

BROTHERS AND SISTERS (AND EVERYONE IN BETWEEN): SEXUALITY AND
CLASS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST, 1970-1995

by

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“Brothers and Sisters (and everyone in between): Sexuality and Class in the Pacific Northwest, 1970-1995,” a thesis prepared by Christa Orth in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of History. This thesis has been approved and accepted by:

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In the past decade, national attention has focused on political battles in the Pacific Northwest, such as the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle in 1999, and Measure 9 in Oregon in both 1992 and 2000. Although these events are usually considered in isolation, they reflect a rich history of growing alliances between labor and gay activism. My close study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) organizations and political activity reveals gay rights activism took on another venue beginning in the seventies: the workplace.

My study explores the history of the LGBT workers' rights movement through: ways they negotiated working-class issues within the gay rights movement through vocational groups and labor unions; how response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic facilitated this workers' rights activism; and how the case study of the Northwest AIDS Foundation in Seattle resulted in class and identity conflicts when gay workers organized a gay workplace in 1989.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Sources and Methodology.....	7
Chapters	9
II. TIES THAT BIND:SEXUALITY AND CLASS IN THE POST-STONEWALL LESBIAN,GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST.....	12
LGBT Working-Class Activism	15
Class Splits and Formal Politics	24
The Harsh Realities of Discrimination at Work	33
Conclusion	41
III. THE STRUGGLE FOR LEGITIMACY: WORKERS’ RIGHTS, HIV/AIDS, AND ANTI-GAY POLITICS IN THE 1980S PACIFIC NORTHWEST.....	42
The Need for Workplace Legitimacy	44
AIDS and the Workplace	48
Anti-Gay Politics and the Workers’ Rights Movement.....	54
Conclusion	58
IV. “WE’RE NOT WIDGET WORKERS” THE UNIONIZATION OF NORTHWEST AIDS FOUNDATION, 1985-1995.....	60
From Family to Business: Why did they Unionize?.....	63
Real Workplace Issues and Ambivalence Toward the Union	70
“We Are Family! I’ve Got All My Sisters and Me”.....	75
Learning Lessons from Organizing LGBT Workers	80
V. EPILOGUE.....	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	90

Secondary Sources.....90
Primary Sources.....93

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. "Support Your Local Gay Activities Council," <i>NW Fountain</i> , February 1979: 10.	89

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, national attention has focused on political battles in the Pacific Northwest, such as the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle in 1999, which pitted anti-globalization forces against transnational corporations; and Measure 9 in Oregon in both 1992 and 2000, which pitted lesbian and gay activists against right wing Christian extremists. Although these events are usually considered in isolation, they actually reflect a rich and little-known history of growing alliances between labor and gay activism in the Pacific Northwest. The close study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) organizations and political activity demonstrates that gay rights activism undertook another venue beginning in the seventies: the workplace.¹

My thesis explores the history of the LGBT workers' rights movement and how it developed over two decades, beginning in the post-Stonewall era of gay liberation and changing to the more inclusive labor movement it is today.² Workplace issues, such as job discrimination and harassment, have always shaped the LGBT rights movement. In the seventies, formal political threats to the gay community, such as anti-gay initiatives,

¹ In this thesis I have used several terms to refer to the sexual identities of these historical actors. I use LGBT, gay, and queer interchangeably. At times I do make distinctions between lesbians and gay men, as they did occasionally act as separate political groups. The term transgender is meant to encompass individuals who identify as transsexuals, transvestites, crossdressers, intersexuals and anyone who transcends gender identity.

² For a look at the status of the national LGBT labor movement see the special edition, "Labor Comes Out," of the *New Labor Forum* (Spring/Summer 2001).

along with workplace homophobia, moved activists to organize. On-the-job prejudice continued throughout the eighties for LGBT employees, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic only exacerbated these problems. Homophobia and AIDSphobia facilitated a growing workplace movement for LGBT rights that labor unions eventually supported. Mounting anti-gay politics in the Pacific Northwest also sparked class debates among LGBT activists themselves. The late eighties and early nineties brought new challenges for unions working with LGBT workers. The case study of the Northwest AIDS Foundation in Seattle demonstrates that this collaboration resulted in class and identity conflicts when gay workers organized a gay workplace in 1989. Despite the shifts and changes in activism, the LGBT movement headed toward a gay-labor alliance while maintaining its sexual integrity.

Starting in the seventies, gay rights activists agitated for social dignity and respect. Similarly, LGBT employees struggled for an economically based recognition that I refer to as workplace “legitimacy.” Legitimacy in the workplace has always been the main goal of the working-class LGBT movement in the Pacific Northwest. Gay employees fought to be taken seriously for their workplace contributions no matter what their sexual orientation or gender identity. Legitimacy for LGBT workers is a theme throughout this thesis and is a component of other scholarship on the history of gay communities.

Many scholars in the fields of LGBT studies, and more recently, LGBT labor studies, have addressed this history of legitimacy for gay people. My study of the Pacific Northwest borrows the frameworks of the emerging literature that examines community

political, social and economic conditions through class and sexuality.³ *Out At Work: Building A Gay-Labor Alliance* is the most recent collection in which the contributors centralize the ways class and sexuality influence LGBT workers' experiences. The book's editors, Kitty Krupat and Patrick McCreery, assert that this text "challenges political and intellectual debates that treat class and identity separately or argue their merits as opposing modes of social and political action."⁴ The assertion that class and sexuality cannot be considered without one another is the basis for my study and for other writers of LGBT labor history. A fundamental contribution that these new labor scholars have made to the history of working people is to understand that the acknowledgement of sexual identity is critical to the success of trade unionism. Conversely, as Kitty Krupat argues in her article, "Out of Labor's Dark Age: Sexual Politics Comes to the Workplace," class identity carries equal weight with sexual orientation in the LGBT workers' movement. Citing bargaining victories for gays and lesbians at companies like DaimlerChrysler, Barney's, and *Village Voice*, she writes:

At the risk of oversimplification, I would suggest that the mere fact such movements have developed in the workplace—the fact they have been advanced

³ For studies on class and sexuality see David K. Johnson, "'Homosexual Citizens': Washington's Gay Community Confronts the Civil Service," *Washington History*, (fall/winter 1994-95): 43-63; Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Gerald Hunt, ed. *Laboring for Rights: Unions and Sexual Diversity Across Nations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999); Bryan K. Garman "'Heroic Spiritual Grandfather': Whitman, Sexuality, and the American Left, 1890-1940," *American Quarterly* (March 2001): 90-126.

⁴ Kitty Krupat and Patrick McCreery, eds. *Out At Work: Building a Gay-Labor Alliance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

through workplace struggle—demonstrates that sexual identity is intimately connected to class and to the ways class is asserted.⁵

Krupat draws on Robin D.G. Kelley's assertion that class is lived through race and gender, but she expands this notion to include sexuality.⁶ Her thesis argues that the LGBT community in the Pacific Northwest lived class through sexuality when sexual oppression and economic hardships affected them. Moreover, I argue that social and political conditions shaped the identities of working LGBT people. Krupat's astute contribution reverberates throughout the field to illustrate the way class and sexual identities shape social and political mobilization.

Examining sexual politics from a class perspective has been a useful way for scholars to assess working-class involvement in the LGBT rights movement. Patrick McCreery's study of the practical effects of national anti-discrimination legislation on gay workers demonstrates that many LGBT workers are not ready to sacrifice open sexual expression for protective legislation. In his article, "Beyond Gay, 'Deviant' Sex and the Politics of the ENDA Workplace," McCreery acknowledges the homophobic politics that exist even within the gay community.⁷ He argues that until gay workers are truly free to express their sexualities at work, the labor movement will never gain

⁵ Kitty Krupat, "Out of Labor's Dark Age: Sexual Politics Comes to the Workplace," in *Out At Work*, 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 18. Also see Robin D.G., Kelley, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 114.

⁷ Patrick McCreery, "Beyond Gay: 'Deviant' Sex and the Politics of the ENDA Workplace," in *Out at Work*, 31-51.

legitimacy for the LGBT community. I draw similar conclusions about the importance of the deconstruction of homophobia in social and political contexts. I argue that without the inclusion of gay identity politics in campaigns for rights, the legislative/political successes of LGBT workers will be only superficial. Not every gay rights group would agree. In 1988, for example, the pro-gay campaign against the passage of an anti-gay initiative in Oregon, subsumed sexual politics with class arguments. Yet whether sexual identity is prominent or hidden, it has always played a significant part in the history of anti-gay legislation.⁸

Making the link between sexuality and everyday work life has been a challenge for the field of LGBT labor studies. Amber L. Hollibaugh eloquently asserts that sexuality is ever-present at work in her published discussion with Nikhil Pal Singh in *Out At Work*:

So someone will say to you, "Sexuality doesn't have anything to do with the way you organize a workplace." And then you think about all the eruptions that happen in the workplace because somebody gets pregnant, somebody has an affair, somebody finds out she's HIV positive, somebody is having sex with somebody else behind the factory building.⁹

I have taken her description of the centrality of sexuality in the workplace and applied it to "out" gay sexuality in a different way: by examining an LGBT workplace where out gay sexuality permeates every aspect of the employees and their jobs.¹⁰ The case study

⁸ For more on the history of the anti-gay Briggs Initiative campaign in California in 1978, see Christian Arthur Bain's article, "A Short History of Lesbian and Gay Labor Activism in the United States," in *Laboring for Rights*, 58-86.

⁹ Amber L. Hollibaugh and Nikhil Pal Singh, "Sexuality, Labor, and the New Trade Unionism: A Conversation," in *Out At Work*, 66.

of the Northwest AIDS Foundation illustrates that in a workplace even where LGBT workers were out, sexuality affected the workplace and, furthermore, impacted the workers' efforts to unionize.

In the past decade scholars in the field of LGBT history have rarely made issues of sexuality and employment fundamental themes in their books, they have peripherally dealt with class and offered some ideas about how labor shaped gay communities. Although these studies do little to place LGBT communities outside of white, middle-class culture, they have nonetheless provided me with insights about the way that class and sexuality affects LGBT working spaces and social spaces.¹¹ George Chauncey's study of pre-WWII New York City describes gay identity formation in the Bowery, where gay men negotiated oppression and resistance in working-class social spaces. This influential book briefly mentions the importance of work in this history because typical gay male jobs created a space for the expression of sexuality.¹² Work is also a theme for the history of the working-class lesbian community in Buffalo, New York. *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Kennedy's study of economic and social self-sufficiency, highlights the notion of a "prepolitical" community

¹⁰ By "out" I mean not hiding expressions of sexuality or gender identity which do not fit a hegemonic heterosexual model.

¹¹ See also John D'Emilio *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); Marc Stein *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000).

¹² George Chauncey. *Gay New York: Gender Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 274.

that emerged from lesbian bar culture.¹³ Nan Alamilla Boyd's 2001 study of San Francisco similarly argues that gay bar culture was political because early resistance to police raids translated into formal political action.¹⁴ Just as working-class bar culture influenced LGBT rights politics, so too did work-based demands for anti-discrimination legislation by gay employees in the Pacific Northwest.¹⁵

Sources and Methodology

This project is a culmination of my research in a variety of Pacific Northwest LGBT community sources that have helped me answer questions about the workers' rights and the LGBT movements. Archives in Seattle, Washington, and Portland, Oregon, and gay community publications contained rich information on the intersections of sexuality and class in the post-Stonewall era. Oral history interviews of LGBT labor leaders and rank-and-file workers have been invaluable. I interviewed ten individuals from local unions such as the Service Employees International Union, the Oregon Public Employees Union, and the National Association of Letter Carriers, all of which had or

¹³ Madeline D. Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁴ Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A Queer History of San Francisco*, forthcoming book.

¹⁵ A few community studies have been written recently about the Pacific Northwest, treating both class and political issues as central to community development. Peter Boag's forthcoming book *Same-Sex Affairs: Male Homosexuality and Scandal in Portland and the Northwest, 1890-1930*, highlights the oppression of same-sex relationships in Progressive-Era vice districts. In her 2001 book on the anti-gay Measure 9, Arlene Stein shows how homophobia and gay rights politics struck up a fierce debate in a small Oregon town even though it did not have a large gay community. Stein, *The Stranger Next Door: The Story of a Small Community's Battle Over Sex, Faith and Civil Rights* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

have openly gay members and leaders. These personal stories provided me with wonderful insights about Pacific Northwest labor history and LGBT rights activism.

To determine the political and economic climate for LGBT workers in the Pacific Northwest, I looked at the Tim Mayhew Collection on Gay Rights at the University of Washington in Seattle. This collection contains extensive papers on political issues such as the 1978 King County Initiative 13, which sought to repeal Seattle's ordinances protecting gays and lesbians from discrimination in housing and employment. The papers of the 1970s Mechanica Collective, an organization dedicated to training and placing women in the trades, are housed in the University YWCA papers in Seattle. At the Oregon Historical Society, the Roger Troen Gay Liberation Collection and the Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest both contain valuable source material about the gay political action committees such as the Portland Town Council and Right To Privacy. Gay news publications *The Fountain*, *Just Out*, and the *Seattle Gay News*, as well as organizational newsletters, have been helpful in placing my findings in a larger context. I looked for references to working-class groups, formal political struggles, discrimination cases, and labor union activity. I found these historical examples and then examined how sexism, homophobia, AIDSphobia, and transphobia complicated LGBT activism on the job.

To examine working conditions and issues for LGBT workers, I looked at collections and papers from the Northwest AIDS Foundation (NAAF). This agency was founded in 1983 and was largely staffed by openly gay and lesbian-identified workers. I chose this organization as a case study because the unionization efforts of the workers

themselves and Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Local 6, provide a poignant example of the relationship between queer identity and working class identity. The NWAFF and SEIU archives contain records of organizing efforts, including the minutes of labor/management and union membership meetings, records of contract negotiations, and collective bargaining agreements from 1990 to the present. These records also include worker-satisfaction surveys from 1992, 1995, and 1997, which provided a window into how workers related their sexual identities to their jobs and their work environment.

Chapters

This project examines the ways that class and sexuality merged to create an identity for the LGBT rights movement in the Pacific Northwest. Working-class elements within the LGBT rights movement shaped the gay rights movement in the Pacific Northwest, not only in activist strategies, but also in post-Stonewall gay identity formation. Working-class identity connects to the LGBT identity in two ways. First, because working-class groups were diverse in terms of gender and class inclusiveness, their history debunks the stereotype that gay activists were white, rich and male. Second, political and social threats to the livelihoods of LGBT people compelled the community to fold trade union activism into their gay rights campaigns. Fighting for political, social respect for the LGBT community and the right to be economically viable inherently connects to labor issues.

My study begins in the post-Stonewall era of the 1970s, the period that witnessed the expansion of the LGBT rights movement into the context of work. The gay rights movement of the 1970s provided a public space for working-class LGBT activists to rally support for working-class issues. Their responses to job discrimination, anti-gay initiatives, and HIV/AIDS fueled the movement throughout the 1980s. I end my case study of an AIDS service organization in 1995 because the introduction of the “cocktail,” or protease inhibitor treatment, dramatically changed the needs of the HIV/AIDS community and the workers that served them.

The first chapter traces the origins of the working-class elements of the gay rights movement in the Pacific Northwest from 1970-1980. I argue that working-class issues held a prominent place in the movement and that organizing done during the 1970s became the foundation for more formal labor organizing in the 1980s and ‘90s. I also argue that class and gay identities emerged together, shaping and forming the way that the LGBT community saw each other and the issues.

The second chapter shows that homophobia on the job affected LGBT workers profoundly. The onset HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s became a watershed moment for LGBT labor activism. In the midst of extreme suffering and loss, gay employees formed alliances with labor unions to combat homophobia and AIDSphobia in the workplace. Oregon’s anti-gay Measure 8 marked the beginning of right-wing conservatives’ backlash against LGBT state workers. The gay community’s response to these politics shows the tension between the sexual and class identities of the LGBT community.

Finally, chapter four examines the unique conditions of an LGBT workplace, owned and operated by LGBT people. Unionization affected both the sexual and class identities of workers at the Northwest AIDS Foundation when they unionized in 1989. The union struggled with cross-class sexual affinities throughout 1989 and beyond. The workers and the union taught each other valuable lessons about the importance of recognizing sexual orientation and class as complimentary categories in organizing.

The title of this thesis comes from the notion that class solidarity in unions creates community among “brothers and sisters” in the struggle for justice. It occurred to me that while brotherhood and sisterhood can apply to the queer community, LGBT workers oftentimes remain on the fringe of the movement because of the challenges they face in their own lives with their sexual and gender identities. Transgender workers, for instance, may choose not to identify as a brother or sister at all because of more fluid gender identities. I have altered the traditional (heterosexual) class solidarity language that often permeates union culture to be inclusive of all queer workers with “Brothers and Sisters (and everyone in between).”

CHAPTER TWO

TIES THAT BIND: SEXUALITY AND CLASS IN THE POST-STONEWALL
LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY IN THE PACIFIC
NORTHWEST

Even in the early days of the post-Stonewall gay rights movement, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community in the Pacific Northwest organized around working-class issues.¹⁶ In the beginning, these issues ranged from police brutality to housing and employment. Working gays and lesbians fought for basic citizenship rights that included protection from discrimination and harassment on the job. Legitimacy at work became a major issue within the gay rights movement, especially among groups for workers' rights. Social respect and economic viability emerged simultaneously as goals of the LGBT community in the Pacific Northwest. The history reveals that gay-identified working-class groups successfully achieved employment protections based on sexual orientation, which, in turn, engendered social respect for sexual minorities.

The myth that the gay community is made of gay, white, upper-class men is perpetuated in popular discourse about class and sexuality. Kitty Krupat argues that "sexual identity is rarely defined as a component of class," in her book *Out at Work: Building a Gay-Labor Alliance*.¹⁷ Looking critically at workers' rights movements

¹⁶ Working-class issues are those that relate to survival and economic sustainability such as housing and employment.

¹⁷ Krupat, *Out At Work*, 4.

within the LGBT community in the Pacific Northwest teaches us that sexual minority activists were not all white and upper-class men, and further, the actual class backgrounds of workers fundamentally shaped the politics of gay rights. The intersection of sexuality and class within gay rights changed the movement. In this way, class was not merely tacked on or shuffled into sexual identity, rather it is integral to the LGBT community's workers' rights activism.

This chapter examines the relationship between the LGBT community and workers' rights issues in the Pacific Northwest in the seventies. There is a multidimensional history in the LGBT community that began with discrimination and working-class resistance which first took the form of efforts to educate and provide resources for sexual minority workers. Focusing on distinctly working-class campaigns within the LGBT community in the seventies I show that activists in Portland and Seattle resisted discriminatory legislation and harassment at work by engaging in education and resource gathering. These groups worked to build self-sufficiency through job referral services and educational activities. Rather than decoupling issues of sexuality and class, these organizations took on the task of exploring relationships and (re)defining identities. *Mechanica Committee for a Cooperative Garage*, *Union of Sexual Minorities*, the *Gay Community Center*, and the *Seattle Committee Against Thirteen* and *Women Against Thirteen* performed gay sexual identities and class identities simultaneously.¹⁸

¹⁸ Although these organizations were located in Seattle, WA, their work is representative of Eugene, Portland, and Seattle activism. Christine Frazer described gay political activism in these three cities as one, unified front. Christine Frazer, interview by the author, tape recording, Eugene, Or. 3 February 2002.

The Pacific Northwest movement consisted of political, social, and economic organizing drives spearheaded by diverse groups of people: women and men, gay and straight, transgender and other sex radicals.¹⁹ For the most part, these groups fought classism as well as racism, heterosexism, and sexism. Coalitions with other movements such as feminism and anti-racism facilitated work toward this goal. At the same time, however, complex identity politics marked the strategies and goals of working-class groups. Working-class groups struggled with sexism within their ranks and endured fierce separatist debates. Activists' responses to sexism both challenged the LGBT movement and propelled working-class activism forward.

Transgender activism is often overlooked in gay rights history, but it was alive in the Pacific Northwest in the seventies. Working-class gay rights groups were transgender inclusive and advocated for transgender rights even when they were unpopular with more mainstream activists in formal politics. Though transgender advocacy groups did not officially form until the eighties, transgender activism was vibrant within sexual minority working-class organizing in the seventies and must not be overlooked.²⁰

In a cold world of domination and discrimination, the workers' rights component shaped the gay rights movement in the Pacific Northwest, not only in activist strategies, but in post-Stonewall gay identity formation. The diligent work and the early organizing

¹⁹ I use the terms sexual minorities and sex radicals to include lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals and communities.

²⁰ The Ingersoll Gender Center was founded in 1977, and was formally incorporated as a non-profit in 1984 in Seattle, WA. Marsha Botzer, interview by author, tape recording, Seattle, Wa., 29 March 2002.

efforts of the LGBT community in the seventies that laid the groundwork for the formal labor organizing and alliances with labor unions that would come in the eighties.

LGBT Working-Class Activism

The Mechanica Committee Toward a Cooperative Garage is a fine example of a working-class women's organization. Founded in 1970 in Seattle, Mechanica was a "skilled trades referral service for women."²¹ They provided job training for women in automotive mechanics, first through the University of Washington Women's Commission and then independently through support from the Young Women's Christian Association. The automotive classes were popular with hundreds of women, and though Mechanica did not describe itself as a lesbian organization, many lesbians taught and attended the classes. Promoting self-sufficiency in both the women's and the lesbian community was important to Mechanica's mission. In a 1973 talk on the Herstory of Mechanica, Julie E. Coryell said:

Mechanica serves as a window on the feminist movement. [Mechanica] raises questions about the responsibility and training for that responsibility which women do carry...we can rethink the nature of our own work and training possibilities...Elizabeth Duncan Koontz, then head of the Department of Labor's Women's Bureau spoke in Seattle two years ago: "Why earn \$2.50 per hour typing when you can make \$6.50 an hour repairing the typewriter?"²²

²¹Gay Heishman, Seattle, to Mr. Lucas, Seattle, 21 November 1975, YWCA Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 3.

²²Julie E. Coryell, "Herstory of Mechanica Committee," 17 January 1973, YWCA Collection, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 1.

In 1972, Mechanica opened a small cooperative garage where women could pay a small use fee to use the garage to work on automobiles and motorcycles. By 1973, they boasted 75 members and the organization and continued to grow in terms of their numbers and their mission.²³ They began an employment referral service for women in the trades. Mechanica counseled women about job opportunities and encouraged construction contractors and manufacturers to hire women in the skilled trades.²⁴ Women would register their contact information and skills with Mechanica and the organization would attempt to refer women to available jobs. These expanded services encouraged the self-sufficiency of women in traditionally male occupations.

The Mechanica example is one indication of the changing identity politics in the working world and in feminism in the seventies. During the period women sought to assert their own interests and skills in traditionally male occupations both for economic and social mobility. This way they could make more money and at the same time break down gender barriers that held women to traditionally female occupations. Mechanica legitimized women's interests in the technical trades, thereby redefining gendered roles in the workplace. Mechanica also created a space for lesbians to be out on the job. Out lesbians associated with groups such as Gay Women's Alliance and the Gay Women's Resource Center both taught and participated in Mechanica's classes.²⁵ Mechanica

²³ Julie Argue Lee, "Women Invade the Grease Pits," *The Seattle Times*, 13 May 1973, Pictorial Section: 8.

²⁴ Heishman to Lucas.

²⁵ For instance, Bev Anderson, one of Mechanica's automotive technology instructors was also on the Advisory Board of the Gay Women's Resource Center.

welcomed lesbians into their collective at a time when mainstream society stigmatized homosexuality. This group, though not exclusively lesbian, carved a place for legitimacy that asserted workplace rights for gender minority workers. The example of *Mechanica* shows that a concerted effort to encourage economic self-sufficiency and workplace rights for sexual minority workers were themes in the gays and work movement.²⁶

Other examples of working-class themes in the gay rights movement included resistance to on-the-job discrimination. Resistance to job discrimination came in many forms, sometimes clever, but always practical. One of the earliest crusades for gay rights was fought to get assistance for a job-training program for gays and lesbians. In 1971, Kathleen Timmons of the *Mechanica* Committee, mentioned just above, tried to use the argument that homosexuality should be classified as a disability to insure that employers gave potential employees protection in hiring.

This week, my application for the ESP (Employment Supplement Program) was rejected on the grounds I did not meet the disadvantaged criteria. Specifically, the administration in the Seattle office [of the Employment Securities Department] ruled that homosexuality is not a handicap in seeking and holding a job... The Government's [sic] policy either prevents me from obtaining Federal employment or forces me to live a lie in order to secure a Government job. The first is an economic strain. The other is a far more serious emotional game, a forced schizophrenia leading to acute paranoia, which many times results in suicide. But the Federal Government's sphere of damage does not stop here. Its image of the homosexual as a pervert, as unstable and immoral sets the standard from employers throughout American society. It is an image that misrepresents me and all homosexuals. It is an image that handicaps me in seeking "professional" type employment.²⁷

²⁶ *Mechanica* became one of the first women-in-trades groups in the Pacific Northwest that welcomed lesbians, but they were not a lesbian-identified organization.

²⁷ Kathleen Timmons, Seattle, to Maxine Daly, Seattle, 29 June 1971, YWCA Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 6.

In September 1971, Timmons' application was reconsidered and accepted.²⁸ This early strategy, though effective in gaining recognition for lesbian workers, was misguided. By arguing that homosexuals had a disability, Timmons was only reinforcing stereotypes about the gay community, rather than working to find proactive solutions to being out at work.

The Gays and Work Symposium in 1977 was an event that demonstrated the significance for LGBT workers of on-the-job discrimination and out gay identities. Several gay-identified working-class groups, including the Union of Sexual Minorities, sponsored the symposium, held at the University of Washington.²⁹ Over 100 gay workers and advocacy organization attended the symposium. Their intent was "to raise the awareness of the special oppression gay people face at work, to explore their relationship to the problems of women and other minorities at work, and to find ways to fight discrimination against gay people at work."³⁰ Presenter Judith Scalise led a discussion on these vital issues:

Lesbians and gay men have to conspire to pretend that we do not exist and are socially acceptable only until somebody discovers the secret. Most live in fear that we will be found out and will lose our livelihood. Those who come out on the job, or who seek work as openly gay people, may find themselves relegated to low-paying or menial work.³¹

²⁸"Homophile News Fronts," *The Fountain*, September 1971: 10, Oregon Historical Society, Portland.

²⁹ Other sponsoring organizations were Committee for Organizing Sexual Minorities (Tacoma, Wa.), Gay Resource Center, Evergreen State College (Olympia, Wa.), and Morning Due Collective (Seattle, Wa.).

³⁰ Hal Nelson, "Gays and Work Forum Set," *Seattle Gay News*, March 1977: 3.

The breadth of issues presented at the 1977 symposium showed the political, social and economic consciousness that had developed in the Pacific Northwest among LGBT activists. Many issues were discussed at this gathering. Workshops were held on fighting discrimination, union protection, double-jeopardy for lesbian mothers, “traditional” gay jobs, and transgender discrimination.³² Not only was the LGBT community aware of the prevalence of discrimination against gay workers, working-class groups encouraged LGBT workers to fight back and gave them the tools to do so.

The symposium, the first event of its kind in the Pacific Northwest, was the fledgling project of the Union of Sexual Minorities (USM).³³ Founded in 1975, the USM developed their own strategies for gaining political and economic equality for sexual minorities. Besides putting on educational programs such as “gays and work,” “gays in the McCarthy era,” and “the history of the gay liberation movement,” USM mobilized the LGBT community to combat local issues such as police brutality, protective legislation extending beyond the Equal Rights Amendment,³⁴ fair housing protection for gays, and anti-sexism.

Working with other minority groups on these issues became an important strategy for the USM, who believed a broad-based coalition would gain power for sexual

³¹ Judith Scalise and John Sheets, *The Other Side*, April 1977: 6, Charles Harbaugh Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 5.

³² “Gays & Work Symposium,” Charles Harbaugh Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Box 12.

³³ Scalise, 6.

³⁴ The ERA was passed in Washington State in 1973. It was defeated federally, of course, in 1982.

minorities. Their work on the issue of fair housing for gays shows this dedication. When the City of Seattle drafted an ordinance to protect the rights of tenants under housing law, the USM advocated for the protections of sexual minority rights. When the City proposed a new draft of the ordinance that did not include gays, the USM organized a rally at a City Council committee meeting to demand rights for all working people. A flier read:

...let's not fool ourselves by thinking that only sexual minorities were denied a place to live under the proposed new ordinance. People were also excluded on the basis of age, legal status, political ideology and physical handicap...Demand that the housing ordinance include rights for all the citizens of this city, sexual minorities, the elderly and handicapped, politicians, ethnic minorities—everyone!³⁵

In addition to reaching out to many communities, USM's dedication to an anti-sexist movement is illustrative of a dynamic discourse in the LGBT community about the roles of lesbians in the movement. The USM included a panel of lesbian workers at the "Gays and Work" symposium. According to this panel, lesbian workers faced many forms of sexism, including restricted access to jobs, lack of affordable childcare for working mothers, and the failure of labor unions to defend the rights of women and minorities.³⁶ These issues were in the forefront of the working-class movement, and many of the organizations that focused on gay workplace issues were careful to be inclusive of women and minorities.

³⁵ "Care To Move?" Charles Harbaugh Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 25.

³⁶ Sam Deaderick, "Gays Discuss Work Discrimination," *The Seattle Gay News*, April 1977: 4.

Though the USM took up other issues, it was first and foremost a gay rights organization. Their mission stated, “Our work is aimed toward and focused specifically on the particular oppression of sexual minorities. In any work we do, this issue will not be subordinated.”³⁷ The identity politics of the USM shows their awareness of class and sexual identities and the importance they placed on the recognition of both. Thus USM, like gay rights groups in the Pacific Northwest, worked to preserve both working-class and sexual minority identities within the gay rights movement.³⁸

Representatives of the USM attended the 1976 conference *Faggots and the Class Struggle*, held in Wolf Creek, Oregon. Conference organizers encouraged “gay men to talk cooperatively about class struggle and faggot oppression.”³⁹ The workshops focused on socialist revolution, the history of class struggles around the world, gender hierarchies in society, and how to integrate class struggles into the gay rights movement. Presentations on class struggle “practice” were given by gay groups such as the San Francisco Bay Area Gay Liberation (BAGL), Seattle’s anti-sexist group Morning Due Collective, and Seattle’s USM.

Conference participants discussed sexism in terms of class at great length at this all-gay male gathering. This conference, which excluded women from participating,

³⁷ “Sexual Minorities Union, Who We Are—What We Do,” Charles Harbaugh Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 12.

³⁸ Radical Activists for Sexual Minorities (RASM) in Portland was a comparable group to the USM at this time. Roger Troen Collection on Gay Rights, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Box 2.

³⁹ “Faggots and the Class Struggle: A Conference Report,” *Morning Due: A Journal of Men Against Sexism* 2, no. 6 (November-December, 1976): 4, Charles Harbaugh Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 2.

ironically included workshops on topics such as the history of the father-dominated family and socialist feminism. The feminist sentiments of the conference activists indicated their sensitivity to issues of gender discrimination in society. The conference statement of purpose included:

We cannot ignore that, in our experience, male supremacy is a special source of the oppression of women and gay men. All men benefit, in the short run, from sexism; and, therefore, most do not as quickly see why it is in their interest to struggle against it. It is clear that in the long run all people will benefit from that struggle. The ruling class derives the greatest advantages from sexism. Some of these are: keeping the working class divided (e.g. straight men won't show their tenderness and support for fellow working men to avoid fag-baiting); and a free source of labor in the home. We are eager to explore further these interconnections between male supremacy and class society.⁴⁰

Gay men explored ways to utilize feminism in the gay rights movement, in this case, by equating women with gay men in the labor force. They ignored the sexism within the gay movement, even as they held a conference that excluded women.

While the Faggots and the Class Struggle conference was effective in elevating issues of sexism and class among gay male activists from San Francisco to Seattle, criticism abounded about the outcome of the conference. One of the criticisms came from the Working-Class Caucus at the conference: that working-class participants criticized being talked down to by presenters who wrapped their arguments in academic theory. The caucus reported, "During many of the presentations the work class was talked about in a very abstract way as if there were no working class faggots here. We were sitting at your feet." Another criticism came from the sissy caucus. Sissies, who self-identified as gay men who were "cross-gender dressers," argued they were

⁴⁰ Ibid., 11.

marginalized at the conference because their way of life was labeled “petit-bourgeois” by the larger gay community. The sissies demanded that the rest of the conference participants respect their sexual identities as sissies and take their contributions to the gay community seriously.

It is taken for granted that drag queens and sissies are petit-bourgeois and that cross-gender dressing comes from a bourgeois state of mind. In fact, sissies, like women, are forced into low-paying jobs because of their feminine identification while STIFS [straight-identified faggots] can visually hide behind their straight-man drag...Drag queens have carried the brunt of straight men’s terror on the street and then are forsaken as tired stereotypes by gay liberation.⁴¹

This class analysis of the sissy identity shows the complications of diversity within the LGBT working-class movement. “Straight-identified” faggots enjoyed gender privilege because they passed in the straight world. Sissies identified more with women than other gay men because of the class disadvantages of cross-dressing gay men. These criticisms represent the challenges faced by the early working-class LGBT movement. Class solidarity and sexual affinity were not enough to prevent prejudice within the LGBT community.

Identities of LGBT working-class people were culturally, ethnically and socio-economically diverse. Both sexuality and class defined the gay rights movement, but more work had to be done to make the class movement within LGBT struggles a friendlier place for working-class people, women and all sexual minorities. The marginalization of the sissies at the conference corresponded with middle-class groups’

⁴¹ Ibid., 66.

exclusion of “radical” sexual identities as they worked to homogenize the image of the gay community for acceptance in the straight world.

Gay men were not the only group within the LGBT community that had to deal with sexism. Christine Frazer, a working-class lesbian who moved to Oregon in 1971, recalled a rift with separatist lesbians. Frazer attended the first all-lesbian conference in Los Angeles in 1974, with her young daughter, Juniper. Gay men had volunteered to do childcare, but separatist lesbians opposed the inclusion of men in the conference. Some of the separatists made disparaging comments about lesbians having children at all. Frazer recalled, “That was the first [time] I had somebody tell me that I had spawned the seed of man. It made me mad, so my reaction would be to irritate them, and say ‘I did it the old fashioned way!’ Or I’d tell them I was bisexual, which wasn’t true.”⁴² Separatist lesbians discriminated against lesbian mothers and gay men alike.⁴³ Like sexism, class splits in the gay community became an issue, especially in pursuing LGBT civil rights through formal politics.

Class Splits and Formal Politics

While many gay organizations agitated for working-class issues, many of the members were not working-class. Class rifts among these groups manifested themselves

⁴² Christine Frazer interview.

⁴³ Discrimination against lesbian mothers by the gay community was so prevalent that the group The Lesbian Mothers Union formed in Seattle in the seventies. YMCA collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 13.

in the strategies that activists used to fight for LGBT rights. In early gay rights struggles, middle-class groups utilized formal politics and working-class groups employed more grassroots approaches. These groups also differed from each other in the choices they made about whom to include and exclude. In 1977, a representative of the Union of Sexual Minorities made reference to the “class split” in gay organizations:

We face a class split in the Gay movement...Not all Gay people have the same interests, some of us are fighting for all sexual minorities—women, men, minorities—others try to dilute the movement to include only white men. Some of us are fighting for a better society, some only for personal careers.⁴⁴

The brand of activism USM criticized was that of the middle-class gay political action groups which worked for gay civil rights in the formal political realm. In their opinion this facet of the gay rights movement was classist and transphobic.

A 1979 ad in the Portland gay newspaper *NW Fountain* revealed the relationship between class and gay identity in the Pacific Northwest at this time [See Figure 1]. The ad was for the local gay activities councils known as the Dorian Group (TDG)⁴⁵ in Seattle; the Portland Town Council (PTC) in Portland; and the National Gay Task Force (NGTF) in Washington D.C. The ad pictured a respectable-looking white man in a suit vest and tie, Jerry Weller, the acting Executive Director of the PTC. The text of the ad read:

I’m a gay civil rights worker. I represent the gay community as a Commissioner on the Multnomah County Democratic Party. I sincerely believe that gay people

⁴⁴ *The Seattle Gay News*, April 1977: 4.

⁴⁵ The Dorian Society was founded in 1967 and dissolved in 1971. A later incarnation, The Dorian Group, was founded in 1974 and continued to work throughout the 1980s.

can and will achieve civil rights by working through and with the political system. Join me in what I consider the fastest growing civil rights movement in history by supporting one of the organizations listed here.⁴⁶

TDG and PTC represented gay organizations with middle-class sensibilities. Though these groups fought for the rights of gays in employment and housing, their main strategies entailed lobbying the legislature and campaigning to elect gay officials. Gay business-owners made up a large portion of the membership and elected legislators remained their central political target.⁴⁷ While these groups enlisted the assistance of working-class people, their ranks and their strategies were oftentimes exclusively middle-class.⁴⁸ The significance of the newspaper ad was as a prescriptive visual representation of a gay civil rights activist as white, male and wearing men's clothes. There was no room for stereotypical flamboyant gays in the TDG/PTC brand of political action groups. The Dorians in Seattle represent a gay group concerned with upholding an assimilationist image. This is evident in the aforementioned ad, but also demonstrated clearly by their political choices surrounding the police harassment of gays. The Seattle police attacked gays in parks and bars throughout the seventies, coupling the arrests and beatings with a

⁴⁶ "Support Your Local Gay Activities Council," *NW Fountain*, February 1979: 10.

⁴⁷ The topics in The Dorian Group newsletter reveal that the TDG's main goals were legislation for gay rights. Charles Harbaugh Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle.

⁴⁸ David K. Johnson's work addresses issues of employment discrimination based on sexual orientation in Washington D.C. in the 1950s and '60s and described how the homophile organization Mattachine Society combated homophobia during McCarthyism in the federal government. Johnson's work shows that the homosexual activists accessed the resources of the middle-class to get what they wanted in the political arena. Many members of the homophile organization, Mattachine Society of Washington were, in fact, government workers with middle-class backgrounds. "Homosexual Citizens': Washington's Gay Community Confronts the Civil Service," *Washington History* (fall/winter 1994-95): 23-43.

public rhetoric about gays as prostitutes and pedophiles.⁴⁹ Radical gay groups such as the Gay Liberation Front distributed literature and held demonstrations to call public attention to the harassment. The Dorian Group, however, ignored this avenue of resistance, fearing that it would inflame stereotypes of homosexuals. In fact, at one point, TDG sided with the Seattle Police Department in their use of vice squads in gay districts, further affirming the class split among gay groups in the Pacific Northwest.

Middle-class gay groups chose to address the issue of LGBT legitimacy through formal politics. The Portland Town Council, for instance, lobbied for gay rights legislation. In 1976 the PTC published its Legislative Guide to Gay Rights, which detailed its goals, both statewide and nationally, to make consensual sex acts legal between adults and to include sexual orientation in civil rights law.⁵⁰ PTC had an early success with the repeal of the law criminalizing sodomy in Oregon in 1971.⁵¹ The group then turned its efforts to gaining protections based on sexual orientation in housing and employment. Their legislative guide read:

⁴⁹ Seattle gays in the seventies resisted police harassment through community education projects. Seattle's Gay Liberation Front (GLF) distributed literature and published newsletters that included information about covert operations by the police to entrap homosexuals. This literature also informed people of their civil rights if they had a police conflict. The gay community resisted police harassment by publicly demanding cooperation from the police. The Seattle Gay Alliance (SGA) called for a meeting with Seattle's police chief and demanded his cooperation in and endorsement of anti-harassment campaigns in the police department. When the police chief ignored their requests repeatedly, the gay community mobilized demonstrations.

⁵⁰ The Legislative Guide to Gay Rights is an incredibly rich source in understanding the history of gay rights legislation in the Pacific Northwest and nationally. Portland Town Council, "The Legislative Guide to Gay Rights," 1976. Roger Troen Gay Rights Collection, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Box 2.

⁵¹ Oregon was the first state to repeal a law that proscribed sexual behavior between consenting adults.

Everyone knows the uncomfortable feelings, antagonism and hatred which our society often shows to homosexual men and women. Discrimination in every sector—jobs, housing, public accommodations, and so on—is a direct result of these feelings. And all gay people are familiar with the actuality or fear of this discrimination. Oregon has laws which protect other vulnerable groups such as women and Blacks from discrimination, but it has no laws protecting homosexuals.⁵²

PTC's civil rights arguments gained support for gay rights from prominent politicians in Oregon. Another early victory came in the form of city ordinances to protect gay workers. In 1974, Portland City Council adopted a resolution for non-discrimination based on sexual orientation in city employment.⁵³ Seattle passed a similar ordinance in 1972.⁵⁴

Though political action groups in the Pacific Northwest were successful in getting mainstream politicians to take issues of gay civil rights seriously, their proposed state legislation never passed during the seventies.⁵⁵ This may have been because TDG and PTC did not enlist the support of a working-class constituency or anyone else who might threaten middle-class homosexual respectability.

⁵² Oregon was the first state to adopt the recommendations of the Criminal Law Revision Commission. "The Legislative Guide to Gay Rights": 67.

⁵³ "Portland protects city workers," *NW Magazine* (6 April 1975): 5.

⁵⁴ It was reported that Seattle's ordinance did not prompt an upsurge in complaints in employment or housing discrimination. By 1977 only 19 claims of employment discrimination had been reported in six years and only six instances of housing discrimination since 1975. Hal Nelson, "Kopay, Uhlman, Push Rights Bill," *Seattle Gay News* (April 1977): 1 and 3.

⁵⁵ For instance, in 1973 Oregon state representative Vera Katz introduced House Bill 2930 that would have outlawed discrimination based on sexual orientation. It was the first sexual orientation anti-discrimination bill ever to be voted on by a state legislative body in the United States. The bill never got past the Oregon House. Roger Troen Collection, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Box 2.

Working-class groups criticized middle-class organizations for excluding transgender individuals in the proposed legislations' definition of sexual orientation. For instance, the USM criticized the transphobia of TDG's 1977 proposed Gay Civil Rights Bill, which would have afforded protections for *gays and lesbians* only. Instead of offering their support for the bill, the USM "proposed a coalition to push for the inclusion of sexual minorities not considered by the legislation," namely transvestites and transsexuals.⁵⁶ In an article about the summit concerning the gay rights bill between TDG and USM, a USM member commented that exclusion of transgender people created divisions in the gay community:

The political differences that surfaced during the meeting [about the Gay Civil Rights Bill] obviously make it difficult to mount a unified response when we are under attack, but those differences are real and must be worked out in atmosphere of mutual respect. We must dispense with the red-baiting from the right, the elitism from the left, and the sexism from the males. We're in this together: an injury to one is an injury to all.⁵⁷

Transgender people in the Pacific Northwest were involved in political and social campaigns for workers' rights from the very beginning. The Union of Sexual Minorities was an organization that was open and adamant about protecting the rights of transgender people. In a 1976 article in their newsletter, the USM wrote:

As implied in our name, we as the Union of Sexual Minorities feel the need to fight for the rights of all women and men who define themselves as sexual minorities, e.g., transsexuals and transvestites, as well as gays. It is a mistake to

⁵⁶ The Gay Civil Rights Bill never made it out of the Washington House of Representatives. Hal Nelson, "Rights Bill Stalled," *Seattle Gay News* (May 1977): 1 and 3.

⁵⁷ "An Injury to One..." *Seattle Gay News* (March 1977): 1.

believe that the need of these other sexual minorities are completely separate from those of gays. To the contrary, those of us who are gay share a similar type of oppression with these other minorities along lines of sex role expectations, and in some cases, choice of sexual partners or activities.⁵⁸

The exclusion of transgender people from middle-class gay groups illustrates another reason for the class split in gay rights and formal politics. The fact that the USM included and welcomed transgender activists into their ranks shows an awareness of the importance of coalition-building across class, sexual and gender identities. The class split among gay organizations manifested itself through the methods and strategies groups used to achieve gay rights. Though the goal of equal protections was clear enough, working-class and middle-class groups operated differently within the movement to achieve this goal based on their class status. However, these groups came together in the late seventies when nationally-based anti-gay groups proposed initiatives that would ban protections for gay workers.

The convergence of working-class and middle-class gay rights groups happened at a time when anti-gay political campaigns were on the rise around the United States. In California in 1978 the Briggs Initiative or Proposition 6 sought to ban gay teachers from public schools.⁵⁹ At the same time in Dade County, Florida, Anita Bryant spearheaded a crusade to eliminate protections for gay citizens that stretched west to Wichita, St. Paul, to Eugene, Oregon. Voters in Eugene repealed the city's gay rights amendment to the

⁵⁸ "Moving On," *The Other Side* 3 (winter 1976-77): 1. Charles Harbaugh Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 5.

⁵⁹ Bain, 66.

Human Rights Code in 1978.⁶⁰ The anti-gay campaigns in the Pacific Northwest were modeled after the Briggs and Bryant campaigns.

In 1978, the threat of anti-gay Initiative 13 brought the Pacific Northwest's LGBT community together to fight for a common cause. Sponsored by Anita Bryant's organization Save the Children, Initiative 13 sought to repeal Seattle's ordinances protecting gays and lesbians from discrimination in housing and employment. The Washington Coalition for Sexual Minority Rights (WCSMR) was created to fight the initiative and began a massive grassroots organizing campaign. WCSMR and its political action committee, Seattle Committee Against Thirteen (SCAT) made a widespread appeal to the people of Seattle in their mission statement:

...to build a united front of the gay, women's, and Third World communities and labor to fight Initiative 13... We are a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to achieving full human and civil rights for sexual minority people. These include gay women and men, sexual minority parents, bisexuals, transgenderals, and transvestites. Although organized and activated in response to the need for passage of the Gay Rights Bill, our work will continue as long as sexual minorities suffer discrimination and intimidation in any aspect of life.⁶¹

SCAT formed from the ranks of the Gay Community Center (GCC), and although the group's activists held working-class values, they utilized the strategies of the middle-class political action committees. The formal political challenges posed by the Initiative 13 campaign resulted in the formation of committees for publicity, media, education,

⁶⁰ For a detailed account of Eugene's anti-gay Initiative 51 and the gay rights groups that tried to stop it, see Laurie McClain, Ellen Greenlaw, Connie Newoman, Charles Spencer, and Shoshana Cohen, *It Could Happen to You: An Account of the Gay Civil Rights Campaign in Eugene, Oregon* (Boston: Alyson Publications, Inc., 1983).

⁶¹ "Washington Coalition for Sexual Minority Rights," 1 May 1978, Charles Harbaugh Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 23.

fundraising, and outreach in the gay community. This was the first time working-class and middle-class LGBT activist tactics came together to fight for a common cause in the Pacific Northwest. Yet, SCAT was able to maintain an inclusiveness that the political action committees lacked in the mid-seventies.

SCAT reached out to both the LGBT and mainstream straight community in order to gain support for gay rights. One advertisement entitled, "But I'm Not Gay..." targeted straight workers. It read:

How Initiative 13 Could Attack You

If Initiative 13 passes, anyone could be fired or evicted solely on the assumption or accusation of being gay. All someone has to do is think or say you are gay. The burden of proof then rests on you, the accused, rather than on the accuser. You will be vulnerable if: You are single, divorced, or live alone; You share your house or apartment with a friend; You are not liked, or you speak up too much at work. Vote No on 13.⁶²

The strategy to appeal to workers and renters based on their class and not their sexuality was successful for SCAT. Not only did this gain the attention of straight voters, but it brought the gay community's identity as a legitimate, work-for-a-living group to the fore. The legitimacy of gays as working-class people helped defeat Initiative 13 in Seattle, and reinforced the dignity of the LGBT community as working citizens who contributed to the economy and the culture of the Pacific Northwest.

Formal political battles for gay rights in the seventies inspired a hybrid LGBT activism between working-class groups and middle-class political action committees. While studying these legislative struggles for gay rights makes clear the class divisions in

⁶² "But I'm Not Gay...", Charles Harbaugh Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 23.

the realm of gay politics, it does not address the history of the real experiences of LGBT workers. The issue of coming out at work was a very real one in an era before widespread policies protected gays in employment.

The Harsh Realities of Discrimination at Work

LGBT workers had immediate problems to deal with in the seventies: how to make a living and how to maintain an “out” gay existence. Post-Stonewall gay rights activism encouraged gays to come out. Activists at gay pride marches chanted “Say it loud! Gay and Proud!” and “Out now! Never going back!”⁶³ But the harsh realities of gay workers fired for being open about their sexualities made coming out difficult and impractical for many workers. The Portland gay newspaper, *The Fountain*, published an article in 1982 that encouraged gays to think twice about coming out on-the-job:

A handful of communities have enacted laws barring job discrimination on the basis of sexual preference, and in theory there is protection for the gay employee working under a union contract. But these protections can be illusory. In almost any other job, the employer can find some basis other than sexual preference for firing a gay employee. Here are some questions to ponder before you come out at work:

Is there another openly gay employee in a position comparable to yours? Do you work where laws or regulations forbid discrimination on the basis of sexual preference? Are you liked by fellow employees? Have you been reprimanded for anything that could serve as a pretext for firing you? Do co-workers tell homophobic jokes?⁶⁴

⁶³ “Chants and songs for the Gay Pride March 1977,” Charles Harbaugh Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 13.

⁶⁴ “The Ins and Outs of Coming Out,” *NW Fountain*, November 1982: 8A.

On-the-job discrimination affected sexual minorities in very real ways. Three widely publicized cases in the Seattle and Portland show that sexual minority workers faced the threat of discrimination because of their sexual orientation. In 1972, the Tacoma School District in Washington State fired teacher Jim Gaylord because he allegedly “publicly admitted being homosexual.”⁶⁵ In this case, the Washington State Supreme Court ruled that the school district could fire an employee for being gay. *The Seattle Gay News* wrote that the Court “decided that as a ‘publicly known homosexual’ Jim Gaylord was an immoral person unfit to teach children.”⁶⁶ Even after appealing rulings several times, Gaylord was never reinstated to his high school teaching position.

Institutionalized homophobia made school districts unsafe places for out gay employees in the Pacific Northwest and nationally.⁶⁷ In 1971, Cascadian High School fired Portland teacher Peggy Burton for being a lesbian. A rumor circulated about her sexual orientation and the school dismissed her immediately. In a dramatic demonstration of the principal’s resolve to eliminate Burton’s influence on the school, hundreds of yearbook pages were torn out because students had dedicated the book to her.⁶⁸ The American Federation of Teachers, the union that both Gaylord and Burton belonged to, passed a resolution in 1970 to protest employment discrimination based on

⁶⁵ Hal Nelson, “A Teacher Who Fought Back,” *Seattle Gay News* (March 1977): 1 and 4.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ For the history of LGBT caucuses in teacher unions, see Miriam Frank, “Lesbian and Gay Caucuses in the U.S. Labor Movement,” in *Laboring for Rights: Unions and Sexual Diversity Across Nations*, ed. Gerald Hunt (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 87-102.

⁶⁸ “ACLU Defends Teacher,” *The Fountain* (June 1972): 1.

homosexuality.⁶⁹ But even after long appeals to win back their jobs, these gay teachers lost to a homophobic system.

Employment discrimination based on sexual orientation remained in the most unlikely places. In 1972, the Seattle Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), an organization dedicated to ensuring fair employment practices, fired John F. Singer for being gay. Singer filed several appeals citing unlawful discrimination. He filed his last and final appeal with the Federal Employee Appeals Authority in 1978, six years after the EEOC terminated him. This appeal said Singer was “disqualified for employment in the Federal Government because of immoral and notoriously disgraceful conduct and [the EEOC ordered] his removal from Federal Service.”⁷⁰ Singer, a well-known radical gay activist also known as Faygele Ben Miriam, was charged with kissing a man in the lobby of his workplace and driving around publicly with the words “Faggots Against Facism” painted on his car windows. After a six-year battle to prove that his termination was based on his sexual orientation, and therefore, unjust, the Appeals Authority found in favor of Singer/Miriam. He went back to work for the EEOC and remained a pillar of LGBT activism in the Pacific Northwest community until his death in 2000.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Bain, 62.

⁷⁰ “Appeal of John F. Singer Under Part 731, Subpart D of the Civil Service Regulations,” Decision No. Seo71380002 (21 July 1978), Charles Harbaugh Papers, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 28.

⁷¹ Faygele Ben Miriam was the plaintiff in a well-known gay civil union lawsuit brought against King County, Washington (Singer v. Hara) in 1973. Roger Troen Collection, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Box 2.

The cases above only account for the few discrimination cases documented in the gay and popular presses. Many more cases of discrimination and harassment in employment existed in industrial jobs and the trades. Discrimination and the threat of discrimination drove the LGBT community in these jobs to organize and educate themselves about how to negotiate being out at work.

Out gay workers faced a volatile and discriminatory climate on the job. An acknowledgement of the hostile climate toward gay workers is clear in an article published in the *NW Gay Review*, a Portland gay newspaper, in 1974 entitled “Looking for a Job,”

The battle for liberation is not won by meaningless things, but is won by ideas and being productive citizens. A person has a right to be proud of whatever they are—but phony masculinity or femininity [sic] has been forced upon us by the heterosexual world and it is time that we stop playing their destructive game and become natural in our mannerisms. This is particularly true for the person who wants to work, to be productive and contribute to society. Even in the occupations that are called traditional for the Gay person, you are not allowed these exaggerations for they are offensive to others. Be yourself—but be the self that people will like, that which fits you as a man or a woman.⁷²

The priority of keeping your job over coming out was critical for many working-class sexual minorities. According to a 1979 survey of gay and lesbian workers in Seattle, 15 percent reported they had been denied jobs, 12 percent had been fired, 8 percent were denied promotions, and 12 percent had their duties reduced, all because they were homosexual.⁷³ Incidences of discrimination and the need for community-wide job

⁷² David VanWagner, “Looking for a Job,” *NW Gay Review* (March 1974): 7.

resources compelled LGBT organizations to focus their resources on the issue of gays and work.

The Gay Community Center (GCC), founded in 1974 in Seattle, was one such group. The GCC was dedicated to providing counseling and referral services, including job referrals, to sexual minorities. GCC operated a Jobline/Emergency Services program to assist gay people with employment and housing resources. From 1974 to 1980, the Jobline provided two full-time counselors to assist with job or career planning, skills assessment, resumé writing, and information on community resources and training programs. Their job listings varied, “ranging from supportive situations in Gay-owned businesses and organizations to traditional situations in the straight job market.”⁷⁴ Hundreds of LGBT people accessed these services each year, which demonstrates the necessity for these kinds of services in the gay community. By 1975, the center was receiving approximately twelve hundred drop-in visits and four hundred calls for information and referrals.⁷⁵ Nearly four hundred people received GCC job referral services four years later in 1979.⁷⁶

⁷³ “Job Discrimination: are we protected?” *GCC Newsletter* (July 1980): 1, Charles Harbaugh Collection, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 24.

⁷⁴ “Jobline,” *GCC Newsletter* (December 1979): 2, Charles Harbaugh Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 24.

⁷⁵ David Neth, “View from the Center,” *GCC Newsletter* (October/November 1975): 4, Charles Harbaugh Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 24.

⁷⁶ “Jobline,” *GCC Newsletter* (February 1980), Charles Harbaugh Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 24.

The GCC suffered through periods of funding crunches and was always making pleas to private donors and public entities for money to fund their projects. In 1975, the King County Council terminated funding for the Jobline. The GCC experienced the same kind of discrimination LGBT workers were used to; out of 1600 other applications the County considered that year, the gay Jobline was apparently the only project that got rejected.⁷⁷ The GCC recognized that the program was vital in connecting LGBT people with employment and struggled to stay open with a volunteer staff.

The GCC served as a clearinghouse for gay groups in the Pacific Northwest and was associated with the radical Gay Liberation Front, the Sexual Minority Prisoners Caucus, and the Venereal Disease Clinic. Like many early gay resource centers, the GCC faced challenges associated with pleasing all factions of the gay community:

In our innocence [sic] we didn't realize the extent of division, hostility, and refusal to interact between the various gay groups [sic] and lifestyles... We failed to consider the number of gay street people who had no place to go.⁷⁸

The post-Stonewall gay identity was complicated by diversity among LGBT people by racism, sexism and classism. On-the-job discrimination was one of those challenges and a few formal groups of gay employees formed to address it at their workplaces.

In 1973 the Gay Public Employees Federation of Oregon formed as the first gay union in the Pacific Northwest. An article published in a mainstream newspaper

⁷⁷ Mike Kenney, "City Council Axes Funds for Gay Jobline," *GCC Newsletter* (October/November 1975): 4, Charles Harbaugh Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 26.

⁷⁸ Neth, *ibid.*

reported that the GPEFO formed because “homosexuals are fired regularly by state, federal and other government agencies because of their sexual preferences, not their work records.” The group’s organizers reported that only five members showed up to their first meeting and attributed the low attendance to the fact that “all except 2 of 100 notices posted in public buildings were torn down soon after they were put up.”⁷⁹ The political, social and economic climate at this time made it nearly impossible for gay employees to organize at work. Working-class LGBT groups formed outside of the workplace in the seventies in the Pacific Northwest. Although short-lived, the GPEFO was not the last effort to organize gay workers against discrimination in the Pacific Northwest.

In the early days of LGBT activism at work, protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation was the goal for gay workers and helped them to gain legitimacy. Employees of the Seattle Public Library workers recognized that rights based on sexual orientation were a professional concern for librarians and they fought to gain protections in hiring and firing. Library workers submitted evidence that “sexual orientation” should be included in their first contract in 1974.⁸⁰ The main objective of this campaign was to gain protection for gay library workers in hiring and firing:

The Library Journal that came out just before the ALA [American Librarians Association] convention in Chicago featured a half page guide to the gay bars of that city. Obviously the Library Journal is aware of the very high percentage of gay persons employed in libraries. As shown above, discrimination based on

⁷⁹ “Homosexuals Fighting Bias in Public Jobs,” *Oregon Journal* 23 March 1973, 2.

⁸⁰ Margaret Baughman and D. Carl Harder, “Sexual Orientation,” Tim Mayhew Gay Rights Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 4.

sexual orientation does exist. We fee that the individual's choice of lifestyle should have no effect on his or her job security.⁸¹

If employers knew that many of the workers were homosexual, they should be afforded protections based on sexual orientation. The Seattle Library workers got their contract with protections based on sexual orientation in 1974.⁸² These library workers wanted to be able to safely and confidently come out on the job and the union contract achieved this goal. Very few gay groups organized at work in the seventies but the groups that did exist were testaments to the need for gay worker alliances in the workplace.⁸³

LGBT workers were lucky to find places to work where they did not have to fight for their sexual rights. Starflower Natural Foods and Botanicals, Inc., in Eugene, Oregon, was such a place. When Starflower closed in 1987, the *Women's Press* ran a celebratory article:

Starflower was...a pillar of the gay community. Lesbians and gay men who worked at Starflower were able to be outspoken and active without risking their jobs.⁸⁴

While it was risky, being out on the job was a form of activism, in itself. LGBT workers took advantage of this unique position to assist the larger gay community. Christine

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² AFSCME, Council 2, Everett, Washington.

⁸³ In 1977 the Washington State Nurses Association's Board of Directors adopted a policy of nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual or affectional preference, which was the first in the country. Tim Mayhew Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle Box 4.

⁸⁴ Constance Newoman, Sally Sheklow, and Jain Elliot, "Starflower closes its doors," *Women's Press* (January/February 1987): 1, The Lesbian Periodical Collection, Special Collections, University of Oregon, Eugene.

Frazer, a former Starflower truckdriver, remembered fondly that though it was illegal for them to distribute goods that were not their own, Starflower proudly distributed LGBT publications up and down the West Coast in their trucks.⁸⁵

Conclusion

For gay workers, the threat of on-the-job discrimination was a real one. In the seventies the Pacific Northwest, the LGBT community faced homophobic challenges from mainstream society and the class and gender divisions within its own ranks. The political, social and economic activity of the 1970s in the Pacific Northwest laid the groundwork for organizing and activism in the 1980s. Though stratified by class, sex, and gender identity, the LGBT community overcame immense challenges. Tragedy struck the Pacific Northwest LGBT community with the onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the eighties, changing the gay working-class and labor organizations which advocated for queer workers.

⁸⁵ Christine Frazer interview.

CHAPTER THREE

THE STRUGGLE FOR LEGITIMACY: WORKERS' RIGHTS, HIV/AIDS, AND ANTI-GAY POLITICS IN THE 1980S PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Political and social innovations by working-class LGBT groups in the seventies paved the way for gay/labor alliances in the eighties in the Pacific Northwest. Fights waged against discriminatory initiatives in employment and housing politicized the LGBT community and more workers expressed their sexual and class identities at work. LGBT workers “came out” at their jobs, forcing a new discourse about discrimination and accommodation on the job. Workers’ rights struggles continued to be fought in both the gay rights and labor arenas, and these movements began to overlap agendas in the eighties. The workplace remained a major site for this coalition for resistance against on-the-job discrimination.

Several scholars have examined LGBT social spaces as sites of socioeconomic and political resistance.⁸⁶ In the eighties, LGBT employees sought workplace legitimacy-which I define as economic and social dignity. Being able to concurrently earn a living *and* be comfortable with sexual expression at work became a goal of the LGBT labor movement. To working-class LGBT activists, there was no difference between social, political, and economic activism or public and private legitimacy.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ See George Chauncey, *Gay New York*; Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*; and Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town*.

Workplace activism allowed LGBT people to rally simultaneously for their social and economic dignity. This dual goal encouraged gay and labor alliances.

Although LGBT activists had established two goals and identified a new venue in the workplace, this gay-labor movement saw shifts on several fronts in the eighties due to the HIV/AIDS crisis. The onset of the HIV/AIDS crisis directly affected the tactics of the working-class LGBT activist community. HIV/AIDS threatened the LGBT community in concrete ways, presenting new challenges with AIDS discrimination in housing and employment. AIDSphobia amplified the workplace tensions already in place due to homophobia. The LGBT community enlisted help from labor unions to keep LGBT workers and HIV-positive workers safe in their workplaces. They did this both to pursue the goal of workplace legitimacy, and out of a dire need for protection due to the HIV/AIDS crisis. The language of legitimacy and dignity became rooted in the early years of HIV/AIDS.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic fueled, in part, a right-wing homophobia that appeared in a concrete way in the late eighties and nineties. Anti-gay political initiatives sought to eliminate workplace protections and other civil rights for LGBT people. The LGBT community's response to these new political challenges resulted in the importance of being 'out' about homosexuality. The anti-gay initiatives also brought gay workers out at the workplace to rally for rights for sexual minority workers. The eighties and early

⁸⁷ For more on sexual and class identities as they relate to public and private spheres, see Amber Hollibaugh, *My Dangerous Desires: A Queer Girl Dreaming Her Way Home* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

nineties political climate helped the LGBT community realize the importance of the intersection of sexual and class identities, and how to make them work together in the interest of resisting oppression.

The Need for Workplace Legitimacy

LGBT workers could not separate their social and economic experiences on the job and sought legitimacy at work where they did not have to hide their sexual identities. Homophobia fundamentally prevented workers from being dignified on the job. Even stellar work performances could not protect gay employees from homophobia. The work experience of Harriet Merrick demonstrates the extent to which LGBT workers dealt with daily discrimination. Merrick, a longtime employee with the University of Oregon and an out lesbian, was (and is) a prolific activist for gay rights who started out working for the student group, Gay People's Alliance in the seventies. She campaigned against Anita Bryant's anti-gay initiative in Eugene, Oregon, in 1978. Merrick put her longtime political experiences to work combating the Oregon state anti-gay measure in 1988, which I will discuss later in this chapter. Merrick chose to come out at work in 1976, when it became too "annoying" for her to conceal her sexual orientation. Though she kept her political activism separate from her job, she faced daily discrimination at work. Merrick described her workplace climate as "fairly homophobic." She said her co-

workers would have been more forgiving of her homosexuality if she just would have kept it to herself.⁸⁸

Merrick received the highest ratings at her job for many years, but several co-workers and managers would not even acknowledge her when she said “hello” to them in the morning. She described relentless homophobia that manifested itself in daily confrontations with her co-workers, including one situation that became more serious:

There was one individual that went beyond [not acknowledging Merrick]. She was really going after me. Kind of like a hunting expedition. My boss at that time had to set her down a couple of times to tell her to cut it out.⁸⁹

What could LGBT workers like Merrick do in a hostile work environment? Merrick said that her supervisor supported her and took care of things when she felt discriminated against. But she said there was no doubt in her mind that she would have been treated worse if she had worked for other supervisors, some of whom clearly disliked gays. Because Merrick was out about her sexuality, daily prejudice affected her work life, and the lives of many other LGBT workers. Even excellent work ratings and friendly supervisors could not protect workers from homophobia. The gay rights movement gained some legal protections for LGBT workers beginning in the mid-eighties.

The political obstacles to workplace organizing by gay workers in the seventies changed in the eighties. Both Washington and Oregon in 1985 and 1987 issued executive orders to protect state employees from discrimination based on sexual orientation for the

⁸⁸ Harriet Merrick, interview by author, tape recording, Eugene, Or., 12 March 2002.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

first time in the Pacific Northwest.⁹⁰ The executive orders, which were long-term projects of gay political action committees like Right To Privacy in Portland and the Dorian Group in Seattle, represented formal political support for working-class LGBT activism. Because it was now illegal to fire employees based on sexual orientation, gay activists could rally for their workplace rights in ways that would have been dangerous before.

Rank-and-file members in labor unions began to push for contractual protections for LGBT workers. Adding “sexual orientation” to non-discrimination clauses in union contracts was particularly important to ensure protections. State workers in the Oregon Public Employees Union got protection based on sexual orientation in September 1987, following a nine-day strike.⁹¹ Though the focus of the strike was on pay equity, LGBT strikers made sure protections for sexual minorities remained a priority.⁹²

Feminism still played a large part in the LGBT movement. Women in unions worked in coalition with gay groups to fight discrimination. In 1984 Seattle’s Radical Women hosted a large conference to build coalitions against workplace inequality called, “Breaking the Barriers of Job Discrimination.” Over one hundred thirty participants from sixty unions came together to “rally the labor movement in defense of its most discriminated-against sectors—women, people of color, the disabled, and sexual

⁹⁰ Washington Governor Booth Gardner signed Executive Order 85-08 on December 24, 1985. Oregon Governor Neil Goldschmidt signed Executive Order 87-20 on October 15, 1987.

⁹¹ Robin Saxton, “State workers gain little from first strike,” *Women’s Press* (November/December 1987): 4, The Lesbian Periodical Collection, Special Collections, University of Oregon, Eugene.

⁹² Ann Montague, “We Are Union Builders Too: Oregon Union Tackles Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation,” *Labor Research Review* 20 (1994).

minorities.” Conference participants passed a resolution to add protection for the category of sexual orientation to union contracts.⁹³ Union members encouraged each other to use anti-discrimination campaigns at their workplaces as organizing tools:

Cheryl Peoples, Equity Committee Chair and executive Board member of the Communication Workers of America (CWA), Local 9102, said that by setting up an equity committee to address discrimination on the job and inside the union, Local 9102 has begun to demonstrate to its members that countering racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination is the way to build solidarity within, and thus strengthen the union.

Rank-and-file workers orchestrated awareness-raising campaigns to bring these issues to the fore of their own unions’ agenda.

Informal social organizations existed as resources for LGBT workers when formal workplace support was absent. These organizations included Cascade Union of Educators (CUE), Portland Professional Organization of Women (PPOW), Lesbian Entrepreneurs, and Blue Collar Guys, who met monthly for potlucks and networking. These groups became important social support networks for LGBT employees who could not be out at work. They provided a social space for gay workers’ discourse about employment issues.

Institutional protections for LGBT workers emerged in the eighties in the form of executive orders and labor union activism. These protections made it safe for workers to be ‘out’ and to demand workplace equity. But despite these considerations, discrimination continued to be a problem for working-class LGBT people. It is the

⁹³ Mary Ann Curtis, “Women workers and unionists demand job equality,” *Just Out* (January 1985): 7 and 15.

stories of brave individuals such as Harriet Merrick that point to the ways in which social and economic dignity still had to be gained at the workplace. Legitimacy at work was not the only issue for the LGBT community, though. In the mid-eighties the HIV/AIDS crisis hit the Pacific Northwest and changed LGBT working-class activism.

AIDS and the Workplace

Although workplace prejudice based on sexual orientation was a problem, legitimacy at work was not the only issue for the LGBT community. The onset of the HIV/AIDS crisis became a watershed moment with LGBT activists simultaneously trying to protect workers from discrimination and a deadly disease. The formation of LGBT-labor alliances became vital for the survival of the working-class LGBT movement in the eighties. The HIV/AIDS epidemic was a watershed moment for LGBT community activism. I periodize the beginning of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the Pacific Northwest in 1983, simply because this is when large-scale organizations formed to prevent the spread of the disease and care for people with HIV/AIDS.⁹⁴ Among scholars and activists, Seattle and Portland are known as “second wave” cities, feeling the full effects of AIDS a couple of years after “first wave” cities such as New York and San Francisco. AIDS organizing was spearheaded by groups founded in first wave cities, but the AIDS

⁹⁴ Northwest AIDS Foundation and Chicken Soup Brigade were begun in Seattle, and Cascade AIDS Project in Portland in 1983.

response in Seattle and Portland response was in step with the spread of the disease in the Pacific Northwest.

The LGBT working-class movement looked very different before and during the struggle with the epidemic. Whereas before AIDS the main issue had been fighting anti-gay discrimination for the preservation of economic livelihood, LGBT activists now struggled to save the *lives* of people affected by AIDS. HIV/AIDS crossed class lines and created an air of vulnerability in society. Gay workers in all professions, in particular, became susceptible to AIDS discrimination. AIDS and homosexuality became synonymous so that out LGBT workers had to combat AIDSphobia and homophobia. This made it especially difficult for LGBT workers to be out about their sexual orientations. The discrimination gay workers faced ranged from wrongful termination to denial of benefits for family members. Homophobia and AIDS-phobia worked hand-in-hand to marginalize and undermine LGBT workers; however the working-class LGBT movement found ways to respond.

HIV/AIDS represented new challenges for LGBT workers who faced AIDS bashing. For instance, Vince Wetzler had the courage to come out as a gay man to his co-workers at a Portland flexible packaging plant in the seventies. Although he endured jeers and homophobic graffiti, his co-workers' ridicule died down after a few months. But when AIDS became a prominent issue in the media with the death of Rock Hudson in 1985, harassment against Wetzler started up again. A co-worker photocopied fliers reading, "Hey Vince, Got AIDS Yet?" In January 1986, a supervisor told him, "Since you're gay, you're a second-class-citizen and you have to work twice as hard to keep

your job.” When his supervisors found out that Wetzler tested positive for HIV in 1987, they fired him.⁹⁵ The homophobia and AIDS-phobia Wetzler braved at work ultimately ran him out of his job. Although Wetzler fought these discrimination charges by filing a complaint against his company, Crown Zellerbach, the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries dismissed his case in 1988, citing “no substantial evidence found.”⁹⁶ Wetzler’s story shows that homophobia and AIDSphobia often worked together to oppress LGBT workers. Discrimination cases that targeted gay workers for their sexuality and their perceived HIV-status were on the rise in the Pacific Northwest and nationally.⁹⁷ AIDS and homosexuality became synonymous, so workers had to simultaneously combat AIDS-phobia and homophobia.

AIDS changed the ways that employers treated their employees, gay or otherwise. New policies on workplace safety, health insurance benefits, and disability discrimination had to be established in order to educate employees and provide for their basic rights. It was always illegal for employers to discriminate against workers based on their HIV status.⁹⁸ State policies, however, made mild mention of AIDS discrimination, and officials rarely enforced anti-harassment statutes. An example of the state’s mild-mannered approach to educating employees about their rights surfaced in 1988. Oregon state employees received a brochure outlining workplace policies about workers with

⁹⁵ Anndee Hochman, “AIDS discrimination suit pending,” *Just Out* (October 1988) 7.

⁹⁶ Email from Christine Lanuza to the author, 20 May 2002.

⁹⁷ In 1992 discrimination against people with HIV accounted for 10.5% of the Americans with Disabilities Act charges nationally. <http://www.eeoc.gov/stats/ada-merit.html>

⁹⁸ Washington Law Against Discrimination, Americans with Disabilities Act.

HIV/AIDS. The policy regarding HIV status and discrimination stated, “Generally, medical records of employees are protected from public disclosure. Self-disclosure is voluntary and should not result in harassment.”⁹⁹ The state’s disciplinary policy to discourage discrimination against HIV-positive workers read as a warning:

When an employee’s refusal to work with an affected co-worker is not based on a reasonable risk of exposure, the employee should be counseled as to current medical information. A continued unreasonable neglect of duty could be subject to normal disciplinary action.¹⁰⁰

Oregon state policies protected employees from AIDS discrimination, but the precedent that the anti-discrimination policies set was a mild one. While the state emphasized the importance of educating employees to be sensitive to the needs of workers with HIV/AIDS, workers themselves did not have strong advocates. At the same time, LGBT activists did not expect special rights on the job, just equal respect for themselves as workers. “Safety” held a different definition for straight workers and LGBT workers when it came to the AIDS issue. While occupational safety and HIV-infection may have been foremost on the minds of straight workers, LGBT workers had job discrimination to worry about. For an LGBT worker, homophobia and AIDSphobia threatened their jobs and jeopardized the legitimacy that LGBT workers had been seeking since the seventies (and for decades before).¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ “AIDS in the workplace: state employees get instructions,” *Just Out* (August 1988): 8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ For pre-Stonewall LGBT history see Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*; and Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town*.

AIDS organizations and labor unions teamed up to educate workers about the risks of HIV and the legal restrictions of AIDS discrimination in the workplace. Labor unions orchestrated the dissemination of knowledge to working people at a time when accurate HIV/AIDS education was virtually non-existent.¹⁰² In 1988, rank-and-file workers from the Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals held the first conference in the Pacific Northwest. The nurses invited the community AIDS organization, Cascade AIDS Project, among others, to present workshops focused on basic education about HIV/AIDS, including guidelines on occupational safety for healthcare workers and employee rights in dealing with AIDS discrimination. Though two hundred people participated in the conference, and two hundred more would have attended if there had been space. President of OFN Kathy Schmidt said the conference was an “overwhelming success...Healthcare workers in this state are hungry for any shred of information about AIDS.”¹⁰³ Labor unions in the Pacific Northwest did address HIV/AIDS education at a crucial time in the epidemic, but the motivation for them to do so came from their rank-and-file membership. The AFL-CIO dragged its feet on taking HIV/AIDS issues seriously. The labor and AIDS alliances in the Pacific Northwest came two years before the AFL-CIO national office called for AIDS awareness in unions.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² For a discussion of SEIU and AIDS education in the early eighties see Miriam Frank, “Lesbian and Gay Caucuses in the U.S. Labor Movement,” in *Laboring for Rights: Unions and Sexual Diversity Across Nations*, ed. Gerald Hunt (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 87-102.

¹⁰³ “Conference on AIDS draws 200 participants,” *The Newsloft* (January-February 1989): 5.

¹⁰⁴ AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland called on union members “to resist hysteria surrounding the AIDS [sic] epidemic, to learn about the disease, take precautions to prevent it, and protect the rights of workers who have AIDS or who may be HIV positive...Union members who have AIDS have a right to

Labor unions urged employers to protect HIV-positive workers from discrimination. Rank-and-file workers found ways to make their voices heard on matters of workplace safety, AIDS education, and non-discrimination. The Oregon Federation of Teachers (OFT), for instance, passed a resolution at their 1988 convention to advocate for people with AIDS:

WHEREAS, AIDS/ARC victims are currently facing discriminatory practices involving breaches of confidentiality and loss of insurability; and
 WHEREAS, AIDS/ARC victims are facing prohibitive health care costs; be it therefore RESOLVED, that OFT directs AFL-CIO to lobby for legislation which guarantees nondiscrimination against AIDS/ARC victims in their workplace; resolution also directs lobbying in [sic] behalf of AIDS/ARC victims retaining healthcare and health insurance benefits.¹⁰⁵

The rights to health benefits were especially important to workers with AIDS due to the high cost of treatment. Additionally, if a person living with AIDS lost her/his job and health insurance, it was impossible to pay for health care. Health insurance companies discriminated against people living with AIDS as well. OFT's first overture to workplace protection for LGBT union members was important to protecting workers from AIDS discrimination. But it was a mild step in advocating for LGBT workers.¹⁰⁶ The same protections for workers based on sexual orientation did not crop up in union contracts until the nineties. But the rank-and-file activism in unions responded to the challenge that HIV/AIDS posed to LGBT workers in the eighties.

work with dignity and without discrimination." "AIDS Awareness encouraged by AFL-CIO President," *The Newsloft* (September-October 1990): 5.

¹⁰⁵ "Resolutions reflect locals' concerns," *The Newsloft*, Convention Summary (1988): 2.

¹⁰⁶ A search through OFT/AFT newsletters from 1975 to 1990 turned up zero reports on LGBT activism among its members.

Anti-Gay Politics and the Working-Class Movement

The threat of anti-gay politics mobilized the LGBT community in the late eighties and early nineties in the Pacific Northwest. The HIV/AIDS epidemic had amplified homophobic and AIDS-phobic sentiment in society and conservative politicians used this to their advantage. Increasing right-wing activity against the LGBT community helped the community identify the seriousness of political threats and the need for widespread activism. Statewide initiatives threatened working LGBT people. But they also mobilized working-class LGBT individuals in terms of their visibility as gay people in the community and at work. The recognition of class identity became an important tool in fighting anti-gay politics. The late eighties and early nineties became an important time to be out at work even with homophobic forces mounting legislative stress on protections for LGBT people in the workplace. Rather than retreating back into the closet, many LGBT workers fought back against anti-gay measures.

Oregon's Measure 8 challenged the gains that gay workers had achieved in 1988 with the executive order to protect state workers. The right-wing Christian group Oregon Citizen's Alliance (OCA) headed the campaign. The OCA's goal of suppressing homosexuality at the state level was made clear in OCA campaign literature which expressed their intention:

to distinguish between private behavior and public policy, and to prevent the establishment of special rights, taxpayer funding, or authorized access to public

schools for individuals or groups who promote, encourage or facilitate homosexuality, sadism, masochism, or pedophilia.¹⁰⁷

The OCA used public sentiment about the link between homosexuality and the HIV/AIDS epidemic as an anti-gay tool, as well. With the 1992 Measure 9, the OCA intended to ban all references to homosexuality in public schools, including eliminating HIV/AIDS education.¹⁰⁸ The OCA focused on campaign rhetoric that appealed to anti-gay sentiments. A Measure 8 brochure claimed that the executive order that protected state employees from sexual orientation discrimination “implies to our children that perverse homosexual practices are morally neutral and normal... This executive order goes beyond tolerance. It *promotes* homosexuality.” The OCA’s propagandizing slogan of “no special rights” for homosexuals has reverberated around the state of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest since the eighties. This conservative group relies on the illogical argument that extending civil rights protections to the LGBT community would give them additional political rights. The OCA’s campaigns have actually tried to strip citizens of their rights such as excluding sexual minorities from civil rights protections in employment, which would have significantly crippled the gay community economically. Measure 8, the OCA’s first statewide measure, sought to overturn the governor’s ban on discrimination against gays in state hiring and services. The Pacific Northwest LGBT

¹⁰⁷ “Statement of Legislative Intent,” *Oregon Citizen’s Alliance Vote YES on Measure 9!* (1992): 2. Tim Mayhew Gay Rights Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 16.

¹⁰⁸ For in-depth studies of the 1992 No On 9 campaign in Oregon, see Patricia Young, “Oregon’s Anti-Gay Measure 9,” (MA thesis, Portland State University, 1997); and Arlene Stein’s *The Stranger Next Door*.

community had found a formidable foe in the Oregon Citizen's Alliance's brand of anti-gay politics.

Despite the efforts of gay rights activists, Measure 8 passed in November 1988, making it legal to discriminate against state employees based on sexuality.¹⁰⁹ When Measure 8 passed, the gay community immediately criticized the campaign strategies of the No on 8 campaign, led by Oregonians for Fairness (OFF), which had chosen to focus on job discrimination rather than gay rights. Groups like Gays and Lesbians United (GLU) and Queers Against Closets (QUAC) criticized OFF for being in the closet, and for not directly combating the stereotypes of the LGBT community as immoral and evil. Fred Menard, a member of GLU, said in a Portland gay newspaper, "I was disappointed that OFF kind of wimped out in not wanting to refer to it as a gay issue." OFF took the words 'gay' and 'lesbian' out of campaign literature entirely.¹¹⁰

The OFF campaign tried to subvert the homophobic power structure by demanding workers' rights rather than drawing attention to archaic stereotypes of homosexuality presented by the OCA. While this strategy was not an ultimately successful in winning the campaign, nonetheless it brought workplace issues to the forefront of the gay rights struggle. Although some in the gay community questioned OFF's campaign tactics, protecting gay workers from discrimination was a fundamental

¹⁰⁹ Harriet P. Merrick, an employee of the Oregon Board of Higher Education, filed a lawsuit against the state with the help of the Oregon American Civil Liberties Union. The suit alleged that "Merrick, due to the inconsistency between Measure 8 and the Board's rules, 'is required by law to carry out and enforce two contradictory and mutually exclusive legal mandates.'" "Lesbian sues to reverse Measure 8," *Just Out* (July 1989): 10. The Oregon Court of Appeals struck down Measure 8 on November 12, 1992. "A real victory for Oregon," *Just Out*, (1 December 1992): 15.

¹¹⁰ Andee Hochman, "After Eight," *Just Out* (December 1988): 13.

right that the LGBT movement had to win to protect their economic viability. Working LGBT people should have had the right to be 'out' in daily life without fear and humiliation. A goal of the LGBT movement became to protect working people from discrimination.

For working-class activists, coming out on the job was still a very volatile issue. Getting fired from one's job was hardly an option for working-class gays who depended on their jobs for their own livelihoods. This narrow approach to ending discrimination against LGBT people left out working-class people entirely. Wetzler's and others' experiences demonstrate increasing HIV/AIDS discrimination and homophobia at work created an inherently inhospitable climate for LGBT workers to come out. After the passage of Measure 8, when it had become legal for employers to discriminate against state employees based on sexual orientation, an editorial, written by activist Carol Steinel, ran in the gay newspaper *Just Out* that encouraged all LGBT people to come out:

I am now absolutely convinced that there is only one tactic which has large scale, lasting impact in the advancement of gay and lesbian rights. COMING OUT. You coming out. Me coming out.¹¹¹

For Pacific Northwest activists such as the one quoted above, coming out would lead to gaining institutional protections for LGBT workers. But to activists for workers' rights, the institutional protections for LGBT people through formal politics and union contracts would lead to a mass coming-out movement. This debate over the relative importance of class and sexuality began in the late eighties in the Pacific Northwest.

¹¹¹ Carol Steinel, "A Coming Out Primer," *Just Out* (December 1988): 2.

Patrick McCreery's scholarship on pro-gay legislation shows that this debate was going on in the nineties among gay rights groups, as well.¹¹² He would concur with the critique of the OFF campaign and argue that more emphasis needed to be placed on sexuality. McCreery brings the issue of sexual deviance to the debate, which, based on the right-wing Christian platform, is commonly understood as the fundamental root of homophobia. The OCA's rhetoric about equating homosexuality with masochism and pedophilia certainly shows that stereotypes of sexual deviance often drive anti-gay legislation. It may not seem like an important argument for the gay labor movement to pursue, but McCreery's approach radicalizes the issues and breaks the problem down to its fundamental element: that gay discrimination exists because of the emphasis people put on sexuality and morality. This is an effective way to bring attention to the question: What does sex have to do with work, anyhow? Unfortunately, in today's political climate, the logic of this argument does not override the bigotry of the heterosexist power structure.

Conclusion

The eighties were a time for growth and change for the working-class LGBT movement. Workplace issues that had been explored by gay groups in the seventies materialized in alliances between the labor and gay rights movements. Labor unions got involved on a larger scale to fight homophobia and AIDSphobia simultaneously. Anti-gay

¹¹² Patrick McCreery in *Out At Work*, 42 .

measures appeared in both Oregon and Washington and the LGBT movement had to face the realities of homophobia and classism in formal politics.¹¹³

The struggles of the eighties Pacific Northwest show how LGBT workers' activism moved the gay rights movement toward a workplace rights movement. In turn, the labor movement met the LGBT community's demands in the wake of the HIV/AIDS crisis. However, labor unions could have done more in the past and should do more in the future to reach out to the LGBT community in fighting for their workplace rights. As I discuss in the next chapter, a case study of the unionization of an AIDS service organization in 1989 shows why sexual identity and worker identity must work together for the LGBT labor movement to be successful.

¹¹³ Washington State saw its own challenges to the gay rights movement in the 1990s with Initiatives 608 and 610, which sought to eliminate protections for state and city workers based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation. Voters defeated both initiatives. The group Hands Off Washington existed from 1992-1997 to lobby against the initiatives and to promote gay rights in Washington State. http://www.acadweb.wvu.edu/cpnws/coll_display.asp?alpha=H Center for Pacific Northwest Studies website.

CHAPTER FOUR

“WE’RE NOT WIDGET WORKERS”

THE UNIONIZATION OF NORTHWEST AIDS FOUNDATION, 1985-1995

If queer workers in the Pacific Northwest and around the country faced discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender expression, what would a workplace look like where homophobia did not exist? Would a workplace free of homophobia and other kinds of discrimination still need a labor union? The case of the Northwest AIDS Foundation (NWAFF) provides some answers to these questions.¹¹⁴ Founded in 1983 in Seattle, Washington, NWAFF employed mostly out gays and lesbians and became the first AIDS service organization to unionize in the United States.¹¹⁵ Service Employees International Union, Local 6 was chosen by the workers to unionize NWAFF in 1989. Workplace dynamics and the unionization campaign at NWAFF reveal that even though gays and lesbians were out at work, their sexual identities affected their class identifications, and vice versa. The sexual and class identities of the workers presented challenges to the initial unionization efforts. There is a lesson to be learned

¹¹⁴ Northwest AIDS Foundation merged with Chicken Soup Brigade, another AIDS service organization, in 2000, and changed its name to Lifelong AIDS Alliance. Workers retained the union throughout the transition.

¹¹⁵ AIDS service organizations in “first wave” cities unionized a few years after Northwest AIDS Foundation. Miriam Frank is conducting an in-depth study of New York City’s Gay Men’s Health Crisis and their 1992 unionization campaign.

here about how class and queer identities work together in a workplace and how unions might approach LGBT workers.

This case study provides a unique opportunity to examine a workplace where most workers identify as sexual minorities, an issue labor scholars have thus far not examined. I characterize NWAF as an “LGBT workplace” because it was a business founded and operated by LGBT workers that provided services to the LGBT community. “I was hired because I was gay,” said Hazel Van Evera, one of the first employees hired by NWAF in 1983.¹¹⁶ The unique opportunities and challenges that this openness created in terms of class struggle will be examined in this chapter. The reasons that NWAF unionized were not unique to an LGBT organization. But as class dynamics surfaced in this LGBT workplace, SEIU faced new challenges with sexual identity politics.

The management at NWAF tried to create a “family” atmosphere based on sexual affinity, and workers, in turn, became invested in this “family.”¹¹⁷ Leaders of the organization gave workers a set of standards to uphold the organization and the “family”: to advocate for clients with HIV/AIDS and to take pride in the openness NWAF provided for the LGBT community’s sexualities. Consequently, NWAF provided an inherent legitimacy for its LGBT workers in terms of their sexual identities. This legitimacy at work convinced some workers they had power in the NWAF “family.” But for others, the union became the vehicle for gaining protections at work that the “family” would and

¹¹⁶ Hazel Van Evera, interview by author, tape recording, Bainbridge Island, Wa., 17 August 2001.

¹¹⁷ The 1983 book *Like a Family* also discusses a labor community in terms of a family. The authors described this “family” as an interdependence and solidarity between workers. Jacqueline Dowd Hall, James Leloudis, Robert Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones, Christopher B. Daly, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

could not provide. NWAF's rhetoric of "family" created problems for the union in terms of convincing workers that union benefits outweighed family benefits. The individuals in this family felt a certain sense of solidarity because they mostly identified as sexual minorities. Issues of sexuality and alliance with the LGBT community in general battled with the class solidarity that the union advocated.

The struggle over the meaning of "family" at the union at NWAF lasted throughout the first decade at the organization. NWAF tried to maintain this company family in spite of the union. In attempting to do so, management's rhetoric and actions to discredit the union mutated this family from a caring, safe space for LGBT workers to a paternalistic relationship. The family analogy put NWAF workers in a subordinate, childlike role, rather than the union's "brothers and sisters" idea of workers solidarity. The family sentiment condescended to NWAF workers who had real concerns based on the power relationships between management and employees. I limit this case study to the period from 1989, the time NWAF unionized, to 1995, when the social, political, and economic climate changed for the LGBT community with the introduction of new treatments for HIV/AIDS in 1995. Though HIV-infection continued to spread throughout the Pacific Northwest, new medical treatments that slowed the disease in the body drastically prolonged the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS.¹¹⁸ As the organization struggled to provide the best services and to advocate for the rights of their clients living

¹¹⁸ I am not arguing that the HIV/AIDS crisis was over in 1995. I am simply pointing out the shift in operations of AIDS service organizations to accommodate the changing needs of people living with HIV/AIDS.

with HIV/AIDS, NWAF administration continuously denied their own employees the right to organize a union. NWAF viewed its “company family” as exceptional for recognizing the rights of their employees to be out as gay or lesbian, but simultaneously denied workers their right to organize.

From Family to Business: Why did they Unionize?

From its inception in 1983, the Northwest AIDS Foundation was the largest AIDS service organization in the Pacific Northwest. The organization saw rapid growth in its first several years, expanding from just five employees in 1983, to thirteen in 1985, to forty in 1988, to over one hundred in 1994.¹¹⁹ Though NWAF was a non-profit organization, its quick development and extensive growth made it into more of a company than a community-based organization. NWAF’s staffing grew in proportion to the rapid spread of HIV infection. Case managers and housing advocates worked to provide people with HIV/AIDS with medical referrals, subsidized housing, and health insurance continuation services. The federal subsidies and grants that provided for NWAF’s initial growth carried only minimal restrictions for organizational accountability.¹²⁰ The agency moved in 1988 to larger quarters on Madison Street on Capital Hill to accommodate its growing services. Labor relations problems began to

¹¹⁹ Jane Mortell, email interview by author, 9 April 2002.

¹²⁰ NWAF received federal monies from the Ryan White Funds and private funding from the Robert Wood Johnson grant, among others.

arise, as they would at any for-profit company that saw rapid expansion. NWAF became a business rather than a family, though they still used the rhetoric of family to rein in would-be workplace labor activists.

The quick development of NWAF's staff and expansion of services created a climate of transition and uncertainty for workers. In 1988, NWAF's first executive director stepped down and made way for new leadership. The agency brought in an interim administrator, and the Board of Directors distributed personnel policies to the workers for the first time in the organization's six-year history. At the top of the list was a fire-at-will clause. While perfectly legal in the state of Washington, NWAF employees felt intimidated by the notion that anyone could be fired at any time for any reason. Van Evera described the mood of the workers during this time: "Employees felt alienated [because of the organizational changes]...Everyone was panicking."¹²¹ The workplace grievances that drove workers to unionize at NWAF were not unique.

NWAF faced legal issues with employees prior to the Board unveiling personnel policies. One employee, for instance, had threatened to sue NWAF for AIDS discrimination. In a letter to the newly elected President of the Board of Directors, Carl F. Wagner claimed to have suffered "AIDS Health related discrimination" at NWAF and the issue had not been resolved by the Board. Wagner purported that the Board had ignored his requests for resolution. He resigned his position in 1988, "under protest," and intended to file grievances against NWAF at the city, state and federal levels.¹²² NWAF

¹²¹ Van Evera interview.

blamed Wagner's work problems on AIDS-related dementia, which reveals a typical company response to an employee's complaint: blame the employee. Wagner's complaints also reveal the inadequacy of NWAFF's employee-relations policies. Wagner's consistent complaints and threats for over six months may have led to the implementation of the strict personnel policies in 1989, including the fire-at-will clause.

For NWAFF workers, the prospect of a union offered fair resolutions for ongoing complaints ranging from unfair hiring and firing policies to gross salary inequities. These workplace issues, among others, moved employees at NWAFF to seek help from the union. Jane Mortell, an NWAFF case manager, called Service Employees International Union, Local 6 for help. Unlike most of her coworkers, Mortell had worked with SEIU at a previous job as a mental health counselor. Though SEIU usually organized larger companies such as hospital workers, they agreed to take on the case. Doug Kilgore, Vice President of SEIU Local 6 was the organizer assigned to NWAFF. He reported that SEIU took on the project of unionizing NWAFF because "the NWAFF staff wanted our help and we felt it was within our mission to do that."¹²³ SEIU initially undertook NWAFF in order to help workers gain protection from the fire-at-will clause and then encountered many more issues in the subsequent years.

Most of the employees at NWAFF were unfamiliar with the purpose of labor unions. This created a fundamental challenge for the organizing effort: first, to educate

¹²² Carl F. Wagner, Seattle, to Barry Bianchi, Seattle 5 July 1988, Charles Harbaugh Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, Box 13.

¹²³ Doug Kilgore, interview by author, tape recording, Seattle, Wa., 2 November 2001.

the workers about unions, and second, to convince them that class solidarity would help them with their workplace complaints. "It was a pretty bourgeois group," recalled former NWAFF case manager Jeff Blum, referring to workers' educational and class backgrounds.¹²⁴ Most if not all the employees were college educated and came from middle-class backgrounds.¹²⁵ NWAFF workers self-identified as middle-class, as evidenced by their self-classification as professional, white-collar workers. One worker wrote in the 1995 employee survey, "I despise being referred to as 'line staff.' I would prefer staff, employee, or team member."¹²⁶ A rejection of the perception of the working-class condition created a problem for the union. The presence of the union confused NWAFF workers because they equated a unionized workplace with the working class. Hazel Van Evera recalled this worker sentiment, "We're not widget workers, we're white collar workers."¹²⁷

Many of the workers at NWAFF came from the gay rights activist tradition. For many employees, working for an AIDS service organization and being out on the job became extensions of the fight for LGBT rights.¹²⁸ Being out at work was a luxury that LGBT workers did not enjoy generally in either the Pacific Northwest or the rest of the

¹²⁴ Jeff Blum, interview by author, tape recording, Seattle, Wa., 27 March 2002.

¹²⁵ I arrived at this conclusion from my interviews with former NWAFF employees Blum, Mortell, and Van Evera.

¹²⁶ "1995 SEIU Local 6 & Northwest AIDS Foundation Employee Survey Results," SEIU papers, Lifelong AIDS Alliance, Seattle, WA.

¹²⁷ Van Evera interview.

¹²⁸ Several employees of NWAFF were involved in community gay liberation organizations such as AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and Queer Nation.

nation at this time, and workers and managers had forged affinities based on sexuality and on gay rights activism. In this case, LGBT identity, gay rights, and the affinities workers and managers had based on sexuality subsumed class solidarity. Doug Kilgore recalled, “The gay activist tradition [of the workers] was resistant to uniformity. They were also resistant to solidarity when it involved “falling in line.” Kilgore said that management used this gay activist sentiment to try to bust the union, “All the traditional tools were used to show that the ‘union is not of us.’ We’re an organization within this [gay] culture. The union is an outsider culture, a straight culture.”¹²⁹ The LGBT sexual identity disrupted the work of the union because the company emphasized the affinities based on sexuality between the workers and management.

The disruption of the non-hierarchical expectations of the workers with strict personnel policies such as the fire-at-will clause was what first compelled workers to organize. Yet, ironically, the class divisions that the union exposed between management and the workers were also uncomfortable for the workers. The class solidarity that rank-and-file workers might otherwise have felt for one another was complicated by their “family” and LGBT community sentiments. The noble tradition of assisting LGBT brothers and sisters committed gay workers to the notion of family. The gay activist tradition actually interrupted the way that NWAFF workers fought for their own workplace rights. These factors had tremendous impact on the effectiveness of the union at NWAFF.

The main goal became widespread support from workers once union activity began at NWAFF in 1989. The initial drive for a union election exemplifies this struggle

¹²⁹ Ibid.

for pro-union support. From the time NWAFF workers contacted SEIU, it took approximately six months to get membership cards signed in order to call for an National Labor Relations Board election on November 5, 1989. Management opposed the vote and did everything they could to deny their workers the right to have a union. The company challenged the voting eligibility of two of the union activists, including that of Jane Mortell, who had initially contacted the SEIU. In Mortell's case, the issue was whether or not her position should be classified as management because she supervised other case managers:

I moved up to a supervisory role out of expertise; and I did a combination of supervision and direct service work (I had a caseload) so I didn't make much distinction between myself and those I supervised; also, I didn't make much more pay.¹³⁰

But because of Mortell's background in union activism, management targeted her position to be classified as union ineligible. The union lost the NLRB hearing that determined the makeup of the bargaining unit, which defined Mortell's supervisory position as management.¹³¹ Mortell was disappointed, but not surprised, at NWAFF's union-busting tactics. Had she been allowed to stay union-eligible, she would have been an asset to the union, especially in negotiations. Management succeeded in weakening the bargaining unit by pulling key union activists into positions that were classified as management. With their votes and participation, the union may have attracted more long-term support from workers. The vote was controversial among workers and

¹³⁰ Mortell interview.

¹³¹ National Labor Relations Board, Case # 19-RC12047 (19 September 1989).

according to Van Evera, “everyone felt strongly about it.”¹³² With 100% participation from the union eligible employees, the union approval vote squeaked by with nine votes for the union and eight votes against.¹³³ Despite the closeness of the vote, the workers continued to fight for a fair and just workplace.

A victory for the union came when NAAF workers ratified the collective bargaining agreement in July 1990, the first union contract for an AIDS service organization in history. The negotiations had been drawn out for nearly nine months due to the company’s unwillingness to compromise on issues that employees had been complaining about for years. The main issues included pay scales, seniority, discipline and discharge, and grievance procedures that led to binding arbitration. The language that the two parties settled on for this first contract included provisions on non-discrimination based on HIV/AIDS-related health issues and concrete grievance procedures, both of which would have addressed the problems Carl Wagner experienced a couple of years earlier.

The union launched successful negotiations to alleviate workplace issues contractually, yet workers still remained ambivalent about the union. Worker solidarity culminated in accomplishments for the union, and improvements into every contract. But the idea of NAAF “family” continued to interfere with union organizing and workers continued to identify with sexuality over class.

¹³² Van Evera interview.

¹³³ Kilgore interview.

Real Workplace Issues and Ambivalence Toward the Union

Employment problems abounded at NWAF, presenting many issues around which the union needed to organize. NWAF workers complained about a range of employment issues, further emphasizing the need for a union. The union agitated for the company to address standard workplace issues that any other company would have to be concerned with, including parking for employees and improvement to the ventilation systems. Case managers who had to travel to visit clients with HIV/AIDS wanted the company to provide parking. For years workers asked the company to replace the antiquated ventilation system, which contained the threat of tuberculosis, was a real health and safety issue for both employees and immuno-suppressed clients. Wages and compensation were continuing issues for NWAF employees. For instance, the 1995 salary and benefits survey administered by NWAF's labor management team, a group made of union activists and NWAF managers, found low wages to be the top complaint of workers.¹³⁴ In fact, the results of the 1995 employee survey revealed that workers at NWAF made less money than comparable staff at other social service agencies.¹³⁵ That year the union bargaining team successfully negotiated a pay raise for all union workers.

Though NWAF was able to get health insurance coverage for its clients, they did not extend the same right to workers. Insurance companies discriminated against out gay

¹³⁴ "1995 SEIU Local 6 & Northwest AIDS Foundation Employee Survey Results," SEIU papers, Lifelong AIDS Alliance, Seattle, WA.

¹³⁵ Out of the 48 surveys returned, 20 employees reported making less salary than comparable positions in other agencies. All of those positions were union eligible.

workers and their domestic partners by refusing to insure them. This discrimination was based on sexual orientation and AIDS biases.¹³⁶ Rather than fight homophobia and AIDSphobia, NWAF reinforced it by putting it in the contract. NWAF's agreement to provide medical and dental coverage to workers read: "to the extent that insurance carriers agree to provide coverage."¹³⁷ This clause relieved NWAF of providing fair health insurance coverage to their workers. Moreover, this language represented a unique violation of workers rights. Kilgore had never seen a contract with this particular stipulation, and he attributed it to the fact that many of the workers were out gays and lesbians. For reasons similar to above, NWAF denied domestic partnership benefits to workers.

Health care, parking, and ventilation did not have much to do with sexual identity, yet sexual orientation had everything to do with the challenges the union would face in the coming years. The sexual identities of the employees contributed to their self-perceptions as workers. This, in turn, created challenges for the union, which relied on NWAF workers' class identities to keep union activity successful. The union struggled for membership and participation at NWAF. In 1995, out of thirty-one union-eligible employees, only seven paid dues to the union.¹³⁸ Only dues-paying members were eligible to participate in union decision-making. Having only 22% membership crippled

¹³⁶ Miriam Frank and Desma Holcomb, *Pride at Work: Organizing for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Unions* (New York: Lesbian and Gay Labor Network, 1990): 53-4.

¹³⁷ "Agreement between Northwest AIDS Foundation and Service Employees International Union, AFL-CIO, August 1990, Article XIV, Section 14.1, SEIU papers, Lifelong AIDS Alliance, Seattle, WA.

¹³⁸ "1995 SEIU Local 6 & Northwest AIDS Foundation Employee Survey Results," SEIU papers, Lifelong AIDS Alliance, Seattle, WA.

pro-union sentiment among workers. Management's union busting further weakened this union of LGBT, non-participating employees.

Class and sexual identifications made it difficult for SEIU to organize NWAF. Former NWAF worker Jeff Blum commented on the tensions between the LGBT community and labor unions:

When you're young, your sexual identity becomes more of an issue and if the unions are conservative and you have to conform to them to a certain degree to benefit from them, then they're not going to be seen as any more attractive than as passing as a queen-in-the-closet heterosexual. Plenty of blue collar men out there are having sex with men and not identifying as gay as there are out gay people not identifying with unions.¹³⁹

The tension between maintaining the management's idea of a workplace "family" and the union's idea of workplace equity caused many employees to be ambivalent or even adversarial toward the union.

Blum recalled that NWAF workers did not understand why the union wanted to pick a fight with NWAF management. Many workers felt that the working relationship between the union and the agency should be amicable. NWAF workers, on the whole, did not recognize the class hierarchies between themselves and management. Workers' identification with the NWAF "family" and their middle-class backgrounds prevented them from seeing the power relationships that created the workplace problems.

The issue of loyalty to people living with HIV/AIDS complicated the work of the union, in terms of social service work and in terms of the LGBT community. Workers had strong loyalties to the community-based organization at a critical time in the

¹³⁹ Blum interview.

HIV/AIDS epidemic. “People would walk through the door just days away from death,” recalled Van Evera.¹⁴⁰ Case manager Jeff Blum said, “At that time, the average life expectancy for clients was less than it is now... It would be unusual for me to work with clients for two years.”¹⁴¹ Organizer Kilgore said: “People were confused between their roles as workers and their roles as helpers. They would ask, ‘Why are we dickering over this stuff when people are dying?’”¹⁴² For some workers, dedication to the job conflicted with their fight for labor rights.

NWAF workers took the jobs they were doing very seriously. Blum commented, “People identified with their jobs very closely. We didn’t see ourselves as radical, but we saw the organization as very radical, in terms of the resources we could provide for our clients.”¹⁴³ The political and social atmosphere in the Pacific Northwest, and society in general, ostracized people with AIDS, and NWAF was a place to which they could turn. For instance, NWAF worked to help people living with HIV/AIDS keep their health insurance when they lost their jobs, get medical treatment, and find housing. Yet they refused to voluntarily provide these benefits to their workers. NWAF failed to recognize either the irony of this situation or that it went against their “family” rhetoric. Surely denying benefits to their workers was not for the preservation of the “family.” Management simply wanted to keep labor costs as low as possible.

¹⁴⁰ Van Evera interview.

¹⁴¹ Blum interview.

¹⁴² Kilgore interview.

¹⁴³ Blum interview.

HIV/AIDS profoundly effected workers at NWAFF. In 1989, unionization was not the main concern of many workers. SEIU organizer Kilgore said of the climate in 1989: “What was hanging around more than gay and straight issues was life and death. It was an atmosphere of gravity, transience and urgency. Union leaders lost partners. To me, and everybody else, [AIDS] was a big deal.”¹⁴⁴ Some workers were not invested in the union because they did not think they would stay at the organization for a long period of time. One worker wrote in her/his 1995 survey that in a few years s/he would be “dead or burned out.”¹⁴⁵ Jane Mortell said of the main challenge at the workplace, “For me, a major challenge at the Foundation was just keeping the morale up on the team; we lost so many clients [that] we had to support each other through humor and team support.”¹⁴⁶ As a result of this loyalty to clients and co-workers, NWAFF workers would not let the union negotiate a walkout policy or a strike clause into their contract.¹⁴⁷ Workers’ ambivalence toward the union stemmed from affinities within the LGBT community. Though workplace issues such as compensation and benefits created some class solidarity among employees, the union struggled to strike a balance between class solidarity and sexual solidarity.

¹⁴⁴ Kilgore interview.

¹⁴⁵ “1995 SEIU Local 6 & Northwest AIDS Foundation Employee Survey Results,” SEIU papers, Lifelong AIDS Alliance, Seattle, WA.

¹⁴⁶ Jane Mortell, email interview by author, 25 April 2002.

¹⁴⁷ Van Evera interview.

“We Are Family! I’ve Got All My Sisters and Me”

NWAF management resisted union workers’ efforts to identify as working-class, and subverted class divisions by calling on alliances based on sexuality. The presence of the union exposed power differentials between management and workers, class stratifications which had previously been hidden behind the “company family.” Gay managers wanted gay workers to identify with them based on their sexual orientations, rather than be divided from them by their places in the job hierarchy. The following story, told by then rank-and-file worker Hazel Van Evera, shows the drama at NWAF based on class divisions and sexual affinities:

Managers took [unionization] very hard. That was where the big “us-them” started happening...there was one time when they came into a staff meeting and they were all wearing blue coats and pantsuits, and banners that said “MANAGEMENT SCUM” on it. It was a joke, but it really was the early days of “us-them.” They were seeing it and trying to make a joke about it.¹⁴⁸

Managers used this “class drag” performance to discredit workers who wanted to identify as working-class by joining the union. By making fun of the class divisions that existed between managers and workers, managers emphasized sexual affinities by calling on the power of queer culture’s drag tradition.¹⁴⁹ Rather than admit that class identifications superceded sexual orientation in the context of the union, they tried to make a joke of class divisions between workers and management.

¹⁴⁸ Van Evera interview.

¹⁴⁹ Labor historian Andrew Ross discussed the power of drag theatrics in his article about LGBT workers at Barneys in New York. “Strike a Pose for Justice: The Barneys Union Campaign of 1996,” in *Out at Work*, 78-91.

NWAF managers reacted strongly against the union in a way similar to any union-busting campaign. The Executive Director in 1989, Nancy Campbell, had a background in state corrections and she had experience working with unions in the past.¹⁵⁰ Workers described Campbell as “rigid” and as having “managerial limitations.”¹⁵¹ Campbell’s strong personality and strict work style made relations with the union difficult. She led management in union-busting activities, including getting rid of union activists. Management fired one of the most active union shop stewards, Frank Kohel, in 1992. Kohel was officially laid off due to a “lack of funds,” but the union disputed both the legality of his dismissal and the motives behind it. Kohel had planned to be on the bargaining team for the upcoming contract negotiations, and the union believed he was targeted by management and discriminated against because of his union activity. SEIU filed an Unfair Labor Practice with the National Labor Relations Board based on “illegal layoff, seniority clause, and discrimination against a union member.”¹⁵² They later withdrew the complaint, citing “political and legal” complications, though the impact of Kohel’s layoff was more than enough to convince NWAF workers of the threat of future discrimination against union members.¹⁵³ Surely this kind of intimidation made

¹⁵⁰ Michael Harmon, “SpringBoard Interview: Nancy Campbell, Northwest AIDS Foundation’s Executive Director,” *SpringBoard Newsletter* (Summer 1989): 1. SEIU Papers, Lifelong AIDS Alliance, Seattle.

¹⁵¹ Kilgore and Blum interviews.

¹⁵² Diana Rainwater, Seattle, to Northwest AIDS Foundation Local 6 Members, Seattle, 12 June 1992, SEIU papers, Lifelong AIDS Alliance, Seattle.

¹⁵³ Diana Rainwater, Seattle, to Northwest AIDS Foundation Local 6 Members, Seattle, 17 July 1992, SEIU papers, Lifelong AIDS Alliance, Seattle.

workers think twice about actively participating in the union. Union activists encouraged up-and-coming union shop stewards to wait until their six-month probationary period was completed before taking on this role.

NWAF management used familiar rhetoric to discredit the union that SEIU organizer Doug Kilgore described as “very hostile”:

They [management] were pushing issues of loyalty vs. disloyalty. And also the classic anti-union message that characterized the Union as a third party, interfering with the “normal” employee-employer relationship. For example: “if you [unionize] we won’t be able to talk to you the same way, we won’t be able to communicate directly...and what does the union want? ... Your dues.”¹⁵⁴

The fact that NWAF used traditional union-busting arguments exemplifies that management operated NWAF as any other company. Management claimed that the union hindered the daily operations of the organization.

According to the company, an inherent conflict existed between the mission of NWAF and the agenda of the union. Management played up this contrived conflict as often as they could through its union busting campaigns. Advocating for people living with HIV/AIDS, in NWAF’s perception, carried more importance than advocating for workers’ rights. The union made a more logical case, that both organizations fought to advance the quality of life for people. Yet, to protect their own interests, NWAF leadership saw a disconnect between the goals of NWAF and the union.

Perhaps the company thought that dedication to their clients precluded them from being dedicated to their workers. A more likely scenario is that NWAF behaved with as

¹⁵⁴ Kilgore interview.

much hostility as any company would toward a union. Though NWAFF was a non-profit organization, the loss of control over workers meant a loss of control over the company's resources in terms of salary and benefits. The NWAFF "family" was really about power and control and the union threatened those power dynamics.

Management also held one-on-one meetings to convince workers that the union was an outside entity, a third party that disrupted the harmony that workers and management had enjoyed before the union came to NWAFF. Former NWAFF employee Jeff Blum recalled these conversations:

It was clearly conveyed to us that it was much preferred that [unionization] didn't happen. And if it did, the blue meanys would be invading our home and life would never be the same. It was cast in a very negative light.¹⁵⁵

The "home" that Blum referred to was a recurring theme in NWAFF's union-busting campaign. The NWAFF "home" related directly to the "family" sentiment that management worked so hard to maintain for the company's own interest, rather than the workers. According to management the union posed a major threat to the communication between the family members, dividing the administration and workers.

NWAFF also distributed anti-union literature to all of its employees to intimidate union members during contract negotiations. During the bargaining sessions of 1992, NWAFF distributed a flier entitled, "Northwest AIDS Foundation: The Real Bargaining Facts," which attempted to discredit the union by accusing SEIU of lying to the members:

We were very disappointed to hear that the Union was claiming that the Foundation was bargaining backward. We wanted to let you know the true facts

¹⁵⁵ Blum interview.

about bargaining. We also wanted you to know the full package offered to the Union at the bargaining table...The Union responded by adamantly objecting to a three-year contract. We believe this was done more out of the Union's own self-interest than it was out of concern for what is best for all of you.¹⁵⁶

The paternalistic tone of this literature is striking and reveals the attitude that only management knows "what is best" for NWAF workers. But the tactic of distributing anti-union literature proved successful for the company, contributing to an air of doubt that already existed at NWAF about the union. With challenges to SEIU's integrity, the union had to spend energy defending itself rather than pushing for more benefits for workers.

NWAF was a workplace where sexuality could be expressed openly. One worker remembers that her first day on the job, she saw Education Department employees wearing penis and vagina costumes.¹⁵⁷ Though most of the workers and managers were gay, the Executive Director was straight. Campbell's experience influenced her perception of the organization. When asked in a 1989 interview about criticism that she was not qualified to head an AIDS agency as a straight woman, she replied, "My sexuality is not the issue. AIDS is the issue."¹⁵⁸ She failed to see that sexuality was part of the workplace issues at NWAF. It is not surprising that Campbell never admitted that workers' rights were legitimate issues at NWAF. Though the Executive Director tried to sweep points of sexuality aside, these issues were central to the culture of the workplace.

¹⁵⁶ "Northwest AIDS Foundation: The Real Bargaining Facts," 1992, SEIU, Local 6, Lifelong AIDS Alliance, Seattle.

¹⁵⁷ Theresa Louise Hathaway, phone interview by the author, 16 May 2002.

¹⁵⁸ Harmon, *ibid.*

Learning Lessons from Organizing LGBT Workers

Anti-union sentiment continued to challenge union workers at NAAF throughout the 1990s. Management did continue union-busting tactics, but much of the discord came from rank-and-file workers. For instance, in 1998 a worker filed for an NLRB vote to deauthorize the membership clause. This vote would have changed union membership from mandatory to voluntary,¹⁵⁹ but union members mobilized a campaign to keep the union, and the issue did not pass. At the next union meeting, members held a party to celebrate their victory. SEIU organizer Debbie Foley brought a cake for the celebration, which she left in the lunchroom. In a show of maliciousness, an anti-union employee smeared the frosting on the cake, ruining it for everyone. Roberta Lord, rank-and-file union activist recalled, “We had such strong happy feelings, [someone] must have had strong upset feelings [that they lost the vote.]”¹⁶⁰ Lord said they suspected the person who destroyed the cake was a particularly rabid anti-union employee. This incident shows the continuing ambiguity, and even hostility, of some rank-and-file workers toward the union at NAAF.

To many NAAF workers, SEIU remained an outside organization. On the whole, workers never felt like the union was their own. These challenges stemmed from class identity. While management purported a “family” atmosphere, management controlled

¹⁵⁹ The union voted in 1996 to change NAAF to a “closed” shop, where membership was mandatory for all union-eligible employees.

¹⁶⁰ Roberta Lord, interview by author, tape recording, Seattle, Wa. 26 March 2002.

power in the company, which many NWAFF workers did not recognize because of their middle-class and non-union backgrounds. If these union workers felt a sense of solidarity with the LGBT community affected by AIDS, then why did the union fail to emphasize a sense of solidarity with other LGBT union workers? The union should have approached LGBT workers with their sexual identities in mind, rather than using class as the benchmark for dealing with all union issues. Sexual orientation mattered to these workers and their dedication to the LGBT community could not be shelved to deal with a seemingly less important on-the-job complaint. While SEIU made important strides to include gay workers in its organized ranks, they still fell short for the employees at NWAFF. Though the workers clearly expressed sexual affinities with their managers and clients, the union remained deaf to issues of sexuality.

While SEIU saw that it was “within their mission” to take on organizing efforts of NWAFF, they did not, and perhaps could not, anticipate the challenges that class and sexual identifications would bring to their projects. As I showed in Chapter Four, unions in the Pacific Northwest had only just begun to address LGBT issues in their contracts. Some workers saw SEIU as having an entirely different motivation: “They took us on as a prestige issue. We were an odd organization. If we were just making widgets, I don’t think they would have gone to all the expense they did on our behalf.”¹⁶¹ Another worker also felt that prestige motivated SEIU to work with NWAFF: “The union really wanted NWAFF because they saw the national network of gay workers and gay activism.”¹⁶² But

¹⁶¹ Blum interview.

SEIU recognized that organizations like NWAFF were permanent in the community and worth organizing. The union had lessons to learn about organizing LGBT workplaces.

The union tried to get workers to come together over salary issues and benefits.

One union-sponsored recruitment flier sang the praises of the benefits of the union:

The union is a strong ally for contract negotiations each year. Compensation issues that include salary and other benefits, like a vision plan, for example. As employee needs continue to evolve and change, the union can help to secure other benefits, too.¹⁶³

This literature first mentions the union as an “ally” rather than as a body of NWAFF workers, which did not help to encourage union members to feel ownership of their union. Second, the flyer made no mentions of class solidarity, gay pride, or adversarial relations with management, all of which were elements of the union at the time. The oversights in this flier illustrate SEIU’s lack of awareness about the central issues. It also highlights the culture clash between the union and the LGBT community.

The union needed to deconstruct the “family” to understand the elements that were keeping the union from being more effective. The paternalistic relationship that management wanted to have with rank-and-file workers simply shows the plan to keep power in the hands of the executive branch of the company. The union could have used the flaws in this rhetoric to gain the union support from workers. An emphasis on class solidarity among union “brothers and sisters” might have cut through the company family

¹⁶² Van Evera interview.

¹⁶³ “Joining the Union...some things you should know!”, 1996, SEIU, Local 6 papers, Lifelong AIDS Alliance, Seattle.

sentiment. SEIU should have embraced rather than ignored the gay culture that existed at NWAFF. An integration of gay issues into contract negotiations, i.e., advocating for health benefits for domestic partners, would have preserved LGBT issues within union activism.

The case of NWAFF leads me to ask this question: How can unions better approach gay communities? While answers to this question need to be studied further, the union at NWAFF has taught me two possible solutions. First, unions should approach LGBT communities to advocated for protections at work based on sexual orientation and gender identity. This could come in the form adding protective language to non-discrimination clauses in contracts and gaining domestic partner benefits. Second, unions that organize LGBT workers should keep in mind that class solidarity is not necessarily subsumed by sexual/gender identity affinities. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender workers have real economic concerns with wages and benefits just as straight workers do. Unions must build sexual and class solidarity simultaneously. Similarly, LGBT community-based organizations should recognize the great political possibilities of gay workers' alliances with labor unions. The political power of queer workers in democratic unions gives political clout to the LGBT civil rights movement.

EPILOGUE

Class politics and sexual identities have continued to clash in the years since 1995 at Northwest AIDS Foundation (which, since 2000, has been called Lifelong AIDS Alliance). In fact, anti-union employees are currently campaigning, once again, to make their workplace an open shop, which would make membership in the union voluntary instead of mandatory. Though management proposed this union-busting move, there is widespread support from rank-and-file workers, including one of the shop stewards. The crux of the objection to the union at this moment is that non-union workers can be terminated for refusing to pay dues (which they are contractually obligated to do). Management has been playing on the idea that they, as the employer, must protect their workers from SEIU, the enforcer of the contract. Ironically, Lifelong AIDS Alliance employees feel more connected to their co-workers who refuse to pay dues than they do to the union that exists because of rank-and-file worker solidarity. This campaign, which pits “family” sentiment against the extraneous union, and plays on the tension between class and sexual identities, could mean the end of the union’s thirteen-year history at Lifelong AIDS Alliance.

The situation playing out today at Lifelong AIDS Alliance is typical of the workers’ apathy about union activity in the United States today. Only 13% of workers in this country are unionized, though the American economy is becoming more and more stratified. Chief executive officers (CEOs) of gigantic corporations have received pay

increases of nearly 20% compared with 3% raises for wage-workers in the year 2000.¹⁶⁴ Women, ethnic minority, and sexual minority workers suffer immensely in an economic and social system that discourages workplace organizing and class solidarity among workers. There has been a breakdown of class-consciousness, even as our society becomes more separate. It is time for workers in the labor movement to make connections again, and sexual and gender identity politics could play a significant role in the building of a new labor coalition.

The LGBT labor movement has a powerful potential by linking class and sexual identity politics to create real change in society. While New Left activism has eschewed identity as a dominant agent of revolution, queer worker-activists recognize the importance of this coalition. In *Out At Work*, Lisa Duggan writes that the book,

offers us crucial information and sharp analyses about the relations between workplace organizing and queer politics—the collaborations, impasses, missed opportunities, and significant new horizons. But perhaps even more importantly, it provides substantial cause for sorely needed optimism.¹⁶⁵

The history of the LGBT labor movement demonstrates the tensions between class and sexual politics. But it also reveals the need for workplace legitimacy for queer employees, and their full, out participation in a declining labor movement.

Despite setbacks in individual union shops such as Lifelong AIDS Alliance, and in the national labor movement, the LGBT labor movement is alive in the Pacific

¹⁶⁴ “Layoff Leaders Cushioned from Downturn,” www.FairEconomy.org/CEOPay.

¹⁶⁵ Lisa Duggan, “Afterword,” in *Out At Work*, 258-259.

Northwest. Seattle's Out Front Labor Coalition and Portland's chapter of Pride At Work continue to strive for workplace legitimacy for sexual minority workers. Gay labor activists from diverse employment backgrounds are participating in these coalitions, from teachers to machinists, and letter carriers to cable splicers. When I attended the biennial convention of the AFL-CIO's LGBT caucus, Pride At Work, in Everett, Washington in 2001, I was struck by the energy created by the mixture of worker solidarity and queer activism.¹⁶⁶ The mandate from the convention participants, which numbered over three hundred from around the United States and the world, was widespread inclusion of LGBT workers in the labor movement locally and globally. Out, queer workers from around the world are making links between their sexual and class identities so that their LGBT brothers and sisters (and everyone in between) can demand workers' rights.

Transgender politics are becoming more prominent in this labor movement. The Pride At Work participants have encouraged their members to add protections for transgender workers in their union contracts. I took this mandate back to my own union, the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation, at the University of Oregon. We fought for five months to get recognition for transgender workers during contract negotiations, a battle which took us through arguments about sexual/gender identity categories, legal language, and the university's support for queer and other minority workers. In the end, we won the inclusion of the words "gender expression and gender identity" in our

¹⁶⁶ For a history of the national chapter of Pride At Work, see *Out At Work*.

contract's non-discrimination clause.¹⁶⁷ Currently, Whitman Walker Clinic in Maryland and the University of Oregon are the only two union contracts in the country that have protections for transgender workers.¹⁶⁸ Several municipalities and counties around the country have made this a priority for city and state workers including Seattle and Portland.¹⁶⁹

Significant change occurred in the LGBT working-class movement during the period between 1970-1995 in the Pacific Northwest. The quest for workplace legitimacy led LGBT workers and activists through job discrimination, HIV/AIDS, anti-gay political initiatives, and struggles to maintain sexual identity politics. The LGBT community made strides toward legitimacy by allying with labor unions, or starting their own groups, to put sexual minority workers on a level playing field with heterosexual employees. The working-class LGBT movement also gained political protections that made the community economically stronger on the whole. There have been many successes for this movement since the seventies, but there is more work to be done for social and economic respect for LGBT workers.


¹⁶⁷ Collective Bargaining Agreement between the University of Oregon and Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation, American Federation of Teachers, Local 3544, AFL/CIO, April 1, 2002 through March 31, 2004.

¹⁶⁸ Whitman Walker Clinic employees won protections in their SEIU contract in 1998. Participants at the AFT-Oregon convention in April 2002 passed a resolution encouraging all state locals to add protections for gender expression and identity into collective bargaining agreements.

¹⁶⁹ Seattle's City Council approved protections for transgender city workers in 1986. Portland and Multnomah County afforded protections to transgender workers in 2001. Future scholarship on this topic should highlight the contributions transgender individuals have made to the LGBT labor movement.

In this thesis, I have shown that class and sexuality are linked, in both the LGBT and labor movements. Post-Stonewall gay rights groups always had working-class elements within their ranks in the Pacific Northwest. On-the-job discrimination profoundly affected the real life experiences of LGBT people at work, especially with the onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Furthermore, sexuality *is* related to work and unionization, which I have shown with the case study of out gay workers at the Northwest AIDS Foundation. LGBT scholars should use the categories of sexuality and class in tandem to study how working experiences have influenced the lives of sexual minority communities. Not only does this brand of study add much-needed dimensions to working-class LGBT history, it has a practical purpose in giving direction to the current LGBT-labor alliances. Class and sexuality must be treated simultaneously as categories of analysis in order to achieve effective social, economics, and political change for LGBT communities.

FIGURE 1



"I'm a gay civil rights worker. I represent the gay community as a Commissioner on the Multnomah County Democratic Party.
 "I sincerely believe that gay people can and will achieve civil rights by working through and with the political system.
 "Join me in what I consider the fastest growing civil rights movement in history by supporting one of the organizations listed here."

Jerry Weller
 Portland Town Council
 Acting Executive Director

**SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL GAY
 ACTIVITIES COUNCIL,**

In Seattle:
THE DORIAN GROUP
 526 Smith Tower
 Seattle 98104
 206/682-6044

In Portland:
PORTLAND TOWN COUNCIL
 320 S.W. Stark, #506
 Portland, OR 97204
 503/227-2765

National:
NATIONAL GAY TASK FORCE (NGTF)
 80 Fifth Avenue
 New York City 1011

Public Service Ad donated by NW FOUNTAIN

"Support Your Local Gay Activities Council," *NW Fountain*, February 1979: 10.

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