in 1973. Here, Morgan denoted trans women to be "men who deliberately re-emphasize gender roles, and who parody female oppression and suffering."[84] In saying this, Morgan illustrated how lesbian separatism was controlling the category of 'woman,' purposefully denying some the right to be included.

Lesbian feminism strongly leaned towards separatism, and the rhetoric of "universal sisterhood" had dissipated largely in the women's movement of the early 1970s, making way for exclusionary politics.[85] Lesbian feminist communes like The Furies Collective were short-lived and often disappeared as quickly as they sprang up. As anthropologist Esther Newton observes in "Will the Real Lesbian Community Please Stand Up?," the lesbian-feminist rhetoric was ultimately unsuccessful in unifying the fragmented women's movement as a whole but also the lesbian community more specifically.[86] In order to unite the two movements, unity between them was increasingly being emphasised, still focusing on their gender similarities but abandoning the breaches of the lesbian-feminist split.

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[83]Murib, "Feminism Is the Theory, Lesbianism Is the Practice," 79.
[84]Robin Morgan, "Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions?" in *Speaking for Our Lives: Historic Speeches and Rhetoric for Gay and Lesbian Rights (1892-2000)*, edited by Robert B. Ridinger (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2004), 204.
[85]Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 203.
[86]Esther Newton, "Will the Real Lesbian Community Please Stand Up?" in *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay: Personal Essays, Public Ideas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 161.

In a speech given by civil rights activist Bernice Johnson Reagon in 1982 this notion resurfaced, making the rhetoric of the woman-identified woman a central point of her argument. Commenting on the climate of lesbian separatism, Reagon used the metaphor of a barred room, stating how "there is no chance that you can survive by staying inside the barred room."[87] Reagon observed that while lesbian separatism helped give shape to in-group identification at the time of conception, it had always been based on the exclusion of others and was no longer proving useful. Lesbian separatism contributed to marginalisation by elevating the identity marker of 'woman,' and a renewed focus on intersectionality at the dawn of the 1980s had, according to Reagon, thus called for another reconceptualization of lesbian feminist identity. Coalitions had to be formed, and common goals had to be nurtured. Instead of staying in the 'barred room,' lesbians should start to actively work together; "We've pretty much come to the end of a time when you can have a space that is 'ours only' – just for the people you want to be there."[88] This process, however, was not going to be simple; "You have to give it all. It is not going to feed you; you have to feed it."[89]

One way in which lesbian feminist and straight women were able to find each other and feed the monster, was through their shared involvement in healthcare and body politics. As Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love already noted in 1972 in *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman: A Liberated View of Lesbianism*, the fact that women were "allowed to control their own bodies" did, due to "a kind of myopia," not always extend to lesbian women.[90] "Freedom of sexual expression," state Abbott and Love, "is imperative if one is to have control of one's own body."[91] They note how, similar to abortion, sexual expression is

[87]Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century," in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology,* edited by Barbara Smith (New York City: Kitchen Table/Women of Color, 1981), 345.
[88]Ibid, 357.
[89]Ibid, 348.
[90]Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love, "Lesbianism and Feminism," in *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman: A Liberated View of Lesbianism* (Toronto: Saunders, 1972), 143.
[91]Ibid.

strongly connected to body politics, and in "[denying] Lesbians the right to sexual expression, they are, in effect, denying Lesbians the right to control their own bodies – a fundamental of the Feminist platform."[92] "Why aren't we in unity to fight what affects some of us?" asked Mariana Louise rightfully in a 1977 issue of *off our backs*.[93]

While Louise was right in stating that lesbian women were not always included in the conversation on women's health, the strict boundaries between different sexualities were slowly being broken down during the early 1980s. In an article reporting on a female-run health centre in a 1980 issue of *Sojourner*, K.C. Turnbull noted that "common grievances against the health care system in this country" increasingly persuaded lesbian and straight women to come together.[94] Turnbull remarked that there were "a lot of connections and similar experiences," emphasising how the approach to women's health was changing.[95] Furthermore, as a 1982 book review in *Kinesis* also illustrated, books such as *The Complete Book of Women's Health* by Gail Chapman Hongladarom increasingly allowed women to take control of their health and come together again as a movement.[96] This could just be the bridge that was needed to start reunifying the movement.

In 1971, The Boston's Women's Health Book Collective published the first edition of their seminal work *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. Two years later, a newly edited edition came out, complete with a chapter on lesbian health written by the Boston Gay Collective entitled "In Amerika They Call Us Dykes." In spelling the title with a 'k,' the chapter takes after the revolutionary civil rights movements of the 1970s and situates itself firmly as a politicised issue. The purpose of this chapter, stated its authors, was to make its readers "see us as we

[92]Ibid, 144.
[93]Mariana Louise, "Combining Our Burdens," *Off Our Backs* 7, no. 9 (1977): 18.
[94]K. C. Turnbull, "Women's Health Is a Collective Effort," *Sojourner* 6, no. 1 (September 1980): 8.
[95]Ibid.
[96]The Province, "Women's Health Book," *Kinesis*, September 1982, 6, Herstory Archive: Feminist Newspapers, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.

see ourselves – as real people."[97] In not "insulating itself with rhetoric" but instead using a non-rhetorical approach that draws attention to the "logic" of uniting, "In Amerika They Call Us Dykes" marked an important moment in the history of both movements.[98] It departed from *Our Bodies, Ourselves* as a whole in combining first person singular and a plural narration style in order to give voice and a sense of agency to the women. The pronoun 'I' was dominant in the narrative, but so was the communal 'we.' In writing the chapter in this manner, "In Amerika" contributed to the goal of equalising straight and lesbian women, unifying lesbian and heterosexual feminists. In a 1985 review of the book in *New Directions for Women*, Datha Clapper Brack emphasised that "we need accurate, accessible information in order to critically evaluate the system."[99] "The women's health movement," she continued, is "filling this need."[100] It became clear that, as Cindy Dickinson noted, in order to "hold back effectively the erosion of our rights to health, we must be informed, share information, organize, strategize and network."[101]

While the Boston Gay Collective initially stated that abortion demands "had no relevance to my life as a gay woman," it increasingly became clear that these issues of women's health were interconnected and intersectional.[102] As Shelley also stated in a 1970 issue of *off our backs*, "it will eventually dawn on large numbers of women that they cannot obtain liberation under the present social structure – that free abortion on demand must evolve into free medical care and childcare centers, which must evolve into socialist institutions."[103] An increasing awareness of the futile mode of forming a "separate identity in

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[97]The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, "In Amerika They Call Us Dykes," in *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, 2nd ed. (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1973), 56.
[98]Ibid, 71.
[99]Datha Clapper Brack, "Taking Care of Ourselves," *New Directions for Women* 14, no. 6, November-December 1985, 5, Herstory Archive: Feminist Newspapers, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[100]Ibid.
[101]Cindy Dickinson, "The Politics of Women's Health," *Women's Voices*, June-July 1983, 3, Herstory Archive: Feminist Newspapers, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[102]The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, "In Amerika They Call Us Dykes," 65.
[103]Martha Shelley, "Subversion in the Womans Movement: What Is to Be Done," *Off Our Backs* 1, no. 13 (1970): 5.

order to be heard" became clear.[104] This, for former Radicalesbian Bunch, marked "a very exciting thing happening that can have an enormous amount of possibility for us personally, and more for the movement for change."[105]

In short, efforts were starting to be made to reunite the women's movement in the early 1980s. "If we are to survive at all as a movement, we are going to have to face this issue head on and refuse to be divided" read an anonymous op-ed piece in a March 1982 issue of *off our backs*.[106] Just eight months earlier a rare cancer had been observed in forty-one homosexuals, as Lawrence K. Altman reported for *The New York Times* in July 1981.[107] The importance of this cannot be overlooked. The outbreak of an epidemic that was so strongly connected to body politics in a marginalized group to some extent "provided a retreat from the divisiveness of the feminist movement," as scholars such as Carroll argue.[108] The next chapter explores the collaboration between the two movements, highlighting how members of both the women's movement and the lesbian feminist movement were able to contribute to the women's health movement. The end of the first chapter marks the dawning of a realisation, one which turns into practical implementation during the late 1980s as women's fight for control over their bodies ignited.

[104]Denise Kulp and Karen Mudd, "Common Causes: Uncommon Coalitions," *Off Our Backs* 15, no. 8 (1985): 4.
[105]Ibid.
[106]"Lesbian-Baiting in the Women's Movement," *Off Our Backs* 12, no. 3 (1982): 17.
[107]Altman, "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals," 20.
[108]Carroll, *Mobilizing New York*, 173.

Chapter Two

Do Not Underestimate the Level of Anger That Lives Here

In the final days of 1985, then U.S. president Ronald Reagan signed the final version of a memo titled "What should the federal government do to deal with the problem of AIDS?"[109] As Brier notes in her account of the Reagan's administration treatment of the then four-year-old epidemic, this allowed federal agencies, local governments, and state governments to "treat AIDS as a public health problem in need of a special report on AIDS."[110] In a news conference in September 1985, Reagan claimed that combatting the epidemic was a "top priority" for his administration.[111] "There's no question about the seriousness of this," Reagan informed the American public, "and the need to find an answer."[112]

Having remained as good as silent on the issue for the first four vital years of the epidemic, however, Reagan had garnered a lot of critique for his treatment of the rapidly unfolding AIDS crisis. *Francisco Chronicle* journalist Randy Shilts was among the more widely circulated critics, with his 1987 book *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* offering the American public a well-cited account of Reagan's first-term administration's lack of action and refusal of funding with regards to AIDS. While Shilts was able to bring the epidemic to a mainstream audience, it should be noted that the book has received heavy criticism for its misuse of "dramatic storytelling," with its narrative of victim-blaming being its main shortcoming.[113] As the public was coming around to Reagan's so-called silence-as-denial strategy, it also became a driving force behind the activism of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), established in New York in 1987. On a poster created by ACT UP member Donald Moffett, Reagan's broadly smiling face is juxtaposed

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[109]Brier, *Infectious Ideas*, 79.
[110]Ibid.
[111]"The President's News Conference," *Reagan Library Archives*, 17 September 1985.
[112]Ibid.
[113]Priscilla Wald, "'The Columbus of AIDS': The Invention of 'Patient Zero'," in *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 213.

with a fluorescent target, designating the responsibility of the unfolding epidemic to a single target.[114]

This chapter illustrates how the political and social context of the late 1980s continued to reinforce the collaboration between the women's movement and lesbian AIDS activism through the women's health movement. In abandoning the 1970s zeitgeist of separatist politics and instead taking on a gradually intersectional approach, this chapter shows how a "community approach to knowledge" became increasingly possible thanks to the collaboration of feminists.[115]

As Donald Francis notes in his article on U.S. policy failure during the AIDS epidemic, the 1980s was "a bad time for a new epidemic."[116] No time is ever a good time for a new epidemic, but Francis continues to make an essential point with regards to the difficulties that activists at this time faced. "The new Reagan White House and [its] agenda conflicted with good public health practices" Francis notes.[117] Reagan's fiscally conservative ideology meant that an already crumbling healthcare system was collapsing even further. This was most notable for those already paying the price for a dysfunctional system, with women's health concerns moving even lower down on the agenda. As Patricia Fleming, then director of the Office of National AIDS Policy also noted at the 1995 First National Scientific Meeting on HIV Infection in Adult and Adolescent Women, "women's history in the epidemic was one of unrelenting marginalization."[118] Commenting on the failure of healthcare institutions for women in *Sojourner* in June 1991, Marla Erlien reinforced this idea, stating how this is "the result of a major strategy of the Reagan/Bush agenda" to "make

[114]Donald Moffett, *He Kills Me*, 1987, Offset printing, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre Pompidou.
[115]Brier, *Infectious Ideas*, 14.
[116]Donald P. Francis, "Deadly AIDS Policy Failure by the Highest Levels of the US Government: A Personal Look Back 30 Years Later for Lessons to Respond Better to Future Epidemics," *Journal of Public Health Policy* 33, no. 3 (2012): 291.
[117]Ibid.
[118]In Stoller, *Lessons from the Damned*, 11.

people with needs the enemy."[119] It was clear that "the administration was remarkably slow to respond to the crisis,"[120] something which later prompted polemics such as Larry Kramer's 2007 "Reagan and AIDS" to label Reagan as an individual a "monster."[121] While the deaths cannot and should not be directly attributed to the federal government alone, diseases and the treatment thereof do not merely exist in a "sociopolitical vacuum."[122] In saying this, Dennis Altman urges the public to look beyond policymaking alone, and to consider other contexts that influenced the way in which the response to the epidemic unfolded.

As Day argues, "the emergence of the AIDS epidemic in the early 1980s converged with the fraught battles over abortion and reproductive rights."[123] In fiscal year 1982, Reagan proposed a 23 percent cut of the 125 million dollar budget for family planning institutions which included abortion services.[124] During the 1980s, many feminist news publications voiced their worries about developments such as these, and set up activist actions in an attempt to counter the "dismantling of these hard-earned reproductive rights."[125] Connecting this issue to the AIDS epidemic, Dennis Altman in *AIDS in the Mind of America* argues that lesbian AIDS activism can be seen as "having a historical parallel to the women's movement."[126] AIDS activism in the 1980s became the most visible output of the lesbian community in the same way as reproductive rights had become one of the most visible activities of the women's movement in the 1970s.[127] Lesbian AIDS activism, noted Erlien, was able to provide "a broadened constituency for acting on all the health issues for women

[119]Marla Erlien, "Women Act Up," *Sojourner* 16, no. 10, June 1991, 13, Herstory Archive: Feminist Newspapers, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[120]Altman, *AIDS in the Mind of America*, 26.
[121]Larry Kramer, "Reagan and AIDS," The New York Review of Books, 12 April 2007.
[122]Altman, *AIDS in the Mind of America*, 26.
[123]Day, *In Her Hands*, 78.
[124]"Federal Abortion Alternatives Cut by Reagan," in *CQ Almanac 1984*, 40th ed. (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1985), 467.
[125]Gail Esterman, "Conspiracy Against Women's Health," *Womanews* 8, no. 9, October 1987, 17, Herstory Archive: Feminist Newspapers, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[126]Altman, *AIDS in the Mind of America*, 93.
[127]Ibid.

that have been sidelined by the health and medical establishments."[128] In an article entitled "Redefining Reproductive Rights," professor of Maternal and Child Health Trude Bennett noted that "feminist participation in coalitions for reforming the U.S. healthcare system is crucial."[129] The alliances that were springing up in America of the 1980s indeed illustrate that there was a growing awareness of the need to work together, recognising, in the words of The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, "the importance of a common struggle waged by all women."[130]

One of the first coalitions of its kind was the Women's AIDS Network (WAN), formed at the Fifth Annual National Lesbian and Gay Health Conference in Denver, Colorado, in 1983. Elaborating on their reasoning behind setting up the initiative in an August 1983 issue of *Mom Guess What*, the group noted how "as women, lesbian and heterosexual, we have much to share, much to offer, much to learn and much to teach."[131] In a document outlining their goals, WAN elaborated on their awareness of the work that is needed in order to "meet the diverse needs of women."[132] WAN was especially concerned with the education of women at risk of contracting AIDS. In November 1984, they organised a conference titled 'Women at Risk: Strategies for AIDS Prevention & Education.' Their focus was on "develop[ing] strategies … and directing HIV services and education toward women and women's needs."[133] In addition, WAN "established an emergency fund which provides assistance to women with AIDS who are having difficulty with housing, medical

[128]Erlien, "Women Act Up," 13.
[129]Trude Bennett, "Redefining Reproductive Rights," *The Women's Review of Books* 8, no. 9 (1991): 14.
[130]The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, "Loving Women: Lesbian Life and Relationships," in *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, 5th ed. (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 156.
[131]"Women's AIDS Network Formed," *Mom Guess What* no. 56, August 1983, 15, Lesbian Herstory Archives, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[132]Women's AIDS Network, "Goals Brainstorming," 1988, 3, Box 1, Folder 3, Women's AIDS Network (WAN) Records, UC San Francisco Special Collections.
[133]Mary Ellen Yates, "WAN: Women's AIDS Network," *Uncommon Voices* 12, no. 1, March 1992, 13, Gay and Lesbian Community, Support, and Spirit: Selected Newsletters and Periodicals, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.

care or other problems as a result of their health status."[134] As an organisation, they focused on making HIV related healthcare accessible for women from all social backgrounds. They noted the necessity of a "needs assessment to identify gaps" in their current activism, broadening the scope of their work beyond a singular identity marker.[135] Members of these activist groups no longer viewed themselves as strictly being a lesbian or strictly being a woman, but instead were working towards crafting a multifaceted sense of self-identity.

The 1984 revised edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* titled *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, similarly illustrated this line of development. The militant tone of "In Amerika" that focused on 'lesbian' as a highly politicised marker of identity made way for a more sedate "Loving Women." While asserting personal bodily agency by using the pronoun 'I' was still a central part of the narrative of "Loving Women," an increasing implementation of 'we' illustrated the symbolical deconstruction of the boundaries between heterosexual women and lesbian women. The authors, grouped together as the Lesbians Revisions Group, emphasised to "have written a chapter quite different in focus and tone from the original one."[136] "It is time for the lesbian community to hear our voices," they stated, "don't segregate us from our other sisters. We all need each other."[137] During the late 1980s, straight women and lesbian women were increasingly taking what had victimised them and "worked toward changing society, making ourselves stronger."[138] Activism during the preceding decade, as outlined in the first chapter, focused on forming distinctive, bounded-off identities as a counterreaction to an unwelcoming sentiment. In contrast, activism during the 1980s focused more on the process of finding strength in each other's differences, working together to attain a greater goal.

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[134]Ibid.
[135]Women's AIDS Network, "Goals Brainstorming," 3.
[136]The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, "Loving Women," 141.
[137]Ibid, 157.
[138]Jackie Winnow, "Lesbians Working on AIDS," *Out/Look* no. 5, Summer 1989, 16, Periodicals from The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ+ Archives, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.

In a chapter on the political aspect of women's health in *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, The Boston Women's Health Book Collective soberly stated that "despite our overwhelming numbers and the tremendous responsibility we carry for people's health, we have almost no power to influence the medical system."[139] This disheartened attitude of the early 1980s was not entirely uncalled for. While the women's health movement continued to make progress during these years, its results were stifled by all that had yet to be accomplished. Some historians, such as Robert O. Self in *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* have argued that as a result, a decline in feminist activism can be seen during this period.[140] When looking exclusively at strictly feminist organisations, this might be a fair observation, but in reality, the activist organisations of the 1980s were no longer as strictly bounded as this. As Laura Briggs stated in an article for *GCN*, "the AIDS movement has had the effect of making us pay more attention to our health."[141] The AIDS crisis "identified a lot of health needs," Briggs continued, "and focused attention on the crisis in the health care system in general."[142] There may have been a decline in 'traditional' feminist activism, giving the illusion that feminist activism in the 1980s was experiencing a decline. One organisation that counters this narrative and is able to illustrate the increasing intersectional activism is the ACT UP/New York's Women's Caucus, established in 1988.

In an interview with Sarah Schulman for the ACT UP Oral History Project, ACT UP member Emily Nahmanson ruminated that the Women's Caucus "was crucially important to the ACT UP community, and to the AIDS activist movement" because "they brought an

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[139]The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, "The Politics of Women and Medical Care," in *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, 5th ed. (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 556.
[140]Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York City: Hill and Wang, 2012), 321.
[141]Laura Briggs, "Organizing for Women's Health," *Gay Community News* 17, no. 45, June 1990, 1, LGBTQ Newspapers and Periodicals Collection from the Lesbian Herstory Archives, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[142]Ibid.

activist history to the group."[143] Consisting largely of lesbian members who had previously worked in other social justice movements, most noticeably the women's health movement, the ACT UP/NY WC was able to "combat alienation" within ACT UP.[144] The WC began as an informal group organising so-called 'dyke dinners' during which they would discuss how to define themselves "within ACT UP and within the crisis," according to member Liz Tracy.[145] Like Brier also notes, the experience of lesbians "with the women's health movement of the 1970s" made that they were able to "organize around [AIDS] politically."[146] The lesbian sentiment in ACT UP was thus highly beneficial for the larger goal they wanted to attain.

As a response to a January 1988 *Cosmopolitan* article, the ACT UP/NY WC organised their first political action, within ACT UP referred to as 'zaps.' ACT UP's *modus operandi* was the 'zap,' an action for which they selected a target to "register their disapproval of and anger toward."[147] These 'zaps' were particularly effective in addressing "issues needing immediate action."[148] The January 1988 'zap' was a response to psychiatrist Dr. Robert E. Gould's article titled "Reassuring News About AIDS: A Doctor Tells Why You May Not Be At Risk." In this article Gould, who was not a medical doctor, proclaimed that American women were not at risk for AIDS and did not need to use condoms. Gould received a large amount of backlash for sharing scientifically incorrect information, and "this anger was funneled into planning," stated member Jean Carlomusto.[149] This planning culminated in the Cosmo demonstration, a demonstration which garnered around 150 attendees as reported by Karen Endor for *off our backs*.[150] At the demonstration, Carlomusto and fellow ACT

[143]Emily Nahmanson, "ACT UP Oral History Project," by Sarah Schulman, 27 April 2003, 22.
[144]Carroll, *Mobilizing New York*, 150.
[145]Ibid.
[146]Jennifer Brier, "Locating Lesbian and Feminist Responses to AIDS, 1982-1984," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 1/2 (2007): 244.
[147]ACT UP/New York, "Actions & Zaps," ACT UP Historical Archive, n.d.
[148]Ibid.
[149]Jean Carlomusto, "ACT UP Oral History Project," by Sarah Schulman, 19 December 2002, 18.
[150]Karen Endor, "Cosmo Demo," *Off Our Backs* 18, no. 3 (1988): 24.

UP/NY WC member Maria Maggenti made a short film documenting the protest while at the same time educating viewers on the innerworkings of the healthcare system and how to take back control. The short film, titled *Doctors, Liars and Women: AIDS Activists Say No to Cosmo,* later became part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. What this short film was thus able to bring to the attention of the general public was the extent to which the ACT UP/NY WC focused on public health establishments and made this activism accessible to the masses. The Cosmo 'zap,' stated Carlomusto, furthermore played an important role as it "melded [the Women's Caucus] into a group."[151] It set new standards for ACT UP both in terms of scope and focus of its actions, contributing in part to the success of Stop the Church a year later.

On Sunday December 10, 1989, ACT UP disrupted Cardinal John O'Connor's Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. The 'zap' was planned in response to the Catholic church's public position on the opposition towards safe sex education to control the unfolding epidemic. O'Connor outwardly pronounced "good morality [to be] good medicine," a statement that was seen as harmful by ACT UP/NY.[152] In collaboration with the Women's Health Action and Mobilization (WHAM!), who were demonstrating the Catholic church's denial of "the basic human right to control their own bodies," ACT UP/NY organised one of its first 'die-ins.'[153] Protesters laid down in the aisles to "symbolize the thousands of people with AIDS killed by the church's hostility."[154] Mainstream media commented vehemently on the action, calling it "utterly pointless – counter-productive, in

[151]Carlomusto, "ACT UP Oral History Project," 21.
[152]Jay Blotcher, "Position Statement," 13 December 1989, Box 15, Folder 1, ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York Public Library, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[153]Jay Blotcher and Mary Anne Staniszewski, "AIDS/Pro-Choice Activists Demonstrate at New York's St. Patrick," 10 December 1989, Box 15, Folder 1, ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York Public Library, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[154]Ibid.

fact,"[155] and voicing "widespread disapproval of ACT UP/NY's effort to destroy the freedom of worship of the parishioners of St. Patrick's."[156] Fellow LGBTQ+ rights organisations such as the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights also condemned the 'zap,' stating how they were "appalled that people were stopped from worshipping."[157] ACT UP/NY, however, showed no remorse, and continued their call for "Cardinal John O'Connor [to be] out of sexual politics."[158] Stop the Church's combative and to some inappropriate nature were innate to ACT UP/NY's strategies at the time. As noted in their 1989 Position Statement in response to the backlash, "ACT UP will never be silent – not in the streets, not in the capital, and not even in the Church itself."[159]

Besides explicitly activist 'zaps,' the ACT UP/NY WC also actively published several publications compiled and edited by The ACT UP/New York Women and AIDS Book Group. Their most notable work was the 1990 *Women, AIDS, and Activism*, which was heralded for its "articulate and non-judgemental" tone of voice.[160] The book, stated Kent Sandstrom in a review for *Signs*, was able to illustrate "the relationship between a tiny virus and the immense cultural shifts" it brought about.[161] The analyses and strategies presented in the book were able to, according to Sandstrom, enable women to "more effectively resist those forces that oppress them."[162] In publishing these materials, the ACT UP/NY WC was indeed able to create what Brier terms a "community approach to knowledge."[163] What was

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[155]James P. Willse, "Civil Disobedience vs. Uncivilized Behavior," *Daily News*, 12 December 1989, 28, Box 15, Folder 1, ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York Public Library, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[156]Jerry Nachman, "Sacrilege in St. Pat's," *New York Post*, 12 December 1989, 26, Box 15, Folder 1, ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York Public Library, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[157]"Unjoyful Noise," *Newsday*, 12 December 1989, Box 15, Folder 1, ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York Public Library, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[158]"No Apology for St. Pat's Protest," *New York Post*, 14 December 1989, 14, Box 15, Folder 1, ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York Public Library, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[159]Blotcher, "Position Statement," 30.
[160]James E. Van Buskirk, "Women, Aids, and Activism Review," *Library Journal* 115, no. 21 (December 1990): 144.
[161]Kent Sandstrom, "Review," *Signs* 18, no. 2 (1993): 466.
[162]Ibid, 468.
[163]Brier, *Infectious Ideas*, 14.

valuable to both the women's movement and lesbian feminist activism was the act of taking back control of one's own health more broadly, and one's own body more specifically. Both movements "value what individuals know to be true of their bodies," exposing the concern of body politics as vital to both movements.[164] Similarly to the work done by The Boston's Women's Health Book Collective in *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, the communal 'we' played a central role in the narrative. Through shaping their rhetoric to be grammatically inclusive, The ACT UP/New York Women and AIDS Book Group was also emphasising the unification of all women across all sexualities, capturing the disposition of the time.

Healthcare clinics catered specifically to lesbian women started to be set up during the late 1980s. The Community Health Project (CHP) was set up in 1983 in New York City, and while its medical director Dr. Barbara Starrett voiced hopes that "women will be drawn to Community Health Project as patients and volunteers," a women's programme did not yet exist.[165] It took five more years until Risa Denenberg, nurse and active ACT UP member, set up a programme specifically aimed at women at the centre in February 1988. Denenberg and her coordinator Dana Greene started organising yearly lesbian health fairs at CHP, centralising the importance of awareness of one's own body and healthcare.[166] "Growth demands change," read the announcement of CHP's creation, and this indeed proved true.[167]

The ACT UP/NY WC specifically and lesbian AIDS activists more broadly were thus able to achieve more thanks to their collaborative efforts from feminists coming from the women's health movement. As Jackie Winnow stated in a 1989 issue of *Out/Look*, activist organisations became "dynamic forces for social change" thanks to the presence of lesbians

[164]Hamilton, "Women in A.I.D.S. Activism," 5.
[165]Kestal Phillips, "Community Health Project: Together Again For the First Time," *The Connection*, 9 November 1983, 16, LGBTQ Newspapers and Periodicals Collection from the Lesbian Herstory Archives, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[166]Risa Denenberg, "ACT UP Oral History Project," by Sarah Schulman, 11 July 2008, 28.
[167]Phillips, "Community Health Project," 16.

within these movements.[168] Winnow explained how lesbians were able to emphasise the necessity of addressing homophobia in the women's movement and sexism in the LGBTQ+ movement, igniting change in movements that "would have remained one-dimensional reform movements."[169] When looking at the increasing participation between lesbian feminist activism and other organisations or caucuses as compared to the 1970s, it is also essential to look at the development in the relationships between gay men and lesbian women.

In a 1988 article for *off our backs,* Denise Kulp highlighted a common worry among women involved in activism that "there seems to be a concern that women, feminists, lesbians especially, are going to forget about doing 'our' own work and give most of our energy to gay men."[170] Kulp continued by noting how there is a lot of "anger and resentment" within the movement and "a belief that when it turns out that lesbians are up against a wall, gay men will just walk away and forget all about us."[171] What Kulp however deemed the culprit of this, was the fact that "we haven't tried to engage them in our struggle, and they haven't had a clue about how to engage us in theirs."[172] Amy Hamilton noted that "women end up doing work on all the AIDS issues, while men do work only on the issues related to men," but perhaps this was not a fair way to look at the situation at hand.[173] There was still a definite rift between lesbian women and gay men during the late 1980s, something which was only being reinforced by a lack of giving the other a fair shot at collaboration. As collaborative actions by different caucuses and activist organisations grew, this "sense of connection" eventually dawned in the early 1990s, with organisations such as the WHAM!

[168]Winnow, "Lesbians Working on AIDS," 12.
[169]Ibid, 11.
[170]Denise Kulp, "On Working with My Brothers: Why a Lesbian Does AIDS Work," *Off Our Backs* 18, no. 8 (1988): 22.
[171]Ibid.
[172]Ibid.
[173]Hamilton, "Women in A.I.D.S. Activism," 4.

illustrating how it was possible to break down the barriers between gay men and lesbian women.[174]

In July of 1988, the ACT UP NY/WC organised a 'zap' on what Wolfe at the time described to be "the bastion of male heterosexuality," namely the Shea Stadium in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, Queens.[175] At Shea Stadium, the gay men and lesbian women in ACT UP joined forces to draw attention to the role of straight men in the epidemic, affirming the lack of responsibility they had been taking with regards to heterosexual transmission. At a Mets-Astro home game coincidentally on Women and AIDS Day, ACT UP bought three sets of 40 seats in each part of the stadium. They unfurled banners with slogans such as "AIDS is Not a Ball Game; Don't Balk At Safer Sex; Strike Out AIDS" as the opposing team started to bat, creating a call-and-response.[176] While not all of those present were appreciative of the 'zap,' with baseball fans calling the action "totally inappropriate," the Shea Stadium demonstration was successful in placing the work the Women's Caucus was doing on the map.[177] As Anne-Christine d'Adesky noted in an *In These Times* article reporting on the action, this 'zap' showed that ACT UP increasingly was becoming "savvy about the message being the medium, and tailored it to fit."[178] The tactics the group were employing were changing, noted also Thomas Morgan in his profile of ACT UP for *The New York Times*. He observed a "growing sophistication," with its tactics moving more towards "mainstream forms of protest."[179] These forms of protest, mainly employed by the Women's Caucus, were

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[174]Carroll, *Mobilizing New York*, 133.
[175]David France, "ACT UP Fires Up," *Village Voice*, 3 May 1988, 36, Box 134, Folder 21, ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York Public Library, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[176]Maxine Wolfe, "ACT UP Oral History Project," by Sarah Schulman, 19 February 2004, 66.
[177]Eloise Salholz and Peter McKillop, "Acting Up to Fight AIDS: A Group's Angry Tactics," *Newsweek*, 6 June 1988, 42, Box 134, Folder 21, ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York Public Library, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[178]Anne-Christine d'Adesky, "ACT UP's Unruly Democratic Spirit," *These Times*, 20 August 1988, Box 134, Folder 22, ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York Public Library, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[179]Thomas Morgan, "Mainstream Strategy for AIDS Group," *The New York Times*, 22 July 1988, 4, *The New York Times Archives*.

effective in connecting lesbian issues to the women's health movement, yet also led to divisions within the organisation. The Shea Stadium action was successful in drawing attention to the work the Women's Caucus was doing, as Wolfe also described, yet this did not come unchallenged.[180] This will be further explored further in the final chapter.

In short, the establishment of new organisations and caucuses spearheaded by lesbian women in order to combat the unfolding epidemic cannot be understood without looking at where these women came from. Having had their start in movements of the preceding decades, lesbian women were often able to organise themselves politically effectively. In charting the history of these movements during the 1980s, starting with the founding of WAN in 1983 and the work done by The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, this chapter has looked at the efforts from the ACT UP/NY WC in particular to explain how straight feminists and lesbian feminists came together to fight a common goal. These women came together in a time of crisis, creating "models as a community" in order to combat the adversity presented by the healthcare system.[181] The third and final chapter will build on these ideas, looking at the organisations that grew out of the ACT UP/NY WC and the milestones they achieved. What this final chapter will importantly add to the narrative, however, is that this growth in lesbian AIDS activism did not come unchallenged. While it ultimately still reframes and situates AIDS as "an intersectional women's health issue," it also considers the consequences of collaborative activism coming from a burgeoning feminist movement.[182]

[180]Wolfe, "ACT UP Oral History Project," 71.
[181]Winnow, "Lesbians Working on AIDS," 13.
[182]Day, *In Her Hands*, 107.

Chapter Three

The Centre Cannot Hold

In April 1991, the AIDS Clinical Trials Group (ACTG) started to recruit HIV-positive pregnant women in New Jersey for a new landmark study, titled ACTG 076. The central aim of the study was to determine to what extent zidovudine or azidothymidine, known to the general public as AZT, would be able to prevent "vertical HIV transmission," meaning transmission during pregnancy, birth, or breast feeding.[183] During the trial's run, critiques questioning the power effects of its scientific discourse were far-reaching. ACT UP/NY, which in its four years of existence had at that point garnered a large, diverse membership, proved one of the loudest voices in the debate surrounding ACTG 076. Writing in the ACT UP/NY Women & AIDS Book Group's *Women, AIDS & Activism*, Risa Denenberg pointed out that "HIV-positive women are a focus for some of the most deep-seated value judgments about AIDS."[184] State implemented HIV testing of pregnant women already represented "a value of fetus over woman,"[185] and this trial was expected to only continue pushing the societal division of "the 'innocent' versus 'guilty' to the extreme."[186]

Some groups in ACT UP were "concerned because this trial is looking primarily at the health of the fetus and not the mother," noted member Mary Pickert.[187] Pickert here identified an important sentiment, namely how, as opposed to the ethos practiced in the women's health movement, AIDS non-profit organisations often impaired the feminist approaches to the self-determination of the patient. In addition, notes historian Sarah

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[183]Eli Manning, "The Bio/Necropolitics of ACTG 076: Lessons from Pregnant Women of Colour Living with HIV for Treatment for Prevention in the Twenty-First Century," *Somatechnics* 10, no. 2 (2020): 234.
[184]The ACT UP/New York Women and AIDS Book Group, *Women, AIDS, and Activism*, ed. Marion Banzhaf et al. (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 159.
[185]Ibid, 160.
[186]Ibid, 159.
[187]Sheila Moreland, "New Studies, New Treatments Raise Questions and Hope," *New Directions for Women* 21, no. 2, April 1992, 5, Herstory Archive: Feminist Newspapers, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.

Schulman, part of ACT UP voiced worries about issues such as the requirement of a placebo, resistance of the mother to future treatments, and the eligibility for healthcare.[188]

For others in ACT UP/NY, most notably Treatment & Data (T&D), the trial was seen as the beginning of a new chapter, one in which governmental collaboration in the medical field would win ground for AIDS activism. To T&D, centralising, in the words of key-member Mark Harrington, "seeking pharmaceutical funds for community-based AIDS treatment research" was of utmost importance.[189] Fellow T&D member David Barr explained that T&D's close collaboration with the government came not from a place of hunger for power. Instead, they felt, the closer they were to power, the more they "could help themselves stay alive."[190]

In short, the debates surrounding the trial were, at the core, about body politics and reproductive justice. ACTG 076 is therefore often considered to be the straw that broke the camel's back, the point after which the political group ACT UP slowly broke off into smaller entities. This chapter therefore looks at the period leading up to, during, and immediately after the trial, looking at how increased collaborative activism between the women's movement and AIDS activism declined and fractured. This chapter explores the trough that followed the so-called activist crest of the 1980s and illustrates what effect this had on the activism waged by lesbian AIDS activists and the women's movement in terms of women's health issues.

In July 1991, following the successful Stop the Church demonstration of December 1989, a group of activists from ACT UP/NY again joined women's health organisation WHAM!, this time on a ferry ride to the Statue of Liberty. Having reached Liberty Island, the

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[188]Sarah Schulman, *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993* (New York City: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021), 533.
[189]Mark Harrington, "A Fifth Anniversary Letter to ACT UP," 9 March 1992, Box 9, Folder 1, ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York Public Library, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[190]Schulman, *Let the Record Show*, 533.

group opened the windows in the top of the statue using keys and unfurled a banner over Lady Liberty's face, reading 'No Choice, No Liberty.' This so-called 'gag' of Lady Liberty was designed, explained spokeswoman Karen Ramspacher in *The Gainesville*, to complement the way in which the "federal government is gagging women's rights."[191]

The 'gag rule' Ramspacher referred to is the Supreme Court's decision in a First Amendment case, *Rust v. Sullivan*, which "upheld a Bush Administration policy prohibiting women from receiving information about abortion from clinics that receive federal funds."[192] On a fact sheet published by WHAM!, they stated how the "gag rule is part of the Bush-endorsed effort to take away all women's right to choose."[193] In collaborating with WHAM! on this action, ACT UP/NY positioned themselves as militantly pro-choice. This, according to ACT UP member Steve Quester, was a "no-brainer."[194] For ACT UP/NY, explained Quester, reproductive rights and AIDS activism were "the same issue, it's about control over our bodies."[195]

Quester's retelling of ACT UP's history tells part of the story, but not all members shared his understanding of the collaborative activism. The joint actions of the 1989-1991 period put ACT UP/NY in the position of functioning like "an affinity group of WHAM!"[196] Affinity groups within ACT UP consisted of a handful of members who formed a self-sufficient support system meant to carry out activist actions. Not everyone in ACT UP had to have the same opinion on issues such as reproductive rights, since not everyone was working on the same issues. During the early 1990s, explained Zoe Leonard, affinity groups increasingly started to "[connect] the work that ACT UP was doing to feminist work and to

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[191]"Abortion Rights Activists 'Gag' Statue of Liberty," *The Gainesville*, 30 July 1991, 4A, *Google News*.
[192]Rosemary Dempsey, "Feminists Fight the Backlash," *Gay Community News* 19, no. 24, January 1992, 3, LGBTQ Newspapers and Periodicals Collection from the Lesbian Herstory Archives, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[193]WHAM!, "Don't Let George Bush Gag Women's Rights!" 1989, Box 112, Folder 6, ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York Public Library, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[194]Steve Quester, "ACT UP Oral History Project," by Sarah Schulman, 17 January 2004, 16.
[195]Ibid.
[196]Ibid.

work around women's bodies," since this was not being done as actively by ACT UP as a whole.[197] While ACT UP as a whole was initially concerning itself with issues surrounding reproductive rights, this shifted as affinity groups within ACT UP sprung up, as Quester explained. At that point, "abortion completely fell off of ACT UP's agenda," and those wishing to connect AIDS activism with reproductive rights politics were dealt a difficult hand.[198]

Working as a lawyer at a Hell's Kitchen federal poverty centre in the late 1980s, Terry McGovern experienced this injustice first-hand. Representing women who had been referred to her by the Women's Prison Association, McGovern observed the discriminatory fate of many female clients. These women, explained McGovern in an interview with Schulman for the ACT UP Oral History Project, "couldn't qualify for benefits because [their files] said, HIV-positive, not AIDS."[199] Using the CDC's definition, which had last been revised in 1987, doctors effectively denied women living with HIV the benefits that AIDS activists had worked to secure in the 1980s. These women did not fall under the CDC's definition of people with AIDS, because this definition was created based on the progression of the virus in men, not encompassing the development of the virus in women.

In 1989, McGovern approached ACT UP, an organisation which had been voicing similar concerns regarding the narrow CDC definition. In a meeting held on December 21, 1989, between the Director of the CDC James O. Mason and ACT UP, ACT UP stated that the current definition was "sexist, racist, and classist."[200] The CDC agreed that a change had to be made, but the reality was that no immediate plans were clearly provided. "The CDC is obviously not committed to ending this crisis," noted an ACT UP representative in a January

[197]Zoe Leonard, "ACT UP Oral History Project," by Sarah Schulman, 13 January 2010, 52.
[198]Quester, "ACT UP Oral History Project, " 16.
[199]Terry McGovern, "ACT UP Oral History Project, " by Sarah Schulman, 25 May 2007, 15.
[200]Linda Wong, "Women Excluded from CDC AIDS Definition," *Sojourner* 17, no. 7, March 1992, 12, Herstory Archive: Feminist Newspapers, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.

1990 article in *Southern Voice.*[201] "It seeks only information which supports its narrow political assumptions and positions," they continued, highlighting the aforementioned discriminatory nature of the definition and the organisation responsible.

Despite the work done in the 1980s, AIDS was thus, in practice, still not being fully recognised as a women's health issue. Women living with HIV/AIDS, states Boehmer, were still being positioned as having a "secondary status."[202] "Diversity in identity practices is attainable," notes Boehmer, but "identity practices are subject to change, and such change expresses a movement's awareness to aligning the movement's identity practices with its collective identity."[203] While lesbian AIDS activists and members of the women's movement found each other through the women's health movement in the era prior, the outward presentation of a fully unified front was starting to show its cracks.

Out of this dissatisfaction grew one of the largest actions undertaken by the ACT UP/NY WC, namely the CDC Definition Project. The CDC Working Group, consisting largely of members of the Women's Caucus and spearheaded by Tracy Morgan and Maxine Wolfe, set up a series of protests to present demands "that all persons from all affected communities be included in discussions to revise HIV terminology, the development of new epidemiology, and the identification of HIV related opportunistic infections."[204] The first two protests took place on January 8 and 9, 1990, at the CDC Headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. The Working Group presented "a detailed list of demands for expanding its epidemiological definitions, which now merely records AIDS cases."[205] Wolfe explained how the two-day direct action solidified the power of the Women's Caucus within ACT UP, illustrating the

[201]"CDC's Definition of AIDS to Be Challenged at Jan. 9 Demonstration," *Southern Voice* 2, no. 23, 4 January 1990, 19, LGBTQ Newspapers and Periodicals Collection from the Lesbian Herstory Archives, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[202]Boehmer, *The Personal and the Political*, 81.
[203]Ibid, 125.
[204]"CDC's Definition of AIDS to Be Challenged at Jan. 9 Demonstration," 19.
[205]"Activists Plan Two Days of Protest in Atlanta," *Sappho's Isle* 2, no. 12, December 1989, 16, LGBTQ Newspapers and Periodicals Collection from the Lesbian Herstory Archives, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.

reputability of the group.[206] As Day describes, the Working Group implemented a joint strategy of "combining direct-action activism, media attention, and litigation," which continuously "forced the CDC back to the negotiating table."[207]

On February 18, 1992, the Working Group set up an action that garnered the most attention they as a collective had until thus far received. Entering a meeting in Washington convened by the American Public Health Association (APHA), the Working Group handcuffed themselves to the people who remained seated after their call to leave in protest of the meeting. Those present did not agree to what Jeff Levi of the AIDS Action Council termed the "dictates of ACT UP," resulting in them being handcuffed to the protest activists.[208] Commenting upon the reasoning behind their mode of protesting and demonstrating, ACT UP member Nancy Brooks Brody noted that "the CDC's methods have always isolated people, and it's not an isolated disease."[209]

A year later, the CDC, after four years of campaigning by the Working Group, broadened the definition to include, among other things, "pulmonary tuberculosis, recurrent pneumonia, and invasive cervical cancer."[210] While the Women's Caucus finally attained this victory for women with AIDS, the 'woman issue' in ACT UP was becoming a divisive question.

At the same time that the Working Group enacted its direct-action strategies to expand the CDC definition, tensions were rising within ACT UP/NY with regards to the aforementioned 076 clinical trial. Members of the Women's Caucus voiced concerns about to what extent the control over their own health care for HIV infected women was taken into

[206]Wolfe, "ACT UP Oral History Project," 88.
[207]Day, *In Her Hands*, 33.
[208]Bree Scott-Hartland, "In Bad Faith," *PWA (People With AIDS) Newsline* no. 75, April 1992, 9, LGBTQ Newspapers and Periodicals Collection from the Lesbian Herstory Archives, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[209]Deborah Schwartz, "Act Up/N.Y. Targets CDC," *Gay Community News* 18, no. 43, 26 June 1991, 3, LGBTQ Newspapers and Periodicals Collection from the Lesbian Herstory Archives, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[210]Kenneth G. Castro et al., "1993 Revised Classification System for HIV Infection and Expanded Surveillance Case Definition for AIDS Among Adolescents and Adults" (Centers for Disease Control, 18 December 1992).

account. Writing in the *Women Alive Newsletter*, Linda Meredith and Maxine Wolfe attested that "'Saving Babies' makes good headlines out of bad science," deeming the conclusions of the trial scientifically unsound and accusing the method of disregarding the mother's health.[211] In addition, the subjects of the trial were primarily women of colour. Women of colour were now in the same position that white, middle-class gay men had been in less than a decade prior. They were dependent on a trial to gain access to medication that could potentially be ineffective or even toxic. After fighting for patient self-determination in the late 1980s, the HIV-positive women participating in ACTG 076 were now subjected to the same injustices in this regard as white, middle-class gay men were mere years before.

In 1991, ACT UP/NY WC member and WHAM! founder Tracy Morgan thus proposed a six-month moratorium on all negotiations with the federal government in an attempt to ease tensions within ACT UP. Morgan explained that the proposal of the moratorium grew out of an increased "micro-splitting of things and micro-abandonments and micro turning the back."[212] During a Women and AIDS conference in Washington, D.C., Harrington met with Tony Fauci, head of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Marion Banzhaf recalled that while women from ACT UP were demonstrating outside of the NIH offices about the lack of attention to women's issues in the epidemic, one of their own members was meeting with the head of said organisation.[213] The floor, including Morgan's collaborator Wolfe, ultimately voted down the proposal for a moratorium. While Banzhaf remembered the moratorium as a blanket ban to all meetings with government officials, Schulman in *Let the Record Show* explains the moratorium to be less all-encompassing:

> Like Mark, most of the people I interviewed about the split mistakenly remembered "The Moratorium" as a halt on all meetings between ACT UP and the government.

[211]Linda Meredith and Maxine Wolfe, "Who Makes National Health Policy: The Government or Burroughs Wellcome?" *Women Alive Newsletter*, 1995, 14, Lesbian Herstory Archives, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[212]Tracy Morgan, "ACT UP Oral History Project," by Sarah Schulman, 12 October 2012, 50.
[213]Marion Banzhaf, "ACT UP Oral History Project," by Sarah Schulman, 18 April 2007, 70.

> But, actually, by the time it came to the floor for a vote, it was a halt on all meetings *about women* without group approval. Technically, this would not have affected T&D because they were not meeting with the government about women, and in a sense, the proposal was a recognition of defeat by the people working on women-with-AIDS issues, trying to systematize some kind of control of their own territory. As often happens, reality is too complex, and a false but easier to remember version of a moratorium proposal as punitive and sprawling has substituted for the historical reality.[214]

While most interviewees remembered this moratorium as the key event which eventually led to T&D's split from ACT UP, Schulman's memory differs. For oral historians, conflicting narratives and discrepancies occur frequently. The oral narratives in the ACT UP Oral History Project may depart from the record, but additional material to corroborate one story over another does not exist in this case. Memory is mutable, and whether the conflicts between T&D and ACT UP are the key event that led to the Split cannot be surely known. What is cemented as a critical moment in ACT UP's history, however, is that T&D split from ACT UP to form Treatment Action Group (TAG) in January 1992.

ACT UP's internal war "cut to the heart of the evolving definition of AIDS activism," illustrating the difficulties the political group was facing in a changing socio-political landscape.[215] Women's health organisations such as The Boston Women's Health Book Collective were in their own way grappling with this changing landscape. 'Relationships with Women' in *Our Bodies, Ourselves for the New Century* emphasised how their "diversity has never been more apparent" in this new socio-political climate.[216] With this diversity, they rightly observed, came difference: "'our community' transforms into 'our communities,' we

[214]Schulman, *Let the Record Show*, 532.
[215]Gabriel Rotello, "A House Divided," *OutWeek* no. 94, 17 April 1991, 4, *OutWeek* Magazine Internet Archive.
[216]The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, "Relationships with Women," in *Our Bodies, Ourselves for the New Century*, 7th ed. (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 201.

need to recognize that not all l/b/t women have the same experiences or concerns."[217] What this collapse of the I/We divide once again demonstrates is the necessity of inclusionary politics, but also an understanding that a collective effort is not always what is needed. A splintering within a movement can have a positive effect, with a better focus on the most pressing issues as a result.

This realisation was dawning in ACT UP/NY as well. At a San Francisco treatment conference two months after the failed moratorium, Peter Staley, member of T&D, gave a speech titled "ACT UP: Past, Present and Future." In this speech, Staley pointed out the rift that had formed "between those of us who joined as a matter of survival and those who joined seeking a power base from which their social activism could be advanced."[218] Ann Northrop explained how many members of ACT UP indeed observed the rift to be developing along these lines. "Gay white men," stated Northrop, "were there for their own personal survival," while most members of the Women's Caucus were active because they saw "the connections and … issues across various social movements over a period of time."[219]

Over the course of the early 1990s, sentiments in ACT UP had changed, and there was an increasing worry that broadening the scope of activism was taking resources away from its original goals. As Wolfe stated, "there was a grouping of men who actually believed that anything that we did about women took away from them."[220] The CDC Working Group, for example, called for a change in "tracking HIV transmission from the current tracking by identity (e.g. 'lesbian' or 'man to man') to tracking by behaviour (e.g. 'cunnilingus' or 'unprotected anal intercourse')."[221] Intersectionality and the ways in which several social justice movements interacted seemed to clash with the structure of ACT UP practiced by,

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[217]Ibid.
[218]Peter Staley, "ACT UP: Past, Present and Future," 1991, Box 119, Folder 4, ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York Public Library, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[219]Ann Northrop, "ACT UP Oral History Project," by Sarah Schulman, 28 May 2003, 14.
[220]Wolfe, "ACT UP Oral History Project," 96.
[221]Schwartz, "Act Up/N.Y. Targets CDC," 3.

among other groups, T&D. As Morgan explained, the Women's Caucus was employing grassroots tactics, whereas T&D was getting "more inside," causing a conflict between these two approaches.[222] Factions of the AIDS movement were starting to diversify, and the old structures of ACT UP were no longer sufficing. In the women's health movement, this sentiment of having to move with a changing society was more widely accepted.

The lesbian women in AIDS activist circles were facing a similar sense of lack of representation as they had with regards to straight feminists in the 1970s. The lesbian activists had always continued to centralise their "political critique of science as a historically sexist enterprise," and this eventually caused cracks to form in the AIDS activist movement as a whole.[223] Similar to the developments discussed in Chapter One, "the combination of tactical differences with ideological and personal hostility" undermined the lesbian feminist activism, sparking the creation of new groups in which their norms and values would remain centralised.[224]

Over the course of the early 1990s, several organisations that grew out of ACT UP/NY started appearing as a form of counterculture. Queer Nation, noted Zoe Leonard, was a clear example of the longing to restructure, wanting to contribute towards the shift from a categorical identity to human behaviour. Established in March 1990, Queer Nation grew out of ACT UP and was created in response to the lack of diversity observed by many in ACT UP. Queer Nation wanted to abandon the essentialism of gay liberation movements where constructing an identity with an "accompanying ideology" was a main focus point.[225] Members of Queer Nation such as Alan Klein have instead stated that part of the appeal was the possibility to "escape the bureaucracy" of ACT UP.[226] The confrontational tactics and

[222]Morgan, "ACT UP Oral History Project," 46.
[223]Brier, *Infectious Ideas*, 175.
[224]Rotello, "A House Divided," 4.
[225]Anthony R. Slagle, "In Defense of Queer Nation: From Identity Politics to a Politics of Difference," *Western Journal of Communication* 59, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 87.
[226]Alan Klein, "ACT UP Oral History Project," by Sarah Schulman, 7 May 2015, 28.

practice of 'outings' tackled by Queer Nation were felt to be insurmountable in ACT UP, a political group that, according to its previous members, was slowly losing its grassroots mentality. ACT UP had become "complicit in the evils of the federal approach to AIDS," setting off the creation of renewed countercultures.[227]

Similarly to Queer Nation, The Lesbian Avengers was founded in 1992 for those who were "fed up with the single minded concentration on gay male issues and the neglect of lesbian concerns."[228] The Lesbian Avengers was a direct-action, activist group whose central role was to "teach lesbians how to organize and how to think politically and have the confidence to move ahead with political expediency."[229] From their 1993 *Dyke Manifesto*, it becomes clear that one of their main goals was to prepare lesbians for adequately organising themselves in years to come. "Folk-wisdom," stated Valerie Kameya in an article on The Lesbian Avengers in *Canadian Women Studies*, "posits that the lifetime [of direct-action groups] is three years before they become ineffective and die out."[230] Perhaps The Lesbian Avengers were in some regards aware of this fate, and thus tried to organise around it. In focusing on being a "catalyst in the formation of a counterculture," The Lesbian Avengers attempted to set the future generation up for success. This sense of immediacy is also present in fierce pussy, a similar lesbian-orientated direct-action group which grew out of ACT UP shortly after The Split. fierce pussy noted how they "didn't want to sit around in a meeting talking endlessly about the correct language. We wanted it to be very quick."[231]

While all three political groups no longer exist in the same way as they did in the early 1990s, they are still active in some capacity and were able to bring about a long-lasting

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[227]Rotello, "A House Divided," 4.
[228]Gabrielle Antolovich, "Lesbian Avengers," *Entre Nous*, August 1994, 1, Gay and Lesbian Politics and Social Activism: Selected Newsletters and Periodicals, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[229]Lesbian Avengers, "Dyke Manifesto," 1993, Alabama Forum Records, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections.
[230]Valerie Kameya, "The Lesbian Avengers Fight Back," *Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers de La Femme* 16, no. 2 (1996): 100.
[231]Jennifer K. Favorite and Marisa Lerer, "Out In the Streets: An Interview with Fierce Pussy," *Public Art Dialogue* 10, no. 1 (2020): 30.

impact. The Lesbian Avengers, for example, organised the first self-proclaimed dyke march in Washington, D.C., on April 24, 1993. Their march "made a special effort to be inclusive of bisexuals and transsexuals," and was representative of the intersectional turn which activism at the time seemed to be taking.[232] The march's mission statement "called for the right to control our bodies," which included, among other things, reproductive freedom and choice and an increase in funding for AIDS.[233]

In short, this chapter has illustrated how the 1992 Split of ACT UP/NY was representative of the fissure between AIDS activism and the women's health movement. Mere years after successfully establishing a Women's Caucus, the women active found that they were unable to fight for their causes in the structure of a larger political group. The groups that grew out of the split, however, illustrate how feminist methodologies and insights were still being used to advocate for body politics. As Dennis Altman rightly predicts in *AIDS in the Mind of America*, "AIDS is said to both have increased a sense of community between gay men and lesbians and to have sharpened the divisions."[234] The conclusion of this thesis sheds light on the question of why it is still relevant to observe these waves in collaboration, even if some political groups ultimately went their own way. It outlines the importance of intersectional activism waged by lesbian AIDS activists and the women's movement, how it has the power to challenge gender as a vector of discrimination, and how this can challenge society's dismissal of women's demands.

[232]Antonia Kao, "We're Here, We're Queer... But What Do We Want?" *Sojourner* 21, no. 10, June 1993, 7, Herstory Archive: Feminist Newspapers, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.
[233]Ibid.
[234]Altman, *AIDS in the Mind of America*, 94.

Conclusion

A Continuing Conversation

Forty-three years after the initial reporting on the epidemic in *The New York Times*, an approximate 37,500,000 adults are living with HIV/AIDS worldwide, of which over 20,000,000 identify as woman.[235] In some countries, HIV/AIDS remains the leading cause of death in the 21st century.[236] AIDS activism thus by no means ends at the final words of Chapter Three of this thesis. What this thesis has done is contribute to an existing body of scholarship on a virus that is still highly stigmatised and of which large parts of its history remain untold. In continuing to study the history and trajectory of HIV/AIDS, awareness will continue to grow, and the forgotten and omitted parts of history will be started to be accounted for.

This thesis has looked at how the construction of the Other within identity subgroups has influenced the activism waged by a variety of political groups within the women's movement and the LGBTQ+ movement. It has looked specifically at how the relationship between lesbian and gay activists and the women's movement was influenced by and influenced the unfolding AIDS epidemic in the U.S., finding its root in the women's health movement. This thesis set out to answer the question of how this process of othering influenced the ways in which these movements were in conversation and conflict with each other, considering moments of reconciliation and dissension between genders and sexualities.

Chapter One titled "Women's Liberation is a Lesbian Plot" started in a period of lesbian separatism. Through exploring the developments that led to this mode of separatist thinking, the position of lesbian feminists in the 1970s was considered. It approached the women's health movement as a place where the othering on the basis of identity markers was

[235]"HIV Statistics, Globally and by WHO Region, 2023," World Health Organization, 2023.
[236]Ibid.

being overcome, positioning the women's movement and the lesbian feminist movement at the dawn of forming a unified front in the fight over control of their bodies.

In Chapter Two, "Do Not Underestimate the Level of Anger That Lives Here," the focus was on the exploration of the new organisations and caucuses that were being created during the early years of the epidemic. In looking specifically at the role of lesbian women and relating this to the history of the women's movement explored in the previous chapter, Chapter Two showed how women across all sexualities started to come together in the women's health movement to take control over their own healthcare and bodies.

The final chapter, titled "The Centre Cannot Hold," both built on and moved away from the narrative outlined in Chapter Two. It showed how lesbian women working in AIDS activism again grappled with difficulties, which created a rift between AIDS activism and the women's health movement. While a split occurred, this chapter also illustrated that feminist methodologies and insights continued to be important in the political groups that grew out of the schism.

In first exploring the animosities that were present in these groups during the late 1960s and 1970s in Chapter One, this thesis approached the period of the 1980s in less definitive terms. In doing so, it has found that the collaborative efforts of the 1980s are less conclusive than scholars such as Carroll have previously stated. What this thesis is therefore able to add to the existing scholarship is the link between the collaboration of the 1980s and the fragmentations of the movement during the 1990s as explored in Chapter Three. It raises questions of continuity or the lack thereof, but most importantly breaks open the narrative that collaboration should always be the end goal. This thesis has created a de-centralised history where central members of big grassroots political groups such as ACT UP NY are not painted as martyrs. This does not mean that their achievements should be diminished, as Chapter Two clearly illustrates, but a parting should not always be taken negatively. This

thesis has observed a cease in othering after a moment of unification in the 1980s. While both movements eventually started to steer away from a largely collaborative mode of activism, othering was no longer an incentive of this. Instead, a gateway for a reconciliation between genders and sexualities was provided, leading to a more constructive form of activism.

Access to healthcare and the control over one's own body to this day remain highly politicised issues. Fragmentation, as this thesis has shown, can result from separation based on identity markers. While this does not have to be a negative development, this thesis has also shown that the formation of broader coalitions can be relevant on the level of activism. In the 21st century, this continues to inform, albeit subconsciously, healthcare activism more broadly and that of epidemics more specifically. Activism in the 21st century can benefit from broader coalitions, even if in the end groups continue to fight for their own cause.

Over the course of writing this thesis, several key issues arose, which will now be addressed here. As the Introduction already notes, exclusionary politics with regards to trans people play an important role in the conversations surrounding the long history of feminist health care practices. The lessons the exclusion and disregarding of trans people from these political groups teaches us are important at a time where issues regarding gender are still highly politicised. Studies such as Barry Reay's 2020 book *Trans America: A Counter-History* should thus be considered when working on topics such as this. The exploration of the relationship between trans activism and healthcare during the AIDS epidemic would be a beneficial contribution to the field, but could not be attained in this thesis due to its scope.

When considering the framework employed in this thesis, it should be taken into account that feminism at the time was a predominantly white and middle-class movement. While this thesis has made efforts to use the feminist lens in an intersectional manner, the movement in itself, especially during the period explored in Chapter One, was overwhelmingly white and middle-class. In addition, the background of the lesbian women

working in AIDS activism was much more varied than their involvement with the women's health movement alone. They often had experience in the civil rights movement, and their race and class were important parts of their identity as well. The role of sexuality cannot be fully understood without looking at these other identity markers, and the role of women of colour in the narrative outlined here in particular needs to be considered in future research.

Practically, during the process of writing this thesis the unavailability of several archives put constraints on the research. The missing digitalisation of the WHAM! (Women's Health Action and Mobilization) Records of the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at the New York University Library especially inhibited further inclusion of this organisation into the thesis. While other materials produced by and about the group could be accessed elsewhere, its main production and most importantly its organisational files could not be accessed. A reliance on Carroll's work done in these archives was thus necessary, providing only a selective account of the organisation.

As outlined in the Introduction, this thesis relies heavily on ego-documents to provide a social historical account of the relationship between the two movements. As Mary Lindemann notes in her contribution to the first volume of the *Encyclopaedia of European Social History*, ego-documents endow "ordinary lives with agency, dignity, and texture."[237] It is especially effective, notes Lindemann, in illustrating how the "rigid categories constructed by historians" are "less confining in practice."[238] While these sources are incredibly valuable when studying the innerworkings of political grassroots organisations and its rhetoric, it should be guarded that they are not used as a singular, factual archival source. In order to attempt to combat this criticism, this thesis also includes several materials from outside the target group, such as *Daily News*, *Newsweek*, and most notably *The New York Times*. ACT

[237]Mary Lindemann, "Sources of Social History," in *Encyclopedia of European Social History*, edited by Peter N. Stearns (Detroit: Scribner's Sons, 2001), 36.
[238]Ibid.

UP Media Committee member Michaelangelo Signorile in his interview for the ACT UP Oral History Project stated that their relationship was a "good cop/bad cop scenario," contentious in nature and not always advantageous.[239] Besides this larger scope in primary source material, it is also important to highlight that while newspaper reporting tries to be objective, it rarely is in the context of sexual minorities. Only positioning ego-documents as subjective is therefore undermining the value these documents have in the academic study of this topic.

This thesis has tried to not merely pay lip service to the diversity of the two movements, but show the valuable work done by all members. Activism that operates at the borders of several movements is, as this thesis has shown, aware of the diversities of a collective movement. The activists central to this thesis thereby at times attempted to dissolve boundaries for a broader coalition. As aforementioned, the lessons learned by both of these movements were not lost after the 1990s. This thesis has shown that the human right to control one's own body remains central, and that it is also a question of risk. In remembering those who put themselves and importantly their bodies on the line in the service of their activism, the collaborative efforts will continue to inform activism today.

[239]Michelangelo Signorile, "ACT UP Oral History Project," by Sarah Schulman, 20 September 2003, 8.

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