

1 Perspectives on the Lesbian and Gay Movements

We forget that all significant political change, and this is going to be the case for gays more than anyone, doesn't just need a wide spectrum of styles and strategies—it depends on a wide range of styles and strategies.

—Franklin Kameny, veteran Washington, D.C., activist

FRANKLIN KAMENY'S observation captures both the limitations and the possibilities of the contemporary lesbian and gay movements. He reminds us that, like most other contemporary social movements, they have made progress by embracing an array of approaches to political, social, and economic change. Indeed, to talk about "the movement" essentializes the rich number of communities, approaches, and debates that have contributed to the lengthy struggle for lesbian, gay, transgendered, and bisexual rights in this country.¹

Yet regardless of how we conceptualize "the movement," lesbians and gay men can celebrate progress.² Over the past twenty-five years, the lesbian and gay movements have achieved greater visibility and more legal protections (Bronski 1998). How has this progress been manifested? There are open communities of lesbians and gay men in urban areas throughout the United States. In addition, openly gay men and lesbians have been successful in the electoral arena, as they have been elected to city councils, state legislatures, and the United States Congress. Community organizations and businesses exist that appeal directly to the needs of the lesbian and gay population (Escoffier 1998, 33). Lesbians and gay men have infiltrated mainstream culture in television, film, and music. The 1998 Pulitzer Prize for fiction was awarded to Michael Cunningham, an openly gay man, for his powerful novel, *The Hours*.

But for all of the so-called "progress," lesbians and gay men remain second-class citizens in vital ways. Fewer than one-tenth of one percent of all elected officials in the United States are openly lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Lesbians and gay men are forbidden to marry, to teach in many public schools, to adopt children, to provide foster care, to serve in the armed forces, National Guard, reserves, or the ROTC. If evicted from their homes, expelled from their schools, fired from their jobs, or refused

public lodging, they usually are not able to seek legal redress. The topic of homosexuality is often deemed inappropriate for discussion in public schools, including in sex education courses. Many public school libraries refuse to own some of the many books that address the issue in important ways. Lesbians and gays are often reviled by the church and barred from membership in the clergy. They are the victims of hate crimes and targets of verbal abuse. Their parents reject them, and many gay youth have either attempted or contemplated suicide. Indeed, one political scientist concludes that “no other group of persons in American society today, having been convicted of no crime, is subject to the number and severity of legally imposed disabilities as are persons of same-sex orientation” (Hertzog 1996, 6).

Like all other social movements, the lesbian and gay rights movements have often been divided over approaches to political, social, and cultural change. In one major approach, the assimilationists typically embrace a rights-based perspective and work within the broader framework of liberal, pluralist democracy, fighting for a seat at the table. Theirs is a “work within the system” approach to political and social change. Typically, they espouse a “let us in” approach to political activism, rather than the “let us show you a new way of conceiving the world” style associated with lesbian and gay liberation.³ Assimilationists are more likely to accept that progress will have to be incremental, and that slow, gradual change is built into the very framework of our government. A second approach, the liberationist perspective, favors more radical, cultural change, change that is transformational in nature and that often arises from outside the political mainstream. Much of the conflict within the lesbian and gay movements concerning political and social strategy has reflected disagreements over assimilation and liberation. It is far too facile to reduce this conflict to a simple dualism. However, the assimilation and liberation categories are useful for understanding the dominant strains within the lesbian and gay movements in the United States over the past fifty years. Liberationists argue that there is a considerable gap between access and power, and that it is not enough simply to have a seat at the table. For many liberationists, what is required is a strategy that embraces both structural political and cultural change, often through “outsider” political tactics. The political and cultural approaches are not mutually exclusive.

The ability of assimilationists and liberationists to work with one another at various times has helped to achieve important progress for lesbians and gays, as will be suggested throughout this book. Yet this strength is also a weakness. The movements have been characterized by a deep ambiguity over what should be their goals, as recent debates over integration of the military, lesbian and gay marriage, and the Millennium

March suggest. Such differences among movement leaders have had negative practical consequences in terms of public policy outcomes, especially when the Christian Right has enormous resources at its disposal for fighting any advances for lesbians and gays.

This book addresses the following questions in light of the themes I have just stated: Given that it has afforded lesbians and gays a certain measure of rights, what are the limits of liberal democracy? To the extent that the lesbian and gay movements continue to work within the framework of "interest-group liberalism," will they merely pursue a reformist strategy embracing a narrow form of identity politics? Is it possible for the movements to link identity concerns within a progressive coalition for political, social, and economic change, one that takes into account race, class, and gender inequities? What are the barriers to doing so? What might such a strategy look like in practice? Can such change be accomplished working within the broader confines of liberal democracy?

In recent years, the mainstream lesbian and gay movements have largely been based on a fundamentally flawed conception of American politics. It is one that reinforces a narrow form of identity politics rooted in a top-down, state-centered approach and that embraces the language and framework of liberal democratic institutions, interest-group liberalism, and pluralist democracy. This book proposes to evaluate that approach critically and to evaluate how well it has succeeded in advancing the status of lesbians and gays in the political, social, and economic spheres. This is an appropriate time to assess the strategies and overall direction of the lesbian and gay movements, especially since American politics and political discourse have become much more conservative over the past twenty years. Before we can accomplish these goals, we must first provide a brief overview of each of the key concepts that are central elements of the overall analysis.

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY, INTEREST-GROUP LIBERALISM, AND PLURALISM

Liberal democracy is the political and economic framework that has guided the American political system since its founding well over two hundred years ago. It rejects excessive interference from the federal government in the private sphere and promotes the right of individuals to pursue their own interests in the economic marketplace. Liberal democracy works in tandem with classical liberalism to promote values that are central to the American ideology: individualism, equality of opportunity, liberty and freedom, the rule of law, and limited government. Those who embrace liberal democratic principles generally believe that the principal decision makers should be

political elites chosen by the citizenry in periodic elections. Citizens play a passive role in the political system to the extent that their participation consists merely of periodic voting. And if citizens choose not to vote, then many proponents of liberal democracy contend that they are generally satisfied with the existing state of affairs.⁴ As James Scott has suggested, “for the pluralists, the absence of significant protest or radical opposition in relatively open political systems must be taken as a sign of satisfaction or, at least, insufficient dissatisfaction to warrant the time and trouble of political mobilization” (Scott 1990, 72).

Political scientists have embraced the pluralist model to describe the institutionalized politics associated with a healthy liberal democracy. Yet as Doug McAdam has pointed out, “the model is important for what it implies about organized political activity that takes place outside the political system” (McAdam 1982, 5). The central tenet of pluralist theory is that power is not concentrated in the hands of any one element in society; it is widely distributed among a host of competing groups. Robert Dahl explains how pluralist theory works in the United States: “Political power is pluralistic in the sense that there exist many different sets of leaders; each set has somewhat different objectives from the others, each has access to its own political resources, each is relatively independent of the others. There does not exist a single set of all-powerful leaders who are wholly agreed on their major goals and who have enough power to achieve their major goals” (quoted in McAdam 1982, 5). This broad distribution of power means that the political system is open and responsive to a wide array of competing claims. Because of the open nature of liberal democracy, as conceptualized in this way, there is no need for individuals to embrace any form of unconventional politics—that is, one that requires participants to go outside the formal channels of the American political system (voting, interest-group politics) to resort to the politics of protest and mass involvement. Those lesbians and gays who endorse an assimilationist, insider-politics strategy are choosing to work within this broader pluralist framework, which also accepts the dictates of interest-group liberalism.

The central feature of interest-group liberalism “is the adjudication through compromise of competing interests” (Phelan 1994, 105). Theodore Lowi, whose classic work *The End of Liberalism* remains the most important analysis of interest-group liberalism, is worth quoting at length:

It is liberalism because it is optimistic about government, expects to use government in a positive and expansive role, is motivated by the highest sentiments, and possesses a strong faith that what is good for government is good for the society. It is interest-group liberalism because it sees as both necessary and good a policy agenda that is accessible to all organized interests and makes no independent judgment of their claims. It is interest group

liberalism because it defines the public interest as a result of the amalgamation of various claims. (Lowi 1979, 51)

Lowi then makes the important connection between interest-group liberalism and pluralism:

A brief sketch of the working model of interest-group liberalism turns out to be a vulgarized version of the pluralist model of modern political science: (1) Organized interests are homogeneous and easy to define. Any duly elected representative of any interest is taken as an accurate representative of each and every member. (2) Organized interests emerge in every sector of our lives and adequately represent most of those sectors, so that one organized group can be found effectively answering and checking some other organized group as it seeks to prosecute its claims against society. And (3) the role of government is one of insuring access to the most effectively organized, and of ratifying the agreements and adjustments worked out among the competing leaders. (Lowi 1979, 51)

This hierarchical, top-down model of American institutional politics is one that nicely dovetails with liberal democracy.

But what if the political process is not nearly as open and responsive to minority groups as the pluralists and the proponents of interest-group liberalism suggest? The roots of this question explain why social movements have historically been a vital part of the American political system. Over time, lesbians and gays have been largely unrepresented in the political process and have faced numerous structural and cultural barriers as they attempt to secure their rights politically. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan, dissenting from denial of certiorari in the case of *Rowland v. Mad River Local School District* (1985), stated the problem well: "Because of the immediate and severe opprobrium often manifested against homosexuals once so identified publicly, members of this group are particularly powerless to pursue their rights openly in the political arena" (cited in Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen, and Katz 1993, 19). From the vantage point of many lesbians and gays, the pluralist political process is hardly responsive at all. But if the pluralist model is accurate, why do we even need social movements? It is to a brief discussion of these questions, which underlie this entire book, that we now turn.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND MARGINALIZATION THEORY

Anti-pluralists have pointed out that social movements arise because the political and economic system is less open than pluralists believe. Over time, social movements have become an integral part of the American political landscape. How are they different from parties, interest groups,

and protests? Three factors distinguish them: (1) they grow out of “a mass base of individuals, groups, and organizations linked by social interaction”; (2) they also “organize around a mix of political and cultural goals”; and (3) they “rely on a shared collective identity that is the basis of mobilization and participation” (Wald 2000, 5). Social movements are also decentralized and made up of an array of organizations. Social movements are often confused with political movements, but there are key differences between them, as Table 1.1 suggests.

Unlike political movements, which tend to represent middle-class interests, social movements represent those at the margins of American society, as defined by class, race, gender, and/or sexual orientation. Political movements are also often identified with a single leader and her or his organization, while social movements are generally much more decentralized and sometimes have no real leader per se. Finally, social movements develop a comprehensive ideology, while political movements most often focus on narrow political objectives such as handgun control or the nuclear freeze. Social movements push for political change at the same time that they often seek structural change in the social, cultural, economic, and private spheres as well (Baer and Bositis, 1993). The lesbian and gay movements certainly meet the criteria for an existing social movement. Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people have persistently occupied a place at the margins of American society.

The vulnerability of groups at the margins of American society⁵ permits elites to create serious obstacles to political participation and to control the political agenda (Scott 1990, 72). In response to their structural and cultural marginalization, groups outside the mainstream identify strategies that they perceive will meet their needs while challenging structures that constrain their life choices. These strategies commonly include developing alternative resources, constructing different ideological frame-

TABLE 1.1. Social and Political Movements Compared

Social Movements	Political Movements
Ideology	Lifestyle
Multiple Leaders	Single Leader Entrepreneur
Social and Political Spheres	Political Spheres Only
Have-Nots	Haves
Social Group Identity	Diverse Social Groups
Group Consciousness	Issue Positions

Source: Denise L. Baer and David A. Bositis, *Politics and Linkage in a Democratic Society* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1993), 166. © 1993. Reprinted by permission of Prentice-Hall, Inc., Upper Saddle River, NJ.

works, and creating oppositional organizations and institutions. Such structures are most often “grounded in the indigenous or communal relationships of marginal groups” (Cohen 1999, 48). This is especially true for the lesbian and gay movements.⁶

From the vantage point of marginalized groups, then, social movements are seen as a vehicle for organization, education, and resistance. Social movements include those activities that comprise, as Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks explain it, “persistent, patterned, and widely distributed collective challenges to the status quo.” They encompass a wide array of strategies and approaches to political and social change; in this way, they “appear to be simultaneously spontaneous and strategic, expressive (of emotion and need) and instrumental (seeking some concrete ends), unruly and organized, political and cultural” (Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks 1995, vii). Under what circumstances do social movements form, survive over time, and influence public policy? Several factors have been identified by students of social-movement theory: a mature communications network, media attention, a series of crises or more general social change, movement resources, movement activity, and supportive public opinion (Haider-Markel 1999, 243). One of the most important activities that social movements engage in is creating “issue frames.” The framing of issues and grievances is crucial for movement members and supporters alike, as they devise political and social strategies for challenging policy elites to respond to their concerns. Issue frames change as social-movement members alter their conceptions of what can and needs to be accomplished in terms of strategy and public policy. Donald Haider-Markel provides a succinct statement of what constitutes successful framing: “Successfully constructed frames usually appeal to widely held values and are, therefore, more likely to invoke government response and mobilize potential participants” (*ibid.*, 245).⁷

Students of social-movement behavior have pointed out that the contradictory nature of movement activity has challenged both political and social systems, as well as analytic categories and explanatory frameworks. These complications have certainly arisen in the context of the lesbian and gay movements over the years. For that reason, this book does not embrace one approach to understanding the movements. Instead, it borrows from the resource-mobilization, political-process, and new-social-movement theory approaches. Much of the conflict among social movements is over who controls access to power, a concept that is of particular interest to political scientists. Ultimately, this book is concerned with the nature and distribution of power in the United States, and conflicts over power, as reflected in how the lesbian and gay movements have intersected with political and public-policy processes at all levels of government.⁸

RESOURCE-MOBILIZATION AND POLITICAL-PROCESS APPROACHES TO SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The resource-mobilization and political-process perspectives on social movements de-emphasize the specifics of group grievances and focus instead on macrolevel external political processes, as well as the internal characteristics of organizations that have consequences for both the development and the daily work of movements (Taylor and Whittier 1992, 104). Of central interest to the resource-mobilization approach are the resources available to the group. What resources determine the success or failure of a social movement? Leadership, organizational capacity, and wealth are such qualities, and they are generally associated with groups that have established extensive social ties and well-developed structures for internal communication and social interaction. In their study of the battles over local gay-rights initiatives, James Button, Barbara Rienzo, and Kenneth Wald (1997) conclude that groups possessing an abundance of these resources and qualities are much more likely to succeed. They found that certain characteristics were particularly important in determining the outcome of campaigns on behalf of gay and lesbian concerns: the level of social and political organization, gay leaders' skills, and "the gay community's" financial resources (pp. 16–17).

The organizational structure of the movement is crucial to resource-mobilization theorists. They also view the activities of collective actors in terms of tactics and strategy. This permits them to "examine movements and countermovements as engaged in a rational game to achieve specific interests, much like pluralist competition among interest groups in political analysis" (Johnston, Larana, and Gusfield 1994, 5). The key here is that movements can be understood not as spontaneous and formless phenomena but as deliberate and patterned frameworks of collective action that operate to achieve specific movement goals. The broad goal of resource-mobilization theory is to understand the conditions that promote both movement growth and political effectiveness (Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks 1995, xii).

The central contribution of the resource-mobilization approach is the recognition that social movements are "shaped more by opportunities available to members for expression and action than by the ideologies they profess to represent" (Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks 1995, xii). Their actions are then connected in a formal way to practical accomplishments, such as a short-term impact on public policy. The resource-mobilization approach is also useful for understanding the established, "work within the system" gay and lesbian organizations that embrace insider, elite-centered, pluralist politics. Yet an uncritical acceptance of the pluralist, inter-

est-group, liberal model of political change is also a central weakness of any systematic attempt to use the resource-mobilization approach to analyze the lesbian and gay movements. It cannot account for groups that embrace unconventional politics, such as ACT UP,⁹ Queer Nation, and the Lesbian Avengers. For this and other reasons, the resource-mobilization model is insufficient for understanding the lesbian and gay movements, as Noël Sturgeon suggests:

While based on an elite model of politics, resource mobilization thus reveals a repressed pluralist belief system: that "out" groups can be included in the political system without major structural change. Resource mobilization cannot thoroughly account for movements that attempt political change through direct changes in what are seen as "private" social relations, or through a complex contestation with various other social forces over the discursive construction of a range of political and economic developments whose political implications are ambiguous. (Sturgeon 1995, 38)

In this sense, then, the resource-mobilization approach, by itself, is unconvincing as an analytical tool for understanding social movements. Recognizing these limitations, social-movement theorists have developed alternative approaches to understanding social movements. It is to a discussion of the political-process and new-social-movement approaches that we now turn.

Like the resource-mobilization approach, the political-process approach also focuses on movement resources. But the political-process perspective focuses more attention on the external resources of the political system, rather than the internal resources of movement organizations. Doug McAdam's 1982 study of the civil rights movement, which traced the development of the movement to political, organizational, and consciousness change, synthesized various political-process approaches into a full-fledged model.¹⁰

As McAdam points out, theories of social movements cannot be separated from a more general conception of institutionalized power. Like the resource-mobilization model, the political-process model is also consistent with the elite model of the political system. The core assumption is that wealth and power in the United States are concentrated in the hands of the very few. As a result, most people have little control over the large political decisions that impinge on their lives. Both the resource-mobilization and political-process models view social movements "as rational attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through noninstitutionalized means" (McAdam 1982, 36–37). The political-process approach denies the omnipotence of centralized elite rule while also recognizing that the

inequality in power between the elite and excluded groups is substantial. Unlike the resource-mobilization approach, the political-process approach is rooted in the notion that the elite will generally exercise power in ways that will enable them to protect their privileged positions in society. Proponents of the resource-mobilization approach believe that some elites will actually encourage social insurgency on behalf of excluded groups, whereas those who adhere to the political-process model think that such elite activity is very unlikely (*ibid.*, 38–39).

To those who subscribe to the political-process model, “movements develop in response to an ongoing process of action between movement groups and the larger sociopolitical environment they seek to change” (McAdam 1982, 40). The model describes insurgency as a response to factors both internal and external to the movement. McAdam identifies three sets of factors that shape insurgency: “the confluence of expanding political opportunities, indigenous organizational strength, and the presence of certain shared cognitions within the minority community” (*ibid.*, 58–59). In support of this third factor, the development of a collective identity, shared values, and shared demands is essential if groups are to acquire “the capacity for exercising effective political power” (Sherrill 1993, 112). Like most political and social movements, the lesbian and gay movements have endured fissures and splits over what strategies to adopt, and these disagreements have been an obstacle to combating the considerable resources of the Christian Right. These three factors will be used to evaluate insurgency in the lesbian and gay movements. Each concept will be developed more fully at relevant points along the way. The political-process approach to studying social movements does not fully capture the intricacies of movements that organize at least partially around identity politics. With that in mind, it is important to integrate new-social-movement theory in our approach to understanding lesbian and gay movements.

NEW-SOCIAL-MOVEMENT THEORY

The resource-mobilization and political-process perspectives have dominated most of the social-movement theoretical work in the United States. What this has meant in practice is that organizational, political, and structural aspects of social movements have been privileged over “the more cultural or ideational dimensions of collective action” (McAdam 1994, 36).

The underlying principles of new-social-movement theory were developed in Western Europe during the late 1980s and early 1990s. New-social-movement theorists typically embrace social protest that attempts to transform societies in fundamental and emancipatory ways. The focus is on broad structural and social change as opposed to the attitudinal and

organizational studies generally associated with American resource-mobilization theory. The central goal of new-social-movement theory is to address the “why” rather than the “how” of social movements. As it does so, it attempts to link social movements to large-scale cultural or structural change. Such linkages include the connections among the structural sources of social movements, their relation to the culture of advanced capitalist society, and their ideologies (Mayer and Roth 1995, 300). At its core, new-social-movement theory emphasizes the importance of understanding identity in everyday life. As applied to lesbian and gay movements and other identity-based movements, new-social-movement theory suggests “that large-scale social change is accomplished in face-to-face relations, at the level of personal identity and consciousness, in the household and neighborhood, whether or not such change is enunciated in public policy and macro-level power relations” (Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks 1995, xiii–xiv). Such views of identity have been associated with the “queer politics” that emerged in the United States during the late 1980s. Queer theorists reject essentialist notions of identity—the belief that identity is fixed. Embracing the social-constructionist perspective, queer theorists have challenged those studying the gay and lesbian movements in important ways.¹¹ For example, how are politics even possible when relevant actors champion the fluidity of identity and resist categorization? And just what is the relationship between culture and politics in so-called “new” movements? What should it be?

New-social-movement theory has done less well in answering these questions and in addressing issues of class, power, and policy in meaningful ways. By itself, then, it is an inadequate framework for understanding the contemporary lesbian and gay “movements,”¹² which often go beyond mere identity politics. But used in combination with elements of the resource-mobilization and political-process approaches, new-social-movement theory is a useful explanatory framework. This book attempts to build on these approaches by placing the factors that shape insurgency—political opportunities, indigenous organizational strength, and views shared by members of the gay and lesbian community—within the broader context of class, power, policy, and identity politics.

THE ASSIMILATIONIST, RIGHTS-BASED STRATEGY

The quest for equal rights is at the core of the contemporary lesbian and gay rights movements’ strategy. As we will soon see, this rights-based approach has dominated mainstream movement thinking from the early years of the homophile movement to today’s debates over the military-service ban and same-sex marriage. Over time, this rights-based strategy

has pivoted on the state's relationship to lesbians and gay men. Lesbians and gays have fought for the right to live their personal lives as fully and freely as possible from negative state intervention. At the same time, they have asked the state to intervene more positively to protect their ability to meet basic daily needs. How have these issues manifested themselves politically? The movements have organized to abolish laws that restrict the right of individuals to engage in private, consensual sexual relations. In addition, they have fought against discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodation and for equal legal protection. This claim of equal legal rights has led to the further demand that lesbians and gays should be entitled to have their intimate relationships "recognized legally, institutionally, and socially" (Blasius 1994, 132). This demand, if transformed by the state into a right, would enable lesbians and gays to enjoy the same privileges that are currently the province of heterosexuals. Finally, in light of the AIDS crisis, the movements have demanded that the state provide lesbians and gays with distributive justice in their right to pursue their sexual health, free from stigma and discrimination.¹³ These are the central elements of the rights-based strategy, which has largely been unquestioned and unchallenged by the contemporary lesbian and gay movements. In the pages that follow, I examine what this assimilationist, rights-based strategy has accomplished over the years, suggesting that it has proved far too narrow and ultimately limited.

METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

A central goal of this book is to identify the political strategies that will best promote the social, economic, cultural, and political changes that lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people need in order to achieve much more than a "place at the table" or "virtual equality."¹⁴ In his fine comparative analysis of the contemporary lesbian and gay movements in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, David Rayside cautions that scholars writing on social movements in general, and the lesbian and gay movements more specifically, are often guilty of two serious mistakes: we romanticize the movement under study "and imagine that all failings are a result of factors external to it," and we tend to treat mainstream movement activists as "unwitting dupes easily assimilated and drawn into unprincipled compromise" (Rayside 1998, xiv). Social-movement politics are conflictual, messy, and complicated; they defy easy generalizations and often even explanations for various behaviors and strategies. I hope that the analysis that follows captures some of this complexity as it pertains to the lesbian and gay movements. My goal has certainly been to avoid the problems that Rayside so clearly describes.

The AIDS policy and activist arena, discussed in detail in Chapter 4, is one that reveals the often-complicated relationship between lesbians and gay men. These complications cannot be separated from the privileges of power, status, and wealth that men have always enjoyed, relative to women, in American society. We will see in Chapter 2 that lesbians have played courageous and integral roles in the development of the broader lesbian and gay movements over time. Beth E. Schneider and Nancy E. Stoller have argued that “sustained attention to the social relations of race, class, sexuality, and culture” deserve considerable attention (Schneider and Stoller 1995, 4). This book examines these social relations within the context of inequalities in resources that impinge on the ability of women to engage in political organizing at all levels of the American political system.

The AIDS policy narrative, which has largely and understandably been offered by gay men, and then replicated by elements of the larger society, has generally understated the crucial roles played by women during the epidemic. Nancy Stoller reminds us of the importance of considering an alternative narrative:

Although AIDS has struck men in higher numbers than women, women have been among the ill since the beginning. They have also been involved as caretakers, educators, physicians, public health officials, and community activists. As a diverse group linked by gender in an epidemic where gender and sexuality are key, women and lesbians in particular have played powerful symbolic, sexual, and social roles. (Stoller 1995, 275)

This alternative narrative has received little attention in most of the scholarly work on AIDS policy and activism. But it is an important one, especially in a society that regards health care as a privilege or “benefit” rather than as a right. It is also important to consider this narrative as we attempt to examine the many challenges and debates facing the lesbian and gay movements with regard to political organizing and policy strategy. One of those challenges is to highlight the importance of breast cancer education, prevention, and treatment for lesbians, in particular, and women more generally. Just as lesbians played a crucial role in organizing around AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s, gay men should play an integral role in insuring that the health care service delivery system is more responsive to the specific needs of women. These issues are examined more fully in Chapter 6.

THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

Chapter 2 examines electoral and interest-group politics within the context of changing political opportunities, and it emphasizes the limitations

of a top-down, insider approach to political, social, and cultural change. This reformist approach has been practiced by an array of national lesbian and gay organizations, including the Human Rights Campaign, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, and the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund. The goals and policies of these organizations are outlined in both contemporary and historical context.¹⁵ The discussion here is meant to lay the groundwork for a discussion of the role of national organizations in key policy areas, including the military-service ban, lesbian and gay marriage, and AIDS. In doing so, Chapter 2 examines indigenous organizational strength and shared views within the lesbian and gay community, two of the crucial components of movement insurgency.

Some attention is also devoted in Chapter 2 to the advantages of having openly lesbian and gay officials serve at all levels of government. The chapter addresses these questions: In what ways does their election further the lesbian and gay movements? What can we expect them to accomplish, given the limitations of working within the liberal democratic framework? To what extent do they merely reinforce a narrow form of lesbian and gay identity politics? Finally, Chapter 2 explores the advantages and disadvantages of working within the framework of liberal democratic principles and considers whether having access to those in power will further the lesbian and gay movements' desire for greater equality at all levels of society. A key goal of this book is to examine the complicated relationship between a top-down approach to political change and the grassroots organizing and mobilizing strategies that are integral to any political and social movement.

If an electoral and interest-group-based strategy will not allow the movements to transcend assimilationist goals, then perhaps a legal-rights strategy will do so. Chapter 3 outlines the basic elements of a legal-rights strategy and identifies the limitations and possibilities of such an approach. This strategy has been championed by many within the lesbian and gay movements because they believe that the law reflects societal prejudices and fears. As a result, it needs to be altered to take into account the basic rights of lesbians and gays. Those who criticize a legal-rights strategy view it as another approach that reinforces liberal democratic, pluralist principles rooted in top-down, state-centered politics, one that focuses far too much attention on the individual.

The chapter explores the limitations and possibilities of a legal-rights strategy by considering three key policy areas: legal strategies challenging the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, the Supreme Court's *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision (1986), and same-sex marriage. Ultimately, the chapter addresses these questions: What have the movements accomplished

when pursuing a legal-rights strategy? In what ways does such a strategy merely reinforce the basic principles of interest-group liberalism? Can such a strategy be pursued without merely reinforcing a narrowly based identity politics? If so, how?

Chapters 2 and 3 examine the lesbian and gay movements largely in terms of top-down, state-centered approaches. Chapter 4, however, explores the grassroots elements of these movements, by evaluating unconventional politics as practiced by groups such as ACT UP, Queer Nation, and the Lesbian Avengers. Unconventional, direct-action politics as practiced in the lesbian and gay movements are placed within their proper historical and theoretical context. The chapter examines AIDS policy at the federal level during the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations, thus providing a context for examining the direct-action, unconventional politics that arose in response to the federal government's neglect of the 1980s and early 1990s. The chapter also explores the tensions between those within the lesbian and gay movements who embrace unconventional politics and those who champion mainstream electoral, interest-group politics.

The consequences of unconventional politics are explored by examining the role played by ACT UP in AIDS policy making. The following questions are addressed: What have been the results of ACT UP's organizing for AIDS policy? What has been the relationship between ACT UP and mainstream AIDS organizations, such as the AIDS Action Council? Are these organizations merely an embodiment of a radical form of nationalistic, identity politics? In what ways have such organizations challenged the underlying presuppositions of liberal democratic, pluralist politics? Discussion of these issues is set in the context of the social-movement theoretical synthesis outlined earlier. Finally, the chapter examines the apparent decline in grassroots activism within the lesbian and gay movements since the early 1990s and attempts to account for this development. One possible explanation is that lesbians and gay men have embraced a politics of privatism that privileges the economic individualism associated with markets in liberal democratic societies.

Chapter 5 explores the conflicts that have pervaded the American political scene over the past thirty years in response to the lesbian and gay movements. The argument here is that the Christian Right has reacted to the movements' gains by mobilizing and organizing at all levels of government. These conflicts are placed in historical context through a discussion of specific examples, such as the Briggs initiative and Anita Bryant's organizing in the late 1970s, the actions of Jesse Helms, Jerry Falwell, William Dannemeyer, and their supporters in response to AIDS, and the various state and local referendums of the 1970s 1980s, and

1990s. The chapter investigates the Christian Right's actions in thwarting federal, state, and local government responses to AIDS, and the ways the lesbian and gay movements have responded to these efforts. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing the Christian Right's mobilization in response to Bill Clinton's plan to overturn the ban on lesbians and gays in the military through executive order, and over the issue of lesbian and gay marriage. It also explores how the Christian Right has used radio programming and organized around local school curricular issues to pursue its conservative agenda.

A central purpose of this chapter is to explore the sources of the Christian Right's antagonism toward lesbians and gays. In doing so, it analyzes the relationship between these movements over time. In addition, the chapter devotes considerable attention to the electoral, legislative, and grassroots strategies embraced by the Christian Right in response to the lesbian and gay movements' attempts to achieve greater equality. Finally, Chapter 5 examines how the latter have responded to the Christian Right's organizing efforts over the years. The entire discussion is grounded in the social-movement theoretical synthesis guiding this book.

Chapter 6 outlines a political strategy for the lesbian and gay movements in light of the analysis presented throughout the book. It builds connections between the positive moral dimensions of the black civil rights movement and the quest for substantive equality that should be a central goal of the lesbian and gay civil rights movement. At the same time, it eschews mere rights-based strategies as far too limiting. It attempts to develop a political language that can move the lesbian and gay movements beyond an unquestioning acceptance of liberal democratic principles and link identity politics to broader class, race, and gender concerns, all on behalf of fundamental and progressive political, social, cultural, and economic change. As it develops these ideas, Chapter 6 considers how coalitions might be built with other groups on the American political landscape. (For example, coalitions can surely be built across a variety of interest groups favoring national health insurance in the United States.) This progressive challenge will embrace participatory democratic principles rather than the top-down, state-centered approach that characterizes interest-group liberalism. By its very nature, such an approach must also challenge the economic class, gender, and race-based hierarchies that are reinforced in the lesbian and gay community. The ultimate goal is to question the naturalness and superiority of the heterosexual paradigm. Chapter 6 also explores the barriers to the proposed political strategy and asks how these might be overcome. As we will see throughout this book, the barriers are significant but should not be treated as insurmountable.

Ultimately, our goal must be to build a political and social movement that attempts to weaken hierarchies, challenge prejudices, and end inequalities in political, social, and cultural life. The challenge is to do so in a way that rises above people's sexual identities at the same time that it respects those identities. That is a central challenge of this book.