Community before Liberation:
Theorizing Gay Resistance in San Francisco, 1953-1969

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Abstract

This thesis offers the first detailed account of the early history of homophile ideas of community. Its geographical centre is San Francisco. The thesis covers the period from the advent of homophile organising in the city in 1953 to the arrival of a new generation of post-Stonewall gay liberationists in 1969. In these sixteen years, ideas of community first emerged in San Franciscan gay bar-based activism, took hold, and from there, began to travel across the United States.

The thesis delivers two overarching arguments. First, it revises our understanding of when homophile ideas of community first surfaced. In the standard historical narrative, homophile activists first forged ideas of community in mid-1960s San Francisco. This thesis uncovers an earlier genesis. It locates the birth of 'community' in the mid-century activism of Latino female impersonator José Sarria, particularly his 1961 campaign for San Francisco City Supervisor. In the following years, ideas of 'the community' circulated in the newspapers of Sarria's collaborator Guy Strait, gradually winning a national audience. The mid-1960s activists often heralded as community's inventors were in fact the inheritors of this earlier generation.

Second, the thesis contends that the early history of homophile ideas of community demonstrated much greater doctrinal diversity than has previously been recognized. According to John D'Emilio's influential account, homophile activists primarily conceived of community as *sexual* community, rooted in shared sexual behaviours and interests. In contrast, my thesis uncovers a plurality of traditions of imagining community to which homophile activists contributed in the 1960s. In particular, the thesis traces homophile projects which pursued broader, coalitional communities in concert with other contemporary political movements, including the Civil Rights, Black Power, sex workers' and immigrant movements. Recovering their legacy corrects myths of a monolithic homophile investment in a single-issue gay politics.

Content

List of Illustrations

Introduction

‘Another sermon, my children.’

With this, Cassandra, in winter 1963, opened what might have been the first published critique of the novel concept of a gay community. A seasoned member of an LA-based, gay male activist group, this mother could not be fooled about the conduct of her ‘children’.[1] No matter what ‘the ridiculous term made popular by our San Francisco brethren’ sought to suggest, gays, Cassandra snidely observed, were ‘about as communal as a school of starving piranhas’. No sense of unity, mutual aid, or solidarity existed between them. They were unwilling to offer each other jobs, publicly disparaged one another’s character, hesitated to join gay organisations, and shirked participation in a pro-gay electoral politics. And as for loving each other, prejudices against religious minorities (‘Those Kikes?!’), racial minorities (‘Those [n******]!’), and gender nonconformity (‘Those queers!’) kept any fraternal and romantic feelings firmly in check.[2] In this context, talk of a gay ‘community’ was deceptive and entirely inappropriate. For Cassandra, it could only elicit disgust. ‘[S]trange, isn't it,’ she asked, ‘how an ordinary word used in a certain context can make you gag’?[3]

The wordsmiths Cassandra held responsible for her revulsion, her ‘San Francisco brethren’, did not take long to respond to these charges. Homophile activist Guy Strait (his legal name), the editor of the nationally successful gay tabloid *The News*, reprinted her broadside in his newspaper. Strait had been at the forefront of promoting the idea of a gay community since Autumn 1961, using the concept to advance his irreverent, ‘militant’ gay politics. In a brief note attached to Cassandra’s column, he claimed that she had misunderstood how San Franciscans employed the concept. ‘We use the word

[1] Cassandra’s group, Gay Girls Riding Club (GGRC), are best known today for their elaborate, gender-bending spoofs of early 1960s Hollywood movies (see Ryan Powell, *Coming Together: The Cinematic Elaboration of Gay Male Life, 1945-1979* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), chapter one).
[2] The masculine gender of the community member was explicit in Cassandra’s column. The n-word is spelled out in the original.
[3] ‘Guest Editorial’, *The News,* volume 3, number 6, 23 December 1963.

"Community" in the sense that we have, in our ranks every facet of life necessary to qualify as a true community. We do not think of a "Community" as a place where one person looks after the other.' As Strait's final words revealed, however, he did indeed hold out hope for just such a community. Gays might resemble a school of starving piranhas in the present, but 'it does not necessarily have to be that way', he asserted – another community was both possible and worth fighting for.[4]

The story of mid-twentieth century community formation has long formed a core element of US histories of homosexuality. Scholars have documented how a small but growing number of women and men who engaged in same-sex sexual and romantic practices began to identify as homosexuals in the pre-war decade and occupy public spaces as a group, particularly in the nation's major cities. By bringing together vast numbers of women and men in single-gender settings and disrupting familial patterns, World War II further accelerated this process. State attacks on urban gay life intensified in the 1950s but also spread knowledge of gay enclaves further afield, attracting an ever-larger number of homosexually active men and women to the cities. From these urban centres, the first so-called 'homophile' political groups arose in the fifties, first in Los Angeles and San Francisco and then across the United States. Gradually, homosexuals created an ever-widening network of institutions. As gay social life proliferated, becoming larger, denser, and more visible, homosexuals across the country began referring to themselves as the 'gay community' they had become.[5]

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[4] Ibid.

[5] For national and local accounts of this development, see John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Esther Newton, *Cherry Grove, Fire Island : Sixty Years in America's First Gay and Lesbian Town* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993); Leila J. Rupp, *A Desired Past : A Short History of Same-Sex Love in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), chapters five and six; Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves : Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Gary Atkins, *Gay Seattle : Stories of Exile and Belonging* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003); Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); Genny Beemyn, *A Queer Capital : A History of Gay Life in Washington, D.C.* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011); Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution : The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015). For a helpful survey of earlier

Privileging the voices of homophile activists like Straits and Cassandras, the present thesis brings to the fore a part of this history that is often kept in the background, asking how homophile activists actually imagined, debated, and fought over 'community'. In the historical literature on gay community formation, the arrival of community can seem like an inexorable event, the last element of the natural, historical progression from homosexual acts to homosexual identity to homosexual community. And certainly, it is comforting to believe that community was always going to be the finale of this resistance story. But while this chronology is not inaccurate, it fails to give a faithful rendition of the experiences of the activists at the heart of this conceptual revolution. To them, community was not an expectation, but an improvised invention borne of necessity, if not desperation. Rather than arriving uniformly at a sense of homosexual community, they travelled a myriad of intellectual and political paths, leading them to disagree fiercely and often irreconcilably over the kind of community that they sought to create. And where we might be tempted to see community as a happy ending, they often remained gravely doubtful about whether community would be able to save them after all.

Combing through the archival tracks they left behind, this thesis presents the first in-depth study of the early history of homophile ideas of community. It finds its geographical centre in San Francisco, the city long and rightfully (as Cassandra's comments also corroborate) identified as the cradle of US notions of gay community. The dissertation spans a temporal arch from the advent of homophile organising in the first half of the 1950s to the arrival of a new generation of gay liberationist activists in the late 1960s. These fifteen years mark the period in which homophile ideas of community first emerged to lasting effect, took hold in San Franciscan gay activism, and from there tentatively began to travel across the United States. The thesis focuses on the city's gay bar activists rather than San Francisco's more frequently studied homophile activists at

works of this body, see Marc Stein, 'Theoretical Politics, Local Communities: The Making of U.S. LGBT Historiography,' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* volume 11, number 4 (2005).

the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) and Mattachine Society.[6] For it is in these bars that homophile notions of community were first coined, debated, and disseminated, sometimes to the resistance, as we shall see, of other homophile activists.

Main interventions

The historical account offered by this dissertation is meant as both an expansion of and a correction to the current early intellectual histories of gay community. Historians have cast significant light on how gay women and men across mid-century United States – from Seattle to Miami, from Los Angeles to Cherry Grove – forged a communal life in often extremely hostile conditions. One thing common to many of these accounts is that, even as they purport to tell the history of gay community formation, they have had curiously little to say on the history of gay ideas of community. While highly sensitive to the shifting meaning of terms like gay, lesbian, butch, femme, queer, homosexual, and homophile, these scholars have shown, at most, a minor interest in exploring when, how, and even if their subjects used the term 'community' when describing their social formations. Only very few exceptions break with this pattern.

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[6] For studies of Mattachine and DOB, see Clare Bermingham, "Feeling Queer Together: Identity, Community, and the Work of Affect in the Pre-Stonewall Lesbian Magazine, The Ladder" (University of Waterloo, 2018); Douglas M. Charles, *Hoover's War on Gays: Exposing the FBI's "Sex Deviates" Program* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2015), chapter five; John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, Second ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1983]), chapters four to six; Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Seal Press, 2007); Phyllis Gorman, "The Daughters of Bilitis: A Description and Analysis of a Female Homophile Social Movement Organization, 1955-1963" (The Ohio State University, 1985); Martin Meeker, 'Behind the Mask of Respectability: Reconsidering the Mattachine Society and Male Homophile Practice, 1950s and 1960s,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality,* volume 10, number 1 (2001); Will Roscoe, ed., *Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of its Founder* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001); James T. Sears, *Behind the Mask of the Mattachine: The Hal Call Chronicles and the Early Movement for Homosexual Emancipation* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2006); Stuart Timmons, *The Trouble with Harry Hay: Founder of the Modern Gay Movement* (2012). For studies of the San Francisco gay bar life, see '"Resorts for Sex Perverts": A Political History of Gay Bars in San Francisco', *Allan Bérubé Collection*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, box 17, folder 9 ("Resorts for Sex Perverts," 1994 updated version text'); Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Sherri Cavan, 'Interaction in Home Territories,' *Berkeley Journal of Sociology,* volume 8 (1963); Anna Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol: Cops, Courts, and the Struggle over Urban Gay Life before Stonewall* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

This prevailing attitude is perhaps best illustrated by the introduction of Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk's *gay by the bay*.[7] There, Stryker and Van Buskirk note the 'slippery, shape-changing' nature of queer terminology, the way in which the meaning of terms like 'gay' and 'queer' has been revised over time. They express their intent to deploy, as much as possible, the vocabulary that was 'used by people to describe themselves in the historical period under discussion'.[8] When the next paragraph opens with the note that '"Community," another word we use frequently in the book, presents its own difficulties', the reader may be forgiven for expecting a few sentences to follow on the history of this concept. Instead, the difficulties reported by the authors relate to the dissonance between the implied unity of 'community' and the multiplicity of cultures and groups that have gathered under this umbrella term. The reminder that '[t]here has never been one monolithic queer community in the Bay Area' is certainly important in the face of the uneven representation of different LGBTIQ populations in popular and academic histories.[9] Still, questions remain: have there always been queer communities? Where did the term originally come from? And what content did it carry for its first users?

Among the many histories of mid-twentieth century gay community formation, John D'Emilio's 1983 path-breaking *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* offers the only original account of the origins of homophile ideas of community. D'Emilio's book was the first monograph published on the 1950s and 1960s US homophile movement and has exerted great influence over the subsequent formation of the field of US LGBTIQ history.[10] Unlike his successors, D'Emilio proved himself deeply invested in

[7] Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *gay by the bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996).
[8] Ibid., p.5.
[9] Ibid.
[10] On D'Emilio's huge influence on subsequent US LGBTIQ history, see for example Stein, 'Theoretical Politics, Local Communities: The Making of U.S. LGBT Historiography'". In 1998, the importance of D'Emilio's work was recognized through the publication of a second edition of the work that included a new preface and afterword. In 2003, the Social Sciences Research Council sponsored "Sexual Worlds, Political

understanding when, where, how, and in what form ideas of community emerged in the US homophile context. He proposed mid-1960s San Francisco as the time and place of gay community's coinage. D'Emilio argued that the idea arose in this context in response to wider structural changes in the city's gay bar life. He suggested that by the mid-1960s, gay life in San Francisco, and in particular its bars, 'was assuming a significantly different shape from its counterparts in other urban areas'.[11] Bar-based activist groups proliferated in number and size, lending the bars an increasing community character. Groups like the Society for Individual Rights (SIR, 1964-1977) could then develop an awareness of what they witnessed around them and articulate this through the concept of a gay 'community'. As the decade progressed, 'the world of the gay bars increasingly took on the contours of a *self-conscious*, cohesive community'.[12] As to the form which homophile ideas of community took, D'Emilio contended – in part by what he wrote, in part by what he left unsaid – that they carried only one, self-explanatory meaning, that of a 'sexual community'. He maintained that gay people in mid-1960s San Francisco came to see themselves as a community '[formed] around a shared sexual orientation'.[13] Hints that gay activists could have been at odds over the meaning of community and the persuasiveness of the sexual community paradigm are entirely absent from D'Emilio's narrative.

D'Emilio's theses continue to shape the scholarly discourse on the subject of gay community. On the few occasions where later historians have displayed a sensitivity to the contingency of ideas about a 'gay community', they have generally adopted D'Emilio's narrative. For instance, subsequent historians of queer San Francisco have stayed faithful to D'Emilio's account in attributing the coinage of 'gay community' to the

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Cultures", a conference organised by Margot Canaday and Pippa Holloway which celebrated the twentieth anniversary of *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities'* publication (Ibid, p.621).

[11] D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, p.195. For D'Emilio's account of the contrast between San Francisco and other cities, see also ———, 'Gay Politics, Gay Community: San Francisco's Experience,' in *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

[12] ———, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, p.177. My emphasis.

[13] Ibid.p.195.

mid-1960s and groups like SIR.[14] LGBTIQ historians also have often followed D'Emilio in referring to the LGBTIQ community as a 'sexual community'.[15]

This thesis departs from D'Emilio's narrative in three principal ways. First, it revises our understanding of when homophile ideas of community first surfaced, uncovering an earlier genesis that had escaped D'Emilio's attention. Under the assault of state forces, gay bar-based activists in the 1950s and 1960s developed a broad range of resistance measures that sought to alleviate and, ultimately, end state harassment. Homophile ideas of community emerged directly out of this activist tradition, were used as some of its sharpest intellectual tools, and remain some of its most enduring resistance legacies. They found their source in Latino female impersonator José Sarria's proud, flamboyant style of gay activism. Sarria devoted much of his energy in the 1950s and early 1960s to defending his place of employment, the bohemian Black Cat café, from state assault; he persuaded its customers to identify as homosexuals and to become gay activists. In 1961, Sarria took the fight from the city's bars into its voting booths when he launched an ambitious campaign for San Francisco City Supervisor as the first openly gay person to run for political office in the United States. During this campaign, his camp took up or possibly even coined the idea of a gay community, a concept they went on to use to persuade reluctant gay sceptics to cast their vote for Sarria and their own 'community'. In the subsequent years, Sarria's former collaborator Guy Strait diffused the language of community through *L.C.E. News,* the most widely circulated gay publication of this period. As the aforementioned Cassandra-Strait exchange illustrates, ideas of gay community had already become sufficiently established by 1963 not only in San Francisco but also in other cities to attract the attention of their first gay critics. The later

[14] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp.227-231.
[15] See for instance Jeffrey Weeks, 'The Idea of a Sexual Community,' *Soundings: A Journal of Politics and Culture,* volume 2 (1996).

generation of SIR activists were, then, not the first generation of community speakers as D'Emilio ventured, but the second.

In its second major departure from D'Emilio's account, this thesis contends that the early history of homophile ideas of community demonstrates much greater doctrinal diversity than has previously been recognized. Where D'Emilio considered ideas of sexual community to hold hegemonic status, my thesis uncovers a plurality of traditions to which homophiles contributed. As the Cassandra-Strait discussion indicates, the question of the basis on which gays could form communities sparked vivacious disagreements in the early years of the concept. In their bars, letters, and publications, homophiles fiercely debated the nature, composition, and boundaries of the communities they strove to create. While some gravitated toward the idea of a sexual community, others did not. Cassandra, for one, did not accept the claim that homophiles formed a community simply on the grounds of their shared (homo)sexuality. In her eyes, community would require the performance of a politics of solidarity, particularly toward more disadvantaged gay subgroups. Cassandra was part of a camp of homophile activists who aspired to create communities that extended beyond the confines of particular sexualities and gender expressions. Many of these activists pursued a broader coalitional politics in concert with other contemporary political movements, including sex workers', environmental, immigrant, Civil Rights, and Black Power movements. We might wish to refer to these as 'political' conceptions of community, since they were often grounded in notions of shared political interests that bound diverse, marginalized groups together. Indeed, different visions of community circulated in homophile discourse and drew influential advocates up until the 1965-1966 dispute over the SIR Community Center, which led to a narrowing of these conceptions. Activists who espoused broader or narrower visions of community at a particular moment often revisited their intellectual commitments later on. In their ideas and practices of community, homophiles showed

considerable agility, adapting their worldmaking tools to changing political circumstances. Where D'Emilio presents a discursive convergence around ideas of a sexual community, this thesis reconstructs the vibrant, multivocal debates around community that governed 1960s San Francisco homophile activism.

Third and finally, this thesis argues that we should view the coinage of homophile ideas of community not as an effect of changes in the structure of the city's gay bar life but as itself an attempt, in itself, to *reshape* that very structure. Here, Cassandra's reluctance to recognize community as an accurate description of the reality of gay bar life serves as a first indicator that the rise of ideas of community was not predetermined by the increasingly communal character of gay bar life. Instead, as I argue in chapter three, once we locate the emergence of these ideas in the stagnant, early 1960s of homophile activism rather than the triumphant, mid-to-late 1960s as historians have previously been inclined, the course of the city's gay bar life can no longer straightforwardly account for the coinage of gay community. We can better make sense of the emergence of homophile ideas of community when we treat them as deliberate, discursive interventions carried out by a discerning group of activists who were involved in what Amia Srinivasan calls 'worldmaking'. They sought to achieve 'the transformation of the world through a transformation of [their] representational practices' through creating new terms, discarding old ones, and reinterpreting worn vocabulary for their own purposes.[16] Erin Pineda refers to this orientation 'toward activists as political theorists, engaged in the creative work of analysing and acting within the present on its own terms' as 'seeing like an activist'.[17] To enable us to see community like an activist, as a live, purposeful, but always unstable political project, this thesis dedicates significant space to the historical recovery of the actions and larger political projects the activists at the

[16] Amia Srinivasan, 'Genealogy, Epistemology and Worldmaking,' *Proceedings Of The Aristotelian Society,* volume CXIX, Part 2 (2019), p.145.
[17] Erin R. Pineda, *Seeing Like an Activist: Civil Disobedience and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), p.202.

centre of this story pursued. While unusual for a work of intellectual history, this groundwork is necessitated by the general absence of thorough treatment of the groups and individuals examined. For, it is only when we grasp the goals and direction of their wider political activities that we can begin to understand the contours of their intellectual manoeuvres.

The thesis offers this revised account of the emergence of homophile imaginaries of community with two objectives. First of all, it hopes to introduce greater historical complexity into scholarly treatments of San Francisco's homophile activism, a subject that continues to spawn significant academic interest.[18] Two stereotypes pervade scholarly depictions. One camp of historians has hailed San Franciscan homophiles as crucial forerunners who built unprecedently large organisations and novel institutions, won a sharp decline in police harassment, and cultivated a new sense of community.[19] Another group has offered a very different take, decrying these same activists as conservatives whose one-issue ideology would give much-needed way to the more radical, coalitional gay liberationists of the late 1960s and 1970s.[20] Both of these one-sided accounts risk losing sight of the continuities and complexities of the period. For example, the establishment of a first gay community centre also brought the marginalization of more liberatory ways of imagining community. Gay liberationists' multi-issue gay politics was often formed in opposition to some homophile thinking, but in alignment with more radical homophile activists that had historically played a central role in the movement. A more subtle reconstruction of the period will pay close attention to what Joanne Meyerowitz has referred to as 'the buzz of political conflict that animated the sexual discourse of past decades', that is, to how various groups of homophile

[18] See footnote six above.
[19] D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, especially chapter ten; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, especially chapter five.
[20] The paradigmatic example here is Emily K. Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), chapter one. On these differing camps, see also discussion in chapter five.

activists engaged in a heated, open-ended conversation about the very meaning of community and the directions of homophile activism.[21]

A second aspiration of this thesis is to provide, by recovering a series of paths not taken, resources for rethinking community in the present moment. Dissatisfaction with notions of sexual community has been an attendant feature of their meteoric rise over the second half of the twentieth century. Following in Cassandra's footsteps, community's critics have alleged that the concept falsely implies that homosexuals comprise 'a homogenous entity', that it 'incompletely and inadequately gets at the shape and scope of queer life', particularly in rural areas, and even that it 'looks increasingly out-of-date' in the face of an expanding variety of LGBTIQ lifestyles and expressions.[22] Qualitative researchers and leading LGBTIQ activists alike confirm a general feeling of malaise among contemporary LGBTIQ folks toward notions of LGBTIQ community.[23] In light of such scepticism, it might be tempting to argue for a radical departure from notions of LGBTIQ community. At the same time, however, it is difficult to see how our current political moment of escalating, interrelated crises does not call for a *greater* turn to community as a possible route toward a different and better future. Perhaps then, we might do better asking with trans activist-writer Kai Cheng Thom, '[w]hat would "community" know about saving us from the apocalypse?'[24] It is my hope that recovering the history of community's multifarious beginnings might go some way in offering an answer.

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[21] Joanne Meyerowitz, 'The Liberal 1950s? Reinterpreting Postwar American Sexual Culture,' in *Gender and the Long Postwar: The United States and the two Germanys, 1945-1989*, ed. Karen Hagemann and Sonya Michel (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/John Hopkins University Press, 2014), p.311

[22] Letter from Robert Koch printed in 'Open Forum', *Vector*, volume 3, number 8, July 1967, p.14; John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp.14-15; John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence: Men's Lives and Gay Identities : A Twentieth-Century History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), p. xiii.

[23] Eleanor Formby, *Exploring LGBT spaces and communities* (London: Routledge, 2017), p.10; ———, "Why you should think twice before you talk about 'the LGBT community'," *The Conversation* (2017). https://theconversation.com/why-you-should-think-twice-before-you-talk-about-the-lgbt-community-81711; Kai Cheng Thom, *I Hope We Choose Love : A Trans Girl's Notes From The End of The World* (2019).

[24] ———, *I Hope We Choose Love : A Trans Girl's Notes From The End of The World*, p.9.

Community before community

The history of homophile ideas of community is, as already indicated, primarily an intellectual history of San Francisco's gay bars and bar-based organisations in the late 1950s and 1960s. As I argue in chapter one, contextualising these ideas means in the first place recovering the landscape of gay bar life, the contours of its policing, and the forms of resistance that were being developed in these spaces. These were the primary experiences from which ideas of community emerged as a 'theory in the flesh'.[25] That is not to say, however, that these ideas did not also have roots in certain intellectual traditions, the uncovering of which can help us understand the formation of these concepts. The most relevant background tradition that warrants some examination is the manner in which the homophile activists of the San Francisco-based groups Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) conceived of community and attendant ideas of responsibility.

The Mattachine Society had been formed by a group of gay male communists in Los Angeles in 1951 with an originally very radical philosophy. However, in 1953, the group was taken over by an anti-communist faction that transformed Mattachine into the bulwark of homophile conservatism.[26] Under president Harold 'Hal' Call, one of the faction's leaders, the headquarters of Mattachine were moved to San Francisco in late 1956.[27] From 1954, Call published the influential *Mattachine Review,* Mattachine's national magazine. Call dissolved Mattachine's national structure in 1960 but remained active alongside his business partner Donald 'Don' Lucas as the leader of Mattachine

[25] Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*, Fourth ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015 [1981]), p.19.
[26] For a defense of Mattachine's politics as less conservative than its reputation, see Meeker, 'Behind the Mask of Respectability: Reconsidering the Mattachine Society and Male Homophile Practice, 1950s and 1960s' and Don Lucas, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 30 December 1996 through 28 February 1998, pp.127-128.
[27] D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, p.89.

Society of San Francisco until it ceased operating in a meaningful way in the mid-1960s.[28]

The Daughters of Bilitis were founded in San Francisco in 1955 as the first known political organisation of lesbians in the United States. DOB had been formed on the initiative of a Filipina working-class woman, Rosalie 'Rose' Bamberger. Its most influential leaders were Phyllis Lyon and Dorothy 'Del' Martin, a white, middle-class, lesbian couple who belonged among the group's co-founders. Under their direction, DOB began publishing its own national magazine *The Ladder* in 1956, collaborating with male homophile groups, and encouraging the creation of chapters across the United States. The Daughters remained the primary vehicle for Lesbian activism in San Francisco until the late 1960s saw the arrival of new gay liberationist groups and DOB's gradual demise.

Both DOB and Mattachine spoke of 'community' before the arrival of specifically homophile imaginaries of community in the early 1960s. They adopted the ideological framework of the dominant heteronormative culture in which the phrase 'the community' did not signify any particular community within the city's diverse social worlds, but San Franciscan (or US) society as a whole. As their publications show, this meaning of the term was widely established among heterosexual authority figures. Thus, a California Supreme Court judge seeking to ground general principles for assessing the obscenity of published material in 1957 asserted that '[t]he book or material must be judged as a whole by its effect on the average adult in the community',[29] A psychiatrist reflecting on the benefits of anti-gay police harassment for wider society could wonder whether they did 'do any good for the community'.[30] Early homophile activists also understood and applied the idea of 'the community' in this way. For instance, Mattachine leader Ken

[28] On the history of Mattachine Society and its more radical predecessor, Mattachine Foundation, see Sears, *Behind the Mask of the Mattachine: The Hal Call Chronicles and the Early Movement for Homosexual Emancipation*; D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*; Timmons, *The Trouble with Harry Hay: Founder of the Modern Gay Movement*; Roscoe, *Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of its Founder*.
[29] Del Martin, 'Editorial: The Four-Letter Word,' *The Ladder*, volume 6, number 2, November 1961, p.5.
[30] Denise Wacker and Philip Sutin, 'Comment Differs: On Problems of Homosexuality,' *Mattachine Review* volume 8, number 9, September 1962, p.16.

Burns in 1956 used the idea of 'the community' synonymously with 'society' when he argued against the idea 'that homosexuals be permitted to separate themselves from the community and form a society of their own'.[31] The term was given the same meaning in Call's 1960 speech on 'The Extent of Homosexuality in the Community' that interrogated 'the percentage of predominantly homosexually oriented adults' in the US population as a whole.[32] In a particularly clear example, Lucas referred to 'the community (society)' by way of clarifying how early homophile activists understood the term.[33]

The universalist aspirations of the term as a referent for San Franciscan or US society as a whole were routinely undercut by the shared understanding among homophiles, their allies, and enemies that gays were marginalised in, or even excluded from, the community. Anti-gay state forces operated on the assumption that homosexuals were rightfully situated outside the community's remit. State agents closing down gay bars argued that these venues were violating the 'good order of the community' or 'the morals of the community'.[34] In contrast, homophile allies lamented homosexuals' unjust treatment on the part of the community. Sexologist Harry Benjamin acknowledged 'the fear of persecution, of entrapment, of blackmail, and of the deadly poison of ostracism' that gay people experience 'in the community'.[35] Psychologist Evelyn Hooker described how she had been repeatedly urged by her homosexual contacts and friends to 'plead their case in the community, to help change the laws, to help change social attitudes'.[36] A gay-friendly priest remarked that many homosexuals 'are estranged from

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[31] Ken Burns, 'Homosexuality in Boise…Let's get at the causes!', ibid., volume 2, number 1, February 1956, p.2.
[32] 'Health Service Personnel Hear Mattachine Speaker,' *San Francisco Mattachine Newsletter*, issue 85, June 1960, pp. 4, 6.
[33] 'Don Lucas proposals 11/57', *James Sears Papers*, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, box 150, folder 'PanGraphic'.
[34] 'What Happened at Jack's', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 5, 10 December 1962; Arthur S. Leonard, *Sexuality and the Law: An Encyclopedia of Major Legal Cases* (New York: Garland, 1993), p.191.
[35] Harry Benjamin, 'In Time… We Must Accept,' *Mattachine Review*, volume 4, number 6, June 1958, p.15.
[36] D.K., 'Taboo Topics,' *The Ladder*, volume 8, number 8, May 1964, p.7.

… the community'.[37] Homophiles, too, communicated a self-perception as the community's outcasts. For example, a 1955 statement by the Mattachine board of directors accused 'the community' of having 'prosecuted and persecuted' harmless homosexual conduct, a contributor to *The Ladder* in 1964 shared her experiences with being tolerated by 'the community' only if she did not openly identify as a lesbian, and a prominent 1960s homophile activist thirty years later expressed his conviction that '[t]he community is never going to be able to push gay people back into the closet'.[38] Like their allies, homophile activists knew from experience that dominant society imagined 'the community' as a heteronormative collective to which gay people did not (fully) belong.

San Francisco homophile activists in the post-war decades responded to their exclusion from this imagined collective with various counterstrategies. Before 1960s gay bar-based activists began drifting toward ideas of forming their own communities or building communities with other marginalised groups, the early generation of homophile activists in Mattachine and DOB pioneered a different approach. They argued that it was both possible and desirable for homosexuals to learn to 'integrate' themselves into the heteronormative community. In the inaugural, 1955 issue of the *Review*, Mattachine elevated this project to one of its core objectives. It characterised itself as 'an organization seeking the integration of the homosexual as a responsible and acceptable citizen in the Community'.[39] Members' letters printed in subsequent issues commended this orientation.[40] DOB similarly promoted homosexual integration into the dominant,

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[37] John Moore Lecture 'Church, Community and Homosexuality', *Evander Smith - California Hall Papers, 1965-1973 (GLC 46)*, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, Folder 9 ('First Methodist Church and Glide Memorial Church service programs, 1965 January 17').

[38] See respectively, Mattachine Board of Directors, 'Let's Kill Idle Rumours about Mattachine's Aims', *Mattachine Review*, volume 1, issue 3, May-June 1955, p.48; The Turncoat, 'Rebuttal to "Living Propaganda"', *The Ladder*, volume 8, number 8, May 1964, p.10; Herbert Donaldson and Evander Smith, 'The Defenders,' in *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990*, ed. Eric Marcus (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), p.163.

[39] 'Mattachine Quiz,' *Mattachine Review* volume 1, issue 1, January-February 1955, p.32.

[40] In the same year, an Ohio Mattachine Society member remarked that '[s]eeking integration of the sex variant as a responsible, productive and acceptable citizen in his community is an important thing to accomplish' (Harold Sylvester, 'Why I am a Member of the Mattachine Society,' ibid., volume 1, issue 2, March-April 1955, p.29). His article was reprinted from official Mattachine Society information material. A December 1956 article praises Mattachine Society for calling 'upon its members to shoulder the

heteronormative community. Until September 1968, each issue of *The Ladder* opened with a reprint of the original DOB mission statement which famously declared DOB '[a] women's organization for the purpose of promoting the integration of the homosexual into society'.[41] DOB also expressed this goal in the conceptual language of 'the community'. Under Martin's editorialship, the lead article of *The Ladder*'s May 1962 issue articulated DOB's belief that 'it is possible for homosexuals to accept themselves and the society in which they live and so become productive citizens of the community'.[42]

Mattachine in particular emphasized that it was not only possible for homosexuals to learn to integrate themselves into the community, but that they even held a responsibility to do so. In an early statement on their aims and principles, Mattachine leaders summarized their ideas on integration as follows,

> Since homosexuals desire acceptance in society, it behooves [sic] them to assume community responsibility. They should, as individuals, actively affiliate with community endeavors, such as civic and welfare organizations, religious activities, and citizenship responsibilities, instead of attempting to withdraw into an invert society of their own. For only as they make positive contributions to the general welfare can they expect acceptance and full assimilation into the communities in which they live.[43]

In place of forming social networks of their own, Mattachine leaders expected homosexuals to learn to fully integrate themselves into the heteronormative society.

The purpose of this survey has not been to castigate DOB and Mattachine for their conservative politics. This would require in the first place a fuller appraisal of the development of their political positions and the circumstances of their early activism than

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responsibility of "members of the human community" and [bidding] them to integrate harmoniously and successfully into the main current of heterosexual society instead of attempting to withdraw into an invert society of their own.' It particularly praises Mattachine Society's emphasis on assuming responsibility within society '[t]hrough active service in the community' (Eric von Gothenburg, 'The Homosexual and Society,' ibid., volume 2, number 6, December 1956, p.35.).

[41] Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, pp.10ff.

[42] 'The Dare of the Future: An Appraisal of the Homophile Movement,' *The Ladder*, volume 6, number 8, May 1962, p.9.

[43] 'Aims and Principles,' Mattachine Review 2, special issue (January 1956): 12–13. The document can also be found in *James Sears Papers*, box 151, folder 'Coordinating Council Minutes 2/2'.

is feasible here. DOB leaders in particular proved themselves more open to revising their positions over the years than they have often been given credit for. As Martin and Lyon explain in their 1972 book *Lesbian/Woman,* the integrationist language of their founding documents reflected the spirit of a more oppressive age in which '[t]here was not the sense of community or solidarity that exists today. Lesbians were isolated and separated – and scared.'[44] Instead, this section has sought to outline longstanding conservative homophile traditions of conceptualising community and responsibility in order to cast a clearer light on the conceptual innovations that would come out of the gay bar scene in the 1960s. As we shall see, gay bar activists engaged with these ideas in a critical, creative, and persistent manner.

Sources, limitations, and terminology

The thesis follows the early life of homophile ideas of community through a variety of social settings that have rarely been conceived as the sites of important, creative intellectual production: from their experiential background in the city's gay bar life, through a set of transgressive opera performances, a historic political campaign, the discourses of the first bar-based political groups, the battle over the country's first homophile community centre, to the first national conferences of homophile groups. In doing so, it confirms, following Mia Bay et al, that approaching the field of intellectual history from the standpoint of marginalised groups often 'challenges common wisdom about where intellectual activities take place'.[45] The bar, the community picnic, the Sunday brunch, the Halloween parade, and the New Year's ball all become pivotal sites at which ideas are introduced, negotiated, disseminated, and challenged to lasting effect.

[44] Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman* (Volcano, CA: Volcano Press, 1991), p.224. See also Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, pp. 18, 24, 55. For defences of Mattachine's politics, see footnote 25 above.
[45] Mia Bay et al., 'Introduction: Toward an Intellectual History of Black Women,' in *Toward an intellectual history of Black women*, ed. Mia Bay et al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), p.5.

Writing intellectual history from the (queer) margins also corroborates another teaching of black women intellectual historians, namely, that such an approach will necessarily take us 'from the essential work of recovery through the development of alternative sources and modes of analysis'.[46] To unearth discourses of community at these different sites, I have had to marshal an extensive range of previously un(der)researched primary sources, from more traditional sources like memoirs, correspondence, newspapers articles, photographs, and legal documents, to more unusual ones such as programs, audio and video recordings of performances, gay bar rags, police and FBI documents, and community databases.

Some sites of queer intellectual production proved more recalcitrant to historical recovery than others. Long recognized as a crucial event in US LGBTIQ history, José Sarria's camp opera performances at the Black Cat have left behind a rich but chequered historical record. While the opera scripts have largely been preserved, the ground-breaking political speeches Sarria gave as part of his performances have not.[47] They were often, if not always, improvised, and on account of their oral delivery failed to leave behind a solid written record.[48] The only extant audio recording of a Sarria show is of a Saturday night performance, when Sarria would have welcomed a mixed, straight and gay crowd and spoken very differently, not from a Sunday opera.[49] Although subsequent oral histories with Sarria and audience members have done much to shed a light on these performances, I was only able to develop a fuller appreciation of their importance after making the friendship of Joe Castel. As a beloved community elder, Sarria was often asked for special performances of his operas decades after he had stopped

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[46] Ibid., p.4.
[47] For the scripts, see *José Sarria Papers*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, boxes 16-22.
[48] For an exceptional contemporary source, see Cavan, 'Interaction in Home Territories'.
[49] For the recording, see 'José at the Black Cat!!!', *José Sarria Papers*, box 129. For the varied composition of Sarria's audiences, see José Sarria, interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open History Town,* GLBT Historical Society, 15 April 1992, p.9; ———, interview by Allan Bérubé, *Allan Bérubé Papers, Oversize 4,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 21 March 1997; 'The Nightingale', *The News,* volume 3, number 6, 23 December 1963.

delivering them for a living. A filmmaker and close friend of Sarria's, Castel had begun recording these re-runs in the 1990s for his award-winning documentary *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020). Already in the 1950s, Sarria was famous for recycling his material.[50] After watching these performances courtesy of Joe Castel, I realised that they included rehashings of speeches that Sarria had given at the Black Cat. This new window revealed a dimension of Sarria's performances that had previously been hidden, their attempt to *create* and not just assemble a gay audience.

One of the major difficulties has been the general lack of documentation of San Francisco's gay bar-based activism. While homophile activists working outside the bars often occupied more stable economic positions, remained engaged in the movement for many years, communicated regularly through written correspondence, and were able to store their materials until the arrival of academic and community historians in the 1970s and 1980s, activists operating inside the city's gay bars frequently operated under more disadvantageous conditions. Their careers were often severely impacted by state harassment, with some, like Sarria, losing their livelihood to police persecution. In Sarria's case, this forced him to repeatedly leave town in search for job opportunities or, in old age, for cheaper rent after he was no longer able to afford San Francisco's rapidly rising rent. Others, such as Guy Strait, were imprisoned for several years for having sex with a minor.[51] Later generations of bar activists consciously built organisations with regular elections and changing leaderships. After several years in the movement, they often burned out and left. With community archives only coming in existence in the 1980s, their personal records have rarely been preserved.[52] In general, they were more

[50] 'The Nightingale'; 'Roving Report', volume 1, number 7, 8 January 1962; 'Roving Report', volume 1, number 8, 22 January 1962.
[51] On the history of sex with a minor charges being used to criminalize homosexuals, see Scott De Orio, *Bad Queers: LGBTQ People and the Carceral State in Modern America* (forthcoming). On Strait's arrest, see chapter four.
[52] On the history of gay community archives, see John D'Emilio, 'Not a Simple Matter: Gay History and Gay Historians,' *The Journal of American History,* volume 76, number 2 (1989): pp.438-439; Lisa Duggan, 'History's Gay Ghetto: The Contradictions of Growth in Lesbian and Gay History,' in *Presenting the Past:*

likely to conduct their activism through informal verbal conversations than non-bar-based activists.

A few types of sources have been invaluable in circumventing, or at least mitigating, these constraints. These groups printed regular publications, newsletters and even newspapers, that provide an extensive, though still under-studied record of their ideas, language, and objectives. Like previous histories of homophile activism, this thesis leans heavily on these publications.[53] The vast expanse of oral histories queer academic and community historians have conducted with San Francisco homophiles has offered a second, vast body of exceptionally useful sources. Some of these interviews, such as the ones conducted by John D'Emilio for *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities,* and Nan Alamilla Boyd for *Wide-Open Town* have formed the backbone of academic histories. But many other interviewers and interviewees have offered their time and stories in the pursuit of other projects, or in the hope that they 'will give professional historians the material needed to tell the whole story more fully'.[54] They have certainly enriched this account. Thirdly and lastly, where these activists left no collection of papers of their own, priceless evidence of their ideas has sometimes been preserved in their letters with activists who were more able or willing to preserve their correspondence.

The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on what kind of source material was available for this thesis. While a first archival visit to California could take place as planned in late 2019/early 2020, a second trip to the East Coast had to be postponed from spring 2020 to summer 2022. As a result, material from Western archives features more heavily than might have otherwise been the case. As the early intellectual history of gay community is for the most part a San Franciscan history, this loss weighted less

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Essays on History and the Public, ed. Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010).

[53] For paradigmatic examples, see D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*; Marc Stein, 'Canonizing Homophile Sexual Respectability: Archives, History, and Memory,' *Radical History Review,* volume 2014, number 120 (2014).

[54] James (Robbie) Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, 2017, San Francisco Public Library, Unpublished manuscript, p.4.

heavily than would have otherwise been the case. Still, it imposed certain limitations on this thesis. Not least, it meant that there was at first not the source material, and finally not the time to end this thesis with a chapter on the nationalisation of discourses of community in the course of the North American Conferences of Homophile Organisations (NACHO).

Finally, a note on terminology. Throughout the thesis, efforts have been made to remain as faithful as possible to the language of the examined periods. It might be helpful to include here a brief discussion of some of the major adjustments the reader will encounter. Where earlier chapters are more likely to speak of 'homosexually active men' and 'homosexually active women', later chapters are more inclined to use 'gay men' and 'lesbians'. Through this shift, the thesis hopes to intimate the increased uptake in gay self-identification in the later periods, in part on account of some of the very activist efforts it documents. To be sure, not all homosexually active women/men of the early 1950s would have identified as lesbians/gay men by the late 1960s, but many did. Similarly, earlier chapters will tend toward using 'gay women', later chapters toward 'lesbians'. This is meant as a reflection of actual historical trends in how women who had sex with women thought of themselves.[55] Beginning in the 1950s, more and more women came to reclaim the label as lesbians from its popular association with deviance, perversion, and a failed female masculinity.[56] In the second half of the 1960s, the move toward lesbian identification was quickened by a second purpose. It also served to express increased female frustration with the lack of attention the male-dominated homophile movement was giving to the problems lesbians were facing as women. Speaking as lesbians rather than gay women emphasized the difference of lesbian from gay male

[55] Gay was a much more expansive term in the 1960s than it is today. A wide variety of gender and sexual non-conformists assembled under its umbrella

[56] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp. 125, 279; Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, p.3; Del Martin, 'I am a Lesbian', *Vector,* volume 2, number 11, October 1966; Martin and Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, p.15; Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p.6.

experiences.[57] Terms like 'lesbian' and especially 'gay' were in general more capacious than they are today, with many different forms of sexual and gender non-conformists, including trans subjects, identifying or being classified as 'gay'.[58]

Furthermore, it was customary in the post-war period for gay men, particularly if they dressed and acted effeminately, to adopt a feminine first name and to address each other with she/her pronouns. The thesis pays homage to this practice. I write about gay men using she/her pronouns when these men are in drag or present themselves with a female name. Thus, in this thesis, Sarria's pronouns are he/him when he is not in drag, and she/her when she is performing or appears as the Empress Norton. This practice was not always followed as consistently as it is here, and gay men were generally very relaxed about pronouns.

My thesis introduces some new terminological practices in how it speaks about community. It refers to 'homophile [or gay/homosexual] ideas of community' to capture the overarching body of homophile notions of community. These ideas could take the form of a (homo)sexual community or other shapes, for example that of a broader community that spanned different constituencies. The 'homophile' in 'homophile ideas of community' signifies that these are ideas *expressed by* homophiles. Contrastingly, the thesis refers to 'ideas of gay [or homophile/homosexual] community' when it intends to signify the narrower idea of a (homo)sexual community, one of several ways that homophiles conceived community. The 'gay' in this phrase refers to the *community's membership.*

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[57] Rick Stokes, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 19 September 1996, p.19. Different gay men received this gesture differently. For gay male frustration with this development, see José Sarria, interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town History Project,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 20 May 1992, p.14. For a more accepting attitude, see Stokes above, and William Beardemphl and John DeLeon, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, July, 1997, p.99.

[58] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, pp.5-6.

Chapter summary

The thesis has five chapters. The first chapter sets the stage for the more ambitious historical and theoretical interventions of the later chapters. It reconstructs the social history of the city's 1950s gay bar life as the social milieu from which homophile notions of community would arise. It traces three distinct phases of antigay policing, documents the shifting forms antigay policing took depending on the targets' race, gender expression, gender, and class, the lack of protection legal action offered to the victims of antigay policing, and presents an overview of how gay bar patrons, staff, and owners resisted antigay policing before the arrival of an organised bar-based movement in the 1960s.

Chapter two moves from the general picture of gay bar-based resistance to the genesis of a particular, radical tradition. It revisits the political activism of Sarria's opera parodies at the bohemian Black Cat café. Sarria's performances have long been hailed as a crucial site of mid-century US gay history, bringing together hundreds of members of an already existing gay group each week. Rereading Sarria's performances as productive moments, where a gay audience was conjured as well as assembled, I argue that Sarria's performances are better understood as having striven to affect a dual movement in spectators' self-definition: from 'normal' to gay men, and from gay men to gay activists. In revisiting Sarria's operas, the chapter documents an important early stage in the formation of 'gay community'. Before a gay community could be imagined, a sufficient number of the city's residents had to conceive of themselves as gay and be moved to act publicly on this self-identification.

Chapter three pivots from the lead-up to the emergence of gay community. It offers a detailed historical reconstruction of Sarria's 1961 candidacy for San Francisco City Supervisor as the first openly gay person to run for political office in the United States. Although Sarria failed to win a seat, historians have widely recognized his

campaign as a remarkable success. The chapter draws our attention to one of the campaign's most enduring though unexplored legacies: its role in producing a novel way of conceptualising San Francisco's gay population, the idea of a gay 'community'. Through an examination of the campaign's struggle against antigay policing, its strategies, obstacles, and key events, I explore why the notion of a gay community was fashioned in this particular context – and what it was meant to achieve.

The fourth chapter follows the subsequent development of homophile notions of community in the early 1960s through the texts of travelling salesman Guy Strait, the first published homophile theorist of community. Strait's reputation as a spokesperson for sexual community notwithstanding, his archive documents the myriad ways homophiles imagined community in the first half of the decade. Strait's own journey through these discourses was pragmatic rather than ideological. He tapped into the rhetorical resources of the various traditions at his disposal, turning to whichever one suited his 'militant' gay politics best. Retracing Strait's thought also sheds light on the queer shockwaves Civil Rights protests in Birmingham, Alabama sent through the gay movement in San Francisco.

Chapter five charts the conservative re-scripting of community in the mid-to-late 1960s by Sarria and Strait's successors, the Society for Individual Rights (SIR). In the wake of unprecedented homophile political victories, the gender-conforming, middle-class, white gay men at SIR's helm began recalibrating San Franciscan gay bar politics toward more moderate trajectories. While offering progressive notions of homophile responsibility, they spearheaded a conservative turn in gay conceptions of community. Conflicts between adherents of narrower sexual, and broader coalitional visions of community finally erupted over the orientation of SIR's flagship project, the nation's first homophile 'community centre'. The former camp's victory enduringly altered how community would be conceptualised by homophile activists in San Francisco and across

the United States. Instead of making the homophile movement more united as the victorious faction had promised, this conservative turn left the movement increasingly divided as the decade came to a close.

The conclusion reflects on how a critical genealogy of homophile ideas of community can enrich not only our understanding of the past, but also our ability to re-imagine and build a better future.

Chapter 1

Gay bars, state persecution, and resistance

The emergence of homophile ideas of community in the mid-century cannot be understood separately from the texture of San Francisco's gay bar life. This is not just because the 'discovery' of gay ideas of community first occurred within the city's gay bar life or because it was in the bars that post-war homosexuals were most likely to find themselves immersed in a communal social network.[1] More to the point, homophile ideas of community were a direct response to the fabric of gay bar life, an attempt to weave a new pattern into an old tapestry. We might think of these incipient ideas of community, following Cherríe Moraga, as a 'theory in the flesh'.[2] They were deeply informed by the bar set's experiences with navigating the concrete land of the bars, their stigmatized sexual longings, and particular social positions. And these ideas were driven toward their articulation by a 'politic born out of necessity' that these experiences propelled.[3] For, like bell hooks, the first homophile thinkers of community came to theory because they were hurting, 'wanted to make the hurt go away', and 'saw in theory … a location for healing.'[4] Before we can understand their attempts to tap into community's 'healing, liberatory function', we need to first survey the shape of the city's gay bar life.[5]

In offering a summary of the social and political history of this world, this chapter can build on what is by now an extensive literature on post-war San Franciscan gay bar life, its regulatory and resistance practices.[6] Rather than revolutionizing what we know,

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[1] James (Robbie) Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, 2017, San Francisco Public Library, Unpublished manuscript, p.75.
[2] Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*, Fourth ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015 [1981]), p.19.
[3] Ibid.
[4] bell hooks, 'Theory as Liberatory Practice,' *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism,* volume 4, number 1 (1991): p.1.
[5] Ibid.p.5.
[6] For the most important works, see Christopher Lowen Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco: Policing and the Creation of a Cosmopolitan Liberal Politics, 1950-1972* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016); Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a*

the chapter seeks to re-organise it in a manner most conducive to the more ambitious historical and theoretical interventions of the later chapters. Thus, the thrust of the narrative woven here is familiar. But the chapter also draws on un(der)researched primary materials, some of which have only recently become publicly available, to provide a comprehensive overview, offer new, under-investigated details, and cast light on insufficiently researched areas of this history, such as the differentiated manner of antigay policing, that warrant our urgent attention.

The first section of the chapter reconstructs the history of the emergence of gay bars at the mid-century and their significance within 1950s gay social life. It sets the surfacing of gay bars as particular social institutions within the wider context of the appearance of a gay identity and heightened state attacks on public homosexuality. These establishments were not the only site at which homosexuals experienced oppression, but they carried a unique function as the only public venues at which homosexuals could congregate and be among themselves. The gay bar was the central hub at which homophiles debated, changed, and refined their ideas, and engaged in resistance activities.

The next sections turn to tracing the development of antigay policing in San Francisco in the 1950s and early 1960s in more detail. They identify three distinct stages. In the early 1950s, gay bars were largely protected from state-enforced closure by an unexpected legal victory. However, even with antigay hostility somewhat thwarted, gay bar patrons remained susceptible to various forms of harassment by both SFDP patrolmen and vice squad agents that regularly upended their lives. The decade's second half saw an intensification of antigay policing in the city. Following the election of a tough-on-crime mayor and the simultaneous re-organisation of California's liquor control agency, gay bars experienced a multi-pronged state assault that threatened the

Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970, Second ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1983]).

survival of individual bars. Patrons, too, suffered tremendously amidst a spike in police raids and an aggravation in police tactics. Eventually, mayor George Christopher's re-election and the succession of two embarrassing, gay-related political scandals inspired a further escalation in state assaults in the early 1960s. By autumn 1961, when, as chapter three will show, a new movement to resist state violence emerged out of the bars and coined ideas of gay 'community', the future survival of gay bars in San Francisco looked increasingly imperilled.

One aspect of police harassment that historians have often alluded to, but that has not yet received extensive treatment, is the differential nature of police harassment. While it is true that the policing of homosexuality led to the apprehension and intimidation of an otherwise relatively under-policed group – white, middle-class men – a wide variety of gay subgroups suffered under police harassment. Those disadvantaged on account of their gender nonconformity, class, race, and other vectors of oppression could expect particularly harsh treatment by police officers. Their suffering was also less likely to be documented than those of more powerful gay subgroups, making an accurate historical assessment of their experiences with antigay policing particularly difficult. Although less hostile than other state agencies, the courts held limited power to soften the damage inflicted by law enforcement agencies on both bars and patrons. Legal recourse was also more difficult to access and less likely to result in a positive outcome for particularly disadvantaged gay subgroups them.

The final section provides an overview of the panoply of ways of resisting state harassment that gay bar patrons, staff and owners developed across the 1950s and early 1960s. These varyingly effective measures included forms of 'spatial defense' (Boyd), internal policing, spontaneous self-defence, identifying undercover state agents, fighting legal battles over bar licenses, and reopening bars under new ownership or as a

corporation. It was out of this tradition of creative struggle against state harassment that ideas of gay community would emerge in the early 1960s.

The San Francisco gay bar, its origins and place in 1950s gay social life

While small groups of Mattachine and DOB activists in the 1950s strategized in their homes and offices on how to integrate themselves into the heteronormative community, many more homosexually active women and men found belonging in the city's drinking establishments. Bars catering to gender and sexually nonconforming clientele had existed in San Francisco since at least the late nineteenth century.[7] Around the mid-twentieth century, we can observe the consolidation of a new type of such venue, the 'gay bar'. Although the term had been in occasional usage since at least World War Two, it was only over the course of the 1950s and 1960s that it began to appear more regularly in San Franciscan homophile and mainstream publications, first in citation marks, and gradually also without.[8]

Gay bars were a particular kind of establishment with an idiosyncratic set of patrons, customs, and social status. In 1964, a San Francisco homophile activist by the name of Guy Strait published an article in his gay bar publication *Citizens' News* in which he sought to explain what made gay bars distinctive. Simply titled, 'What is a Gay Bar?', the article registered three core characteristics. First, a gay bar was patronized by self-identified homosexuals. These did not even have to form the majority of clients, but they had to be present. Second, its gay patrons were free to engage in subcultural lingo and

[7] See Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp.25-29.

[8] For an early use of 'gay bar', see Jim Kepner's 1943 correspondence, cited in Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), p.125. On the emergence of the first gay bars in 1940s United States, see also John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, Third ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 290-291. For references to 'gay bar' in the late 1950s and 1960s where the term is still set in citation marks, see for example Table of Contents, *Mattachine Review,* September 1957, volume 3, number 9; Del Martin, 'Fire Hoses Next?', *Ladder,* September 1961, volume 5, number 12, pp.14-15; 'History of SF Homophile Groups', *Ladder,* October 1966, volume 11, number 1, p.9; '"Gay Bar" Shut, Bos Goes Free', *San Francisco Examiner,* 6 September 1961, p. 16; 'State Board Reprieves Powell Street 'Gay Bar'', 8 July, 1960, p.35.

open conversation about their sexual desires and experiences. Third and finally, bar owners policed their patrons' conduct and appearance since they expected their place to become the target of state harassment and sought to prevent its closure by instituting certain behavioural and sartorial codes. In drawing up this list, Strait sought to differentiate gay bars from another, closely related, often confused, but, at least to him, distinct set of venues: bars he termed 'homosexual but not gay'. Bars like the men-only, upper-class Oak Room in the St Francis Hotel also attracted a homosexually active clientele, but the men meeting there 'held a variance of understanding of homosexuality itself'.[9] While some identified as gay, others considered themselves 'not at all homosexual'. Where gay bar patrons openly conversed on sexual matters, the clientele of bars like the Oak Room sought to arrange trysts through coded language that allowed them to discretely ascertain each other's homosexuality and interest without revealing themselves to the uninitiated. These codes protected not only the patrons, but also the bar itself. In comparison to gay bars, homosexual bars experienced a much lower level of policing and were often able to stay open for many years.[10]

Strait's description hints at two preconditions for the emergence of gay bars. Most importantly, the development of the gay bar relied on a shift in how women who had sex with women and men who had sex with men came to understand their own sexual activities. Before there could be gay bars, there had to be gays. Asked why there were no gay bars in 1930s San Francisco, local female impersonator and gay activist José Sarria explained, '[t]hey didn't set up a business for gay[s] because in those days you didn't have gay[s]'.[11] It is now commonly accepted among US historians that

[9] For a comment on the upper-class nature of these 'more prosperous' establishments see 'Local disregard of rights', *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 2. See also Michael Robert Gorman, *The Empress is a Man: Stories from the Life of José Sarria* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.138. For the Oak Room's character as a male-only bar see José Sarria, interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open History Town,* GLBT Historical Society, 15 April 1992, p.6.

[10] 'What is a Gay Bar?', *Citizens News*, volume 4, number 5, pp.6-7.

[11] José Sarria, interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town History Project,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 20 May 1992, p.2.

homosexuality as an identity category emerged and started to consolidate itself in the mid-twentieth century.[12] Around that time, women who had sex with women and men who had sex with men were no longer simply engaged in particular kinds of sexual activity. They started to become classified – and indeed understand themselves – as a distinct group of individuals, homosexuals. The emergent hetero-/homosexual dichotomy displaced its predecessors, the division of men into fairies and 'normal' men and romantic norms of female friendship, as the dominant sexual and gender regime.[13] This transition, however, proceeded unevenly across different regions, classes, cultures, and institutions.[14] Hence, it remained possible for some men in mid-century San Francisco to have sex with other men and identify as gay, and for others engaging in similar behavior to deny being homosexual.

A second causal factor for the emergence and proliferation of gay bars in San Francisco arrived in the shape of novel forms of state persecution. As we shall see in more detail below, in the late 1940s, municipal authorities embarked on the novel project of attempting to close any bar that openly catered to homosexuals. This ironically contributed to the creation of (more) gay bars in two, related ways. In a first step, it forced bar owners to make a choice between cultivating homo- or heterosexual patrons. Whereas before they might have welcomed a mixed crowd into their venues, from then

[12] The success of D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* enshrined this argument in US LGBTIQ historiography. For a review of how later work in the field has engaged with D'Emilio's chronology, see Marc Stein, 'Theoretical Politics, Local Communities: The Making of U.S. LGBT Historiography,' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* volume 11, number 4 (2005).

[13] On early twentieth century female erotic friendships, see Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Women's Press, 1985); ———, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women who loved Women, 1778-1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004)

[14] For critiques and qualifications of this chronology, see for example John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Peter Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs : Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Regina G. Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). The unevenness of this process had already been noted by some of the very historians who were instrumental in establishing its contours. See for example, George Chauncey, *Gay New York : Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 13.

on, the presence of *any* homosexual might result in an establishment's closure. Conversely, heterosexual patrons, too, became a risk to gay venues due to their unfamiliarity with the behavioural codes patrons were henceforth expected to perform in gay bars in order to protect them from forced closure (e.g. no same-sex kissing, touching, and dancing).[15] As a result, there were fewer bars that welcomed homosexuals, but these bars became more exclusively gay. This situation created a second incentive for the opening of gay bars. It rendered them more lucrative. Owners of failing straight bars or entrepreneurs looking to make a quick buck knew that any foray into the gay bar business was likely to be brief, but gays' exclusion from most other bars was likely to make it profitable, too.[16] Many owners – 'people who live off the queers' as one gay columnist remarked – hired gay barkeepers who spread the word about the new location, and often found sudden economic success.[17] As George Chauncey observed with regard to the effect similar forms of state harassment had on 1930s New York gay bar life, these state actions did not eliminate gay bar life so much as 'foster the creation of exclusively gay bars'.[18] In this way, antigay state agents were fighting the very 'problem' that their actions had helped to produce in the first place. For many law enforcement agents, this produced opportunity rather than consternation as they set about exploiting the delicate legal position of gay bars to extract hefty blackmail money from their owners.

Within 1950s San Franciscan gay social life, gay bars occupied a place of unrivalled importance. Bars catering to gender and sexual non-conformists were often the first point of contact for new arrivals seeking to build a new, gay life for themselves

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[15] See discussion below.

[16] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.82, citing former gay bartender Bob Ross; Toto le Grand [Lou Rand Hogan], "The Golden Age of Queens: Part Six," *Bay Area Reporter*, 27 November 1974, p.20, https://archive.org/details/BAR_19741127; 'What is a Gay Bar?', pp.6-7.

[17] Toto le Grand [Lou Rand Hogan], "The Golden Age of Queens: Part Six," *Bay Area Reporter*, 27 November 1974, p.20. On this manner of establishing a gay bar, see 'What is a Gay Bar?', pp.6-7; Helen P. Branson, *Gay Bar: The Fabulous, True Story of a Daring Woman and her Boys in the 1950s*, ed. Will Fellows (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), p.95; Larry Howell, interview by Martin Meeker, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 17 December 1998 & 14 January 1999, p.63.

[18] Chauncey, *Gay New York : Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, p.349.

in the city by the bay.[19] Not everyone was as confident as George Mendenhall, who upon setting foot in San Francisco in the early 1950s approached a police officer for directions to the nearest gay bar.[20] It was more common for homosexuals to be 'brought out' by more experienced friends who were ready to introduce the newcomer to the local bar scene.[21] In total, a web of as many as thirty gay bars existed at any time in 1950s and early 1960s San Francisco.[22] They attracted thousands of visitors each week.[23] Mattachine Society leader Hal Call estimated in June 1960 that '[o]n a typical Saturday night, there may be as many as 20 or 25,000 adult homosexuals in and about San Francisco's gay bars'.[24]

Gay bars offered the only public spaces in which sexual and (to a lesser extent) gender nonconformists could openly come together, converse, and in concert forge new social meanings, practices, and relationships that diverged from those promulgated by dominant, heteronormative society. Before the arrival of homophile organisations, bars provided 'the only kind of social setting that was recognized' among gays outside of private house parties.[25] 'Everything went through the bars', as gay performer José Sarria summarized the state of affairs.[26] The cultural significance of gay drinking establishments as spaces of refuge, solidarity, and social bonding derived from their

[19] Jim Duggins, interview by Jim Duggins, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 30 June 1995, p.11; Reba Hudson, interview by Jim Breeden, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 23 August 1995, p.12; Bob Ross, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 13 March 1998, p.16.
[20] George Mendenhall, 'George,' in *Word is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives*, ed. Nancy Adair and Casey Adair (San Francisco: New Glide Publications, 1978), p.72
[21] Bobby Pace, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 3 May 1998, pp.19-20; Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.44.
[22] 'What is a Gay Bar?', p.6; John D'Emilio, 'Gay Politics and Community in San Francisco Since World War II,' in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin B. Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey (London: Penguin, 1991), p.459**.**
[23] For references on the popularity of gay bars and their sizeable crowds see for example Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp. 132, 141, 283.
[24] Hal Call, 'Why Perpetuate This Barbarism?,' *Mattachine Review*, volume 4, number 6, June 1960, p.14.
[25] Hal Call, interview by Jim Breeden, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, Undated, p.2.
[26] José Sarria, interview by Joe Castel, Joe Castel Private Collection, date unknown; ———, interview by Jim Breeden, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, date unknown.

general ability to keep a habitually hostile world at bay.[27] Protected to a degree from the prying eyes of outsiders, many encountered in gay bars more liberty to be themselves than anywhere else. In the words of Mendenhall, 'there was no freedom' at the time, 'your freedom was in a gay bar, and when you go out on the streets you were Mr. Straight or Miss Straight.'[28]

Bars also acted as important places to develop social connections, as locations where you could go 'to establish friends, meet people' without fearing social ostracism as a gay person.[29] Many gay people later compared the role of gay bars to the role churches assumed for the Civil Rights movement as the places where people 'gathered, whether it be for social reasons or sexual reasons or political reasons.'[30] Many of those who had been estranged from their birth families found in gay bars a new, chosen family. Bars explicitly assumed the family's mantle on traditional family holidays like Christmas, where it was custom for bars to provide free meals to their regulars and employees.[31] For many bargoers, bars provided the 'living room' in which the family life of their chosen family could take place.[32]

The gay 'families' congregating in these spaces were often separated, particularly along the lines of race and gender. Even though there was no formal racial segregation of bars in 1950s and 1960s San Francisco, many bar owners refused to serve black customers, crowds could be hostile to racial outsiders, and some police officers punished African Americans who overstepped the informal colour line and patronized white bars.[33]

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[27] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.127; Barbara A. Weightman, 'Gay Bars as Private Places,' *Landscape,* volume 24 (1980).
[28] Mendenhall, 'George,' pp.72f.
[29] William Beardemphl and John DeLeon, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, July, 1997, p.35.
[30] Ron Williams, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 19 April 1998, p.197.
[31] 'Roving Report', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 6, 25 December 1961; 'Roving Report', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 7, 8 January 1962.
[32] Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.60.
[33] "Segregation and the Civil Rights Movement in San Francisco," accessed 6 October 2022, https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Segregation_and_the_Civil_Rights_Movement_in_San_Francisco .

Gays of colour were more likely to be welcomed in venues located in districts with a more cosmopolitan mindset and clientele, like North Beach.[34] While majority-black gay bars, such as the Big Glass in the Fillmore district, existed from at least the early 1960s, gay bar life was for these reasons often more central to the lives of white gay women and men than to those of gays of colour.[35]

Gay women, too, often gathered in their own venues. This was in part because they hoped to meet future sexual or romantic partners inside the bars. The owners of lesbian bars were often also very engaged in forging spaces were women felt especially comfortable, safe, and excited to be.[36] But there were other pressures at play, too. Women were barred from entry into certain gay bars, particularly upper-class establishments.[37] They were also more likely to be subject to the unwanted, aggressive advances of men inside gay male bars where owners were less responsive to the safety needs of their female clients.[38] For these reasons, gay women often patronized their own bars. Lesbian bars formed a vibrant element of the city's gay nightlife, occupying a distinct geographical territory.[39] They were never, though, as numerous as gay male bars. The lower income level of women, the resulting inability of many lesbians to live independently of their families, sexual violence, laws against female bartenders, and social norms against single female sociability all conspired to keep the number of lesbian bars lower than that of gay male bars.[40]

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[34] Ibid., see also discussion of Black Cat in following chapter.
[35] Note from Hortense to Sarria, 10 October 1961, *José Sarria Papers*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, box 25, folder 6; Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *gay by the bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996), p.24.
[36] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, chapter 2; Paris Poirier and Kanopy, 'Last Call at Maud's,' volume (2016); Weightman, 'Gay Bars as Private Places', p.14.
[37] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.125.
[38] Roey Thorpe, 'The Changing Face of Lesbian Bars in Detroit, 1938-1965,' in *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories*, ed. Genny Beemyn (New York: Routledge, 1997); Joan Nestle, *A Restricted Country: Documents of Desire and Resistance* (London: Pandora, 1996).
[39] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, chapter two.
[40] Charlotte Coleman, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, early 1997, pp.33-34; D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, p.291; Jordan Lee, interview by Paul Gabriel and Philip Hong, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 10 August 1995, p.72; Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd,

In addition, bars also had specific class positions. They distinguished themselves in terms of location, interior design, sartorial requirements, and, sometimes, in terms of gender policies. Depending on its class position, different bars would attract different crowds.[41]

Gay bars under attack in the early 1950s

Post-war gay bars could not take their ability to carve out autonomous semi-public spaces for granted. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, bars in San Francisco (and across the United States) were forced to wage a constant, defensive battle to protect themselves from the assaults of a multitude of private and, especially, state agents. As the decades progressed, these attacks became more pernicious and effective, and bars with an openly homosexual patronage were increasingly struggling to stay afloat.[42] But already in the early 1950s, state agents had access to a panoply of ways of assaulting gay bar clientele, even while the bars themselves were protected by an important legal victory.

In the 1940s, military, state, and municipal agencies had closely collaborated to harass and shut down many bars catering to visibly homosexual clientele.[43] However, state attempts to close down gay-friendly venues suffered an embarrassing setback at the eve of the decade when Sol Stoumen, the stubborn, straight owner of the bohemian Black Cat bar contested the revocation of his liquor license by the State Board of Equalization (SBE), California's liquor control agency. The SBE had gotten invested in this project after Stoumen refused to sign a closed-shop agreement with the local

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Oral History Collection, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 2 December 1992; William Plath, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 18 April 1997, pp.1-2.

[41] 'Queen of the West', *Citizens News,* volume 3, number 11, 9 March 1964; 'Bar Conduct', *ibid.,* volume 3, number 15, 4 May 1964; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.125; Hudson, interview by Breeden, 23 August 1995, pp.25-28; Don Lucas, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 30 December 1996 through 28 February 1998, p.509.

[42] For important accounts of the mid-century policing of San Franciscan gay bars, see Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, chapter three; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, chapter three.

[43] ———, *Wide-Open Town*, pp.114-123.

culinary workers union. Incensed, George Reilly, the SBE's chair, San Francisco district supervisor, and an avowed pro-labor Democrat, instructed his agents to develop a case against the bar and shut it down for being a 'homosexual hangout'.[44] Following a two-year legal battle, *Stoumen v. Reilly* eventually found its way to the California Supreme Court which in 1951 unexpectedly decided in Stoumen's favour and enjoined the restoration of the Black Cat's license. The court ruled that as long as no crime was committed the mere presence of homosexuals on an establishment's premises was not illegal.[45] The verdict had profound implications. For several years, *Stoumen v. Reilly* largely put a halt on state attempts to close down gay-friendly bars. As the U.S. military, the sole state agency continuing to press ahead with this endeavour soon found out, its former collaborators in the San Francisco Police Department (SFDP) and SBE were cautious not to violate the Supreme Court's ruling and 'institute proceedings against such establishments where only [a] congregation of undesirable persons was taking place.'[46] Without their support, there was little the military could do, and the number of bars serving gay clientele proliferated in the early 1950s.[47]

The *Stoumen* victory tempered state persecution for several years, especially in regard to bar closures. It did not render gay-friendly bars a reliably safe place for patrons. A quotidian source of harassment many patrons encountered throughout the 1950s came in the shape of SFPD patrol officers. In the absence of specific guidance from their superiors, beat officers held wide discretion over how they handled their daily encounters with gay bars.[48] Not all opted for harassment, not even among those with antigay prejudices. Some patrol officers who 'didn't want to go near' gays simply ignored the

[44] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.85
[45] SCOCAL, Stoumen v. Reilly, 37 Cal.2d 713, available at: (https://scocal.stanford.edu/opinion/stoumen-v-reilly-29515) (last visited Sunday September 25, 2022); Arthur S. Leonard, *Sexuality and the Law: An Encyclopedia of Major Legal Cases* (New York: Garland, 1993), pp.190-192
[46] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp.123, 127-129; Fred C. Franke, ABC Special Agent, Supplemental Report on the Senior Armed Forces Disciplinary Control Board meeting, 30 March 1955. ABC Files, CSA, F3718:341–342, cited in Boyd, p.129.
[47] Ibid.p.123.
[48] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, pp.79-80.

presence of gay establishments in their precincts.[49] Nor did all officers who targeted gay bars hate gays. Some also pursued harassment for other reasons, such as 'to encourage the bars to remain discreet, to keep the gay nightlife circumscribed within specific geographic boundaries, or to encourage protection payments.'[50]

Harassment by beat officers took various forms. Many officers used 'their mere presence' as a means of intimidation.[51] They would 'terrorize' gay bars on their daily tours 'just by walking in,' striding up and down the length of the bar, lingering, and staring at patrons, threatening the possibility of arrest.[52] During their inspections, patrolmen like other police officers often also engaged in various forms of physical and verbal harassment. This included the use of derogatory terms like 'queer', touching patrons without their consent in ways that asserted dominance, or derisively asking younger patrons about whether their parents knew they were visiting a 'queer' place.[53] Customers and staff who responded to this abuse by talking back were commonly arrested or even beaten up.[54] It was also common for patrolmen to more rigorously police parking outside gay venues than elsewhere.[55] Particularly hostile beat officers might further post themselves outside gay venues to shake down, beat up, and/or arrest exiting patrons under statues against vaguely defined crimes like public drunkenness, 'disturbing the peace' and 'vagrancy', or for jaywalking.[56] That these arrests had an antigay character

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[49] Ibid.p.80. For an incident in which a police officer decided not to book patrons of a gay bar because he did not want his name to appear next to theirs in the next day's newspapers see Thomas Cahill, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 28 July 1997, pp.61-62. See also Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.78, for police officers resisting transfer to the sex crimes detail on account of their disgust for homosexuals.

[50] ———, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.81. For an example of a beat officer seeking to set limits on the territory occupied by gay life see Craig Daley, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 19 February 1995, pp.109-110.

[51] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.81.

[52] Fernando Feliciano, interview by Kurt Schroeder, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 31 May 1995, p.7. See also Mendenhall, 'George,' p.72.

[53] Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.66.

[54] Ibid.p.67; Cahill, interview by Gabriel, 28 July 1997, p.61; Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II*, pp.125-126; 'The Police Dilemma', *LCE News,* volume 1, number 17, 28 May 1962.

[55] 'No Parking', *LCE News,* volume 1, number 22, 6 August 1962.

[56] Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, p.23; Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, 'Reminiscences of Two Female Homophiles,' in *Our Right to Love : A Lesbian Resource Book*, ed. Ginny Vida (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1978), p.124; Nancy May, 'The Best Kind of Friend,' in *Making History: The Struggle for*

was clear to all those involved. Some officers even forthrightly told their targets that the only reason these laws existed was so 'that when we stop you, and we do not have a reason to arrest you, we can dig something [up] in those god-damn old vagrancy laws, where there's enough to hold you.'[57] The harm patrolmen were able to inflict on the targeted individuals and businesses could often be averted by paying them and their captains off with money, food, drinks, and, occasionally, the services of female sex workers.[58] Bar owners who opted against these 'reassuring' arrangements could find some comfort in the knowledge that, compared to other, higher-ranking state agents, beat officers' powers to harass gay venues were relatively limited.[59] One of their most effective tool of harassment therefore lay in their ability to build up a police record that would trigger assaults by more powerful state agents, including the SFPD sex crimes detail.[60]

Among the various policing forces infiltrating gay bar spaces, patrons often feared the officers of the sex crimes detail the most.[61] Up until the mid 1950s, the detail was composed of only two permanent agents: Sergeants Murphy and Gallagher, the former of which had a gay son he was believed to pay to keep out of town.[62] Colloquially referred

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Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990: An Oral History, ed. Eric Marcus (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), p.139; P. Lane, 'National Legal Defense Fund – Becomes a Reality', *Vector,* number 3, number 5, April 1967.

[57] José Sarria, interview by Susan Stryker, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, Oral History Collection, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 14 June 1999. See also Benjamin Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movement* (London: Routledge, 2011), p.28; 'SS', *The News,* volume 2, number 25, 16 September 1963; 'The Police Dilemma'.

[58] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.75; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp.141-143; Howell, interview by Meeker, 17 December 1998 & 14 January 1999, p.92; Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, pp.61-62; Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1982), p.54.

[59] Howell, interview by Meeker, 17 December 1998 & 14 January 1999, p.92.

[60] Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, pp.21,23; Herbert Donaldson and Evander Smith, 'The Defenders,' in *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990*, ed. Eric Marcus (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), pp.149-150. For rank-and-file police officers assuming a similar role in state operations against gay bars in Los Angeles and New York, see Branson, *Gay Bar: The Fabulous, True Story of a Daring Woman and her Boys in the 1950s*, p.59 and Chauncey, *Gay New York : Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, p.337, respectively.

[61] For testimony on the terror that the sex crimes details stirred in the hearts of gay customers, see for example Michael Rumaker, *Robert Duncan in San Francisco* (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1996), pp.13-14; Mendenhall, 'George,' p.72.

[62] Sarria, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, p.6; ———, interview by Breeden, date unknown.

to as the Vice or Morals Squad, the sex crimes detail were often less concerned with upholding the City's legal codes than with fulfilling their superiors' orders to police and keep in check a variety of 'deviant', criminalised populations. Indeed, Christopher Agee has argued that the 'broader connotations' of the detail's original name, the sex detail, 'reflected the squad's mandate to punish activities not specifically proscribed by law.'[63] Staff at the Black Cat, a bar Murphy used to frequent before it became gay, remembered an earlier emphasis of his work in the 1930s and 1940s on policing San Francisco's sex workers.[64] Over the course of the 1940s and 1950s, the sex crimes detail increasingly began targeting the City's homosexual population. In the early 1950s, their work was mostly informed by the priorities of a municipal politics that sought to reduce the visibility of homosexual behavior rather than launch spectacular antigay actions that threatened to advertise the City's existing population and attract more gay migrants.[65] The detail therefore concentrated their policing on spaces where gay activity was most likely to be noticed by heterosexuals, such as cruising spots in parks, public bathrooms, and bus terminals.[66]

In the first half of the 1950s, this emphasis and the vice squad's relatively small size meant that it rarely entered gay bar spaces. Still, their occasional forays held the same potential for devastating the lives of those targeted as later, more frequent operations. One of the people entrapped by Murphy and Gallagher in the early 1950s was José Sarria, an aspiring teacher. Sarria was detained during a visit to the bathrooms of the St Francis Hotel's Oak Room, a male-only, upper-class bar where men interested in having sex with other men could discretely meet – Strait's prime example of a bar that

[63] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.77.
[64] Sarria, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, p.21. For another gay source confirming that the vice squad was principally occupied with fighting gambling and street prostitution in the 1930s see Toto le Grand, "The Golden Age of Queens," *Bay Area Reporter*, 18 September 1974, p.34.
[65] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, pp.76-77; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.174.
[66] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.77. See for example 'Morals Situation Draws Attention of San Francisco Police, Press', *San Francisco Mattachine Newsletter*, number 13, June 25, 1954.

was 'homosexual but not gay.'[67] After a man reached over to briefly touch his penis, Sarria was arrested for ostensibly committing a sex crime, leading to his lifelong registration on the new California sex-offender registry, the first of its kind.[68] The arrest thwarted Sarria's career aspirations only a few months before he was due to complete his education.[69] He was forced to leave college, sell property he had inherited from his immigrant mother to pay the lawyers, and seek full-time employment, which he eventually found in one of the few places that would still hire a person with a sex charge: a gay-catering bar.[70] Sarria had to do all this without being able to share his plight with his loved ones. Even with his 'very understanding' family, he felt too ashamed to let anyone in on his secret.[71]

When Sarria eventually succeeded at launching a second, thriving career as a female impersonator, he knew he was relatively lucky.[72] Other gay men who were arrested by the vice squad rarely fared so well. One of his former lovers who was caught having sex with a sailor in the privacy of his own home lost his job as an undertaker, his wife, thirty thousand dollars in legal bills, and ended up living a life of poverty as a night

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[67] Sarria, interview by Breeden, date unknown; ———, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, p.6; 'What is a Gay Bar?', p.6.

[68] Scott De Orio, 'Bad Queers: LGBTQ People and the Carceral State in Modern America,' *Law & Social Inquiry,* volume 47, number 2 (2022). On the sex-crime panic that motivated the establishment of the registry, see Estelle B. Freedman, ''Uncontrolled Desires': The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960,' *The Journal of American History,* volume 74, number 1 (1987); Anna Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol: Cops, Courts, and the Struggle over Urban Gay Life before Stonewall* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), pp.77-78. A similar incident happened to the future leader of Mattachine New York, Frank Kameny, in a San Francisco bathroom in 1956. Kameny was touched without invitation and, although he rejected the advances, arrested on the spot. This spelled the beginning of the end of his career as an astronomer (Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution : The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), p.129).

[69] On measures to prevent convicted sex offenders from teaching in public schools, see Jackie M. Blount, *Fit to Teach: Same-Sex Desire, Gender, and School Work in the Twentieth Century* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005); William N. Eskridge, Jr., 'Privacy Jurisprudence and the Apartheid of the Closet, 1946-1961,' *Florida State University Law Review,* volume 24, number 4 (1997): pp.751-752. For stories of Californian teachers who lost their teaching credentials after they were arrested for 'solicitating' an uncover police officer in a public park or cruising a public bathroom, see Larry Buttwinick, interview by Martin Meeker, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 25 February 2004 and 1 March 2004, pp.21-22 and Chal Cochrane and Tom Rolfsen, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 27 March 1997, pp.80-81.

[70] Sarria, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, p.6. ———, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 9 July 1997, p.21.

[71] ———, 'Address to International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE)' (1989); ———, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, p.6.

[72] For a gay man expressing a similar sentiment, see Rumaker, *Robert Duncan in San Francisco*, p.80.

clerk at a cheap hotel.[73] Sarria's 'love of his life' Jimmy completed suicide in his cell after he was repeatedly arrested for public drunkenness and a judge threatened to lock him up for life.[74] Gay activists would later lament the 'hundreds' of gay male lives lost to suicide as the direct result of vice squad entrapment.[75]

The escalation of state assaults in the second half of the 1950s

The time period in which *Stoumen* offered a modicum of protection to gay bar patrons and especially the bars themselves lasted until the mid-1950s. The 1955 election of Republican Mayor George Christopher heralded a novel era of intensified terror. Under Christopher's administration, a reshuffled police leadership intent on quelling homosexual public life found a committed ally in California's reorganised liquor control agency. The new, multipronged wave of attacks the authorities soon unleashed threatened the future of gay venues as well as the livelihoods of thousands of gay bar patrons.

In November 1955, Greek-born Republican Christopher edged out his rival George Reilly, the former SBE director who had failed to close down the Black Cat, to be elected Mayor of San Francisco. Christopher had campaigned on the promise to deliver what Reilly had failed to do: to 'clean up' a City festering with so-called 'vice', gamblers, sex workers, homosexuals, and other criminals.[76] He quickly set about aligning the already antigay SFPD even closer to his agenda.[77] Christopher appointed a new Police Chief, Francis 'Frank' Ahern, who was known to share his virulent anti-vice politics.[78] Within his first year in office, Ahern expanded the bureau to which the sex crimes detail was attached from five to twenty-four officers.[79]

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[73] Sarria, interview by Castel, date unknown, p.7.
[74] Ibid.p.13; Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.127.
[75] Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.62.
[76] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp. 134
[77] Ibid.pp. 134,142
[78] Ibid.p.142
[79] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.77.

Under the Ahern's regime (1956-1958) and that of his successor Thomas Cahill (1958-1970), the sex crimes detail began to attack gay venues more openly and frequently.[80] Suddenly as many as a hundred to two hundred gay women and, more often, men were arrested in San Francisco by the vice squad each week.[81] In a particularly menacing routine, police officers would enter gay bars and demand patrons' names, addresses, places of employment, and proof of identification, without revealing what would happen with this information or justifying their actions.[82] Once the police had a certain number of entries for a particular person, they 'would nail you,' in the words of gay bar employee Bob Ross. 'They had no qualms about beating the devil out of a gay person who was arrested or picked up on the streets'.[83] A gay patron remembered with similar dread the 'many times' she and her friends were 'beaten up, run over by the cops, persecuted by the police.'[84] Gay victims of state attacks were told either by police officers or judges to leave town because 'we don't need your kind in San Francisco'.[85] During their visits of gay bars, vice squad agents would frequently park their police cars right outside the entrance, sometimes with their lights on, to signal police presence and further discourage patronage.[86] Orchestrated assaults conducted by vice squad and other police officers also included sending in minors with meticulously altered IDs and loudly arresting bar staff as soon as they had served them; enforcing arbitrary occupancy limits which decreased patronage and required bars to hire staff to monitor the number of

[80] Ahern died suddenly of a heart attack in 1958.
[81] Sarria, interview by Breeden, date unknown.
[82] Feliciano, interview by Schroeder, 31 May 1995, p.7; Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.62; 'The Question', *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 9, 5 February 1962; 'Fear or Respect, Mr Cahill?', *ibid.,* volume 1, number 10, 19 February 1962; 'Overheard', *ibid.,* volume 1, number 23, 20 August 1962.
[83] José Sarria and Bob Ross, interview by Randy Alfred, *The Gay Life Radio Series,* GLBT Historical Society, 18 January 1981.
[84] Pat Bond, 'Pat,' in *Word is out: Stories of some of our lives*, ed. Nancy Adair and Casey Adair (San Francisco: New Glide Publications, 1978), p.65. For other testimonies of police officers beating up suspected homosexuals, see 'The Question', *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 9, 5 February 1962; Bill Beardemphl, 'Parries & Thrusts', *Vector,* volume 4, number 4, March 1968.
[85] 'Fear or Respect, Mr Cahill?', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 10, 19 February 1962, 'High Cost of Justice', ibid., volume 1, number 16, 14 May 1962.
[86] José Sarria et al., interview by Randy Alfred, *The Gay Life Radio Series,* GLBT Historical Society, 12 April 1980; Mendenhall, 'George,' p.72; Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.63.

customers; disrupting the opening of a kitchen in order to arrest one of the bar owners for having failed to pay a three-year-old parking ticket; and calling in fire brigades to clear bars of customers and tie off their entrance, all to extinguish a non-existent fire in a backroom that often did not exist either.[87] In the words of a gay bar patron, the vice squad aimed to make their victims 'feel that they were less than human. It was a frightening period.'[88]

As many gays suspected, the escalation in police attacks occurred on orders of the police leadership, who were often themselves under pressure from high-ranking state agents like the mayor or the district attorney.[89] Already in May 1955, district captains received a six-page directive from Ahern's predecessor, acting chief George Healy, that informed them what actions they were expected to take to keep 'gathering places of homosexuals under constant pressure'. These included closer collaboration of beat officers and inspectors of the sex detail, regular visits of twenty-two bars catering to homosexuals (gays 'will not frequent places visited by the police'), checking young patrons for their age, requesting identification ('this has a great effect upon the person questioned'), making arrests whenever a law has been violated ('[a] simple drunk arrest has a great detrimental effect on these types of places'), parking a police car in front of the bar a few minutes before closing time, and stopping 'obvious homosexuals of the effeminate type' in the streets and making an arrest 'if warranted'.[90]

Among police actions against gay bars in the late 1950s and early 1960s, none were more feared by patrons and owners alike than police raids. Although relatively rare, they still occurred often enough that they had to be reckoned with at all times and were

[87] ———, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, pp.62-63; Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, pp.21-22; 'Roving Report', *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 5, Dec 11, 1961. See also, 'Vicious Reports', *ibid.,* volume 1, number 23, 20 August 1962.
[88] Mendenhall, 'George,' p.72.
[89] Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.63; Ernest Lenn, 'Police Order Renews Drive on Sex Deviates', *San Francisco Examiner*, 26 May 1955, p.8.
[90] Lenn, 'Police Order Renews Drive on Sex Deviates'.

'talked about constantly' inside gay bars.[91] The greater police numbers involved during raids encouraged officers to exceed even their usual, high levels of violence and aggression. When asked about how patrons and staff acted during raids, gay bartender Craig Daley testified that 'you kept your mouth shut right for openers and didn't move 'cause … [t]hey were ready to bat your head with a billy club … [T]hey weren't in there for a social call. They were in there to bust these queers out of their bar.'[92] Unlike in other police actions, large numbers of patrons and staff would be arrested during raids. During a 1956 raid, ninety out of the three hundred patrons were picked out as regulars on the basis of undercover agents' observations and booked on vagrancy charges.[93]

Police attacks in the second half of the 1950s intensified to a point where they could be sufficient to put the future of gay bars in peril. Word of arrests made in a particular gay bar spread quickly among the gay bar crowd and places believed to be under police observation could expect a dramatic, and sometimes fatal, drop in footfall.[94] During periods of amplified police activity, gay bars suffered citywide as patrons across the Bay opted to stay home rather than risk arrest.[95] Owners targeted by a raid also had to contend with paying bail money for their customers and staff, as well as court and attorney fees.[96]

While SFPD harassment on its own could already place gay bars at risk in the late 1950s, a greater threat to their survival emanated from the newly formed Alcoholic

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[91] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.106. For further testimony on the common nature of raids see also Buttwinick, interview by Meeker, 25 February 2004 and 1 March 2004, p.17; Gerald Fabian, interview by Bill Walker, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 30 November 1989 & 23 January 1990, p.94; Ross, interview by Gabriel, 13 March 1998, pp.52,56; Daley, interview by Gabriel, 19 February 1995, p.108; Lyon and Martin, 'Reminiscences of Two Female Homophiles,' p.124.
[92] Daley, interview by Gabriel, 19 February 1995, pp.108-109.
[93] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.141.
[94] Ibid.p.126; 'Roving Report', *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 5, Dec 11, 1961; 'Crucifixion without Nails', *ibid,* volume 1, number 23, 20 August 1962.
[95] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.106. On continuous police raids in mid 1950s Miami forcing many gays bars to shut because of a lack of patronage, see ibid, p.121.
[96] Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, p.23; Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.63; Sarria and Ross, interview by Alfred, 18 January 1981, John Gieske, 'José: A Portrait,' *The Sentinel,* volume 7, number 2, January 25, 1980, found in *José Sarria Papers*, box 1, folder 12 ('Clippings 1980-1989').

Beverage Control Department (ABC). The ABC was created in 1955, ostensibly to replace the SBE as the state agency tasked with overseeing California's liquor trade. From the very beginning, the ABC was conceived by its creators in the California State Senate and interpreted by its own personnel as a tool for attacking the City's gay bar spaces and other places of 'vice'.[97] For this purpose, the Senate endowed the ABC with broad constitutional powers to protect 'public welfare and morals' as well as specific anti-vice statutes.[98] It took the ABC less than a month to begin infiltrating gay venues and file first accusations.[99]

In order to persecute and shut down gay venues more effectively, ABC agents diverged from the department's usual protocols in their proceedings against gay establishments. In their standard practice – that is, when not targeting gay bars – ABC agents monitored bars as openly as their task allowed and with the objective of effecting a change in a bar's practice if it was found to violate liquor rules. They visited bars in units of one, were identifiable by their equipment (firearms, flasks to sample drinks, notebooks to jot down their observations), carried out arrests on premises (if warranted), and issued warnings to bars so they could adjust to ABC standards without the need for a formal hearing or other further action.[100] When ABC agents entered gay bars, on the other hand, they did their best to conceal their ongoing investigations in order to build up extensive cases that would justify revoking a venue's license and forcing it to close. They came without their usual, identifiable tools and worked in pairs or threes so that ABC

[97] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, pp.86-87; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.136.
[98] Section 24200(e) of the Business and Professions Code declared as sufficient grounds for the revocation of liquor licenses when a venue had become 'a resort for illegal possessors or users of narcotics, prostitutes, pimps, panderers, or sexual perverts' (———, *Wide-Open Town*, p.137). ABC agents were permitted to submit as evidence 'the general reputation' of an establishment. (Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.87). On the state legislature putting the section in place to aid the ABC's prosecution of gay drinking establishments see William N. Eskridge, *Gaylaw: Challenging the Apartheid of the Closet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p.79; Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.87; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.137.
[99] "Petition for Writ of Certiorari and Points and Authorities in Support Thereof," in *Stoumen v. Harris, Supreme Court of the State of California* (private collection of Joe Castel), Exhibit A, Accusation under Alcoholic Beverage Control Act and State Constitution, August 20, 1956, pp.1,3.
[100] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.88; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.138.

agents could corroborate each other's observations in court.[101] Inside bars, agents were anything but passive observers. While state agents often denied entrapping gay men, this was at most 'a matter of semantics' as one straight owner of a gay bar observed.[102] Trained in how to dress gay, act gay, and solicit the interest of patrons, if they were not gay themselves, they flirted with other customers and sometimes even initiated contact in the hope of collecting incriminating evidence against the customer and, ultimately, the bar.[103] When patrons left together with an ABC agent, the agent and their partners would arrest the patron as soon as they had left the building. Arresting them outside ensured that owners stayed unaware of being monitored, that there were no observers of ABC (mis)conduct, and that bar staff could not intercede on behalf of the accused or inform them of their legal rights.[104]

After approximately twelve to eighteen months of such clandestine operations, gay bar owners would suddenly be presented with an accusation of several dozen infractions that had ostensibly been committed on their premises over that time period.[105] The patrons were not identified which made it impossible to call upon them as witnesses 'even if [the accusations] weren't true,' as was frequently the case.[106] The ABC's own hearing officers then adjudicated the accusations in the first instance.[107] Between 1955 and the early 1960s they consistently ruled for the maximum penalty: to revoke the

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[101] See footnote above.
[102] Branson, *Gay Bar: The Fabulous, True Story of a Daring Woman and her Boys in the 1950s*, p.57.
[103] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.88; Joe Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, p.15; Martin and Lyon, interview by Boyd, 2 December 1992; 'Justice, Tennessee Style', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 22, 6 August 1962.
[104] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.88; Martin and Lyon, interview by Boyd, 2 December 1992; 'The Pointed Question', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 18, 11 June 1962.
[105] Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, p.8; Daley, interview by Gabriel, 19 February 1995; Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 April 1997, p.34; José Sarria, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 15 September 1996, p.5.
[106] Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, pp.15-16, 73; Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 April 1997, p.35; Sarria, interview by Gabriel, 15 September 1996, p.5; Donaldson and Smith, 'The Defenders,' p.149.
[107] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.87; Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, p.16; Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 April 1997, p.35.

accused venue's liquor license, even in flagrantly made-up cases where key witnesses could not describe the bar's interior and repeatedly misidentified their waiter.[108]

State attacks on gay bars reach their zenith in the early 1960s

The prospects of the City's gay bar life took an even more ominous turn in the early 1960s. Building on an important legal victory and responding to a string of gay-related political scandals, Mayor Christopher orchestrated another major state offensive against the bars. As state agencies tightened their cooperation, a change in strategy at last seemed to offer the authorities an opportunity to enduringly lower the number of gay bars, and even fantasize about eliminating them for good.

The legal groundwork for this escalation in state attacks was laid by the California Supreme Court's 1959 ruling in the case *Vallerga v. Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control.* In *Vallerga,* the owners of the Oakland gay bar Mary's First and Last Chance had appealed the ABC's decision to withdraw their liquor license.[109] The Supreme Court's decision marked a definitive end to the legal protection it had afforded the bars through its 1951 verdict in *Stoumen*. When the Supreme Court's ruling on *Vallerga* was announced, it sparked jubilation among some San Franciscan gay activists.[110] It declared unconstitutional the anti-homosexual statute under which Mary's had its license withdrawn, upheld the court's earlier verdict in *Stoumen*, and enjoined the ABC to reverse its order of revocation.[111] Any gay elation was, however, premature. Where the court gave with one hand, it took away with the other, establishing new grounds for the

[108] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.87.
[109] Vallerga v. Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, 347 P.2d 909 (Cal. 1959) My account of the *Vallerga* ruling draws on Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, pp.89-90; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp. 181-183, 206-207; Eskridge, *Gaylaw: Challenging the Apartheid of the Closet*, pp.94-95; Leonard, *Sexuality and the Law: An Encyclopedia of Major Legal Cases*, pp. 193-195.
[110] See *Mattachine Review*, volume 6, number 8, August 1960, p.25. Contradicting the judgments of other historians and legal scholars, Nan Alamilla Boyd has argued that *Vallerga* constituted a 'success' for gay and lesbian bars (see Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp.206-207).
[111] *Vallerga v. Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, 347 P.2d 909 (Cal. 1959)* ; Eskridge, *Gaylaw: Challenging the Apartheid of the Closet*, p.94.

authorities to close down gay bar spaces. Citing the powers vested in the ABC through the Californian Constitution, the Supreme Court argued that the 'display of sexual desires and urges … when made in a public place as a continuing course of conduct' was sufficiently harmful to 'public welfare and morals' to warrant the closure of the spaces in which it was taking place.[112] Such conduct, it argued, had taken place at *Mary's* in the shape of same-sex flirting, touching, kissing, and dancing, behaviour courts treated as innocuous when it occurred between a woman and a man.[113] The court indicated that had the ABC justified its decision on the grounds of the bar patrons' conduct and not on Mary's status as a 'resort for sexual perverts', the revocation of Mary's liquor license would have been upheld.

As the dicta made clear, the Supreme Court objected to the *manner* in which the ABC justified curtailing homosexuals' right of assembly, not to the project itself. While it rejected persecuting gay bars through overt, antigay laws, it suggested that the ostensibly neutral language of the Californian Constitution with its vague concern for 'public welfare and morals' would provide a superior, defensible legal basis for state attacks. After *Vallerga,* no gay drinking establishment that allowed the types of same-sex behaviour that the court had identified as a danger to 'public welfare and morals' could any longer count on Supreme Court protection. While pro-gay legal activists condemned the dicta as 'discrimination against homosexuals *as a class* – not because of what they *do,* but because of what they *are*', the agents at the heart of state attacks celebrated the ruling.[114] The ABC area administrator responsible for San Francisco

[112] *Vallerga v. Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, 347 P.2d 909 (Cal. 1959)*
[113] The only exception here constituted the criminalization of sex work.
[114] Del Martin, "Oh, Bitter Dicta! A Case Won – And Lost," *The Ladder,* volume 4, number 5, February 1960, pp. 5-9, 19-20. Not all state agents were fully satisfied with the ruling. Some lamented the ounce of protection that *Vallerga* promised to the few gay establishments who stringently policed their patrons' behaviour. See Fimrite, "Why 'Gay' Bars Get in Trouble," *San Francisco Chronicle,* 29 May 1960. They need not have worried. In practice, even the most stringent forms of internal policing could not protect gay bars from being forced to close. See the discussion below.

rejoiced that the *Vallerga* dicta 'probably' made the end of the City's gay bars 'inevitable'.[115]

Where *Vallerga* established the legal basis for a new offensive against gay-friendly bars, two events that took place in 1959 and 1960 soon guaranteed Mayor Christopher's continued leadership. The first occurred during the mayoral elections of 1959 when Christopher's main challenger Russell Wolden decided to launch a vicious attack on the incumbent.[116] With less than a month remaining to election day, Wolden falsely accused the anti-vice Christopher of pandering to the City's homosexual residents. Wolden's accusations for the first time in US history turned homosexuality into a principal campaign issue during a major city election. They greatly backfired. An outraged citizenry punished him at the polls, not for seeking to profit from the stigmatization of a persecuted group but for nationally smearing their city as a gay haven. A landslide victory for the popular incumbent ensued.

The so-called Wolden affair was soon followed by the 1960 'Gayola' scandal as the next gay-related event to capture local and national media attention.[117] In early 1960, a determined group of San Francisco gay bar owners in the Embarcadero and Lower Market Street areas went public with allegations of SFPD and ABC extortion practices. Stoumen had recently become a custodian for the local Castaway bar and was one of the leading figures of this reprisal.[118] For months, local press continuously reported on the unfolding 'Gayola' scandal, its forthcoming indictments, the arrests of the accused

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[115] Stoumen and Munro, "Appellant's Opening Brief in the District Court of Appeal: State of California, First Appellate District, Division Two, Sol M. Stoumen, Petitioner and Appellant, vs. Russell S. Munro, Director of the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control of the State of California, et al.," ed. Pan-Graphic Press (1963), p.32, cited in Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.90.

[116] For more extensive accounts of the so-called Wolden affair, see ———, *The Streets of San Francisco*, pp.91-92; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp.204-206; D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, pp.121-122, 182.

[117] For longer treatments of the Gayola scandal, see Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, pp. 92-98; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp. 207-210; D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, pp.182-183; Stryker and Van Buskirk, *gay by the bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area*, p.43.

[118] Sarria, interview by Breeden, date unknown; ———, interview by Gabriel, 15 September 1996, p.2

state agents, and their trials that ended in the conviction on minor charges of two and the acquittal of four of the state agents involved.

For Christopher, who had built his political career on the promise of clean, corruption-free governance, the protection of conservative, 'family' values, and the fight against 'vice', the succession of gay-related scandals constituted a significant risk to his reputation.[119] Against this background, Christopher in summer 1960 publicly announced his decision to launch a new, major offensive against gay bars.[120] He demanded that the District Attorney, the ABC, and the police collaborate even more closely in the hope of striking a decisive blow against gay bar life.

In the early 1960s, state attempts at infiltrating gay bars had become increasingly constrained by the familiarity of gay bar staff with the ABC and police agents attempting to enter their establishments incognito. The closer cooperation between ABC and SFPD opened up new avenues to circumvent this emerging obstacle. It gave the ABC access to a much larger pool of state agents. Rather than use experienced but recognizable agents, the department began to train newly hired police personnel in infiltrating gay bars, dressing and acting gay, soliciting the interest of patrons, collecting incriminating evidence, and carrying out arrests outside of the bar.[121]

This change in policy soon reaped rewards. Even as the number of gay residents continued to rise, the number of gay bars fell drastically.[122] ABC and SFPD reported by October 1961 that the employment of new police recruits had helped cut down the number of gay bars by more than half, from thirty to eighteen, in the space of only twelve

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[119] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.76; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.134; D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, p.182.

[120] The most extensive treatment of this offensive can be found in Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, pp.99-100 See also D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, pp.183-184. The following paragraphs rest on these sources.

[121] Ernest Lenn, 'Special Cops for 'Gay' Bars,' San Francisco Examiner, October 12, 1961. For a discussion of how gay bars collaborated to acquire this familiarity with the looks of state agents, see below.

[122] Martin Meeker estimates that San Francisco's gay population grew from 'somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000' in the early 1950s to 'as many as 15,000 to 20,000 by 1960.' (See Martin Meeker, "Come out West: Communication and the gay and lesbian migration to San Francisco, 1940s–1960s" (University of Southern California, 2000), p.32).

months.[123] If this was an assault on all gay bars, it was also a particular attack on the centres of bar-based resistance. All bars involved in the Gayola scandal were among those closed.[124] Of the eighteen remaining bars, fifteen were facing pending license revocation proceedings with predictable endings.[125] As state agents boasted about the dramatic decline in gay drinking establishments, it looked as if the history of the San Francisco gay bar would come to a close.

Differential treatment according to class, gender expression, gender, and race

A survey of mid-century antigay policing in San Francisco would be incomplete if it did not discuss how these forms of policing affected different gay groups differently. While none of San Francisco's gay residents could feel safe from state attacks, they also did not encounter equal levels of threat. Groups which were privileged in terms of class, race, gender, and/or gender conformity had not as much reason to be fearful as others.

For one, the drinking establishments in which they met were less likely to become the target of antigay state campaigns. Vice squad operations predominantly took place in the city's poor, black, and brown neighbourhoods.[126] As publisher Guy Strait protested, state agents 'do not go into the more prosperous bars' in which wealthy, white, gender-conforming men in particular met, even though same-sex advances occurred there as routinely as in gay bars visited 'by the non-conformity type'.[127] A few months earlier, popular local columnist Herb Caen had noted the same discrepancy in state treatment.

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[123] Lenn, 'Special Cops for 'Gay' Bars,' p.3.
[124] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.100; 'ABC asks more power', *L.C.E. News*, volume 2, number 6, 24 December 1962.
[125] Lenn, 'Special Cops for 'Gay' Bars'; Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.100. A somewhat different picture emerges from the most comprehensive source on the number of gay-friendly drinking establishments, the late Bill Walker's database housed at the GLBT Historical Society of San Francisco. It lists fifty-three gay and gay-friendly drinking establishments for 1961, the same number as in 1955 and only one less than in 1960. However, this number included all gay-friendly drinking establishments, not all of which were gay bars and therefore subject to increased police harassment. The database corroborates that the 1950s and early 1960s were a time period of particularly stringent policing. By 1965, the number of gay-friendly venues had expanded to seventy-six, by 1969 to one-hundred-and-twenty-five.
[126] Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol*, p.107.
[127] 'Local disregard of rights,' *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 2, 30 October 1961.

Bars patronized by upper-class clientele were left alone from police harassment visited upon all other gay bars. He concluded that the only moral of this story, 'if it's a question of morals' was '[d]on't be a poor One. Don't be a poor anything'.[128]

Their class status and wealth also frequently protected upper-class homosexuals on those occasions where they were caught in an antigay police action. It was common practice for attorneys of well-to-do homosexuals to pay off police officers to prevent their clients from being booked.[129] Sometimes, however, upper-class status alone was sufficient to protect homosexuals from arrest. During the infamous 1961 Tay Bush Inn raid, police officers arrested over a hundred bargoers but only after 'picking out the people there, like lawyers' daughters and sons, anyone who had any political clout here in San Francisco, [and] sending them on home.'[130] As experienced gay lawyer Evander Smith noted, '[t]he gay people who were being arrested' were those who 'didn't have any money'.[131]

While upper class status comprised a source of protection few homosexuals could access, gender conformity offered another, more widely available one. Gender-nonconforming gays were more vulnerable to arrest in part because of the geography of antigay policing. Gender nonconforming gays were mostly found in more heavily policed working- and mixed-class gay bars rather than the upper-class bars the police largely left alone. Not only were they often unwelcome in respectable gay establishments, they were also more likely to belong to the City's working classes due to the unspoken requirement of gender conformity that generally accompanied white collar jobs. [132] One

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[128] Herb Caen, 'La Dolce Vita,' *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 20, 1961, p.17.
[129] Donaldson and Smith, 'The Defenders,' p.150.
[130] Ethel Whitaker [pseud.], interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 30 August 1992, cited in Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.214. See also 'Tay Bush Arrests', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 16, 14 May 1962.
[131] Donaldson and Smith, 'The Defenders,' p.152. See also José Sarria, interview by John Lockhart, 2001; ———, 'Lecture for Variations in Human Sexuality class' (1986), San Francisco State University (SFSU).
[132] On their rejection from upper-class bars, see Buttwinick, interview by Meeker, 25 February 2004 and 1 March 2004, pp.25-26. See Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.51 for testimony on gender-nonconforming gays being widely rejected from gay bars.

gay patron who dressed as a visible 'dyke', that is, a masculine gay woman, recounted, '[y]ou couldn't work in any office job because there you were in your costume. … So we went to work in the factory'.[133] Gender-nonconforming gays like her often found themselves in the target areas of police oppression in part because the discrimination they were experiencing in other areas of their lives forced them to live in more heavily-policed areas.

Gender conformity not only offered protection to gay women and, especially, men by providing them with access to less heavily policed spaces, but also by improving their interactions with state agents. Police officers frequently singled out gender-nonconforming gay men and women for particularly egregious treatment, as we already saw in the 1955 police directive and its targeting of 'obvious homosexuals of the effeminate type'.[134] Police treatment of gender-nonconforming gays was so predictably awful that one gay man likened 'being seen with someone who was "obvious"' to playing Russian Roulette.[135] Some officers picked on gender nonconformists because they were the most visible gay subgroup. Many others, however, could not even conceive of gender conforming gays due to the historic association between homosexuality and gender nonconformity.[136] In the words of former patrol officer Richard Hongisto, '[t]here was no recognition' among early 1960s beat officers 'that a masculine appearing male might be

[133] Bond, 'Pat,' p.63. See also Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp.82ff; D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, pp.106-107; *San Francisco Police: Official Publication San Francisco Police Officers' Association*, May 1954, p.28 and March 1958, p.30, cited in Branson, *Gay Bar: The Fabulous, True Story of a Daring Woman and her Boys in the 1950s*, pp. 50,53. For a contemporary sociological study of a Canadian city that showed that covert gays frequently occupied higher socioeconomic positions vis-à-vis overt homosexuals who often relied on low status jobs for survival where their sexuality did not require to be concealed, see Maurice Leznoff and William A. Westley, 'The Homosexual Community,' *Social Problems,* volume 3, number 4 (1956).

[134] For further examples see Sarria, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, p.10; Duggins, interview by Duggins, 30 June 1995, p.13; Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.67; Robert Cromey, 'Ministry to the Homosexual', *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, box 6, folder 10 ('Correspondence re- Council on Religion and the Homosexual').

[135] James T. Sears, *Behind the Mask of the Mattachine: The Hal Call Chronicles and the Early Movement for Homosexual Emancipation* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2006), p.161.

[136] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.79.

a homosexual'.[137] These officers could let gender conforming gays off lightly because they did not read them as gays. At times, this allowed gender conforming gays to escape police punishment altogether. When police officers encountered them during a raid, they might question them whether they knew 'what kind of a place that was,' ask them what they were doing in a queer bar, or even flatly tell them that they 'don't belong in this place,' and send them away unpunished.[138] Gender conformity granted a certain level of protection from state assaults that many gay women and men consciously or unconsciously benefitted from.

The degree to which class and gender performance could determine the nature of police interaction was perhaps nowhere as obvious as in the case of gay women. Due to their rarer presence in gay public life, the decreased visibility of their sexual practices, the greater acceptance of female friendships, the specific interests driving state operations, and their greater concerns with the male citizen, gay women were generally less likely to become the target of police harassment.[139] Some former police officers and gay men at times even asserted that gay women did not encounter police violence at all, or only exceedingly rarely.[140] Hongisto went so far as to assert that patrolmen in early 1960s San Francisco found it difficult to even conceptualise a female homosexual at a time where 'there was virtually no recognition that Lesbian women existed except in books'.[141]

Such descriptions, however, at most reflected the experiences of middle and upper class, gender-conforming women. They could sometimes harness their privileges to

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[137] Richard Hongisto, interview by Scott Bishop, *Scott Bishop Papers,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 2 May 1990, pp.6-7.

[138] Hudson, interview by Breeden, 23 August 1995, 49-51; Ross, interview by Gabriel, 13 March 1998, p.52.

[139] Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp.12-13; Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol*, pp.21-22.

[140] For gay men claiming that gay women did not face police harassment, see for example Sarria, interview by Breeden, date unknown; Eric Marcus, *Making History : The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), p.61. Some lesbians, too, made this argument. See for example Shirley Willer, 'The Lesbian, The Homosexual and the Homophile Movement', *Vector,* volume 2, number 11, October 1966, pp. 8-9.

[141] Hongisto, interview by Bishop, 2 May 1990, p.7.

avoid incurring violence from antigay state agents. This power is aptly illustrated by how police officers handled the Daughters of Bilitis' first national convention in 1960. When San Francisco vice squad officers arrived unannounced at the first lesbian convention in their city, they approached organiser Del Martin with the question whether there were any women wearing men's clothes among their participants. After Martin introduced them to the attendees, a crowd of women clad in respect of the convention's dress code in the outfits of middle-class matrons - their 'best dress or skirt and blouse, stockings, and heels' – the officers left without taking any action.[142] Whether the officers struggled to conceive of these women as lesbians in light of stereotypical images of gay women as 'mannish' or whether they simply feared how interfering with these respectable women might be received is unclear. In either case, it was the women's gender conformity and/or class status that protected them from further police action. Similarly, gender conforming, well-dressed gay women bar patrons could often escape police harassment of lesbian bars unharmed and sometimes even with a police apology.[143]

By contrast, masculine presenting women patronizing gay bars frequently encountered vicious forms of police harassment. Among feminine gay women bar patrons, it was common knowledge that dykes who dressed in masculinely gendered clothing 'got harassed more often' and 'got into a lot of trouble' with the police.[144] For Pat Bond, police violence was part and parcel of her experience as a bar-going dyke and endowed her with a vivid knowledge of gay oppression. '[G]ood God! - the times when we've been beaten up, run over by the cops, persecuted by the police', she recounted. 'So many times. There was no recourse; you just had to put up with that crap - and being called names by the police, being rousted out of bars for no reason when you were just

[142] Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Seal Press, 2007), p.62; Martin and Lyon, interview by Boyd, 2 December 1992.
[143] Hudson, interview by Breeden, 23 August 1995, pp.49-51.
[144] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp.64-65.

sitting having a beer'.[145] The ghastly treatment of a female sex worker's butch partner further illustrates how police officers did not treat working class, gender nonconforming gay women any better than their male counterparts, particularly if they were also situated at other intersections of oppression. The sex worker's 'husband' was arrested (no cause beyond their gender-nonconformity was given in the police report) and subjected to a gruesome, humiliating medical examination to determine their sex.[146] As the episode demonstrated, whether gay women encountered police officers as brutal, merely bothersome, or even peaceful often depended on their class status and gender expression.

The racial position of homosexuals, too, impacted the rate and manner in which they encountered antigay policing.[147] Of course, as racialised subjects, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx gays were already the target of more frequent and more punitive policing in the racist police system of mid-century San Francisco.[148] But there is also evidence that law enforcement agents singled out people who were both racialised and visibly gay, especially black gay men, for especially egregious treatment. Two incidents illustrate this. In March 1962, an African American gay man was stopped without explanation by a police officer known among homosexuals for having a particular dislike

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[145] Bond, 'Pat,' p.65. For other example of gay women patrons being singled out for arrest because of wearing 'men's clothing', see Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.79; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.217.

[146] *San Francisco Police: Official Publication San Francisco Police Officers' Association*, volume 4, number 7, p.9, cited in Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.79. Since this is a police publication, it is important for the historian to approach the description of this incident with caution. It is possible that other types of violence were committed by police officers in this instance but not mentioned. For a similar incident from late 1960s San Francisco of a masculine presenting gay person being arrested for alleged gender nonconformity and patted down to ascertain their 'real' gender, see Suzan Cooke, interview by Susan Stryker, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 10 January 1998, pp.16-17. For a treatment of the close, and often overlapping social lives, policing and resistance practices of sex workers and lesbians in mid-century San Francisco, see Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp. 83-101.

[147] See also Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol*, pp. 21; 107-108.

[148] On racist policing in mid-century San Francisco, see Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, especially chapters two and five; Daniel Edward Crowe, *Prophets of Rage: The Black Freedom Struggle in San Francisco, 1945-1969* (New York: Garland Pub., 2000), pp.79-87; 112-113; Aliyah Dunn-Salahuddin, 'A Forgotten Community, A Forgotten History: San Francisco's 1966 Urban Uprising,' in *The Strange Careers of the Jim Crow North: Segregation and Struggle Outside of the South*, ed. Brian Purnell, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2019); Paul T. Miller, *The Postwar Struggle for Civil Rights: African Americans in San Francisco, 1945-1975* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 42-47, 88-96; Tomás F. Summers Sandoval, Jr., *Latinos at the Golden Gate: Creating Community and Identity in San Francisco* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), pp.162-165; 175-176.

for ‘negro non-conformists [i.e., gays]’. After the police officer confirmed, presumably to his disappointment, that the man had no police record, he sent him away with the words, ‘Get your [ass] off the streets. We don’t like you ___ [expletive]. If there is anything I hate it’s a ___ [presumably, ‘queer’] and a negro (he did not exactly say Negro) to boot’.[149] In autumn 1963, another African American gay man was less lucky. After an officer stopped him in the early morning hours, found out that he had come from a gay bar, and lived with a white man, he arrested him under the cynical pretext that he thought that he might have ‘something to do with raping a white woman’. When the man pressed to know the exact charges, the officer sneered, ‘we can always think up something for a n----- q---- that thinks he is good enough for white people’.[150]

These two episodes provide scarce windows into the routine maltreatment black gay men experienced by police agents. Although police abuse of racialised gays rarely made it into the archives of predominantly white homophile organisations and activists, both episodes suggest that it was a common occurrence.[151] In each case, the officers clearly had experience with harassing black gay men. The second episode suggests two further elements of the policing of black, gay bodies that are worth noting. First, even visibly queer black people were not safe from pernicious accusations of raping white women. Second, as Christopher Agee has also noted, police officers could be more concerned with black gay men’s violation of the colour line than with their homosexuality.[152] They registered gay black bodies as black first, and gay only second. If being gay already made one vulnerable to police harassment, being black often spelled even greater danger.

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[149] Heil! Seig [sic[Heil!, *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 18, 11 June 1962.
[150] ‘SS’, *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 25, 16 September 1963.
[151] For a prominent exception, see Emily K. Hobson, ‘Policing Gay LA: Mapping Racial Divides in the Homophile Era, 1950-1967,’ in *The Rising Tide of Color: Race, State Violence, and Radical Movements across the Pacific*, ed. Moon-Ho Jung (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015).
[152] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.64.

The prevalence of white, middle-class, gay male targets in the archives of mid-century antigay policing has led some historians to conclude that this history departs to an important extent from the usual discriminatory patterns of US urban policing. Lvovsky, for example, suggests that her book on this subject 'can be seen as a complement to the eye-opening histories of racialized policing published in recent years: a study of the very different project of enforcing a largely white-identified morals offense'.[153] The survey of police interactions presented in this section puts some pressure on such interpretations. It shows that gays departing from the prototype of the white, middle-class, male citizen were routinely singled out for arrest, and subject to more brutal mistreatment. Those who departed on multiple counts could often expect even worse treatment, but also were the least likely to have their fate documented.

While more research on this area is needed, the examples discussed above drawn from various homophile experiences suggest a few reasons why these cases might not appear in the archives of antigay policing. For one, police officers might have booked gay groups they targeted for particularly harsh treatment under weightier charges than those they typically applied during their antigay operations. This would have been especially tempting to enact on groups they could expect to be more plausibly laden with such charges, such as black men. The officer insinuating that the black gay man he had arrested might have 'something to do with raping a white woman' clearly felt that this was a weightier accusation than him being a homosexual, and more likely to strike terror in his victim.[154] Another explanation might be that officers were less likely to book some of these groups and have them enter into the formal judiciary process because they were inclined to favour more vicious, extra-legal forms of punishments they could mete out themselves. Reports by both perpetrators and victims of particularly brutal police attacks

[153] Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol*, p.21.
[154] He was not the only SFPD officer with this attitude. Black bisexual poet Robert Kaufman was repeatedly beaten up by SFPD officers in the 1950s. They were more furious at his relationship with white women like his wife than at his homosexuality (Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, pp.63-64).

on the bodies, lives, and dignity of queer subjects often do not linger on the question whether and under which statute the victims were eventually charged. The message is clear. The real punishment in such cases came in the form of the brutal, physical attacks. After such treatment, police officers might in fact have favoured for their victims to be simply dismissed rather than charged and entering into a formal judiciary process where police violence might be thematized.[155] A third factor might be that white, middle-class gay men would have been most likely to have faith in the court system, contest their charges and hence, leave behind a record for historians.

Homophile activists responded to the varied character of antigay policing in different ways as subsequent chapters will show. While some sought to ignore it and prioritized the experiences of white gay men as the presumed archetypical victims, others developed resistance strategies, activist agendas, and conceptions of community that foregrounded the experiences and priorities of particularly attacked gay subgroups.

The lack of protection offered by the courts

The legal arena only offered a very limited measure of protection, if it offered any at all, to persecuted bars and patrons. Gay bar owners sometimes pursued legal challenges to their license revocations. They faced the deliberate disincentive of a lengthy and expensive legal process.[156] Merely to steer their case through the first two ABC-controlled initial hearings and have it enter the regular US legal system incurred legal costs of approximately $5,000.[157] Many bars targeted with liquor license revocations could not raise this sum.[158] Even the popular Black Cat could only engage in lengthy court battles because staff repeatedly agreed to forego their wages in order to keep the

[155] While based on Feinberg's experiences in Buffalo and not in San Francisco, hir harrowing description of sexual and physical police assault in Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues* (Self-Published, 1993) come to mind here.
[156] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.88.
[157] 'ABC and Justice', *L.C.E. News*, volume 2, number 2, 29 October 1962; 'ABC asks more power'.
[158] 'The Future of Our Bars', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 3, 12 November 1962; 'ABC Asks More Power'.

bar afloat.[159] The lower and superior courts which awaited after the initial ABC hearing offered little respite and routinely proved themselves the ABC's reliable allies.[160] All owners who were stripped of their license lost not only their $3,000 investment but were also barred from re-application.[161] Property owners who had rented to such a business were prohibited from renting to drinking establishments for several years. This not only disincentivized them from renting to gay businesses but also meant that bar owners could not recoup some of their investment by selling their equipment on to the succeeding business.[162]

The courts often proved themselves less hostile to gay defendants than law enforcement officers but wins for gay venues were still exceedingly rare.[163] Nor did legal victories guarantee protection. Bars which openly challenged antigay state agencies could expect even fiercer attacks in the future.[164] Sometimes, as in the case of *Vallerga,* their successful appeals even opened up new legal vulnerabilities for gay bars as a whole. No subsequent challenge was able to replicate the triumph of the first such battle, *Stoumen*, which had not only given the Black Cat the second of its seven lives but also provided years of legal protection for all of San Francisco's gay bars. If some bar owners still chose to engage in legal battles, it was not just out of stubbornness or naivety, but also because legal challenges stalled state action and prolonged many bars' lives. Recognizing this, state agents eventually changed the rules around license revocations, stipulating that bars would be barred from serving alcohol while their appeals proceeded in court.[165]

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[159] Sarria, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, p.7. On the high legal costs, see also Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, p.103.
[160] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.88
[161] Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, pp.27, 71.
[162] Ibid.p.73; Chauncey, *Gay New York : Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, p.338.
[163] For the courts being generally better disposed toward gay defendants than police officers, see Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol*. For the small chances of gay legal success, see Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.86.
[164] 'ABC Asks More Power'.
[165] Ross, interview by Gabriel, 13 March 1998, p.61. Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 April 1997, p.35 even claimed that bars were eventually shut altogether during the ongoing legal process.

Like bar owners, gay bar patrons for the most part could not count on legal recourse to significantly soften the harm committed by antigay policing forces. For one, many of those arrested did not make full use of the means of legal contestation open to them. Demanding a trial by jury offered the most promising route for accused homosexuals to have their charges dismissed.[166] As the gay lawyers Evander Smith and Herb Donaldson noted, '[e]ven then, the average citizen in San Francisco wasn't nearly as bigoted as the police' or the courts.[167] However, it was common for offenders to waive their right to trial by jury and be convicted by a judge or even to plead guilty.[168] In both cases, they would receive a fine and probation. First time defendants were often offered a plea bargain, whereby they pleaded guilty to a lesser offense that did not require registration as a sex offender.[169] Repeat 'offenders' were not so lucky, and many were laden with a life-long registration as a sex offender under a novel, 1947 statute that had been expanded in 1949 and 1950 to include those convicted of 'lewd vagrancy', one of the most common charges levelled at arrested homosexuals.[170] Registered sex offenders were barred from teaching in public school, government jobs, many professions, and business licenses.[171]

Gay defendants had several reasons for not opting for jury trials. Many were too ashamed to subject themselves to public scrutiny.[172] Many others lacked access to accurate information on their legal rights and consequences of their actions.[173] It was not

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166 Donaldson and Smith, 'The Defenders,' p.148; William Plath, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 18 September 1996; Sarria and Ross, interview by Alfred, 18 January 1981.
167 Donaldson and Smith, 'The Defenders,' p.148.
168 Ibid.p.148.
169 Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol*, pp. 116-123; 'UCLA Homosexual Study', *Vector,* volume 2, number 9, August 1966. Sarria belonged among this camp. (See José Sarria, interview by Randy Shilts, *Randy Shilts Papers,* San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco History Center, 1980?, p.2).
170 Eskridge, 'Privacy Jurisprudence and the Apartheid of the Closet, 1946-1961', p.716.
171 Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.175; Bill Beardemphl, 'President's Column,' *Vector*, volume 2, number 10, September 1966.
172 Donaldson and Smith, 'The Defenders,' p.148; Beardemphl, 'President's Column', *Vector* volume 2, number 10, September 1966; Rumaker, *Robert Duncan in San Francisco*, pp. 74-75.
173 Sarria, interview by Gabriel, 15 September 1996, p.4; Manuela Soares, 'The Purloined Ladder,' *Journal of Homosexuality,* volume 34, number 3-4 (1998): p.31.

until 1966 that police officers would be required to inform criminal suspects of what actions they had a right to take under police custody.[174] Although all defendants had the right to legal representation, not all were able to afford adequate counsel.[175] While some lawyers charged as little as possible to aid these clients, standard attorney fees were $200-250.[176] Those fees often rose even higher when defendants demanded a trial by jury.[177] Some lawyers had built lucrative careers defending gay clients and had economic interests in their continued plight.[178] While the Office of the Public Defender offered free counsel, it was notoriously understaffed to the point where gay organisations advised against making use of it.[179] As one gay activist quipped, '[e]veryone in this city has these rights, but to gain them sometimes costs a fortune'.[180] Other defendants were able to afford legal counsel but were advised to plead guilty by lawyers who were too ashamed to defend homosexuals.[181]

Where defendants were able to defy these pressures and pleaded not guilty, they could sometimes have their charges dismissed either by a judge or a jury. Such verdicts spared the defendants from the onerous burden of having to register as a convicted sex offender. Homophile activists, some of whom knew from personal experience of the importance of fighting one's case, dedicated a lot of time and resources toward such legal efforts. At the same time, however, gay legal victories in several ways imposed less 'meaningful constraints' on antigay policing efforts than sometimes assumed.[182] For one, paths to courtroom success were predominantly open to the most advantaged gay

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[174] On the history of the so-called Miranda rights, see Gary L. Stuart, *Miranda: The Story of America's Right to Remain Silent* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004).
[175] 'Freedom and Power', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 18, 11 June 1962; 'UCLA Homosexual Study'.
[176] For lawyers charging minimal fees, see Donaldson and Smith, 'The Defenders,' p.152; Gieske, 'José: A Portrait'. For standard fees, see Sarria, interview by Breeden, date unknown; Gieske, 'José: A Portrait'.
[177] Beardemphl, 'President's Column', *Vector* volume 2, number 10, September 1966.
[178] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp. 104, 106; Hal Call, interview by Dennis Saxman, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 30 August 1995, pp.29-30; Lucas, interview by Gabriel, 30 December 1996 through 28 February 1998, p.445; Donaldson and Smith, 'The Defenders,' p.151.
[179] 'How the League Operates', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 9, 5 February1962.
[180] 'Freedom and Power'.
[181] Ibid.; Evander Smith, 'The Judicial Branch of Government: Watchdog of Liberty', *Vector,* volume 3, number 3, February 1967.
[182] Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol*, p.124.

groups. Not only because fighting court cases was expensive, but also because more wealthy, white gay men were more likely to garner the sympathy from the predominantly wealthy, white male judges.[183]

The main reason, however, why positive legal outcomes curbed antigay policing only to a very limited extent was that, on their own, they simply did not deprive law enforcement agencies in a meaningful way of their capacities to inflict harm. Even had gays consistently pleaded guilty, which they did not, and even if judges and juries had consistently dismissed gay cases, which they also did not, the police would have still had many ways of casting terror on gay lives. Before gay cases began to play out in court, police agents had often already achieved their pernicious objectives. Courtroom scenes were, for the most part, only the encore to the drama of the street and the police station. As one gay activist wrote, '[o]ften the greatest damage is not done through punishment, but through arrest and exposure'.[184]

Whatever the eventual court outcomes, police arrests caused immediate harm to the lives of many gay people. Police officers routinely passed on the names, addresses, and employment information of arrested homosexuals to newspapers who published them.[185] The accused subsequently lost their jobs, families, and friends. As one bar owner put it, the employment information published 'was history, because once that paper hit the streets, they didn't work there anymore'.[186] If the police learned that they had arrested a professional, they would 'most assuredly notify the accrediting group', meaning that, whatever the court outcome, the suspect was likely to lose his professional license.[187] Even if gays knew not to pass on any professional information to the police officers, they still forfeited time they could be working. Those who could afford it lost

[183] Ibid., pp.116-117.
[184] 'So. Cal. ACLU Policy on Sex', *Vector,* volume 2, number 3, February 1966.
[185] See for example, 'Too Gay Party: 103 Taken to Jail,' *San Francisco Examiner*, August 14, 1961, p.12.
[186] Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 April 1997, p.46. See also Rumaker, *Robert Duncan in San Francisco*
[187] Evander Smith, 'The Judicial Branch of Government - Watchdog of Liberty', *Vector,* volume 3, number 7, June 1967.

hundreds of dollars on attorneys and bail bondsmen. Those who could not afford bondsmen had to spend longer periods in jail, often losing their jobs, homes, and cars in the process.[188] Police brutality, though rarer, also inflicted significant damage to its victims without relying on any collaboration on the part of the judiciary.

Arrests on homosexual charges further created a police record that could subsequently come back to harm all suspects, including those who had won a dismissal of their charges in court. Law enforcement officers deliberately built up arrest records to ensure heavier penalties when suspects were arrested again in the future.[189] They sold these records to employers, insurance companies, and banks to help them screen their potential employees and clients and prevent homosexuals from getting jobs, insurance, and bank accounts. Gay lawyer Evander Smith protested this practice with the words,

> The police may have arrested the wrong person, may have thrown, and in fact usually do throw, the book at a person arrested accusing him of every conceivable thing they can think of, or maybe no law has been broken at all by the arrestee. In any event that innocent person now has a record which will certify him as a criminal the rest of his life - in spite of the fact that he was, let's say, released without trial when the charges were dismissed, or he was found innocent.[190]

The fact that police departments kept the money raised from the sale of arrest records gave them a particularly wicked incentive for antigay arrests.[191] To be sure, discharged defendants could apply for expungement of their criminal record. Expungement statutes, however, had been hollowed out by the judiciary and legislature to the point where expungement processes did not actually eliminate arrest records or prevent bar employers from finding them.[192]

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[188] P. Lane, 'SIR Meets "OR" Bail', *Vector,* volume 3, number 5, April 1967.
[189] '[What We Want] To Live as Free Americans', *The News,* volume 2, number 20, 8 July 1963.
[190] Smith, 'The Judicial Branch of Government - Watchdog of Liberty'', *Vector,* volume 2, number 12, November 1966. See also 'Arrest Erasure', *Citizens News,* volume 3*,* number 18, June 22, 1964.
[191] Smith, 'The Judicial Branch of Government - Watchdog of Liberty'', *Vector,* volume 2, number 12, November 1966.
[192] ----, 'The Judicial Branch of Government - Watchdog of Liberty', *Vector*, volume 3, number 1, December 1966.

Finally, police harassment created a general atmosphere of terror and instilled a sense of worthlessness in many gays. For many homosexuals, San Francisco presented itself as a 'police city', clouded by a 'heavy climate of fear' that police activities created. Whether they fell victim to antigay policing themselves or only saw and heard of it, it seemed like 'the Morals Squad was everywhere'.[193] This atmosphere affected the experiences of all homosexuals, curbing their freedom, and assaulting their own self-worth. For those directly targeted, these effects could be particularly pronounced. Repeated police harassment and violence left dyke Pat Bond never feeling 'that I was really worth very much,' burdening her with low self-esteem that constrained her decision making and option in all areas of her life.[194] Gay author Michael Rumaker, who was arbitrarily arrested in the streets but had his case dismissed in court, recounted how 'the effects of that experience were to stay with me for many years. I had almost gotten caught. After that, I became more cautious in my habits, more closed. I began, in earnest, to learn a perfect frozen face … What this did was take years away from me'.[195]

That the courts could at best abate some of the most vicious effects of police harassment was clear to both homosexuals and the police itself. After a bar raid in neighbouring Menlo Park, gay publisher Guy Strait complained that 'the good chief knows, publicity of this sort is enough to ruin almost any business, it is definitely enough to ruin the character of the persons involved'. By slipping their names to the newspapers who promptly printed them, the police 'prejudged and sentenced them to far more than the law allows.' Never one to mince his words, Strait referred to this process as 'Crucifixion without Nails'.[196] The hefty legal costs law enforcement officers' accusations could trigger for gay bars often made even the few cases in which bars defeated the

[193] All the above quotations are from Rumaker, *Robert Duncan in San Francisco*, pp.13-14.
[194] Bond, 'Pat,' p.65.
[195] Rumaker, *Robert Duncan in San Francisco*, pp.75f., 80.
[196] 'Crucifixion without Nails', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 23, 20 August 1962. See also, 'Freedom and Power'.

police pyrrhic victories – they might have won in court but the 'damage was done', as gay bartender James 'Robbie' Robinson put it.[197] Some gay activists came to interpret police harassment of gay bars as a deliberate attempt to raise the costs of such business to an unsustainable level.[198] Police agents most transparently displayed their knowledge of their own powers in their routine practice of arresting gay people on charges they knew would not hold up in court. In a particularly revealing example, vice squad agents informed gay-friendly clergy in 1964 that if they went ahead with their plans to hold a gay ball, 'mass arrests would be made indiscriminately even though the police knew that they would not be good arrests and that the Judges before whom the defendants appeared would dismiss the cases'.[199] Aware of the limited protection legal defense offered, homophile activists in the post war decades mobilized a panoply of different strategies with the aim of decreasing police power and invalidating the statutes police officers used to harass them.[200]

Gay bar resistance to state harassment

Although many gay bar patrons, staff, and owners struggled with a negative self-image as a result of living in a deeply antigay society, few of them accepted the state assaults directed at them as justified. Instead, the inhabitants of San Francisco's 1950s and 1960s gay bars as a collective developed a panoply of ways of resisting state harassment. This section summarizes resistance strategies that they had put into place before the arrival of an organised bar-based movement in the early 1960s. These varyingly effective

[197] Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.63.
[198] 'High Cost of Justice'.

[199] 'Chronology of Events Occurring in Connection with Arrest of Above Individuals on January 1, 1965', *Evander Smith - California Hall Papers, 1965-1973 (GLC 46)*, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, folder 4 ('Chronology of Events').
[200] For homophile activists describing this as an objective of the movement, see José Sarria's 'Meet the Candidates for Supervisor' speech, 3 November 1961, *José Sarria Papers*, box 25, folder 6 ('S.F. Board of Supervisors, 1961, Campaign Materials'); 'Halowe'n [sic] News', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 22, 6 August 1962; Evander Smith, 'The Judicial Branch of Government: Watchdog of Liberty', *Vector,* volume 2, number 1, December 165; 'UCLA Homosexual Study'; Evander Smith, 'The Judicial Branch of Government - Watchdog of Liberty', *Vector*, volume 3, number 12, November 1967.

measures included ‘spatial defense’, internal policing, spontaneous self-defense, identifying undercover state agents, fighting legal battles over bar licenses, and reopening bars under new ownership. While some of these measures sought to protect bars from being targeted by state agents, others aimed at undercutting the operations of state agents already inside the bars, alleviating the effects of license revocations procedures under way, or even side-stepping them altogether.

Most, if not all gay bars adopted what Nan Boyd has called ‘spatial defenses,’ architectural and interior design features that sought to prevent bars from attracting the attention of state agents and make harassment less effective once they were inside. Spatial defenses ‘included utilizing a back rather than a front entrance to the building, covering windows and darkening the bar so patrons could see newcomers quicker than they could be seen, locating the dance floor in a backroom, away from the entrance, and hiring a door-person or “hostess” to watch and regulate the entrance’.[201] It was not until the early 1970s that San Francisco saw its first gay bar with uncovered glass windows.[202] In addition, many bar owners also made sure their venues had easily accessible back entrances so that patrons could beat it through the backdoor as soon as state agents entered for a raid.[203] Sometimes, gay bars were strategically placed in properties whose back exit opened into another ‘vice’ establishment, e.g. a heterosexual bar with women sex workers. This way, when the vice squad entered either establishment, customers could escape through the back door and warn the patrons and staff of the other bar.[204] Over time, bar owners also learned from their collective experience that gay restaurants were less likely to be targeted for police harassment than pure drinking establishments.

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[201] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp.126-127. For examples from San Francisco bars see also Robinson, My Story, One Gay’s Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.79; Duggins, interview by Duggins, 30 June 1995, p.15; Sarria, interview by Stryker, 14 June 1999; Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 April 1997, p.28. For an extensive discussion of spatial defences of 1970s US gay bars, see Weightman, ‘Gay Bars as Private Places’”.

[202] Daley, interview by Gabriel, 19 February 1995, p.99; Duggins, interview by Duggins, 30 June 1995, p.50.

[203] Ross, interview by Gabriel, 13 March 1998, p.52.

[204] Ibid.p.56

One bar owner suggested that this might be explained by the restaurant patrons' better behavior.[205] However, since police treatment of gay venues was generally unaffected by patron behavior but very responsive to class status, the greater protection enjoyed by gay restaurants might be better explained through their higher-class status. After learning about this policing pattern, many owners began opening mixed establishments that had a restaurant as well as a bar.[206]

Another shape resistance to state harassment frequently took was the internal policing of patrons' behavior. As we saw above, this was such a ubiquitous feature of gay bars that Strait identified it as one of their three defining characteristics. The types of behavior and spaces bars policed varied from venue to venue as did the diligence of their policing. Same-sex dancing and touching belonged among the activities, and male bathrooms among the areas, most heavily policed.[207] While some bars were more laissez-faire about monitoring their clientele, many bars owners 'found themselves in the unfriendly position of exerting more control over their patrons than they might expect from the police,' creating a sometimes 'very staid' atmosphere.[208] The D'Oak Room, a particularly cautious bar, even hired floor walkers to patrol customers' behavior.[209] Even the most stringent policing, however, could not protect gay bars from being closed by the ABC. At the D'Oak Room, nothing could ever occur 'except conversations, and this was enough to close it'.[210] Even if they disliked it, many customers and staff understood why bar owners opted for internal policing. As gay bartender Craig Daley, who especially regretted not being able to dance to live music in bars noted, 'you just had to police your

[205] Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, p.8.
[206] Ibid.; Ross, interview by Gabriel, 13 March 1998, p.8.
[207] See for example Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, pp.92-93; Daley, interview by Gabriel, 19 February 1995, p.69; Martin and Lyon, interview by Boyd, 2 December 1992; Pace, interview by Gabriel, 3 May 1998, pp.46-47; Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 April 1997, p.28; Branson, *Gay Bar: The Fabulous, True Story of a Daring Woman and her Boys in the 1950s*, pp.130-131.
[208] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.126; Daley, interview by Gabriel, 19 February 1995, p.52.
[209] Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 April 1997, p.28.
[210] 'What is a Gay Bar?', p.6. See also 'Is it our Fight?', *L.C.E. News*, volume 2, number 6, 24 December 1962.

bar to keep [state harassment] away from you.[211] Some patrons even interpreted internal policing as a sign that bar owners were genuinely 'interested in your welfare' and protecting their patrons from the long-term consequences of getting arrested, and not solely in their own short-term profits.[212]

Like state policing, internal policing did not affect all bar patrons equally. Visually impaired patrons who needed to be steered through a crowded bar space could find them particularly unwelcoming as staff would reprimand them for touching their companion and putting the bar's license at stake.[213] Gender nonconforming gays similarly found themselves a frequent target of internal policing. Since their presence could attract state attention and was used by police and ABC inspectors 'as a pretext to raid a gay bar', they were '[a]s a rule… not welcome in gay venues,' especially during periods of increased state activity.[214] Bar staff were instructed to 'discourage' their business, frequently ejected them from the premises, or asked them to get changed if they wanted to be granted entry.[215] Heterosexual patrons comprised a third group that often came up against gay bars' behavioural codes. Many heterosexual patrons unwittingly violated the norms governing gay spaces when they behaved like they did in straight bars, touching and hugging their friends and family members without second thought. Those patrons were either rebuked by bar staff, harassed until they left, or even thrown out.[216]

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[211] Daley, interview by Gabriel, 19 February 1995, p.52, 69. See also Pat Bond, interview by Allan Bérubé, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 18 May 1981, p.30; 'Under 21? Stay Out of Bars', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 22, 6 August 1962.

[212] See for instance 'Under 21? Stay Out of Bars'; 'No Dancing', *L.C.E. News*, volume 2, number 9, 3 February 1963.

[213] Martin and Lyon, interview by Boyd, 2 December 1992.

[214] Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.51; Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II*, p.125. See also 'Roving Report', *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 11, 4 March 1962.

[215] Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.51; Elliot Blackstone, interview by Susan Stryker, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 6 November 1996, pp.17-18; Buttwinick, interview by Meeker, 25 February 2004 and 1 March 2004, pp.25-26, 35; Pace, interview by Gabriel, 3 May 1998, pp.60-61.

[216] Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman* (Volcano, CA: Volcano Press, 1991), p.216; ———, interview by Boyd, 2 December 1992; Branson, *Gay Bar: The Fabulous, True Story of a Daring Woman and*

While spatial defences and internal policing sought to prevent bars from becoming the target for police suppression, spontaneous self-defense and the identification of undercover state agents aimed at undermining the work of police agents who had already infiltrated gay bar spaces. Spontaneous self-defence on the part of patrons and staff could take the form of verbal push backs or, more rarely, physical resistance to police brutality.[217] Some bar owners also instructed their staff to follow state agents with their own note cards to record the events taking place' and 'send a message back: the employees were monitoring the police as the police were monitoring the venue'.[218]

The widespread operations of undercover state agents opened up a door to different forms of gay bar resistance, namely to efforts to publicly reveal their identities. By blowing the disguise of plainclothesmen and alerting their patrons to their presence, gay bars protected their patrons from arrest and made it more difficult for state agents to observe same-sex behaviour that could be used against the bar in court. In many gay venues, bar staff and patrons developed secret ways to communicate the presence of suspected or recognized undercover agents to each other. Most often, these took the shape of non-verbal signalling. For example, bartenders would serve suspected state agents their drinks in a particular type of glass that identified them to their regulars.[219] It was also known that customers who were unsure about the status of the person they had been talking to could ask the bartenders at an opportune moment whether they had been conversing with a recognized state agent.[220] In a few bars, employees even boldly introduced undercover agents to the entire bar as they entered or got the whole bar to

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her Boys in the 1950s, p.65; Bond, interview by Bérubé, 18 May 1981, p.26; Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.78.

[217] For some incidents of such resistance, see Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, pp.66-67; Cahill, interview by Gabriel, 28 July 1997, p.61; Allan Bérubé, 'The First Stonewall,' *San Francisco Lesbian and Gay Freedom Day Program,* volume (1983); Jim Kepner, interview by John D'Emilio, *IGIC Audiovisual Collection,* New York Public Library, New York, 23-30 September 1976.

[218] Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, pp.66-67.

[219] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.89; Branson, *Gay Bar: The Fabulous, True Story of a Daring Woman and her Boys in the 1950s*, p.58f.

[220] Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.204.

stand up and serenade him. This was José Sarria's favoured method at the Black Cat.[221] The fact that state agents were legally obliged to identify themselves if questioned played into the hands of suspicious gay bar staff, even if we may wonder whether state agents abided by this law on all occasions.[222]

Identifying state agents came easy to San Francisco gay bar staff where they were already familiar with them from prior policing operations or when the agents were former regulars.[223] They also, however, conducted concerted efforts to familiarize themselves with the faces of state agents. In the late 1950s, gay bar owners and staff began taking pictures of ABC agents entering the department's headquarters to then circulate and help each other recognize undercover agents in their venues.[224] Several gay bars in the late 1950s and early 1960s took their cooperation further through an arrangement to call each if they identified an undercover agent in their bar and describe the agent's appearance. This ensured that the agent would not go undetected whenever they decided to move on and inspect the next gay bar.[225] From at least early 1963 onward, gay bar owners and staff organising themselves as the Tavern Guild of San Francisco also informed each other of upcoming legal hearings so that other owners and staff could attend and familiarise themselves with the looks of the accusing state agents.[226] Finally,

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[221] Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); Sarria and Ross, interview by Alfred, 18 January 1981; Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movement*, p.26; 'José', Mark Thompson, *The Advocate*, 3 April 1980, p. 32.

[222] Sarria in particular recalled using this legal obligation in identifying undercover agents. See Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); Sarria, interview by Stryker, 14 June 1999; Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movement*, p.26. That police officers may at times have defied their legal obligations is suggested not only by the general conduct of SFPD and ABC agents but also by experiences of gay activists in different LGBT movements. Sarah Schulman reports that ACT UP New York began each of their meetings by asking undercover state agents to identify themselves. Although ACT UP strongly suspected being monitored, no agent ever did identify themselves (Sarah Schulman, *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021), p.30).

[223] Long-time SFPD vice squad member Sergeant Murphy had been a regular customer at the Black Cat in the 1930s and 1940s (Sarria, interview by Breeden, date unknown).

[224] Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.100.

[225] Sarria, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, p.9; Sarria and Ross, interview by Alfred, 18 January 1981; Sarria, interview by Gabriel, 15 September 1996, p.5; ———, interview by Shilts, 1980?, p.3; Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movement*, p.29.

[226] Minutes of February 19, 1963, *Tavern Guild of San Francisco Records*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, box 1, folder 11, cited in Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.102.

Strait's publications also aided efforts to identify undercover state agents by printing pictures of them.[227]

Spatial defences, internal policing, spontaneous self-defence and efforts to identify undercover state agents offered resistance but could often only slow down state efforts to arrest gay bar patrons and revoke the bars' liquor licenses. Even when state agents overcame these forms of resistance, however, they had not exhausted gay bars' resourcefulness. Rather, resistance entered a new phase of legal activism. Endeavors to protect patrons who had been arrested inside gay bars often focused on persuading them to demand a jury trial. In the 1950s, gay bar owners, staff, and pro-gay lawyers started regularly encouraging patrons to demand a trial by jury.[228] By mid-1950s, the San Francisco Bay Area had already begun to build a reputation for this form of legal resistance.[229] Activist efforts to push jury trials benefitted not only the courageous patrons who opted for them but, when orchestrated in large numbers, held the potential to make all future arrests of gay bar patrons less harmful. As jury trials piled up and created a backlog of several months, judges started to resent the extra work antigay police fervour was creating for them and warned the district attorney that they would throw out any cases that were not airtight. [230] The backlog also made opting for jury trials even more promising. The long wait often affected the accusing officer's ability to remember the incident.[231] Occasionally, the accusing officer would not even be present to deliver their testimony because they had retired, left the force, or died, and the case

[227] See for example *Citizens News*, volume 3, number 15; printed in *Wide Open Town Collection*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, box 5, folder 33.
[228] Donaldson and Smith, 'The Defenders,' p.148; Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, p.24; Sarria, interview by Breeden, date unknown; Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 September 1996; Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.240; Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); Sarria and Ross, interview by Alfred, 18 January 1981; Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movement*, p.27; Gieske, 'José: A Portrait'.
[229] Branson, *Gay Bar: The Fabulous, True Story of a Daring Woman and her Boys in the 1950s*, p.130.
[230] Sarria, interview by Breeden, date unknown; Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 September 1996; Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); Sarria and Ross, interview by Alfred, 18 January 1981; Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street*, p.53; Cahill, interview by Gabriel, 28 July 1997, pp.83-84; Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol*, p.118.
[231] '"Carmen" – José Sarria at Chez Jacques, San Francisco, November 25, 1979', *Allan Bérubé Papers,* box 156.

would be thrown out for that reason.[232] In addition to coordinating the legal defense of their patrons, gay bars sometimes also pursued a second legal avenue of resistance: contesting their liquor license revocations. This has already been discussed above.

Many gay bar owners did not cease their resistance even after they had lost their legal battles and were barred from re-applying for a new license. Instead, they applied for another license under the name of a friend, relative, or lover, and reopened in a new location.[233] And so, the cycle of state persecution and gay resistance could start afresh.

By the late 1950s, the decade-old resistance movement coming out of San Francisco's gay bars had developed a wide range of countermeasures to continued state persecution. But while resistance strategies took many shapes, they often remained tied to a very inflexible distribution of roles. The top-down movement tactics of 1950s bar activism consistently revolved around the leadership of bar owners. Owners determined their venues' 'spatial defences,' instructed their staff to police patrons' behavior, orchestrated attempts to identify undercover state agents, incentivized arrested clients to plead not guilty by covering their legal fees, and filed legal actions against bar closures.

While bar staff could fill an invaluable supporting role in these efforts, patrons were largely relegated to a peripheral part. Even where organised resistance efforts depended on the courage of particular patrons to plead not guilty, the opportunity for them to contribute was sporadic, conditional on their misfortune, and always temporary, ending with the completion of their legal case. Some, like bartender James 'Robbie' Robinson, recognized the individual acts of defiance to which customers resorted from their marginalised position as 'small but important, "push-back" gestures or talk that gave others encouragement to eventually, say "enough".'[234] But none of San Francisco's bar

[232] Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 September 1996; Sarria, interview by Breeden, date unknown.
[233] Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, p.71; Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*, p.102; Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 April 1997, pp.6-7; Ross, interview by Gabriel, 13 March 1998, p.60.
[234] Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.66.

staff or owners were ready to base their strategies on the mobilization of the masses patronizing the bars. This changed when Latino female impersonator José Sarria in 1958 brought the Black Cat operas into being, a soon iconic community event. From this stage, Sarria began her efforts to transform her weekly audience of several hundred into self-identified gays and gay activists.

Chapter 2

José Sarria and the transformation of the Black Cat audience

On Wednesday, March 5, 1958, a festive crowd dressed in kimonos, traditional hats, and other Japanese-inspired apparel filed into San Francisco's Black Cat café for an unusual performance of Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly*.[1] By then, the Cat's regulars had long grown enamoured with the antics of the small, Latino female impersonator José Sarria, the bar's leading entertainer. Many might have been present a few days earlier when Sarria, upon hearing pianist James 'Hazel' McGinnis strike up the first notes from Bizet's *Carmen,* had staged a short, spontaneous medley of the main arias, 'making up campy words.'[2] The performance was so well-received that Sarria and McGinnis announced their production of *Madame Butterfly,* a choice made in part because the setting would allow Sarria to pass off his whiteface and feminine clothing as Kabuki*,* the heavily stylised Japanese performance art.[3] Thus, he hoped to evade arrest under section 440 of the Police Code, a statute San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) officers regularly used to arrest gender-nonconforming people for appearing in public 'in the dress, clothing or apparel not belonging to or usually worn by persons of his or her sex.'[4] As Sarria stepped

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[1] John Gieske, 'José: A Portrait', *The Sentinel,* volume 7, Number 2, 25 January 1980, a copy of which can be found in *José Sarria Papers*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, box 1, folder 12 ('Clippings 1980-1989'). Sarria's first opera performance is often dated rather imprecisely with 1958. (See for example Vern L. Bullough, *Before Stonewall : Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002), p.377; Michael Robert Gorman, *The Empress is a Man: Stories from the Life of José Sarria* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.210). The more precise dating of 5 March 1958 is suggested by a note of 5 March 1978 written by Sarria and James 'Hazel' McGinnis which claims that 'camp opera' had been introduced to San Francisco twenty years prior to that day with their first performance of *Madame Butterfly* (See '1958/1978, 20th Anniversary Cruise, José/Hazel', *José Sarria Papers*, box 16, folder 10, ("Performances 1970-1978"). A note in the biweekly *LCE News,* volume 1, Number 12 of 19 March 1962, p.4 on recent anniversary celebrations of Madame Butterfly at the Black Cat seems to substantiate the accuracy of this dating.

[2] Gieske, 'José: A Portrait'; Jeff Jones, Viceroy to Her Majesty the Widow Norton, 'Her Most Imperial Majesty, Empress I Jose, the Widow Norton,' March 1, 1997, *José Sarria Papers*, box 1, folder 10 ('Writings about Jose Sarria, 1984-2002').

[3] José Sarria, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 9 July 1997, pp.19-20.

[4] The full text of the section read, 'Sec. 440. *Wearing of Apparel of Opposite Sex with Intent to Deceive Prohibited.* It shall be unlawful for any person to appear in public, with intent to deceive, in the dress, clothing or apparel not belonging to or usually worn by persons of his or her sex.' For the early history of this section in mid-nineteenth century anti-prostitution efforts, see Clare Sears, *Arresting Dress: Cross-dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-century San Francisco* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2015), pp.41-60. On SFPD use of this ordinance for antigay policing in the mid-twentieth century, see for example *L.C.E.*

onto the improvised stage in front of his friend's piano, smoke, excitement, and trepidation over what might happen next all combined to fill the Black Cat's air.

Sarria and McGinnis' camp satire of *Madame Butterfly* lasted twenty minutes, was not broken up, and, because of the tradition it spawned, proved a pivotal event in San Francisco and US LGBTIQ history. The show turned out to be such a success that the bar's owner Sol Stoumen persuaded the duo to make the Black Cat operas a weekly, Sunday afternoon fixture, which they would remain until the Cat's forced closure on Halloween 1963. At a time of intense anti-gay repression, they gave the rare, joyous gift of openly gay entertainment, 'ice cubes … in the desert' as one visitor later described them.[5]

Regularly drawing crowds of several hundred spectators, the Black Cat operas during their five-year spell also represented gay San Francisco's largest weekly political event.[6] The operas often integrated political advice into the stage action. During *Carmen,* for example, a letter from the protagonist's mother urged him to plead not guilty and demand a trial by jury if he was ever arrested for committing a homosexual act.[7] Sarria further used his Sunday platform to disseminate information about upcoming police raids, discuss gay-related news, and 'preach', as he referred to his speeches, a proudly gay politics.[8] Gay activist George Mendenhall recounts how numerous San Francisco

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News, volume 1, numbers 2-4. The section was repealed on July 24, 1974, per Ordinance 377-74 of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors (see *San Francisco Municipal Code: Housing-1973, Police-1973, Traffic-1974* in the San Francisco Law Library).

[5] William Beardemphl and John DeLeon, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, July, 1997, p.87.

[6] For testimony of the size of Sarria's crowd see George Mendenhall, 'George,' in *Word is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives*, ed. Nancy Adair and Casey Adair (San Francisco: New Glide Publications, 1978), p.72; José Sarria et al., interview by Randy Alfred, *The Gay Life Radio Series,* GLBT Historical Society, 12 April 1980; Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p.23; 'José: A Portrait,' John Gieske, *The Sentinel,* volume 7, Number 2, 25 January 1980, found in *José Sarria Papers*, box 1, folder 12 ('Clippings 1980-1989').

[7] '"Carmen" – José Sarria at Chez Jacques, San Francisco, November 25, 1979,' *Allan Bérubé Papers (#1995-17)*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, box 156; Allan Bérubé, 'The First Stonewall,' *San Francisco Lesbian and Gay Freedom Day Program,* volume (1983), found in *Allan Bérubé Papers (#1995-17)*, box 13, folder 14 ('"The First Stonewall," Black Cat, Parade Program Xerox, 1983.').

[8] For Sarria references to his 'preaching', see for example José Sarria, interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open History Town,* GLBT Historical Society, 15 April 1992, p.9; Joe Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020).

gay activists of the early 1960s 'were first exposed to politics at the Black Cat'.[9] At each performance, the magic, as it were, spread from the stage onto the audience. As patrons watched Sarria become the operas' various characters, they were themselves subject to being transformed by Sarria into self-identified gays and gay activists. This chapter recovers the history of these efforts.

Drawing on new archival sources, the chapter is intended as an expansion of the historical narratives surrounding Sarria's performances. Scholars of US LGBTIQ history have commented since the 1980s, the discipline's 'breakthrough decade,' on the formative influence of Sarria's operas.[10] They have, however, hitherto only recovered an incomplete account of the intentions and achievements of Sarria's performances. The main contribution of the Black Cat operas, historians have contended, was to bring together, serve as a 'rallying point' for, 'galvanize,' instil pride in, and raise the consciousness of an already existing gay group.[11] But this was only part of the story. As D'Emilio put it so well, pre-Stonewall gay 'activists had not only to mobilize a constituency; first they had to create one'.[12] Rereading Sarria's performances as productive moments, where a gay audience was conjured as well as assembled, I argue that Sarria's performances are better understood as having striven to affect a dual movement in spectators' self-definition: from 'normal' to gay men, and from gay men to gay activists.

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[9] George Mendenhall, interview by Scott Bishop, *Scott Bishop Papers,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 23 April 1990, pp.3-4.

[10] John D'Emilio, 'Not a Simple Matter: Gay History and Gay Historians,' *The Journal of American History,* volume 76, number 2 (1989): p.440. In addition to the sources cited below, see also Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution : The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), p.103; John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence: Men's Lives and Gay Identities : A Twentieth-Century History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), pp.216-217.

[11] See respectively, Bullough, *Before Stonewall : Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context*, p.378; Bérubé, 'The First Stonewall', found in *Allan Bérubé Papers (#1995-17)*, box 13, folder 14 ('"The First Stonewall," Black Cat, Parade Program Xerox, 1983.'); Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.58; Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *gay by the bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996), p.42; John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, Second ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1983]), p.188.

[12] ———, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, p.5.

Before presenting this argument, I first prepare the scene by recovering the Black Cat's history as a hub for radical organising and its gradual transformation over the course of the 1950s into a centre for gay activism. With the stage set, I then show how Sarria used his performances at the Black Cat in the first instance to fashion 'gay' audience members.[13] Recent scholarly work on the mid-century construction of homosexuality has tended to focus on the foundational role of heterosexual authorities: medical professionals, legislators, bureaucrats, military personnel, prison guards, police officers, judges, and others.[14] This chapter turns our gaze to the actions of homosexuals themselves, uncovering Sarria's performances as a crucial moment of gay identity formation. This focus bears two major benefits. It strengthens our understanding of what Regina Kunzel has termed 'the uneven history of modern American sexuality', that is, of the ways in which a sexual system based on gender performance did not, as has sometimes been assumed, seamlessly and universally give way to the hetero/homosexual binary across the mid-century.[15] A decade into the second half of the twentieth century, many Black Cat patrons who engaged in sex with members of their own gender still did not consider themselves 'gay'. This is particularly true of more wealthy, gender conforming male audience members from the adjacent financial district who were able to situate themselves in an older system of gender and sexual signification in which they could – and desired to be – considered 'normal' and not 'gay.' Sarria's performances sought to persuade these bankers to give new meaning to their

[13] Among Sarria's chroniclers, Nan Boyd has come the closest to recognizing this aspect. She described Sarria's shows as '[daring] the "bohemians" who frequented the Black Cat to identify themselves more openly as homosexuals.' However, even on Boyd's view, Sarria's role was to persuade and encourage rather than to create. In the same passage, Boyd describes Sarria's audience as 'a closeted bargoing homosexual constituency' who need Sarria's encouragement to come out as the gays they already were (Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.211).

[14] See for example, Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Regina G. Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Anna Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol: Cops, Courts, and the Struggle over Urban Gay Life before Stonewall* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

[15] Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy*, especially pp. 6-7.

sexual practices, to see and declare themselves as ‘gay’ rather than ‘normal’. But Sarria himself was also not an advocate for homosexuality in its ‘classic’ sense. He did not conceive of it as defined solely by sexual object choice and divested of its historical links to gender nonconformity. To him, the gay man remained an effeminate, ‘nelly queen’ who could never become a full man.

Revisiting Sarria’s performances as productive sites also adds to our insight into the means by which homophiles sought to forge a gay identity. Previous work has emphasized the importance of gay efforts to disseminate information through books and periodicals and of the role modeling that happened in lesbian bar cultures.[16] Sarria’s shows employed an arsenal of still underappreciated activist tools in the service of the construction of gays, such as humour, ridicule, encouragement, singing, and references to what would later be called ‘gay pride’. In these way, Sarria’s performances sought to produce the ‘gay’ spectators who could then be assembled, galvanized, and empowered.

In a second, simultaneous movement, Sarria then sought to make gay activists out of spectators who already identified as gay. Ultimately, convincing men to publicly identify as gay was not an end in itself for Sarria. Rather, it allowed him to approach them with demands to become active on behalf of their social group. He explained and modelled to his audiences that being gay was about more than achieving an authentic relation to oneself. As a legitimate political group, gays were entitled to demand an end of their persecution and respect for their civil rights. In articulating and popularising this account of gay group identity, Sarria’s performances proved a crucial steppingstone toward the later development of the idea of a San Francisco gay community.

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[16] For scholarship stressing the importance of disseminating information, see D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, pp.32-33; Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). For scholarship stressing role modelling, see Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold : The History of a Lesbian Community*, 20th Anniversary ed. (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014 [1993]), chapter 9.

In the concluding section, the chapter moves from historical reconstruction to theoretical reflection. It examines what insights Sarria's gay 'worldmaking' may offer to similar, subsequent projects (gay and otherwise), especially in regard to how radical activist projects can be communicated intelligibly and successfully.

The Black Cat's history, clientele, and early fights against state oppression

By the time the curtains were raised for *Madame Butterfly,* the Black Cat had already amassed a long history as a hub for political organising and sexual activities that provoked the disapproval of San Francisco's municipal authorities.[17] The Black Cat opened in 1906, the year of the devastating San Francisco earthquake, but it was not until WWI that it first entered the records as a target of state attacks. During a period of local and national anti-prostitution fervour and heightened labour conflict, city officials accused the Black Cat of hiring 'disreputable' women and cultivating close ties to the labour movement.[18] Municipal authorities in 1921 subsequently withdrew the Black Cat's dance license and the bar was forced to temporarily close until after Prohibition's repeal in 1933.[19]

When it re-opened shortly after, the Black Cat once again welcomed a diverse clientele of groups living outside the narrow moral confines of middle-class United

[17] For a longer discussion of this early history see Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.56.
[18] On the history of the San Francisco Labour movement during World War I, see William Issel and Robert W. Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865-1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), chapter 4; Michael Kazin, *Barons of Labor : The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), chapter 9; Robert Edward Lee Knight, *Industrial Relations in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1900-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), chapter 8. For a more general history of the US Labour movement in the same period, see Melvyn Dubofsky and Foster Rhea Dulles, *Labor in America : A History*, Eighth ed. (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 2010), chapter 13. On anti-prostitution efforts in 1910s San Francisco see Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp.38-44; Josh Sides, *Erotic City : Sexual revolutions and the Making of Modern San Francisco* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.21-23. For a discussion of nationwide anti-prostitution campaigns in this era, see John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, Third ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp.208-215.
[19] See 'Dance Hall Ruling of Police Board Affects S.F. Cafes', *San Francisco Chronicle,* 8 January 1921, p.6; 'Police Clamp Lid on Cafes; Oust Dancers,' *San Francisco Examiner,* 8 January 1921, p.11; 'Five Uptown Cafes Listed for Layne's Axe', *San Francisco Chronicle,* 29 March 1921, p.2; 'Police Commission Stops Café Dances,' *San Francisco Chronicle,* 26 April 1921, p.16; 'Black Cat, Pup Dances Banned,' *San Francisco Examiner,* 26 April 1921, p.11; and the announcements of the Black Cat's 'Grand Closing' in the *Chronicle* and *Examiner* issues of 5-7 May 1921.

States.[20] Sitting on chairs and seats improvised out of orange crates, longshoremen, sex workers, and sailors shared the 'rough,' 'funky' bar with a mixed clientele of 'transvestites', intellectuals, artists, poets and other 'Bohemians,' as well as 'heterosexual grey flannel suit types' working in the adjacent financial district.[21] After Sol Stoumen, a heterosexual, Jewish man acquired the bar in 1945, the Black Cat's reputation as a haven for the artistic, eccentric, and defiant spread as far as New Orleans, Chicago, New York, and across the US borders.[22] ruth weiss, Allen Ginsberg, John Steinbeck, and Bette Davis belonged among the many who found a home at the Black Cat, described by a poet patron as one of San Francisco's few 'islands of freedom'.[23] Sarria, who began visiting the Black Cat in the late 1940s, was first attracted to it as 'a bohemian bar where women smoked in public, believed in free love, where artists [wanted] to talk about their art work, where you could sit in the bar and play chess and cribbage, where you would go and have one glass of wine, where you would go and recite poetry,' as well as break out into spontaneous singing or dancing.[24] Especially at

[20] Nan Alamilla Boyd cites 1933 as the year of the Black Cat's reopening (Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.244), but gives no sources. For the earliest evidence I was able to find see 'What to do,' *San Francisco Examiner,* November 9, 1934, p.35. For reference to the Black Cat's 'working class feeling' see Gerald Fabian, interview by Bill Walker, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 30 November 1989 & 23 January 1990, p.80.

[21] Jim Duggins, interview by Jim Duggins, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 30 June 1995, p.23; Fabian, interview by Walker, 30 November 1989 & 23 January 1990, pp.79-80; Larry Howell, interview by Martin Meeker, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 17 December 1998 & 14 January 1999, pp.83-84; Allen Young and Allen Ginsberg, *Allen Ginsberg: Gay sunshine interview* (Bolinas, CA: Grey Fox Press, 1974), p.33 cited in D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, p.187; Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian, *Poet be like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance* (Hanover, N.H.: Published by University Press of New England [for] Wesleyan University Press, 1998), p.41. See also 'Golden Gate Park: Fog, Fags, & Famine', Angelo D'Arcangelo, March 29, 1970, *José Sarria Papers*, box 1, folder 11 ('Clippings 1970-1979').

[22] See Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); 'The Nightingale of San Francisco', *José Sarria Papers*, box 1, folder 10 ('Writings about Jose Sarria, 1984-2002'); and 'José at the Black Cat!!!', ibid., box 129 ('Casette Tapes') for evidence of the Black Cat's national and international reputation. The fact that Stoumen received his liquor license in 1945 suggests that he acquired the Black Cat in that year. ("Petition for Writ of Certiorari and Points and Authorities in Support Thereof," in *Stoumen v. Harris, Supreme Court of the State of California* (private collection of Joe Castel), Exhibit A, p.2). This date is also given in Gieske, 'José: A Portrait.'

[23] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.56; Ellingham and Killian, *Poet be like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance*, p.41; Young and Ginsberg, *Allen Ginsberg: Gay sunshine interview*, p.33 cited in D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, p.187; Nancy J. Peters, 'The Beat Generation and San Francisco's Culture of Dissent,' in *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture*, ed. James Brook, Chris Carlsson, and Nancy J. Peters (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998), p.203.

[24] Sarria, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, pp.7,9; ———, interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town History Project,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 20 May 1992, p.3; ———, interview by Joe Castel, Joe Castel Private Collection, date unknown, p.11.

night it became ‘a wild scene’, in the words of weiss, a place where conventions of propriety were frequently left at the doorstep.[25]

Common racial boundaries too were often undermined at the Black Cat. Former staff members and patrons later spoke of the Black Cat as a racial ‘melting pot’.[26] In a period of pervasive racial segregation of public venues, the Black Cat’s relatively mixed clientele was highly unusual.[27] Some white patrons met ‘almost all of the third world people that [they knew]’ at the Black Cat.[28] In particular, the bar gained a sizeable African American male patronage, drawn in part by the legendary Black Cat chef, union activist and jazz horn player David Pendleton ‘Bumblebee’ Thompson.[29] Sarria’s performances would later further attract a significant ‘Spanish contingent’, gay men with Latin American heritage, to the Black Cat.[30]

From at least the early 1940s, the Black Cat’s largely heterogenous, but male-dominated clientele also comprised a few women and many men who had sex with partners of their own gender.[31] During this period, the Black Cat began making a name for itself as one of the city’s ‘gay bars’.[32] This label may, however, mislead twenty-first century readers in one of two ways. As discussed in the previous chapter, the term ‘gay

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[25] Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020).
[26] Fabian, interview by Walker, 30 November 1989 & 23 January 1990, p.111; José Sarria, interview by Jim Breeden, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, date unknown; Peters, ‘The Beat Generation and San Francisco’s Culture of Dissent,’ p.203. See also ‘The Nightingale’, *The News,* volume 3, Number 6, 23 December 1963.
[27] Stryker and Van Buskirk, *gay by the bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area*, p.24.
[28] Fabian, interview by Walker, 30 November 1989 & 23 January 1990, p.11.
[29] See photographs of Black Cat patrons in the collections of the Oakland Museum of California, the José Sarria papers at the GLBT Historical Society, and the Harold L. Call papers at the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives. Information on Thompson (13 February 1904 – 14 February 1967) is scarce but can be found in ‘P.D. Thompson is Dead at 63’, *San Francisco Examiner,* 16 February 1967, p.43; Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.218; José Sarria, interview by Allan Bérubé, *Allan Bérubé Papers, Oversize 4,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 21 March 1997. Thompson’s friend Sascha Jean Weinzheimer testified that at his funeral jazz greats like Kid Ory, Pops Foster, Louis Armstrong, Earl Fatha Hines, Bob Scobey gave him a New Orleans style funeral, marching down Van Ness Avenue to ‘the best music possible’ ("Pendleton David Thompson," 2020, https://cnac.org/emilscott/thompson04.htm).
[30] Gieske, ‘José: A Portrait’.
[31] On the Black Cat being a male-dominated bar, see Sherri Cavan, ‘Interaction in Home Territories,’ *Berkeley Journal of Sociology,* volume 8 (1963); Bois Burk, ‘Campus and SF Area Newsletter, Nov. 24, 1958’, *Bois Burk Papers*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, folder 14 (‘Letters from BB to Friends “Nitty Gritty” 1958-1974’).
[32] Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp.113, 125. See also Thomas Cahill, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 28 July 1997, p.60.

bar' did not suggest (as it would today) that the Black Cat was primarily catering to patrons who engaged in same-gender sex. Even at the heyday of Black Cat gay activism in the early 1960s less than a quarter of its regulars were interested in homosexual erotic or romantic relations.[33] Secondly, it was also not the case that those patrons who did pursue same-gender sex were by all accounts classified as 'gay' or 'homosexual.' As one gay activist noted in the early 1960s, there were still 'many' patrons of San Franciscan gay drinking establishments 'who engage in homosexual acts but consider themselves not at all homosexual'.[34] Instead, these patrons ascribed to an earlier taxonomy of male sexuality which had placed emphasis on gender performance, not sex partner choice, as the key marker of sexual difference.[35] In this system, which divided men into 'normal men' and 'fairies,' men could have sex with other men without forfeiting their 'normal' status as long as they abided by male cultural roles in their sexual and general conduct (which 'fairies,' or 'queers,' did not do). These 'normal' men came to the bars to find male sexual partners but during intercourse would refuse to perform those sexual acts which were gendered feminine, e.g. receiving anal sex or performing fellatio, and which, if you performed them as a man, 'would mean you were queer'.[36] At the Black Cat, this segment included service men (soldiers, sailors, navy personnel), married men, as well as bankers.[37] As a contemporary sociological study noted, the Black Cat's reputation 'throughout most of the city' as a place for gender and sexual transgression

[33] ''What is a Gay Bar?', *Citizens News*, volume 4, number 5, p.6.
[34] Ibid. This remained true throughout the 1960s as we know from further homophile testimony. See for example, Gary Teller, 'I Give you my word as a homosexual...', *Vector,* volume 2, Number 2, January 1966; Beardemphl, 'Parries & Thrusts' and Michelle Duloc and René Autil, 'Fluff buff & butch', both in *Vector*, volume 4, number 8a, July 1968.
[35] The most extensive reconstruction of this earlier sexual regime remains George Chauncey, *Gay New York : Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994). See also ———, 'From Sexual Inversion To Homosexuality: Medicine And The Changing Conceptualization Of Female Deviance,' *Salmagundi,* volume, number 58/59 (1982); ———, 'Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War One Era,' *Journal of Social History,* volume 19, number 2 (1985).
[36] José Sarria, interview by Randy Shilts, *Randy Shilts Papers,* San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco History Center, 1980?, p.3.
[37] Ibid.; Sarria, interview by Bérubé, 21 March 1997.

made it ‘a place where trade, or non-homosexuals who might be willing to enter into a sexual relationship for either money or lark, may frequently be found’.[38]

With its welcoming attitude toward those pursuing same-gender romance and sex, the Black Cat once again became a recurrent target for state attacks. The SFPD in particular began harassing the Black Cat, and repeatedly raided it in the 1940s. During one raid, the future chief of police Thomas Cahill (1958-1970) and a senior Vice Squad colleague identified about forty patrons in total for arrest. This included all those who were not willing to take police harassment quietly and were ‘a little inclined to give lip’, as Cahill put it. When Cahill and the senior officer finally left the Black Cat, however, they were puzzled to find none of the arrested patrons outside. The detective who had been tasked with holding them so that they could then be taken to the police headquarters across the road, photographed, and have their fingerprints recorded, had treated them in his customary manner. After giving them a beating, he had sent them on their way, loath to have his good name appear in the papers next to the names of unsavoury homosexuals.[39] Receiving physical and verbal mistreatment but escaping arrest, the patrons had been relatively lucky that night. Testimony from other documented Black Cat raids suggests that they usually ended in arrest. Gay activist Jim Kepner observed a 1943 Black Cat raid in which he watched police officers ‘haul out’ and arrest fifteen ‘brothers’, including some who ‘might have been sisters for all [he] could tell at first glance’ of their outward appearance. The officers were being ‘damned rough about it’, despite receiving minimal verbal and even less physical resistance in return, which exclusively came from ‘some of the bolder queens’, Kepner’s ‘sisters’.[40] During two further raids in 1947 and 1949 that attracted media attention, police forces arrested a total of sixteen patrons and staff members and prosecuted nine of them under an array

[38] Cavan, ‘Interaction in Home Territories’, p.24.
[39] Cahill, interview by Gabriel, 28 July 1997, pp.60-62.
[40] Bérubé, ‘The First Stonewall’.” See also Jim Kepner, interview by John D’Emilio, *IGIC Audiovisual Collection,* New York Public Library, New York, 23-30 September 1976.

of charges. The nine prosecuted individuals had their names and, unless they had refused to give them, addresses printed in the papers.[41]

In the late 1940s, state harassment adapted and, as discussed in chapter one, the Black Cat became the testing ground for a new, legal form of anti-gay state persecution in which municipal and state-level actors collaborated to revoke gay bars' liquor licenses. The state's first attempt to withdraw the Cat's liquor license ended with Stoumen winning an unexpected victory in *Stoumen vs. Reilly* (1951), and remains the best known altercation. As we saw in the previous chapter, Stoumen's legal triumph heralded a period of relative safety from state attacks for San Francisco's gay-patronized bars. It also, however, rendered the Black Cat a 'symbol' of gay rebellion, subject to constant state assault even in this generally more secure period.[42] Three further attempts at revoking the Black Cat's license followed in the first four post-*Stoumen* years, with the last one ultimately successful and leading to the Black Cat's closure in 1963.[43]

Sarria's Black Cat beginnings and the bar's evolution into a centre of gay activity

Although the Black Cat first gained a reputation as a 'gay bar' in the 1940s, it was not until the subsequent decade that the Cat's homosexually active clientele became its dominant social group and the bar evolved into a locus for San Franciscan gay social life. This transformation was driven in part by changes in the geography of the City's artistic underground. After the Cat had served as a vibrant centre of Bohemian life throughout the 1940s, the early 1950s saw the subculture migrate to other North Beach

[41] The charges ranged from selling liquor to minors, underage drinking, delinquency of a minor, possession of marijuana, violation of the state vagrancy law, through to assault. See 'Three of Six Seized in Raid on Black Cat Café Released,' *San Francisco Examiner,* 5 September 1947, p.17, 'Cleanup begins at Night Spot; Cafes Warned,' *San Francisco Examiner,* 15 June 1949, p.1; '3 In Café Raid Convicted,' *San Francisco Examiner,* 16 June 1949, p.19; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.57.
[42] The Black Cat's owner, patrons and state opponents all shared an understanding of the Black Cat's status as an important 'symbol' in the battle over San Francisco's gay bars' right of existence. See "Petition for Writ of Certiorari and Points and Authorities in Support Thereof," Exhibit E, p.17; Bérubé, 'The First Stonewall'."
[43] Ibid.

locales further up Columbus Avenue.[44] By the mid-1950s, this change was already complete and 'the action had shifted elsewhere'.[45] As Bohemians frequented new public meeting spots, the void they left behind at their old stomping ground did not remain unoccupied for long. Stoumen's unusual open-mindedness and, even rarer, stubborn insistence on his right to cater to whoever *he* wanted to opened the doors for the Black Cat's lasting conversion into a gay bar. Gradually, the character of the Black Cat began to change. The arrival of a new employee, José Sarria, in the early 1950s greatly contributed to and accelerated this process, helping to transform the Black Cat into a leading site for gay entertainment, thought and activism.

Sarria's career at the Black Cat spanned roughly a decade and almost half a dozen particular occupations. When it began in around 1953, Sarria was in the thick of recovering from his arrest by the Vice Squad at the St Francis Hotel's Oak Room on an alleged sex crime that had irretrievably dashed his dreams to become a teacher.[46] He had moved to San Francisco from Redwood City to look for full-time employment, had – with his mother's financial assistance – taken first steps toward launching a new career as a female impersonator, and had recently begun dating a dashing young waiter, Jimmy, who worked at the Black Cat.[47] The ruin the Vice Squad had wreaked on his own professional life meant that Sarria was able to cover for Jimmy, an alcoholic, on the

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[44] Thomas Albright, 'The Elevated Underground: The North Beach Period,' in *Rolling Renaissance: San Francisco Underground Art in Celebration, 1945-1968* (San Francisco: Intersection: Centre for Religion and the Arts, 1976 [1975]), pp.15-16; Peters, 'The Beat Generation and San Francisco's Culture of Dissent,' p.203.

[45] Albright, 'The Elevated Underground: The North Beach Period,' p.16. See also Henry Herman Evans, *Bohemian San Francisco* (San Francisco: Porpoise Bookshop, 1955), p.16, cited below.

[46] There is no definitive evidence as to which year Sarria began working at the Black Cat. Sarria often recounted that he started working at the Black Cat shortly after his arrest in around 1952 or 1953, which forced him to abandon college education and look for a full-time job. (See for example Sarria, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992). His union records indicate that Sarria filed for unemployment and permanently moved to San Francisco in 1953 having previously resided in Redwood City with his adopted family from where he attended college in San José (*José Sarria Papers*, box 1, folder 8 ("Union Membership Material 1948-1955"). These records suggest that Sarria could have started working at the Black Cat from as early as 1953 or shortly after.

[47] On Sarria's move to San Francisco, see footnote above. On his first steps toward becoming a female impersonator and his mother's support see José Sarria, 'Address to International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE)' (1989); ———, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, 6; Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, 141; Sarria, interview by Gabriel, 9 July 1997, pp.14-16. On meeting Jimmy, see Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020).

frequent occasions that his addiction caused him to miss work.[48] From the very beginning, Sarria proved a fabulous addition to the bar. Previously a regular customer himself, the stand-in waiter thrived in the Cat's boisterous atmosphere. In a treasured contribution to Black Cat eccentricity, Sarria used his childhood vocal training to great acclaim and routinely delighted the patrons with spontaneous renditions of popular songs of the day.[49]

Soon, Sarria was hired as a permanent member of staff, working as a waiter, cook, hostess, and, finally, entertainer.[50] Sarria had succeeded to build up a following for himself with his impromptu singing, enabling him to move quickly from serving drinks, cooking food, and welcoming guests to entertaining them from the Black Cat's improved stage of a bevy of tables situated at the back of the bar.[51] Sarria performed on Friday and Saturday night, three shows apiece.[52] His shows combined storytelling, stand-up comedy, impersonation, and singing to create a hilarious, camp cabaret that reliably attracted audiences of a few hundred people.[53] Sarria's delivery in outrageous, gender-ambiguous dress, including his signature red high-heels projected a proud gay identity that shocked many gay first-time visitors.[54] The majority of Sarria's audience, however, were comprised of heterosexual visitors whom, unless they were friends or potential trade, the gay crowd indiscriminately referred to as 'tourists'.[55] Especially on weekend nights, the Cat's notorious reputation for moral and sexual transgression drew in pairs and groups of more adventurous heterosexuals looking for unusual thrills.

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[48] Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.125; Gieske, 'José: A Portrait'.
[49] José Sarria, interview by JD Doyle, November 2012.
[50] See for example ———, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, pp.3-5.
[51] Sarria held these jobs concurrently. For example, even after he had gained the status as the Black Cat's most celebrated performer, Sarria still regularly worked as a chef during lunchtime hours (———, interview by Bérubé, 21 March 1997).
[52] ———, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, p.8; ———, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, p.4.
[53] William Plath, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 18 April 1997, p.53; José Sarria, interview by John Lockhart, 2001; Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.118; Sarria, interview by Gabriel, 9 July 1997, p.60.
[54] Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); James (Robbie) Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, 2017, San Francisco Public Library, Unpublished manuscript, p.44.
[55] Cavan, 'Interaction in Home Territories', p.24; Bob Ross, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 13 March 1998, p.19; Sarria, interview by Lockhart, 2001?.

During Sarria's reign as the Black Cat's leading performer, the bar completed its transformation from a 'bohemianesque joint' to a 'nucleus' of gay social life.[56] As Sarria later proudly testified, 'little by little, I changed the character of the Black Cat'.[57] Already a few years into Sarria's activities, the Black Cat's metamorphosis had sufficiently advanced to draw some heterosexual rebukes. 'One of the most colorful places for a real drunk in other days' had 'changed hands', a 1955 guide to San Francisco Bohemia disdainfully reported, 'the new owner encouraged the fruit [homosexuals] and the place went to hell'.[58] It was not until the creation of Sarria's operatic parodies in 1958, however, that the Black Cat cemented its place as a defining gay institution of the era.

Originally conceived as a method to incentivize the Sunday brunch crowd to stick around until the afternoon, Sarria's popular operas evolved into far more than a commercial success.[59] Sarria's unusual, openly gay entertainment provided the centre around which hundreds of participants in San Francisco's gay world came together on Sunday afternoons to create and inhabit a gay public sphere of their own. Many newcomers to the city were brought by their gay contacts to see one of Sarria's operas as an introduction to the City's gay social life.[60] Even experienced homosexuals entering the Black Cat for the first time were astonished at 'the mass feeling of oneness, of unity and good fellowship' found at Sarria's operas.[61] During the performances, audience members were served the latest news on the state operations targeting homosexuals, were fed with insistent affirmations of their worth, and, through laughter and tears, flirtations and conversations, learned to redefine their sense of themselves as individuals and as a group. Once the operas began, the audience were invited to participate in a

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[56] ———, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, p.9; 'Sad Day on Montgomery St,' *San Francisco Chronicle,* October 15, 1949, p.9;
[57] Sarria, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, p.9.
[58] Evans, *Bohemian San Francisco*, p.16
[59] Sarria, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, p.4; Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020).
[60] Bobby Pace, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 3 May 1998, pp.19-20; Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.44.
[61] Burk, 'Campus and SF Area Newsletter, Nov. 24, 1958'.

healing, empowering process of queer rewriting. Under the power of McGinnis' pen and Sarria's voice, historic actions were transposed into contemporary settings like Union Square, a popular gay pick-up spot, in order to reflect and shed light on contemporary gay experiences. The performances mockingly questioned heteronormative cultural narratives of a straight national past. At the same time, the Black Cat operas also pressed forward, projecting a more inclusive future in which the celebrated heroes of some of the most august cultural scripts, scripts which were re-enacted each week in opera houses across the country and the world, were potentially gay. Both the past and the future appeared hopefully queer.

Strategies of conversion: Making 'normal' bankers 'gay'

As a popular doorway into a defiant, self-confident gay politics, Sarria's performances shaped the direction of San Franciscan gay thought and activism for years to come. Their effects included the creation of a 'gay' audience, transforming, in many cases, 'normal' spectators' understanding of themselves.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Sarria primarily encountered 'normal men' interested in homosexual acts in the form of a group of patrons who flocked to the Black Cat from the neighbouring financial district: wealthy, gender-conforming male bankers whom he diagnosed in contemporary gay jargon as living 'a double life'.[62] Unlike the later language of the closet, the metaphor of the double life suggested, following George Chauncey, 'not gay men's isolation, but their ability … to move between different personas and different lives, one straight, the other gay'.[63] These 'very correct … gentlemen' were regular participants in the city's gay world.[64] They could be found in its

[62] Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980; Sarria, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, p.9; ———, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, pp.4-5; ———, interview by Shilts, 1980?, p.2.
[63] Chauncey, *Gay New York : Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, p.6.
[64] Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980.

gay cruising spots, its bars, parks, and 'tea rooms' (bathrooms), seeking out casual, same-gender sexual contacts. Their participation was however always limited to these contexts and geographies. Outside of them, they lived heteronormative lives as normal men, with all the associated benefits and privileges. 'At the Cat they were one thing, and outside they were something else,' Sarria summarized their way of life.[65] As this group of bankers dipped their feet into the Black Cat's proudly gay atmosphere, they found their self-understanding increasingly scrutinized by its leading entertainer.

Sarria 'couldn't understand people living double lives' long before he encountered the Black Cat bankers.[66] He sometimes explained this puzzlement with reference to his loving upbringing. In his extremely supportive family, he 'was never told not to do these things' that men and women living double lives sought to conceal.[67] His upbringing instilled rare confidence in the young José but also left him unprepared to meet people invested in living more furtively. Particularly in the early stages of his life, there was nothing that 'made [him] more nervous and angry' than encounters with people whom he identified as gay but who rejected this identification.[68] One episode from the late 1940s when Sarria was employed as a waiter at the San Francisco airport illustrates the high levels of irritation and discomfort such encounters could bring him. During this period, Sarria became so incensed with Jack, an airport bus boy he was convinced was gay but who would not admit it, that he began to bully him. He started addressing Jack in gay male argot, calling him 'Mary' at their every encounter – even in front of his colleagues. When Jack took to avoiding his tormenter, Sarria reacted by loudly chasing 'Mary' across the airport lobby whenever he saw him.[69] Over time, Sarria changed how he responded to encounters with seemingly reluctant 'gays.' He began to become more

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[65] Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.161.
[66] Sarria, interview by Castel, date unknown, p.6. See also Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980; Sarria, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, p.5; ———, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 15 September 1996, pp.2-3.
[67] ———, interview by Castel, date unknown, p.6.
[68] 'Grand Opening, Turf Club' ([1986]), *José Sarria Papers*, box 130.
[69] Ibid.

curious and to inquire about why these people were making what he perceived to be an odd choice.[70] From the early 1950s onwards, Sarria's new workplace furnished him with a ready pool of interlocutors in the shape of the Black Cat's financial sector clientele.

One explanation many bankers gave Sarria for why they were not living openly gay lives was that they were afraid of their family's response. It was 'shocking' for the entertainer to hear the 'hatred' with which some Black Cat patrons discussed their parents and grandparents.[71] He had previously thought 'that everybody felt the same way I did' about his relatives; for Sarria, seeing his family was always 'a treat' because they 'let you do everything you wanted'.[72] This included, in his case, running around in dresses and other femininely gendered attire.[73]

Many bankers further noted that they would risk their job if they were to present in gender-nonconforming attire or otherwise come out as gay at work. Sarria theorised this as a problem that affected the bankers as *men* in finance. Their female assistants, he later claimed, 'could get away' with gender-nonconforming attire and short hair that gave them 'just a very business look'.[74] In this assessment, Sarria underestimated the barriers gay women faced. As we saw in the previous chapter, gay women testified that *any* office jobs, both lesser-paid 'female' and better-paid 'male' positions, came with requirements of gender conformity. Hence, it was not the case that male bankers would have been penalised for open displays of homosexuality because they were *men* in finance, but because they were in finance.

Sarria received his most perplexing responses from bankers who altogether rejected his assessment that they were living a 'double life' and were hiding their 'homosexuality'. Committed as these bankers were to the older sexual and gender

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[70] Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980; Sarria, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, p.5.
[71] ———, interview by Gabriel, 15 September 1996, p.2.
[72] Ibid.
[73] See Sarria, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, pp.5-6; ———, 'Address to International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE)'; Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.49; Sarria, interview by Gabriel, 9 July 1997, pp.2-5.
[74] ———, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, p.9.

taxonomy with its focus on gender performance as the primary site for defining 'queerness', they were confident that their adherence to norms of masculinity in their sexual, sartorial and other practices rendered them 'normal men'. Clothed in the standard masculine attire of suits, shirts and ties, 'they thought that if you are dressing like this, this made them men'.[75] These bankers, too, might have felt uncomfortable with telling people at their job or in their families who they were having sex with. But they did not understand their actions as efforts to conceal an inner homosexual self. They were normal, not gay, and who they were having sex with was simply irrelevant to this matter.

In time, Sarria came to understand how family pressures and job requirements may have prevented many of his contemporaries from living their homosexuality as openly as he lived his.[76] But he considered the idea that these male bankers were not gay simply ridiculous. 'Hell no, hell no', he would utter in reply to such nonsense.[77] 'These nelly queens that worked in the financial district were fooling nobody but themselves'.[78] The bankers' own ideas about their sexuality notwithstanding, they were definitely gay.

An imaginative political thinker, Sarria combined three different strategies in his efforts to convert the bankers to a gay self-identification. First, Sarria used his stage at the Black Cat to ridicule their attempts at authentically performing cultural norms of masculinity. Sarria did not seem convinced that any gay person, as the bankers were to him, could successfully 'pass' as a (normal) man. In his shows, he frequently related this belief to his audiences. For example, he would tell them that their family members will have 'at one time or another suspected that you were gay or different than the rest of your brothers and sisters. The joke is on you, thinking that you are fooling them.'[79] Sarria, however, did not often limit himself to such mild forms of verbal rebuke. He routinely

[75] ———, 'Lecture for Variations in Human Sexuality class' (1986), San Francisco State University (SFSU).
[76] ———, interview by Gabriel, 15 September 1996, p.3; ———, interview by Shilts, 1980?, p.6.
[77] ———, 'Lecture for Variations in Human Sexuality class'
[78] Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980.
[79] Ibid.

included in his performances short, comedic sketches in which he cuttingly impersonated the bankers. Drawing attention to what he perceived to be their obvious effeminacy, he mocked their belief that they were passing as normal, masculine men. 'Have you ever seen the effeminate or the gay man get on the cable car to go down to the financial district?', Sarria would ask his audience in another example of him conflating effeminacy and homosexuality,

> They have the latest suit, down to the shorts matching the stripes, matching the stockings, matching everything with their nice little briefcase. Have you ever noticed how a gay person runs to catch the cable car [audience laughter, Sarria presumably performs their effeminate running style at this moment], how he reaches out to grab a hold of the post, how he stands there being very proud of the fact that he made it in one piece [laughter], how in a very, very butch [masculine] voice he says 'Battery Street' [laughter; name of tram stop close to financial district] and then how he just floats off [laughter] to run to the corner. And they think that they are fooling people [laughter].[80]

In these humorous routines Sarria cleverly used the stage format to reveal the bankers' behaviour to be nothing more than a mere performance, an unsuccessful affectation of normal masculinity. Just as Sarria was impersonating the bankers but clearly not a banker himself, the bankers were impersonating normal men and falling short. Their immaculate attire, feminine gait and movement were making a mockery of their intentions.

Because of how he understood what it meant to be gay, Sarria did not believe that the bankers could address this issue by becoming better actors and improving on the quality of their impersonations. To Sarria, homosexuality and gender nonconformity were inextricably linked. There was no homosexuality without an inversion of gender norms. The gay man was at his core an effeminate man. Thus, no matter how hard gay men might try, they would never be able to shake off their femininity. As Sarria would tell his

[80] Ibid.

audience members, 'all the men's perfumes, all the men's razors, all manly things that you may do, does not make you a man'.[81] If Sarria made his audience sing 'God Save Us Nelly Queens', his anthem to effeminate gay men, at the end of each performance, it was in part because he was convinced that 'that's what you are'.[82] For the bankers to pretend otherwise was more than futile, it was downright 'ridiculous'.[83]

Extant testimony does not include statements in which Sarria clearly sets out why he was confident that ridiculing the bankers' behaviour and self-definition would effect a change in their self-identification and actions. In this absence, we might best think of Sarria's mockery as pursuing this goal by increasing both the burdens of identifying as normal men and the benefits of defining oneself as gay. Sarria's antics rendered it harder for the bankers to live a 'double life' as normal men. In at least one of their popular hangouts, identifying as a 'normal' man henceforth meant exposing oneself to mockery from its leading personality and, potentially, Sarria's many followers. Bankers' ability to freely 'move between different personas and different lives, one straight, the other gay' became increasingly compromised. Conversely, Sarria's rebuke also made embracing a gay self-identification more advantageous. After the mockery set in, identifying as gay became a condition for winning fuller acceptance into the world of San Franciscan gay bars. To be sure, it also continued to carry significant risks such as the potential loss of employment and familial ostracism. But bankers had now also experienced first-hand that there was something to gain from taking such risky steps.

A second strategy Sarria adopted to persuade his audience members to self-identify as gay was to kindle and affirm a sense of pride in their sexual and/or gender difference through public speeches. To Sarria, being gay 'was nothing to be ashamed

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[81] Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020). See also Sarria, 'Address to International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE)' where Sarria argued that even 'the most expensive men's razor' did not make a gay person a (normal) man.
[82] Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.162.
[83] 'José,' Mark Thompson, *The Advocate*, 3 April 1980, p.32.

of' and he claimed to have never been ashamed of being gay himself.[84] But Sarria also recognized that many gay people were met with profound rejection within the deeply anti-gay culture of 1950s United States, including in their own families, and that these experiences left deep marks on their self-confidence. If the bankers did not identify as gay, this was in part because 'there was nobody out there screaming that gay was good' and that 'there is nothing wrong with being gay'.[85] In response to the general dearth of affirmation, Sarria began to include speeches into his shows in which he shared his pride at being gay with his audience. Years before the idea of 'gay pride' was coined, Sarria 'preached' from his Black Cat 'pulpit' that 'gay was good' and encouraged men who had sex with other men but did not identify as gay to '[b]e proud of what you are'.[86] Through these speeches, Sarria sought to subvert dominant characterisations of homosexuals as sick, immoral, or unlawful, and win over hesitant homosexuals, as he saw the bankers, to a proud gay self-definition.

It is hard to overstate how powerful and transformative Sarria's public affirmations were for many gay audience members. As gay activist James 'Robbie' Robinson, who suffered from being rejected by his family and in church, vividly recounts,

> If you could see him on this stage, you felt like it really was okay. And he would say it when you left. He said when you walk out of that door, "remember, stand tall. You are as good, if not better, than anybody else." And you think, maybe I am okay. Because all your life as a kid, and in the church, you know, jokes about queers, and you are a queer, you know, and you think to yourself this is not good, you know, this is wrong, it's always been wrong. But when you have a little guy stand up there and tell you it is not wrong, it is great! Have a good time.[87]

It is in part through Sarria's speeches on gay pride that people like Robinson 'found a home' in a gay identity, learned to relate to their homosexuality with acceptance and

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[84] Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980.
[85] Sarria, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, p.4 ———, 'Lecture for Variations in Human Sexuality class'
[86] ———, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, p.9; ———, 'Lecture for Variations in Human Sexuality class'; Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1982), p.52.
[87] Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020). See Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.241, for similar testimony from another gay male audience member.

approval, and developed a self-confidence that would allow them to become influential activist figures.[88]

Sarria's third and most iconic strategy for converting his audience members to a public, gay identity was through collective singing. At the end of each show, Sarria would make his audience stand up, sometimes regroup outside the Black Cat, hold hands, and join him in a rendition of 'God Save Us Nelly Queens', Sarria's gay adaption of the UK national anthem. A defiant chorus of hundreds of voices singing at the top of their lungs would rise up, reaching a sufficient volume to be heard in the police station and city jail across the street where many gay people arrested over the weekend were being held.[89] A memorable event in the life of many audience members, this tradition retained the capacity to stir ferocious audience participation decades after the Black Cat's closure.[90] For Sarria, getting his audience to stand up as a collective and join him in asking for the divine protection of San Francisco's 'nelly queens,' effeminate, gay men who had sex with other men, was 'one way' to 'make them admit that they were gay' and 'acknowledge who they were'.[91] Importantly for Sarria's project, these moments of self-recognition occurred in a context that gave positive meaning to homosexuality. When they stood up to sing, audience members 'for one moment …admitted, and with pride, what they were'.[92] Gay self-identification was positioned not as a source of shame, but as something to be celebrated. Through this shared ritual, Sarria was able to entice his audience to act in ways he could not always first convince them to think.

The extent to which Sarria succeeded at persuading the Black Cat bankers to adopt a gay identity is unclear. Sarria himself claimed that over time he got the bankers

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[88] The chapter of his memoir in which Robinson describes his first visits to the Black Cat is titled 'Finding a Home' (Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, chapter 3).
[89] For accounts of this ritual see Benjamin Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movement* (London: Routledge, 2011), p.27; Sarria, interview by Shilts, 1980?, p.4; Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980; Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.162.
[90] See for example 'Grand Opening, Turf Club, undated [1986],' *José Sarria Papers*, box 130; *The Stonewall Archives*, (2006), DVD 3: Gay Men take action before Stonewall.
[91] Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980; Sarria, interview by Doyle, November 2012.
[92] Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980; Sarria, interview by Shilts, 1980?, p.4.

to ‘kind of agree’ with him on the positive value of homosexuality and the importance of living an openly gay life.[93] However, no direct testimony from the bankers themselves seems to have survived. This is unsurprising, insofar as oral histories have mainly preserved the voices of the 1950s and 1960s San Francisco gay movement’s leading figures. While the movement’s leadership included many former Black Cat patrons, it was predominantly composed of activists with more job protection than the bankers: employees or owners of gay bars, factory workers, self-employed publishers, hairdressers, or lawyers, as well as the rare employees with supportive work environments.

It was not until the early 1970s that bankers rose to the higher echelons of the gay movement. The fate of the era’s most prominent gay banker, David Goodstein served as a stark reminder of why so few male bankers who were having sex with other men had gone public about their sexuality: a former vice-president of a major bank, Goodstein had been fired as soon as his homosexuality became known,.[94] The same period also saw major banks begin to make first, reluctant contact with the increasingly powerful gay movement. In an unprecedented development, the local branches of Bank of America and Hibernia Bank in 1974 were pressed into signing up to Harvey Milk’s gay-dominated, local merchant association, the Castro Valley Assocation (CVA) against their initial reservations.[95] In the absence of the bankers’ own testimony, we are left to speculate whether some former members of Sarria’s audiences might have played a role in these and similar subsequent decisions.

[93] Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980.
[94] Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street*, p.60.
[95] Ibid., p.90.

Fashioning gay audience members into gay activists

In addition to addressing male patrons who had sex with other men but did not identify as gay, Sarria used his Sunday performances to speak to those of his audience members who had already arrived at a gay self-definition. Sarria's interaction with his gay audience members took a very different shape and direction to his exchange with the bankers. As self-identified gays, there was no need for Sarria to convince them of their homosexuality. Instead, their subject position created an opening for a conversation between audience and entertainer about the meaning of one thing they held in common: being gay. Through his 'preaching' and collective rituals, Sarria impressed on his audience that being gay was of more than personal significance. It also provided a platform from which gays as a group could demand that their civil rights be respected; it gave them a responsibility to show up for fellow gays, particularly the most marginalized subgroups, in other ways as well. Under Sarria's leadership, self-identified gay spectators were gradually shaped into confident gay activists.

Two of the performance elements that Sarria was using to push the bankers toward a gay identity – his speeches on what would become known as 'gay pride,' and the collective singing of 'God Save Us Nelly Queens' – played a vital role in this process. Sarria's 'preaching' on homosexuality being a source of pride not shame lay the groundwork from which many gay audience members learned to understand themselves as legitimate but persecuted rights-bearers. Before Sarria could expect gay people to stand up and defend their rights as gays, he needed them to regard their homosexuality as a valuable aspect of their selves that did not warrant violent repression. As Sarria's contemporaries Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, the co-founders of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), explained, a '[c]hange from a negative to a positive self-image is necessary in any oppressed group before its members can even conceive of undertaking an activist

liberation movement'.[96] Sarria appreciated the importance of this shift because he understood his own pride as the foundation of his activism, 'that allowed me to do the things I have done, and to do them my way'.[97] By the same token, many of his gay audience members like Robinson first had to learn that 'it really was okay' to be gay before they could develop the confidence to demand that their rights be respected. Only after Sarria's speeches had helped Robinson see his homosexuality as something 'great' could Robinson become a gay activist and a founding member of the Tavern Guild of San Francisco (1962-1995), a powerful organisation of gay bar staff and owners.[98]

Once Sarria's gay audience members had gained a firm sense of their self-worth, they became open to his teaching that gays were discriminated against as a group and ought to defend their civil rights. During his shows, Sarria would frequently 'make these political comments about our rights as homosexuals', as Black Cat regular George Mendenhall recalled.[99] Taking a cue from the language of Civil Rights activists, Sarria asserted that gay people 'had the same rights as any other group'.[100] Sarria was one of the first gay activists who began to translate the Civil Rights Movement's analysis to the context of contemporary gay lives.[101]

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[96] Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, 'Reminiscences of Two Female Homophiles,' in *Our Right to Love : A Lesbian Resource Book*, ed. Ginny Vida (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1978), p.127.
[97] José Sarria Speech As Grand Marshal at 1995 San Francisco Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Pride Celebration, *José Sarria Papers*, box 4, folder 1 ('Awards and Honors, 1970-2010').
[98] For further oral history passages in which Sarria explains his attempts to instil pride in his gay audience members as part of his efforts to get them 'to stand up for our rights', see Sarria, interview by Shilts, 1980?, p.4; Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.241. For Robinson's role in founding the Tavern Guild see Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, pp. 72-73. On the Tavern Guild see Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp.223-226.
[99] Mendenhall, 'George,' p.73.
[100] Email from Dennis Nix, May 5, 1987, *José Sarria Papers*, box 1, folder 10 ('Writings about Jose Sarria, 1984-2002').
[101] For another pioneering attempt to transcribe Civil Rights demands and strategies into a gay activist context, see the discussion of Guy Strait's publishing in chapter four. For a more general discussion of this subject, see Nikita Shepard, ""The Second Largest Minority": Analogies between Race and Sexuality in the American Homophile Movement, 1944-1968" (2018). Not all activists, especially at the more conservative Mattachine Society, appreciated this analysis. When Strait printed a letter from a San Francisco reader referred to by his initials as 'HC' proclaiming that 'I have never heard of anyone being deprived of Civil Rights', he was forced to print a clarification in a subsequent issue that the letter had *not* been sent by Hal Call, the leader of San Francisco's Mattachine Society. Call had been receiving abuse within gay bar circles for 'his' letter. Evidently, readers readily attributed this position toward Civil Rights to Call. The letter may have been made up by Strait to parody Call's stance (See 'The Readers Write', *LCE News,* volume 1, Number 8, 22 January 1962, and 'Roving Report', *LCE News,* volume 1, Number 10, 19 February 1962).

Before such an analysis became popular, many gay people had interpreted their lived experiences of oppression as evidence that they did not possess the same rights as other groups of US citizens. As Sarria remarked, many gay 'people in those days didn't believe you had rights' since 'nobody told them' otherwise.[102] DOB activist Billye Talmadge similarly noted that 'people had no idea of their rights as just human beings'.[103] Those thousands lucky enough to find their way to the Black Cat received a different education through Sarria's confident 'preaching' that gays could lay claim to the same rights as any other group of US citizens. For many gay patrons like Mendenhall, later a leading figure of the gay activist group SIR (1964-1977) and editor of its newspaper *Vector*, Sarria's speeches marked the 'beginning of my awareness of my rights as a gay person'.[104]

Sarria did not rely on verbal argumentation alone to transform gay spectators into gay activists. During his shows, his 'preaching' first introduced gay people to a self-conception as legitimate right-bearers. The closing ritual of 'God Save Us Nelly Queens' then played a vital part in getting his audience members to take the next, vital step in their personal evolution. As they stood up and raised their voices, they moved from considering Sarria's exhortations to experimenting with a new self-understanding and putting it into practice. Many would remember this ritual as the beginning of their careers as gay activists. 'We were really not saying, "God Save Us Nelly Queens,"' Mendenhall recalls of the weekly singing coming out of the Black Cat, 'We were saying, "We have our rights too."'[105] Robinson similarly remembers 'singing as a group so the cops could hear us from across the street' as the first occasion 'we recognized ourselves as a

[102] John D'Emilio, 'Gay Politics, Gay Community: San Francisco's Experience,' in *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p.83; Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movement*, p.27.
[103] Manuela Soares, 'The Purloined Ladder,' *Journal of Homosexuality,* volume 34, number 3-4 (1998): p.31. See also, D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, p.57.
[104] Mendenhall, 'George,' p.72.
[105] Ibid., p.73.

"group"' and began to 'speak about our needs *and demand* that they be recognized'.[106] For audience members like Mendenhall and Robinson, the weekly singing ritual at the Black Cat represented a crucial rite of passage. They came to the Black Cat one way, as self-identified but often ashamed gays, and left another, as proud gay activists standing up to their oppressors and demanding the respect of their rights and needs.

Knowing what Sarria taught those of his audience members who already identified as gay allows us to better appreciate why Sarria sought to harass, persuade, and tempt his 'normal' customers into identifying as gay in the first place. For Sarria, making his patrons identify as gay was not an end goal in itself. Nor did he see it as something that was of importance simply for the individual gay person, though he did believe that gay people living a double life were 'missing out on life' and the joys an openly gay life held in store.[107] Instead, moving spectators to a gay self-identification mattered because it made it possible to approach them with a set of political demands. It mattered, in other words, because of what it allowed Sarria *to do* with his audience members. Once they recognized themselves as gay, they could be addressed as members of a gay collectivity and urged to participate in collective action on behalf of their group. In the wake of Sarria's historic 1961 Supervisor campaign, that collectivity would come to be known by a new name, as the gay 'community'. The 'mass feeling of oneness, of unity and good fellowship' that gays experienced at the Black Cat operas would find expression in the coinage of a new concept.

Sarria's performances as gay worldmaking

In the final section of this chapter, I want to turn from the historical recovery of Sarria's performances to a reflection on the insights they might continue to offer to political movements, thinkers, and activists. Mining Sarria's shows for advice and inspiration may

[106] Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.75. Emphasis in the original.
[107] Sarria, interview by Gabriel, 15 September 1996, p.3. See also Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.161.

run counter to the spirit of a purely historicist enquiry and, on some accounts, the task of the historian itself. Perhaps, as Quentin Skinner has argued, we shall indeed 'do better to learn to do our own thinking for ourselves' instead of turning to the past in search for 'directly applicable 'lessons.''[108] However, for those of us engaged in political movements such visions will risk seeming inappropriately present-centred. When we understand our work as an extension of previous generations' struggles, we might learn to develop our thinking in dialogue with those who came before us, informed by both their successes and failures.[109] These exchanges rarely yield lessons that can be straightforwardly applied to our own lives and battles.[110] But even as we find ourselves in different historical circumstances pursuing other goals, the examples of our movement predecessors like Sarria may still guide us. We can especially benefit from looking at *how* they fought their struggles and 'the principles that are the basis of [their] practice' as Bernice Johnson Reagon has suggested.[111] Then, as we put old movement strategies, beliefs, and structures to novel use, we can hope to continue the vital tradition of carving out collective routes to our survival.

Amia Srinivasan's paper 'Genealogy, Epistemology and Worldmaking' offers a helpful interlocutor for examining what successor movements (gay and otherwise) might take from Sarria's performance. Srinivasan reflects on the conditions under which a particular set of political interventions, which she refers to as 'worldmaking', can prove successful. Worldmaking, as Srinivasan defines it in distinction from other recent usages is 'the transformation of the world through a transformation of our representational

[108] Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume 1, Regarding Methods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.88.
[109] See for example Bernice Johnson Reagon, 'Coalition Politics: Turning the Century,' in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), pp.363-364 for a call to study movement elders.
[110] See also adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017), p.17.
[111] Johnson Reagon, 'Coalition Politics: Turning the Century,' p.366

practices'.[112] Altering how we think about and conceptualize our social world, Srinivasan proposes, can seek to refashion it in one of two ways. First, by *causing* for changes to the social world to occur. One example Srinivasan gives here is how the substitution of the concept 'sex worker' for 'prostitute' alters the way sex workers are then treated and allows for questions concerning the sex workers' labour rights to come into view. Alternatively, we might think of how Sarria's representation of the gay bar patrons as rights bearers leads to them becoming mobilized and demanding that their rights be respected.

The second way in which worldmaking can be done is when changes in our representations 'have *constitutive effects,* bringing into existence new things or making things true'.[113] In this type of worldmaking, the transformation of our social world is already achieved by the refashioning of our representations. To give Srinivasan's own example, once the concept of the prostitute achieves a certain amount of discursive traction, it brings 'into existence a new sort of person – the prostitute – whose social role it is to be exploited by men, marginalized by the law, and condemned by society.'[114] Similarly, Sarria's representation of gay people as rights bearers attempts to *create* this figure of the gay rights bearer who cannot be indiscriminately attacked by state agents.

Presenting Sarria as an exemplar of a worldmaker aligns with Srinivasan's own interest in the worldmaking of marginalized groups as collective agents for whom 'such ideological upending has been not only possible, but necessary'.[115] Catharine MacKinnon and the feminist movement are her principal paradigm here, but she names

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[112] Amia Srinivasan, 'Genealogy, Epistemology and Worldmaking,' *Proceedings Of The Aristotelian Society,* volume CXIX, Part 2 (2019): p.145. Srinivasan self-consciously parses this term differently to Nelson Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978), the text she credits with inspiring her usage of the term in 'Genealogy'. For another recent application of the term in the realm of political thought that refers to worldmaking as the rethinking and remaking of the global world order, see Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire : The Rise and Fall of Self-determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[113] Srinivasan, 'Genealogy, Epistemology and Worldmaking', p.145.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid., p.139. For an earlier, brief account of Sarria's performances as worldmaking see Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movement*, p.27.

many others, including anti-imperial, Black liberationists and gay worldmaking attempts. By demarcating a particular form of activism that many different political movements engage in, Srinivasan opens up space to explore shared difficulties and what different worldmakers might learn from each other.

The main challenge Srinivasan identifies for worldmaking endeavours is to achieve sufficient uptake, in particular among those parties standing to lose from them. 'Simply changing one's own local representations hardly suffices to worldmake,' Srinivasan notes. 'One's proposed redescription must vie for uptake against the dominant mode of representation. This means it must be taken up by the very people whose interests will be undermined if the redescription does in fact take hold'.[116] To convince those gay people who were already suffering under police harassment to identify themselves as gay rights holders is not yet to accomplish worldmaking. The next, much harder step would have been to win over those homosexually active men who could pass as 'normal' men to enact this discursive shift. What insights can Sarria's shows offer to successor worldmakers seeking to overcome this type of hurdle?

Sarria's performances suggest that a strategic multiplicity of measures, not all consensual or non-violent, might be required to successfully address this obstacle. By itself, the 'unforced force of the better argument' may prove insufficient.[117] The example of the Black Cat bankers is illustrative here. In light of the significant risks that identifying as gay would incur for the bankers, simply telling them that they were gay was evidently not enough to stop them from pursuing their self-interest. Sarria therefore came to employ a wide variety of worldmaking strategies, including harassment, verbal argumentation, temptation, singing, and group pressure, to move the bankers to a gay

[116] Srinivasan, 'Genealogy, Epistemology and Worldmaking', p.146.
[117] This is Jürgen Habermas' term. For a recent discussion of the 'surprising amount of force' that 'lies behind and undergirds' even Habermas' own conception of the superior argument, see Amy Allen, 'The Unforced Force of the Better Argument: Reason and Power in Habermas' Political Theory,' *Constellations,* volume 19, number 3 (2012): pp.362-363.

self-identification. Sarria especially extolled the benefits of humour in getting customers to do things they did not want to do. 'To tell people something, you must do it in a humorous way,' he contended. 'If I was to come up here… to preach to you, you'd tell me "Go to hell," and you would do it anyway. But if you make it tongue in cheek, it works'.[118] Srinivasan too presents a diversity of activities not limited to verbal or written persuasion as holding worldmaking potential. She gives the example of 'Mamie Till's decision to publicly display the dead body of her son, in a bid to reclassify black boys as vulnerable children rather than violent threats' as an instance of non-verbal worldmaking.[119] Sarria's shows, then, serve as a further reminder of the wealth of tools available to prospective worldmakers, and of the necessity to use them liberally and simultaneously to overcome the great odds facing any worldmaking attempt.

Sarria's example may also inform prospective worldmakers' attempts to meet a second challenge Srinivasan identifies. Any redescriptive intervention, Srinivasan observes, 'must strike a fine balance between familiarity and departure. Too familiar, and it will be a recapitulation of what came before; too strange, and it will be unintelligible'.[120] In other words, those pursuing radical representational interventions need to communicate their visions in ways that both draw the world anew and also '*picture the world right*, as it is currently constituted' in the eyes of their target audience.[121]

Sarria's performances indicate that theory presented in the form of practice, what we might term, following Frederick Douglass and Saidiya Hartman, 'thought in deed', could be uniquely suited to help worldmaking projects retain their radicalness without having to sacrifice their intelligibility.[122] The gulf between the world as many first-time spectators of Sarria's shows had experienced it through a lifetime of (often internalized)

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[118] Sarria, 'Lecture for Variations in Human Sexuality class'.
[119] Srinivasan, 'Genealogy, Epistemology and Worldmaking', p.147.
[120] Ibid., p.150.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2019), pp.60-61; Saidiya V. Hartman and Fred Moten, *The Black Outdoors: Fred Moten and Saidiya Hartman at Duke University* (2016).

antigay shaming and assaults, and the world as he sought to remake it, in which being gay was a source of pride and the homosexual a deserving rights-bearer, was enormous. It is little wonder that upon first witnessing Sarria's shows many, like Robinson, were left to wonder, 'what in hell was going on?'[123]

To bridge this conceptual chasm, Sarria developed rituals that would make his visitors act in alignment with his vision before they were necessarily ready to commit themselves to that vision intellectually. Given the weight of their lifelong experiences, it is unlikely that patrons would have been able to immediately espouse Sarria's teachings that being gay was something to be proud of and that gay people were legitimate but discriminated-against right bearers. However, from their very first show they were induced through the singing of 'God Save Us Nelly Queens' to act *as if* what Sarria was suggesting was indeed true. When patrons later looked back upon how they had learned to see themselves as a group who 'could speak about our needs *and demand* that they be recognized,' they would be drawn back to descriptions of 'standing up at the Black Cat and singing as a group so the cops could hear us from across the street'.[124] Through altering his patrons' actions, Sarria was able to begin laying a bridge from the familiar to the strange that his audience members were then more able to traverse intellectually. To other worldmakers, Sarria's success might intimate that even though worldmaking aims at rewriting the landscape of our representations, it may occasionally find a prosperous beginning elsewhere: at the distinct, though related site of our actions.

[123] Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.44.
[124] Ibid., p.75.

Chapter 3

José Sarria's 1961 campaign for San Francisco City Supervisor and the birth of the idea of a gay 'community'

By spring 1961, female impersonator José Sarria's success at fashioning gay activists allowed him to enter a new stage in his political leadership. As more and more homosexually active people expressed a readiness to identify as gay, come together, and fight for their rights, discussions could gradually shift from *why* to become a gay activist to *where* and *how* to take collective action. Sarria was convinced that mobilizing more people to identify as gay and defend their group could win improvements across many different facets of gay life, including, for example, their sexual health.[1] However, the primary focus of his activities at his place of employment, the Black Cat café, had long lain with the fight against oppressive law enforcement agencies.

With the backing of hundreds of gay bar patrons, staff, and owners, Sarria began more concertedly organising around the issue of antigay policing. For this purpose, he co-founded in March 1961 the first political organisation coming out of San Francisco's gay bars, the League for Civil Education (LCE, pronounced 'Elsie').[2] Half a year later, LCE's formation paved the way for transferring the battle against police harassment from the city's stages and courts into its voting booths. When Sarria announced his candidacy for San Francisco City Supervisor in the November 1961 municipal elections, he launched a historic political campaign as the first openly gay person to run for political office in the United States. Although Sarria ultimately failed to win one of the five open seats, coming in twenty-ninth out of thirty-three candidates with a total of 5,613 votes, historians of US LGBTIQ history have widely recognized his campaign as a resounding success. They have credited it with demonstrating the potential of a gay electoral politics

[1] Michael Robert Gorman, *The Empress is a Man: Stories from the Life of José Sarria* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.162.
[2] Activists of the League adopted both L.C.E. and LCE as acronyms. In this thesis, I use LCE.

to contemporaries and successor generations,[3] with helping fashion an overtly political understanding of homosexuality,[4] and with setting in motion or feeding 'a steadily growing stream of gay political activity' that would eventually transform San Francisco over the course of the 1960s into the nation's 'gay capital'.[5]

In providing the most extensive reconstruction of Sarria's campaign to date, this chapter is not motivated by setting these various accounts right, all of which capture important elements of Sarria's candidacy. My aim is instead to draw attention to an aspect of Sarria's campaign which, though it has so far evaded scholarly attention, constitutes one of its most enduring legacies: its role in producing a novel way of conceptualising San Francisco's gay population, the idea of a gay 'community'. In standard narrative, form preceded idea, and gay 'community' is coined in mid-1960s San Francisco to describe a rapidly expanding gay bar life and its increasing community character.[6] In a correction to these accounts, this chapter identifies Sarria's 1961 run for City Supervisor as the concept's moment of emergence. Through a recovery of the campaign's objectives, key events, and obstacles, I seek to explain why activists fashioned the notion of a gay community in this particular context – and what it was meant to achieve.

Sarria's campaign was devised to ward off the Black Cat's threatened closure and improve the lives of San Francisco's gay population more generally. It sought to do so in two ways. On the one hand, by encouraging the City's gay residents to assert their rights and liberties more confidently. On the other, by proving the existence of a large and

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[3] Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 210, 212; Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p.73; Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *gay by the bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996), p.42.

[4] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.210; John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, Second ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1983]), p.188.

[5] Ibid., pp.188f., 195; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.203.

[6] See especially D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, chapter 10, particularly pp. 176-177, 195. Nan Alamilla Boyd also identifies the mid-1960s as the moment in which gay community is 'shape[d] and articulate[d]'. See Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp.227-231.

unified gay voting bloc to the oppressive state authorities. To achieve these goals, the campaign focused on garnering gay votes only, a strategy that came at the expense of more coalitional visions for Sarria's candidacy. The campaign's mobilizing efforts reached their peak at the gay holiday of Halloween when Sarria defied police suppression to promote his campaign to thousands of the city's gay revellers. Not all gay residents, however, approved of Sarria's campaign. Prevailing prejudices amongst more respectable gay men and women against gender nonconformity risked undermining Sarria's attempts to prove the existence of – or indeed, call into being – a unified gay population. Faced with this challenge, Sarria's supporters coined the idea of a gay 'community' in an attempt to bridge these ideological divides. It sought to establish that gays held a responsibility to their 'community' and create the very community the term seemed to presuppose. The campaign's partial success at proving the existence of substantial numbers of gay voters laid some crucial foundations for the gradual, subsequent consolidation of the idea of a gay 'community' in the years to come.

The League for Civil Education and the fight against antigay policing

The more Sarria worked on the issue of antigay policing, the more his awareness grew of the need for gay mass resistance. Sarria's outspokenness increasingly drew those who had been arrested to approach him for advice and 'phone [him] at all hours of the night'.[7] Witnessing both the need and the heightened readiness among San Franciscan gays to fight discriminatory law enforcement, Sarria decided in early 1961 that the time had come to expand the fight off-stage. Together with his friend Guy Strait (his legal name) and several other activists, he co-founded the first formal political organisation emerging out of San Francisco's gay bars, the League for Civil Education.[8] At this point,

[7] 'José: A Portrait,' John Gieske, *The Sentinel,* volume 7, number 2, January 25, 1980, found in *José Sarria Papers*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, box 1, folder 12 ('Clippings 1980-1989').
[8] For a list of LCE's founders, see 'Minutes of First Meeting of Incorporators and Directors of League for Civil Education, A California Non-Profit Corporation', ibid., box 23, folder 1 ('League of Civil Education 1961-1962').

Sarria had been 'preaching' to his audiences for years that state oppression could only be overcome by sticking together, organising yourself, and resisting as a collectivity. 'United we stand, divided they catch us one by one,' he never tired to remind them. [9] With the founding of LCE, Sarria and his collaborators ventured to prove to what degree this held true.

In its first six months, LCE conducted a wide range of activities in pursuit of its core aim to build a movement against the oppressive policing of San Francisco's homosexually active population.[10] At their first event in March 1961, LCE hoped to initiate a dialogue on 'Problems of civil rights and harassment of alleged homosexuals in bars' between bar operators and patrons on the one hand, and their oppressors in the SFPD, ABC, and the office of the District Attorney on the other.[11] Unimpressed with the state agencies' lack of commitment – only two lower-rank police officers attended, or perhaps rather, monitored the meeting – LCE's subsequent events took a more confrontational stance.[12] Over the summer, LCE held two free public 'forums' in the San Francisco Main Library.[13] The first informed the primarily gay audience on their rights in case of arrest, the second on California's new anti-vagrancy law that was signed into effect in June 1961.[14] (The previous anti-vagrancy law had been among the statutes San Francisco police most

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[9] For statements of this motto or similar teachings see José Sarria Speech at 1995 San Francisco Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Pride Celebration, ibid., box 4, folder 1 ('Awards and Honors, 1970-2010'); Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.219; Joe Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); José Sarria, 'Speech at Lesbian and Gay Freedom Day' (1981), San Francisco; José Sarria et al., interview by Randy Alfred, *The Gay Life Radio Series,* GLBT Historical Society, 12 April 1980; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.59; Jordan Lee, interview by Paul Gabriel and Philip Hong, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 10 August 1995, p.54.

[10] That this constituted LCE's main objective often remained unstated. For LCE's official, obscure statement of purpose see for example *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 5, 11 December 1961, p.6. For an earlier handbill that more explicitly linked LCE's founding to the fight against police harassment see reprint of 'Facts about the League for Civil Education' in *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, box 17, folder 2 ('DOB/Mattachine - FBI Released Documents').

[11] Notice of LCE Meeting on March 21, 1961, *José Sarria Papers*, box 23, folder 1.

[12] Letter from Guy Strait to Chief of Police Cahill, March 31, 1961, ibid.; 'Report to the Membership,' *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 15, 29 April, 1963, p.1.

[13] FBI report on 'homosexual activities' in San Francisco, 1/29/62, in *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers*, box 17, folder 2; Herbert Donaldson, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 2 September 1996, p.1.

[14] For testimony to the primarily gay composition of the audience, see Herbert Donaldson and Evander Smith, 'The Defenders,' in *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990*, ed. Eric Marcus (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), p.147.

frequently cited in their arrests of homosexuals and members of other marginalised communities, notably African Americans.)[15] Concurrently, the LCE leadership was meeting with attorneys and securing legal counsel for several arrested homosexuals.[16]

LCE turned to the gay bars to recruit members and build a mass movement. In spring and summer 1961, Sarria led advertised visits to some of the City's gay bars in which he introduced the organisation and its purposes, told gays 'that they could exert political pressure if they organized, and then solicited memberships'.[17] By the end of the summer, LCE could already hope to impress potential recruits with a record as one of the Bay Area's leading groups in the struggle against state harassment.

In autumn 1961, LCE added with the publication of *L.C.E. News* what would prove to become its most durable weapon in the fight against state oppression.[18] A biweekly newspaper, *L.C.E. News* first appeared on October 16, 1961. It was initially sent only to LCE's membership as well as being laid out for free in many gay bars. Unlike earlier LCE newsletters written by Sarria, *L.C.E. News* was the pet project of Strait, its editor and principal author. Strait's commitment to the publication was immense.[19] He 'was content

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[15] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.217.

[16] LCE Newsletter of April 15, 1961, *José Sarria Papers*, box 23, folder 1.

[17] FBI report on 'homosexual activities' in San Francisco, 1/29/62, in *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers*, box 17, folder 2 ('DOB/Mattachine - FBI Released Documents'). See also LCE Newsletter of 15 April 1961, *José Sarria Papers*, box 23, folder 1.

[18] *The News,* as *L.C.E. News* had by then been renamed, ceased to act as LCE's official newspaper at the end of 1963. Strait, however, continued to publish it as *Citizens' News* and then *Cruise News and World Reports* until February 1967. (The end of *The News* as LCE's official publication is noted here, *The News*, volume 3, number 7, 13 January 1964, p.1. *L.C.E. News* became *The News* from volume 2, number 17, 27 May 1963. *The News* turned into *Citizens News* from volume 3, number 7, 13 January 1964 and ceased publication with volume 4, number 4 in March 1967. Strait published *Cruise News and World Report* from June 1965 to February 1967.)

[19] Little is known of Strait's pre-LCE political activities. See Guy Strait, interview by Unknown interviewer, *Video Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 30 November 1986 for the only surviving oral history with Strait which contains some discussion of his early life. He had briefly joined Mattachine Society in the 1950s but left over disagreements with the organisation's conservative tactics. (Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 208). In the late 1960s and 1970s, Strait would serve several years in prison for child pornography (See Clifford L. Linedecker, *Children in Chains* (New York: Everest House, 1981), pp. 240-241). On Strait's imprisonment, see also Scott De Orio, "Guy Strait and the Making of "Bad" Queers in the Long 1970s" (Queer History Conference 2022, San Francisco, 2022) Letter from Guy Strait to Bill [Plath?], 1 May 1976, *José Sarria Papers*, box 6, folder 8 ('Correspondence 1976); Letter from Guy Strait to José Sarria, 1 June 1976, ibid.; Letter from Guy Strait to Dick Andretta, 3 July 1978, ibid., box 6, folder 10 ('Correspondence 1978); 'Guy Strait,' *Declassified files of the Federal Bureau of Investigation* received by the author on 3 January 2020 following an FOIA request. Jim Kepner, interview by Paul D. Cain, *https://www.tangentgroup.org/kepner-interview/,* The Tangent Group, 8 January 1994.

to live in a small apartment and devote his time to putting out the *L.C.E. News*' and 'practically abandoned' the basis of his livelihood, his work as a travelling salesman.[20] *L.C.E. News* allowed the organisation to promote its activities, recruit members, and communicate news on events and conversations taking place inside San Francisco's gay bars. In the words of gay activist Rick Stokes, the paper was 'the way in which we were kept aware as to what was going on.'[21] From its inaugural issues, this included information on the fight against discriminatory law enforcement agencies. Each issue of *L.C.E. News* was replete with revealing articles on state harassment, police corruption, and gay resistance. Its militant character added to its appeal and *L.C.E. News* became a hugely popular addition to San Francisco's gay bar life.[22] At its height, it claimed to reach a circulation of 10,000 copies, which exceeded the (nationwide) figures of all the biggest homophile publications.[23]

Through their focus on antigay policing, LCE modelled gay activism as a solidarity politics that prioritized the concerns of less protected gay subgroups. Sarria hoped to 'help the little man who was gay, who was out on the street, that would get into hot water.'[24] He was dismayed that existing gay organisations, and in particular Mattachine Society, pursued political strategies based on educating more privileged gay (and heterosexual) groups, 'the upper crust, the lawyers and that' as Sarria referred to them.[25] Sarria could not understand why gay activists should centre their energies on those who had less need of their support. 'My argument was that those people are not the ones

[20] 'Report to the Membership,' *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 15, April 29, 1963; Donaldson, interview by Gabriel, 2 September 1996, p.4.
[21] Rick Stokes, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 19 September 1996, p.10.
[22] See chapter four for a discussion of how *L.C.E. News'* militancy added to, rather than subtracted from, its mass appeal.
[23] 'Third Year', *The News,* volume 3, number 1, 14 October 1963; 'The League', *The News,* volume 3, number 4, 25 November 1963; D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, p.189.
[24] José Sarria, interview by Jim Breeden, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, date unknown.
[25] Ibid.

…sucking dick … and getting arrested. So we don't need to go to them. We need to go to the ones that are getting arrested and help them.'[26]

One subgroup that Sarria's 'little man' might have been referencing in particular were gays of colour. As we saw in chapter one, police violence singled out this group for particularly harsh treatment. The extent to which LCE's concern with antigay policing might have been a response to its racial dimension is, however, unclear. Extant documents suggest that the League did not publicly frame their anti-policing struggle as motivated in this way. It is possible though that this silence was more a product of strategic decisions than of ideological commitments. As Sarah Schulman has noted in her discussions of ACT UP New York, gay activists of colour organising in white-dominated settings have sometimes deliberately eschewed conversations on race when these would detract from the urgent political work that needed to be done. Rather than 'waste their time trying to teach their white male comrades to be less … racist,' ACT UP organisers of color got on with things and channelled ACT UPs extensive resources toward fights that primarily aided more marginalised groups.[27] Sarria's contemporary, LA-based female impersonator and gay activist Sir Lady Java made a similar decision. In her interactions with the predominately white ACLU in the 1960s, Java framed police injunctions against her genderbending performances in racially neutral terms as a workplace discrimination issue. Later in her life, however, she reclaimed her struggle as a fight against the wider issue of anti-Black racial profiling.[28] Sarria might have likewise understated any racial motivations behind LCE's focus on antigay policing out of calculations of political expediency.

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[26] Ibid. See also José Sarria, 'Lecture for Variations in Human Sexuality class' (1986), San Francisco State University (SFSU). On Sarria's reasons for founding LCE and his disagreement with Mattachine see also ——, interview by John Lockhart, 2001; ———, interview by Randy Shilts, *Randy Shilts Papers,* San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco History Center, 1980?, pp.4-5.

[27] Sarah Schulman, *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021), p.32.

[28] Treva Ellison, 'The Labor of Werqing It: The Performance and Protest Strategies of Sir Lady Java,' in *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, ed. Tourmaline, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2017), p.10.

If, on the other hand, LCE's silence was evidence of a lack of antiracist analysis, then the fact that LCE nevertheless focused on an issue that disproportionately affected gays of colour would still underscore the importance of gay of colour leadership. Such leadership could suffice to turn a group's priorities toward the needs of racialised gays even where the leaders did not act out of antiracist intentions. Their lived experiences with sometimes overtly, sometimes covertly racialised police violence still shaped their political priorities.

State agents greeted LCE's resistance to antigay policing with hostility. Ironically, their reaction is best preserved in the records of the Federal Bureau of Investigations' (FBI) extensive operation to monitor, infiltrate, and undermine the first US gay political organisations.[29] LCE formed no exception to this rule. From as early as May 1961, a couple of months after LCE's formation, FBI agents began collating information about the organisation from informants attending LCE events and various state agencies.[30] During a speech at the East Bay Intelligence Group's meeting of 17 January 1962, an ABC representative informed his colleagues at other state institutions with a mixture of disdain, disgust, and alarm of the new gay organisation.[31] Disparagingly referring to gay activists as 'fruits' or 'homos', he sneered at the temerity of LCE organisers to inform gay people of their 'rights' (citation marks in the original). LCE were not only to be laughed at, however. The ABC investigator also menacingly characterized it 'as a militant organization which is fighting the vagrancy laws and is endeavoring to do everything it can to discredit law enforcement.' He predicted that LCE would 'continue to attack law enforcement agencies, law enforcement methods, legislation aimed at coping with the sexual deviate, and any

[29] On the FBI's campaign, see Douglas M. Charles, *Hoover's War on Gays: Exposing the FBI's "Sex Deviates" Program* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2015).
[30] FBI report from San Francisco 5/23/61, *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers*, box 17, folder 2. These appear to have included no one other than Hal Call, president of the Mattachine Society (see Eric Cervini, *The Deviant's War: The Homosexual vs. the United States of America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), p.408).
[31] FBI report on 'Homosexual Activities' from San Francisco, 1/29/62, *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers* The exact composition of the group is left unstated in the document.

officers that are engaged in the investigation of homos or homo premises.'[32] While the investigator found evidence for his hypothesis in speeches made at LCE events and *L.C.E. News* articles, he failed to mention LCE's most audacious recent action, Sarria's campaign for San Francisco City Supervisor.

The motivations behind Sarria's campaign

Sarria's activism with LCE proved a vital steppingstone toward his 1961 campaign. From very early on, LCE's strategizing against state harassment included the pursuit of a pro-gay electoral politics.[33] In a newsletter of 15 April 1961, Sarria announced that the yet-to-be-incorporated organisation would seek to secure the 'protection' of San Francisco's gay population in part by supporting the 'election of public officials who are not bigots'.[34] Sometime between April and October – there is insufficient evidence for even an approximate dating – this broad determination turned into Sarria's specific decision to stand as a candidate for one of the five open San Francisco City Supervisor seats in the upcoming November 7 municipal elections. It was the first time an openly gay candidate would compete for US political office.

Framed by an overarching concern with antigay state harassment, the campaign was motivated by a series of smaller objectives that extended beyond simply winning a seat, a goal few of Sarria's supporters considered realistic.[35] In the eyes of Sarria and his employer at the Black Cat, Sol Stoumen, the campaign's most important sponsor, Sarria's candidacy most immediately served as a means to fight back against the Cat's threatened closure and protect the basis of their economic survival.[36] For Stoumen and

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[32] Ibid.
[33] For an earlier instance of homophile activists arguing for the importance of a gay electoral politics, see Del Martin, 'Editorial: The Homosexual Vote', *The Ladder*, volume 4, number 10 (July 1960), pp.4-5.
[34] LCE Newsletter of 15 April 1961, *José Sarria Papers*, box 23, folder 1.
[35] See the discussion below of how Sarria's supporters reacted to his loss.
[36] Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1982), p.56; Charlotte Coleman, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, early 1997, p.102. See also 'Golden Gate Park: Fog, Fags, & Famine,' Angelo d'Arcangelo, *José Sarria Papers*, box 1, folder 11 ('Clippings 1970-1979'), p.5.

his staff, the intensification of state persecution from 1960 onwards had come at an inopportune time. At that point, the Black Cat found itself already four years into a protracted legal battle to avert the state's fourth and ultimately successful attempt to revoke Stoumen's liquor license. Three times the Cat had fought back, and each time it had gained another life. As the appeal wound its way through the courts, it became increasingly clear that it might not be granted a fifth.

Stoumen's growing awareness about the Black Cat's diminishing prospects expressed itself in desperate efforts to enter into negotiations with the state. In early 1960, Stoumen launched two such attempts, both unsuccessful.[37] As one ABC agent claimed to have told Stoumen, the Black Cat had become a 'symbol' in the fight against unruly gay bars and the state was determined to close it once and for all.[38] Other bar owners might have been expected to seek such arrangements with state agents.[39] For Stoumen, the stubborn and principled heterosexual champion of San Francisco's gay bar scene who had consistently refused to pay extortion money, this was highly out of character.[40] His increasing willingness to compromise betrayed a dawning sense of hopelessness.

The Black Cat's legal position became even more precarious in early 1961 when failures at informal negotiation were followed by bad news from the courts. On 17 March 1961, the Superior Court announced that it had signed on its findings and judgement in favour of the ABC.[41] Many other owners of gay bars gave up when they reached a similar stage in their respective legal battles.[42] Stoumen once more proved his exceptional tenacity when he decided to continue the legal battle and filed a motion for a new trial on

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[37] For Stoumen's attempts at negotiating a lower penalty, see "'Petition for Writ of Certiorari and Points and Authorities in Support Thereof," in *Stoumen v. Harris, Supreme Court of the State of California* (private collection of Joe Castel), Exhibit E, pp.14-23.
[38] Ibid., Exhibit E, p.17.
[39] James (Robbie) Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, 2017, San Francisco Public Library, Unpublished manuscript, p.62.
[40] Sarria, interview by Breeden, date unknown.
[41] 'Petition for Writ of Certiorari', p.22.
[42] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.144.

17 April 1961.[43] To what extent he still believed in the legal process at this point is unclear. By autumn 1961, however, Sarria's participation in the San Francisco city elections offered another glimmer of hope.

Sarria aspired for his campaign to contribute toward saving the Black Cat and improving the lives of San Francisco's gay population more generally by delivering two key messages to the City's gay residents and its antigay authorities. To San Francisco's gay population, Sarria aspired to deliver a message of empowerment. In a continuation of his civil rights centred activism at the Black Cat, Sarria sought to encourage them to demand recognition of their equality and rights as US citizens. He felt that gay people had been 'browbeaten' into thinking they were 'second-rate citizens' with less than full citizen rights.[44] In reality, they could often successfully call to have their rights respected if only they dared 'to take advantage'.[45] The rights Sarria was most concerned with were rights related to the electoral process, particularly the rights to vote and stand in elections. In the early 1960s, many gay people, and especially those with police records, felt scared to even register to vote, fearing that the city administration might respond by publicly denouncing them as convicted homosexuals and re-arresting them.[46] To run for office as an openly gay person was even more 'unheard of' to the vast majority of the City's gay inhabitants.[47]

Sarria aimed to use the campaign to prove that gay concerns about voting and running for political office were inflated. As so often in his career, Sarria did not rely merely on theoretical arguments to prove his point. A shrewd strategist, he understood that his claims would be significantly bolstered if he staged dramatic events to illustrate their veracity, events that would quickly become the talk of the town. To demonstrate

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[43] 'Petition for Writ of Certiorari', p.22.
[44] Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p. 206.
[45] Sarria, interview by Lockhart, 2001?.
[46] Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980; José Sarria and Bob Ross, interview by Randy Alfred, *The Gay Life Radio Series,* GLBT Historical Society, 18 January 1981; ibid.
[47] Craig Daley, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 19 February 1995, p.104.

that gay fears about voter registration were unfounded, Sarria recruited his close friend, the celebrated female impersonator Michelle to register as a first-time voter in front of a substantial gay audience.[48] As this spectacle demonstrated, even someone as rebellious as Michelle, whose willingness to defy state authorities and risk arrest were well-known, could register to vote.[49] Similarly, Sarria's own courageous run for City Supervisor sought to demonstrate that even gay people, and even gay people *like him* who by autumn 1961 had been arrested at least once for a so-called 'sex crime' and was 'notorious' for defying various city ordinances, could run for office.[50]

By disarming gay fears about the voting process and achieving a mass turnout, Sarria could hope to transmit a second, related message of gay strength to the city authorities. Wedded as they were to seeing homosexuals as a small number of abnormal, isolated individuals, many state agents believed that the City's gay inhabitants would never form a large, organised group with the capacity to promote its own political agenda.[51] This interpretation allowed state authorities to pursue their anti-gay agenda with confidence and an expectation of impunity. Many gays too shared the assumption that their group could never be united, and used this belief as a justification for their inaction.[52]

In order to change this attitude, Sarria intended to use the campaign as an unofficial censes of the city's gay population. A decade prior, Alfred Kinsey's best-selling studies *Sexual Behavior of the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human*

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[48] Sarria later claimed that as many as two hundred fifty gay people attended Michelle's registration (see Sarria and Ross, interview by Alfred, 18 January 1981; Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980).
[49] For Michelle's history of defying anti-gay state authorities see Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p. 67; Fernando Feliciano, interview by Kurt Schroeder, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 31 May 1995, p.15.
[50] José Sarria, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 15 September 1996, pp.4-5; ———, interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open History Town,* GLBT Historical Society, 15 April 1992, p. 10; Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*; Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980; Sarria and Ross, interview by Alfred, 18 January 1981, p.205f; Sarria, interview by Breeden, date unknown; Benjamin Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movement* (London: Routledge, 2011), p.29.
[51] See the discussion in chapter one, and also Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p. 205f; Sarria, 'Lecture for Variations in Human Sexuality class'.
[52] 'Community', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 26, 1 October 1962; 'We Must Fight Now'.

Female (1953) had illustrated to the nation that homosexual behavior was much more common than the authorities were ready to admit.[53] The activists behind LCE had been working for a while to find ways of demonstrating this in San Francisco. Four years before the campaign, they campaigned for homosexuals to cast a dissenting vote on an obscure municipal bill, lever 37a, in order to test their numbers. More than eight thousand responded.[54] Building on this success, Sarria's campaign was to once more, but this time more transparently, 'tally by secret ballot the voting strength of this minority group' as DOB's *The Ladder* reported.[55] Sarria sought to prove that there were as many as 'ten thousand voting queens' in San Francisco ready to support a pro-gay candidate and join an organised effort to push back against antigay harassment.[56] Sarria and his supporters shared the belief that if gays 'never showed any sort of cohesion or being able to work together,' they would never be treated differently.[57]

Getting the audiences' attention

Perhaps unsurprisingly for a female impersonator, Sarria conceived of his campaign in theatrical terms as a performance and of the two groups he was seeking to speak to as his audiences.[58] Sarria's chosen designation on the 1961 ballot sheet, 'entertainer-host',

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[53] For discussions of Kinsey's studies, their findings and results, see Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), chapter 9; John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, Third ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 285-287, pp.285-287.

[54] On the lever 37a campaign, see Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, interview by Scott Bishop, *Scott Bishop Papers,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 1 May 1990, p.8; Letter from Guy Strait to Charlie [Randy Wicker], 1 October 1962, *Randy Wicker Papers*, New York Public Library, New York, box 1, folder 'Correspondence (General), 1961-1962'; 'L.C.E. One Year Old', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 14, 16 April 1962.

[55] 'Here and There', *The Ladder*, volume 6, number 1, October 1961, p.22.

[56] Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); Sarria, 'Lecture for Variations in Human Sexuality class'; Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, p.102; Sarria, interview by Lockhart, 2001; Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movement*, p.29; 'José: A Portrait', Gieske.

[57] Don Lucas, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 30 December 1996 through 28 February 1998, p.209. On the influence gay campaigns to prove themselves a cultural minority had on treatment in the legal system and the press, see Anna Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol: Cops, Courts, and the Struggle over Urban Gay Life before Stonewall* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), p.10.

[58] See also 'Today's Performance' in *José Sarria Papers*, box 1, folder 10 ('Writings about Jose Sarria, 1984-2002').

marked both what he wished the average voter to know about his professional life but also aptly summarized his own understanding of political campaigning.[59] 'Watch me', he told city authorities whenever they questioned his assertion that 'ten thousand voting queens' lived in San Francisco and that they could be united behind a gay cause.[60] 'Watch me', he replied to any gay people who expressed scepticism over whether an openly gay person like Sarria would be allowed to run for office.[61] Such statements sought to transform doubt into excitement. For, as Sarria understood so well from years of stage experience, the success of his campaign depended not on him alone, but on the interplay between performer and audience - on how his ideas and actions landed with his target audiences, and whether they landed at all.

Given the recent events surrounding the 1959 Wolden affair and the 1960 Gayola scandal, Sarria probably never needed to be concerned about receiving the authorities' attention.[62] Sarria learnt how closely indeed they were watching his campaign when he attempted to file his registration as a candidate and struggled to receive the support of any of the two major parties. It was only after Sarria threatened to sue the Democratic Party, the party he had voted for all his life and with whom he was registered as a voter, that they finally allowed him to list himself as a Democratic candidate, though without party endorsement.[63] Sarria's supporters made sure the SFPD, too, bore witness to their historic campaign. They installed a large banner outside the Black Cat which announced its status as the campaign headquarters. It could not have been missed by the police officers in the Hall of Justice across the street.[64] As we will hear more about below, police attention was further confirmed by their hostile reaction to Sarria and his supporters during the Halloween 1961 celebrations.

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[59] For the ballot sheet and other official materials related to the 1961 elections see folder 'Elections: 1961' in *Subject Collection*, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco.
[60] Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.206; Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980.
[61] Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020).
[62] See the discussion in chapter two.
[63] Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980; Sarria, interview by Gabriel, 15 September 1996, p.5.
[64] 'Candidate Arrested,' *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 4, [undated].

While Sarria's campaign had reasons to be confident that they had succeeded at attracting the interest of one of their target audiences, they did not know until election night whether they had managed to draw the other and to convince the City's gay residents to cast their vote for Sarria. Much of the energy and meagre budget of Sarria's campaign was hence dedicated to winning gay voters.

Sarria's team primarily turned its attention to the city's gay bars as a ready source of voters. Equipped with a thousand campaign postcards and posters printed at Pan-Graphic Press, the printing enterprise run by Don Lucas and Hal Call of Mattachine Society, they ran the circuit of San Francisco's gay bars to promote the campaign, collect campaign contributions and try to win potential voters.[65] The campaign's profile in the bars was further strengthened by the presence of *L.C.E. News.*[66] Thanks to the efforts of Sarria's supporters, Sarria's candidacy remained a recurrent topic of conversation in many San Francisco gay bars in the pre-election months.[67] From the bars, Sarria's campaign spread across the city and its gay meeting spots. It especially sent out supporters to the City's gay cruising spots, its parks and department stores, to register voters who might not visit the bars.[68] By October 1961, Sarria's camp claimed to have registered more than ten thousand new voters.[69]

The bars also collected campaign donations and supplied Sarria's modest budget.[70] At the campaign headquarters, the Black Cat, Sarria received his largest contribution, $200 from Sol Stoumen, a donation that made up over half of the campaign's budget.[71] Stoumen also supported Sarria by renting him part of his property for the hectic campaign

[65] Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); *José Sarria Papers*, box 25, folder 9 ('Receipts').
[66] Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, p.101.
[67] Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.86.
[68] Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020).
[69] *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 1, 16 October 1961.
[70] *José Sarria Papers*, box 25, folder 9.
[71] Ibid.

period to save him his commute to work.[72] During this period, Sarria and Stoumen's wife Candy regularly shared cooking responsibilities. [73] Sarria and Stoumen became '[a]s close as people can be on a friendly basis'.[74]

Sarria's campaign focused on proving the existence of a local constituency but fired the imagination of gay supporters nationwide. As extant letters of support show, enthusiasm for Sarria's campaign spread across the West Coast and at least as far east as Abilene, Texas.[75] It found a particularly fervent advocate in Robert Barrows, an employee or owner of a Portland gay bar who reported having overheard customers discuss Sarria's candidacy at several occasions. Barrows knew of Sarria's campaign postcards, requested further campaign literature and in addition to sending a campaign contribution of five dollars offered to distribute a hundred postcards to his customers to send to friends in San Francisco at his own expense.[76]

While Sarria and his supporters promoted the campaign widely within gay networks, they refrained from pursuing heterosexual voters. This choice aligned with their campaign goal to prove that large numbers of gay voters resided in the city. Winning many heterosexual votes would have been detrimental to this endeavour. Forgoing the heterosexual vote meant on the one hand declining speaking invitations. Of the nearly thirty invitations Sarria received to address unions, neighbourhood associations, interest groups and other organisations, he seems to have turned down all but one by local radio station KCBS. Sarria repeatedly excused himself with reference to the large number of

[72] Sarria's regular address was at 759 14th Avenue in the far-away Richmond District. See ballot sheet in *Subject Collection*, folder '1961 Elections'.
[73] José Sarria, interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town History Project,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 20 May 1992, p.6.
[74] Ibid., p.7.
[75] *José Sarria Papers*, box 25, folders 6 ('Campaign Materials') and 7 ('Correspondence'). See also Stokes, interview by Gabriel, 19 September 1996, p.11.
[76] *José Sarria Papers*, box 25, folder 7. Subsequent reports of The Tavern in *L.C.E. News* confirm its status as a gay bar. See for example advertisement in *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 14, 16 April 1962.

invitations he received that made it impossible for him to accept all invitations. In light of this unfortunate circumstance, he explained, he had decided to accept none.[77]

The other measure Sarria took to avoid attracting heterosexual votes was to adapt his language in mixed, hetero-homosexual settings so as to make his candidacy illegible and unappealing to straight voters. When Sarria accepted the invitation of radio station KCBS to appear on their 'Meet the Candidates for Supervisor' segment of November 3, 1961, his speech was broadcast across the city.[78] It is unlikely, however, that many heterosexual listeners would have understood why the replacement of laws 'in the municipal codes of San Francisco that are outdated, obsolete, unnecessary and which tend to infringe' on citizens' rights was important enough to form this candidate's central campaign promise. Sarria named two police code sections he intended to abolish, one against washing streets and sidewalks between 8 AM and 6 PM, and the other against appearing in public as an 'unsightly or improper person'. Neither of these obscure examples is likely to have inspired urgency in his heterosexual listeners. Gay and other minority listeners, on the other hand, would have been more clued in to Sarria's political priorities. They had ample experience with police officers using vague and seemingly outdated statutes against crimes like vagrancy, public drunkenness and dressing in clothing 'of the opposite sex' as tools of oppression against minority subjects.[79] Gay people were so frequently booked on these statutes that they developed abbreviations for them.[80]

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[77] *José Sarria Papers*, box 25, folder 8 ('Invitations to Speak'). Later in his life, Sarria sometimes claimed that he gave campaign speeches in several schools (see for example, Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.206). These claims are not corroborated by extant documentation of Sarria's campaign. If Sarria did indeed speak in schools, and his inconsistent later statements render this somewhat doubtful, the relevant point here seems to be that Sarria's presumably predominantly heterosexual school audiences would not have been able to cast a vote. His attempts to count the number of gay San Francisco voters could have still proceeded unimpaired.

[78] One copy of the speech is printed in *José Sarria Papers*, box 25, folder 6 ('S.F. Board of Supervisors, 1961, Campaign Materials'), another is part of the GLBT Historical Society's permanent exhibition. The subsequent citations are to the former copy.

[79] See chapter two.

[80] For example, 'grand vag' as shorthand for 'grand vagrancy' (see Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.105).

As we shall see in more detail below, *L.C.E. News* similarly advertised Sarria's candidacy in cryptic language that heterosexuals who entered gay bars would not have been able to decode. It never once clarified that Sarria was a gay candidate and that this was why the paper was supporting him. As lesbian bar owner Charlotte Coleman explained, *L.C.E. News* was the primary avenue through which the people involved in the gay bar life were kept abreast with developments relating to Sarria's campaign. Any heterosexual patron picking it up, however, 'wouldn't have known' that the paper was promoting a gay candidate.[81] They lacked the required familiarity with the subcultural context to make sense of the bar rag's persistent advocacy for this particular candidate. In its disregard for the heterosexual voter, *L.C.E. News* was typical of Sarria's campaign.

Not all of Sarria's supporters agreed with this exclusive focus on gay voters. Some saw in Sarria's candidacy a potential window toward a wider coalitional politics between different marginalised groups. A supporter going by the name of Sal suggested that Sarria should go after Spanish-speaking voters. Sal urged Sarria to visit Latinx bars, cafes, and stores with campaign posters as well as place advertisements in Latinx newspapers.[82] Another backer, Hortense, thought that Sarria should set his sight on winning black voters. Hortense encouraged Sarria to visit the Big Glass, a white-owned but black-patronised, predominantly gay bar in the African American Fillmore neighbourhood, and ask to leave campaign material there.[83]

There is no surviving evidence, however, that Sarria heeded this advice. His focus appears to have remained steadfastly on using his campaign as an unofficial gay census. As Nan Alamilla Boyd commented on the unfulfilled coalitional promise of Sarria's activism, 'Sarria's leadership anticipated one direction that a politicized queer social movement might (but ultimately did not) go - toward a true coalition between

[81] Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, p.101. See also 'Dear Senator', *The News*, volume 3, number 2, 28 October 1963.
[82] Undated note from Sal to Sarria, *José Sarria Papers*, box 25, folder 6.
[83] Note from Hortense to Sarria, 10 October 1961, ibid.

disenfranchised groups'.[84] It seems that Sarria himself played a part in pushing LGBTIQ activism down a different path.

Sarria's own, anti-black prejudices might have played a role in his reticence toward a coalitional approach. During the 1960s, African American activists boldly pushed back against pervasive racial segregation practices in San Francisco, including in the private housing market.[85] When a disgruntled, presumably white, racist voter pressed Sarria on his position on this issue, Sarria declared in a statement bristling with dog whistle racism that he would protect a property owner's right 'to rent, sublease, or share with whoever he feels meets his standards'.[86] It is one of very few concrete policy positions that have survived in Sarria's archive.

Halloween 1961

Sarria's most important campaigning date was Halloween 1961, the major gay holiday of the year. It conveniently took place only a week prior to the elections. For the City's gay residents, and especially for gay men who endearingly referred to Halloween as Witches' or Bitches' Christmas, the holiday was endowed with special cultural meaning as a night of revelry, transgression, and protest.[87] NEW OLREANS has its Mardi Gras; NEW YORK has its Harlem Drag Ball; SAN FRANCISCO has HALLOWEEN,' the program for a gay Halloween revue announced.[88] On Halloween, more than on any other night of the year, gay men felt emboldened to act and dress in violation of informal and codified gender codes, to come dressed in 'high camp' or 'drag'.[89] They still faced the

[84] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.60.
[85] Aliyah Dunn-Salahuddin, 'A Forgotten Community, A Forgotten History: San Francisco's 1966 Urban Uprising,' in *The Strange Careers of the Jim Crow North: Segregation and Struggle Outside of the South*, ed. Brian Purnell, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2019). For resistance to racial segregation in housing, see particularly pp. 215-219.
[86] Undated letter from Sarria to James Barton, *José Sarria Papers*, box 25, folder 7.
[87] 'Around the Town', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, Issue 2, undated; Jim Connor, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 2 May 1998, p.10.
[88] 'Michelle International Souvenir Program', *San Francisco Halloween History Project*, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, folder 'Montgomery Street Celebrations Mid-1960s'.
[89] Daley, interview by Gabriel, 19 February 1995, p.67; Gerald Fabian, interview by Jim Breeden, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, Undated, p.34; Bobby Pace, interview by Paul Gabriel,

risk of assault from groups of straight men hunting for them in the streets and, to a lesser degree than on other nights, policemen.[90] However, many showed defiance, and sometimes even fought back, on the tacit collective agreement that, at least for that night, gay people would not allow themselves to be cowed.[91]

At the symbolic and social centre of this cultural event stood San Francisco's female impersonators. Every year, thousands gathered in- and outside of the City's gay bars to see them arrive and parade in their spectacular costumes.[92] It was custom for female impersonators to travel from bar to bar to bask in their fans' admiration, collect free drinks, subcultural fame, and, sometimes, prizes.[93] While at least a half dozen gay and lesbian bars sought to draw crowds at Halloween in the early 1960s, the Black Cat under Sarria's leadership had acquired a special reputation as 'the focal point' or 'center' of the City's Halloween celebrations.[94]

In lionizing one of the most persecuted gay subgroups, Halloween staged a temporary reversal of traditional hierarchies. On Halloween, it was not in the power of

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Oral History Collection, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 3 May 1998, p.63; José Sarria, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 9 July 1997, p.22.

[90] Antigay street violence is reported in *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 1, 16 October 1961; 'Halloween 1963', *The News*, volume 3, number 3, 11 November 1963, and possibly alluded to in Thomas Cahill, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 28 July 1997, p.143. The police were slightly less lax about arresting and harassing gay people on a night in which some heterosexuals too could be found dressing up in gender nonconforming costumes (Donaldson and Smith, 'The Defenders,' p.153; Sarria, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, p.9; 'A Halloween for Kindred Spirits', Robert Strebeigh, *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 2, 1964, p.11). That antigay police violence still occurred is admitted by a former police officer here, Elliot Blackstone, interview by Susan Stryker, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 6 November 1996, pp.32-33.

[91] For drag queens fighting back and beating up their assailants, see Bob Ross, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 13 March 1998, p.31, and 'Halloween 1963'.

[92] Strait estimated that five thousand people crowded the city's gay bars at Halloween 1961 (see 'Halloween Review', *L.C.E. News*, volume 1 number 3). One regular attendee thought that between five hundred to a thousand people gathered in and outside the Black Cat alone, while a performer put that number at five to ten thousand (Daley, interview by Gabriel, 19 February 1995, p.104; 'Michelle International Souvenir Program'). Bar owner Charlotte Coleman remembers that there were six to eight venues which participated in Halloween in the 1960s. These venues were so crowded that Coleman had her front bar dismantled for the night to create space for a stage and extra seating (Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, p.106).

[93] Ibid., pp.106-107; Daley, interview by Gabriel, 19 February 1995, pp.103-104; Feliciano, interview by Schroeder, 31 May 1995, pp.11-14; Larry Howell, interview by Martin Meeker, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 17 December 1998 & 14 January 1999, p.53.

[94] *Talk of the Town*, number 5, November 1964;'Michelle International Souvenir Program', William Plath, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 18 September 1996 Feliciano, interview by Schroeder, 31 May 1995, p.10; Ron Williams, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 19 April 1998, p.40. For the number of bars participating see Coleman, interview by Gabriel, early 1997, p.106).

the policeman, who struggled to have his authority recognized, but of a female impersonator, Sarria, to direct the crowd outside the Black Cat and create room for arriving vehicles.[95] Sarria later even claimed that on Halloween the Chief of Police would drive him to North Beach, politely open the door, and recognize his reign over the celebrations about to unfold.[96] While this particular custom is not corroborated by other sources, the mere fact that such stories could be told in relation to Halloween illustrates the revolution of established social order that Halloween always threatened, however temporarily, to enact. For one night, one of San Francisco's most oppressed groups could plausibly lay claim to orchestrating city life.

In 1961, Sarria's campaign benefitted from his central position in the City's Halloween celebrations. Familiar with the power of a well-staged entry, Sarria rented limousines that allowed him and his entourage to tour the City's gay establishment and promote his campaign to the thousands of people partaking in the celebrations.[97] Sarria and his entourage came dressed as a mafia mob in black tuxedos and carrying violin cases.[98] Given Sarria's usual Halloween habit of dressing in fabulous, feminine attire, his more respectable, masculine-gendered outfit (more on this choice below) was reportedly already enough to 'cause a near riot' wherever he appeared.[99] During his visits to the gay bars, Sarria shook hands and possibly gave speeches to advertise his campaign across town.[100] Sarria also found time to lead the celebrations at the Black Cat and garner votes at his campaign's headquarters.

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[95] Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 September 1996.
[96] Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street*, p.54; José Sarria, interview by JD Doyle, November 2012; 'Email from Dennis Nix, May 5, 1987, *José Sarria Papers*, box 1, folder 10 ('Writings about Jose Sarria, 1984-2002').
[97] Sarria and Ross, interview by Alfred, 18 January 1981.
[98] Ibid..
[99] 'Halloween Review'.
[100] Ibid. That Sarria might have addressed crowds in other bars than the Black Cat is speculation on my part. On Halloween, gay bars would erect improvised stages to allow for contestants to parade their outfits. It is difficult to imagine that Sarria with his natural inclination toward self-promotion would not have taken the chance to advertise his campaign to the gathered crowds, especially since he was used to giving speeches in gay bars for his campaign (see photograph L2008.2.7 in the Oakland Museum of California's Sarria collection).

Events that occurred that Halloween at the Cat illustrated how Sarria's team encouraged his supporters to creatively explore avenues of collective resistance that extended beyond Sarria's campaign. For many revellers, previous Halloweens had often ended in the same, predictable way, with a night at the police station. Each year at midnight, police officers would station themselves outside of gay venues.[101] They would then arrest any exiting partygoers whose dress could be construed to violate section 440 of the Police Code that made it 'unlawful for any person to appear in public, with intent to deceive, in the dress, clothing or apparel not belonging to or usually worn by persons of his or her sex.'[102] Wagons full of people whom the police classified as men who 'looked too much like a woman' were arrested every year.[103]

In 1961, Sarria's campaign team were determined to put an end to this discriminating routine. After seeking legal counsel, they created hundreds of black, cat-shaped felt tags reading 'I am a boy'. They advertised them in *L.C.E. News* and started distributing several weeks prior to Halloween. With the tags, they hoped to offer protection to any femininely attired revellers risking arrest under section 440. Anyone wearing a tag declaring their 'real' gender could implausibly be accused of intending to deceive anyone about their gender, and LCE were readying themselves to sue should this provide insufficient protection.[104] The measure was a great success. Mass arrests under section 440 ceased so suddenly and consistently that gay activists mistakenly thought that they had achieved for the section to be abolished altogether, which it was not until 1974.[105] This success proved to San Francisco's gay revellers that there was power in collective resistance and that new, effective ways of pushing back against state harassment could be found.

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[101] Sarria, interview by Doyle, November 2012; Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street*, p.54.
[102] Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.179.
[103] Ibid.; Sarria, interview by Doyle, November 2012.
[104] Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.179.
[105] 'Halloween News', *The News*, volume 3, number 1, 14 October 1963. The section was repealed on July 24, 1974, per Ordinance 377-74 of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors (see *San Francisco Municipal Code: Housing-1973, Police-1973, Traffic-1974* in the San Francisco Law Library).

That is not to say that police violence was absent altogether that year. Police animosity stoked by Sarria's campaign first expressed itself that night when police officers sought to impede celebrations at the Black Cat. They then threatened to arrest Sarria when he stepped in and took over the police's customary role of crowd control so the contestants could safely enter the bar.[106] Later that night, a police officer interrupted a private party where Sarria's supporters had distributed 'I am a boy' stickers and been careful not to offer the police an easy excuse to interfere, keeping out minors, obeying fire safety and liquor laws. The officer detained hundreds of guests without charging them for almost an hour, then, as he was leaving, arrested five under various spurious charges.[107]

A divided electorate

Sarria's campaign did not always receive as enthusiastic a crowd as it did on Halloween. When many gay people first heard that a female impersonator was running for political office, they expressed scepticism of Sarria's intentions, unsure whether he might simply be 'an entertainer that needed more publicity'.[108] '[B]eing that he was in drag, I don't think it helped,' Sarria's supporter Stefan Hemming noted, 'they don't take people in drag too serious.'[109] Those preconceptions were a hindrance to Sarria's campaign, but they could be overcome by a visit to the Black Cat and hearing Sarria speak earnestly about his campaign. Some of San Francisco's rising political stars like Phillip Burton, then a member of the California State Assembly and later of the House of Representatives, his younger brother John, and Willie Brown, who would become the first African American

[106] 'Law Enforcement versus Harassment', *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 3, undated. At Halloween 1962, police cooperation had again been restored and Guy Strait complimented police officers' actions in a sincere letter of thanks to SFPD Chief Cahill (see 'To the Chief', ibid., volume 2, number 3, 12 November 1962, p.11).
[107] 'Law Enforcement versus Harassment'.
[108] Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980.
[109] Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020).

mayor of San Francisco and speaker of the California State Assembly, once attended a Sunday brunch on the suspicion that no openly gay person could be serious about running for office. After the performance and a conversation with Sarria they left convinced otherwise, and with the admission that they were too scared for their career to offer any help even (or perhaps especially) as some were having sex with men themselves.[110] They had come to understand that Sarria was not simply performing but was marrying politics and performance in a purposeful and convincing fashion.

While suspicions that the campaign might be a publicity stunt were relatively easy to dispel, abiding prejudices among gay people against gender nonconformity formed a more formidable obstacle to Sarria's success. Some strongly 'resented' Sarria's campaign for this reason from the very start.[111] Others initially approved of Sarria's candidacy when it was conceived as a count of the City's gay population but were put off when Sarria, buoyed by rising support, began to express serious ambitions about winning a seat.[112]

Gay activists often explained these prejudices in terms of the unwelcome visibility gender nonconformity conferred to homosexuality. Going unnoticed was highly valued in many gay circles. As Donald Webster Cory commented in his influential *The Homosexual in America*, '[m]any homosexuals consider that their greatest fortune, their one saving grace, has been the invisibility of the cross which they have had to bear.'[113] In the same vein, San Francisco bar owner Bill Plath observed that many gay men and women did not want the heterosexual public to even know 'that homosexuality

[110] Sarria et al., interview by Alfred, 12 April 1980; Sarria and Ross, interview by Alfred, 18 January 1981; José Sarria, interview by Susan Stryker, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, Oral History Collection, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 14 June 1999; Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.207.
[111] William Beardemphl and John DeLeon, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, July, 1997, p.87; Daley, interview by Gabriel, 19 February 1995, p.105.
[112] Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 September 1996; Beardemphl and DeLeon, interview by Gabriel, July, 1997, p.86f.
[113] Donald Webster Cory, *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach* (New York: Greenberg, 1955 [1951]), p.230.

existed'.[114] They had learnt from experience that greater visibility was often followed by an increase in antigay hostility.[115] This investment in concealing homosexuality put them in direct, acute tension with gender-nonconforming gays, the 'obvious' or 'screaming queens', butch lesbians, drag queens, male and female impersonators. As Plath drily noted, 'you can't very well not rock the boat when you come out in costumes like that'.[116] Sarria likewise explained the reservations of potential conservative gay voters through their fear of a state-led, antigay backslash to heightened gay visibility. Many gays, he reported, were 'content with 2 AM park trysts and being able to go to each other's homes and play cards. Why stir the hornet's nest?'[117]

While some gays were alarmed by the visibility Sarria's campaign conferred to homosexuality, others were 'aghast' at the manner in which it portrayed homosexuality.[118] Invested in shedding homosexuality's stigmatizing association to gender non-conformity, they objected to being 'represented [to] our supervisors by a drag queen'.[119] As Esther Newton showed in her ground-breaking anthropological study *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America,* female impersonators occupied an ambivalent position in 1960s gay social life.[120] At a time when male homosexuality was commonly associated with femininity and where anybody who was judged a 'sissy' could be quickly suspected of being a 'queer', female impersonators and drag queens were the gay subgroup 'who most visibly and flagrantly [embodied]' gender nonconformity, homosexuality's 'stigma'.[121] More than any other group of gay men, they could be described to indeed act and dress 'like women'. In exclusively gay social settings such

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[114] Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 September 1996.
[115] See also Barbara A. Weightman, 'Gay Bars as Private Places,' *Landscape,* volume 24 (1980): pp.9-10.
[116] Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 September 1996.
[117] Sarria, interview by Shilts, 1980?, p.1. On these concerns, see also Larry Carlson, 'Open Forum: Organizations', *Vector,* volume 3, number 9, August 1967.
[118] Daley, interview by Gabriel, 19 February 1995, p.105.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Esther Newton, *Mother Camp : Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979 [1972]).
[121] Ibid.p.3. On these historical connections, see also David M. Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp.110-113.

as Halloween celebrations, their bold, unapologetic embodiment of femininity could see them receive significant acclaim and appreciation.[122] In heterosexual-dominated contexts like municipal elections, on the other hand, gender-conforming gays often treated the brazen effeminacy of female impersonators as a 'source of dishonor' for their group.[123] They argued that gender nonconforming gays were perpetuating historical links between homosexuality and gender nonconformity and thereby barring gender compliant gays from being seen as respectable.[124]

Though historical evidence is inconclusive, it is likely that gay men would have been more discouraged from voting for Sarria on account of this particular reason than gay women. In an asymmetrical, patriarchal world, men simply had more to lose from being associated to femininity than women from being linked to masculinity.[125] Gay men could often draw on both personal experiences and fledgling homophile research to learn how associations to effeminacy could strip them of some of their male privileges. Effeminate gay men for example reported struggles with finding employment.[126] A 1960 Daughters of Bilitis report on the lives of approximately hundred gay male members of Mattachine San Francisco confirmed that gay men held lower economic and social status than their heterosexual peers.[127] Published both in the *Ladder* and as a separate publication, the study suggested that even gay men who did not express femininity as openly as drag queens or female impersonators suffered materially and socially from their perceived rejection of masculinity.

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[122] Newton, *Mother Camp : Female Impersonators in America*, pp.3-4.
[123] Ibid., p.3.
[124] On the charge of reinforcing these connections, see for example, 'Effeminacy v. Affectation', Randy Wicker, *Mattachine Review,* volume 4, number 10, October 1958, pp. 4-6.
[125] Newton, *Mother Camp : Female Impersonators in America*, p.xiii. In 1955, US women earned on average 63 cents for every dollar men made (Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Seal Press, 2007), p.134).
[126] See for instance *ONE Magazine*, March 1958, p.30, cited in Helen P. Branson, *Gay Bar: The Fabulous, True Story of a Daring Woman and her Boys in the 1950s*, ed. Will Fellows (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), p.53.
[127] Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, p.54. See also Daughters of Bilitis, *DOB Questionnaire Reveals Some Facts About Lesbians And Some Comparison Between Male and Female Homosexuals* (San Francisco, 1960).

Cultural stereotypes of gay women as 'mannish' did not come without drawbacks of their own, such as the brutal forms of police violence inflicted on many masculine gay women.[128] Differently to gay men however, some gay women like Florence Jaffy, the DOB report's author, welcomed these associations and experienced the windows lesbianism opened up to gender-nonconformity as a liberation from the restrictive female role.[129] Even such regular victims of police violence as dyke Pat Bond embraced this widespread sentiment. '[W]ho wanted to be a woman, for Chrissake', Bond asked.[130] Although some lesbians too rejected Sarria's gender-nonconforming representation of homosexuality,[131] gay men generally had more to lose from the perpetuation of historical links between gender transgression and homosexuality.

The birth of the idea of a gay 'community' and its original function

Sarria and his supporters attempted to placate the worries of more respectable gay voters in the first place by 'masculinizing' his public appearances in the election run-up. For his campaign photo, Sarria borrowed a shirt, tie, and jacket – items he did not own himself – so that he appeared in traditional masculine attire in the waist-up picture.[132] Even though it 'just broke [his] heart,' he also did not dress in feminine dress at any other occasion in the campaign period, including Halloween.[133] The sole exception were his Sunday operas where his gender ambiguous clothing constituted an essential part of the allure.

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[128] See the discussion in chapter one.
[129] Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, pp.54, 134.
[130] Pat Bond, 'Pat,' in *Word is out: Stories of some of our lives*, ed. Nancy Adair and Casey Adair (San Francisco: New Glide Publications, 1978), p.56. Bond knew from experience that being a lesbian came with its own set of drawbacks such as the violence of straight men struggling with rejection, commented,
[131] See for example Daley, interview by Gabriel, 19 February 1995, p.105.
[132] It would have been unlike Sarria to deliver a spotless performance of masculinity. Most recipients of Sarria's campaign material would not have known that he was getting ready for work when the photo was being taken and already wearing his famed red high-heels (Sarria, interview by Gabriel, 15 September 1996, p.1).
[133] Sarria and Ross, interview by Alfred, 18 January 1981; Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movement*, p.29.

Sarria's camp also, and more ambitiously, sought to overcome conservative opposition by trying to transform how San Francisco's gays understood themselves as a group. As we saw in the previous chapter, Sarria by 1961 had a long history of using his platform at the Black Cat to forge a 'gay' group identity. In the wake of the campaign, Sarria's supporters went one step further, arguing that the city's gender and sexual non-conformists not only comprised a shared group as 'gays', but that they in fact formed a gay 'community'.

The main medium in which traces of this conceptual innovation have been preserved is in the issues of *L.C.E. News*.[134] Unlike previous LCE newsletters which had made no mention of the concept, Guy Strait's publication from the very first issue used veiled references to 'the community' to introduce its readers to this new collective self-understanding.[135] The inaugural issue of October 16, 1961 promised to 'report the day-to-day happenings in the "community"', praised the registration of 10,000 new voters in 'the "community"', and voiced its hope that the publication would 'serve a useful purpose in the "community."'[136] In some ways, these statements were rather unremarkable. As shown in the introduction, references to 'the community' were commonplace in the homophile magazines of the 1950s and early 1960s. Both *Mattachine Review* and *The Ladder* frequently cited the concept, employing 'the community' in established, heteronormative fashion as a synonym for wider society. In *L.C.E. News,* however, a very different imaginary governed the term. The quotation marks used in each instance signalled Strait's departure from the concept's standard interpretation. In both the first and subsequent issues, *L.C.E. News* never explicitly stated that its references indexed the notion of a *gay* community. It relied instead on context to convey the message.

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[134] One arena in which the idea of a gay 'community' might have first been fashioned and disseminated is during Sarria's Sunday operas. However, with no surviving records of the speeches Sarria gave during his Sunday performances, this remains a subject of speculation only.
[135] Copies of previous LCE newsletters can be found in *José Sarria Papers*, box 23, folder 1.
[136] [Untitled], *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 1, 16 October 1961.

Every reference to the idea of 'the community' in *L.C.E. News'* inaugural issue was laden with gay subcultural meaning. Each of 'the community's' 'happenings' the issue reported on were events related to the gay male bar scene, its institutions, and celebrities. *L.C.E. News'* allusion to ten thousand newly registered voters in 'the community' came at the back of LCE's well-publicised attempts to register voters within San Francisco's gay bars for Sarria's campaign. Lastly, the paragraph in which *L.C.E. News* shared its hope to 'serve a useful purpose in the "community"' too was laden with gay subcultural content. It closed with the statement 'UNITED WE STAND DIVIDED WE WILL SURELY FALL,' a citation of Sarria's iconic motto which visitors of his immensely popular shows would be able to recite decades after the Black Cat's closure.[137]

LCE members and those immersed in the City's gay bar life, *L.C.E. News'* two largest and often overlapping groups of readers, might have at first wondered at the strange quotation marks set around the commonplace term. It is unlikely, however, that many would have struggled on further reading to decipher the allusions to the new concept of a gay 'community' emerging out of Sarria's campaign.[138] *L.C.E. News,* as Strait wrote in a later issue, was 'meaningless' when 'taken out of context'.[139] It derived its whole meaning from being read inside the cultural setting of San Francisco's gay bar scene. That Strait's readers generally succeeded at decoding his novel conception of 'community' is also suggested by the lack of exposition of the term in later issues. If Strait had left many of his readers confused, an explanation of the term would have been necessary to include in subsequent issues.

Dominant historical explanations for why the idea of a gay 'community' emerged in San Francisco have tended to identify structural changes in the city's gay bar life as the

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[137] Lee, interview by Gabriel and Hong, 10 August 1995, p.54.
[138] There appears to be no surviving evidence of the immediate reception of this conceptual innovation. For a well-connected homophile activist attesting to the distinctiveness of LCE's use of community and his reception of the term as a euphemism for 'homosexuals', see Hal Call, 'Breakthrough – When will it come', Mattachine Review, April-September 1964, p.18.
[139] 'Dear Senator', *The News*, volume 3, number 2, 28 October, 1963.

key causal factor behind this discursive shift. In his path-breaking 1983 study *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities,* John D'Emilio argues that this idea surfaced after 'the gay subculture in San Francisco … was assuming a significantly different shape from its counterparts in other urban areas'.[140] As the gay bar life more and more resembled a community, it gave rise to a new awareness within its inhabitants that reflected these structural shifts. A '*self-conscious*, cohesive community' began to form in San Francisco, from where the idea then spread across the United States.[141]

Such structural explanations rightly identify an essential precondition for why the idea of a gay 'community' could surface and eventually take hold in San Francisco gay bar culture. Thousands of people participated in this shared cultural life each week, drank, laughed, and slept together, created their own subcultural conversations, linguistic and behavioural codes, and, when they found themselves targeted by oppressive state agents, engaged in collective acts of resistance. Moreover, with the publication of *L.C.E. News,* the bars even further assumed the shape of a community. Bar owner Bill Plath recalled how the newspaper made the bars feel less insular. By reporting on bar-based events, it made those involved in the gay bar life see themselves as 'related to other people because you knew what they were doing and you wanted to participate in what they were doing.'[142] In this way, LCE 'developed a sense of community' even as its references to the concept seemed to presuppose the community's very existence.[143] That the gay bars could plausibly be described as a community was indeed a prerequisite for the coinage of the term. As Amia Srinivasan reminds us, successful representational interventions must '*picture the world right,* as it

[140] D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, p.195.
[141] Ibid., pp.177, 195. Italics not in the original.
[142] Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 September 1996.
[143] Ibid.

is currently understood,' even as they innovate and try to draw the world anew.[144] Else, they risk being unintelligible.

Nevertheless, the emergence of the concept of a gay 'community' cannot solely, or even primarily, be explained through changes in the structure of the City's gay bar scene and an increasing community character. If early 1960s gay activists had merely been looking for a term to capture the expansive, interconnected nature of the gay bar subculture, they would not have needed to invent. The idea of a 'gay world', a concept whose lineage reached as far back as the late nineteenth century and which was still in wide circulation in 1960s San Francisco, would have readily suggested itself.

More devastatingly for such structural explanations, it is hardly obvious that even with the addition of *L.C.E. News* the City's gay bar life in late 1961 resembled more of a community than in previous years. As shown in chapter one, the early 1960s did not represent a time of expansion for the City's gay bars but of stagnation in which their number stayed flat despite a rapidly rising gay population.[145] None of the other structural shifts in San Francisco gay bar life D'Emilio cites as contributions to the coinage of gay 'community' had yet occurred. Neither the Tavern Guild (*1962) nor the Society for Individual Rights (*1963) had been founded, the new allies the gay movement would find in liberal members of the clergy toward the mid-1960s had not yet been attracted, and the successful pushback against police harassment of the 1965 New Year's Day ball not yet taken place. Once we locate the emergence of gay 'community' in 1961 rather than the period of growth of the mid-to-late 1960s as historians have previously been inclined to do, the course of the city's gay bar life can no longer straightforwardly account for the

[144] Amia Srinivasan, 'Genealogy, Epistemology and Worldmaking,' *Proceedings Of The Aristotelian Society,* volume CXIX, Part 2 (2019): p.150. Italics in the original.

[145] The most comprehensive source on the number of gay drinking establishments remains the late Bill Walker's database, housed at the GLBT Historical Society of San Francisco. It lists fifty-three gay and gay-friendly drinking establishments for 1961, the same number as in 1955. By 1965, this number had expanded to seventy-six, by 1969 to one-hundred-and-twenty-five. On the growth of San Francisco's gay population in the 1960s, see Martin Meeker, "Come out West: Communication and the gay and lesbian migration to San Francisco, 1940s–1960s" (University of Southern California, 2000), p.32.

coinage of gay community.[146] To understand why Sarria's supporters pressed ahead with their conceptual innovation, we have to instead look at the political work the concept of a gay 'community' allowed them to do. In other words, we have to pay attention to how Sarria's team used the concept of a gay 'community' not simply to capture the world as it already existed, but also to make it anew.

The introduction of the notion of a gay 'community' fit neatly within the political project of Sarria's campaign. Most importantly, it allowed Sarria's camp to argue that members of San Francisco's gay population, including sceptics to their project, held a responsibility to their community. Sarria's campaign defined this responsibility in two ways: through participation in their gay electoral politics, and through involvement in the broader fight against state oppression. The idea that gay people owed their community a vote for Sarria was prominently advanced in the first *L.C.E. News* issue. The issue noted that this 'duty' fell to San Francisco's gay population because of the failure of local government to respect the pledges of the US Declaration of Independence and protect its citizens from 'the never ending encroachment of the big and the uninformed.' In light of this neglect, Strait called on citizens themselves to defend their 'rights and liberties'. The main form Strait suggested this should take was an electoral politics. 'It is the first duty of every citizen to register to vote, then to vote.' But if this was a general duty all citizens owed as citizens, it was also a particular duty that members of oppressed groups owed to their communities. For, it was '[o]nly by being vocal' and making its voice heard that 'a group, however loosely confederated, [can] make their [weight] felt.'[147] In the second issue, published just a few days before the election, Strait did not repeat this argument. Even so, he once again linked community membership to the expectation of a vote for Sarria when he expressed the hope that the publication of *L.C.E. News* would

[146] Nan Boyd also influentially adopts D'Emilio's chronology of gay community's coinage in Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp.227-231.
[147] *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 1, 16 October 1961.

'give the "community" new incentive to develop a more civic-minded attitude'. Any reader wondering what this might involve received an answer in the emphatic next line, 'VOTE VOTE VOTE VOTE VOTE VOTE VOTE.'[148]

L.C.E. News petitioned with its readers to participate in the local elections not because it saw an inherent worth in the activity of voting *per se* but rather because it valued the *gay* electoral politics advanced by Sarria's candidacy. LCE refrained from openly urging the readers of its publication to vote for Sarria in order not to forfeit certain tax benefits tied to its non-partisan legal status.[149] However, it did not stop short by much. The only campaign advertisements the inaugural issue featured were Sarria's. It also noted LCE's leadership's involvement with Sarria's campaign, included enthusiastic descriptions of Sarria's campaign, disparaging remarks on the other campaigns ('most of them seem to be running for Senior Class President, not public office'), and a plea not to cast the maximum number of five votes but to only vote 'for those candidates in which you are sincerely interested' to maximise the chances of 'the candidate you are interested in'.[150] *L.C.E. News'* promotion of Sarria's campaign was so overt that it felt the need to deny endorsing Sarria's campaign thrice in the first issue's two pages to protect its tax status.

L.C.E. News presented the duties gay people bore toward their 'community' also as participation in the wider project of resisting state, and particular police, oppression. In *L.C.E. News'* second issue, Strait noted with regret that over the first six months of its existence LCE's service to the community had almost exclusively taken the shape of providing legal assistance to gay victims of 'bigotry' and 'undue PD [Police Department] harassment'.[151] This emphasis, Strait admitted, led to the neglect of other important work

[148] *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 2, [30 October 1961?].
[149] 'Third Year,' *The News*, volume 3, number 1, October 14, 1963.
[150] *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 1.
[151] Ibid., volume 1, number 2.

LCE needed to do 'so that we may fulfill [sic] our obligations to the "community"'.[152] Fighting state oppression was evidently not the only form Strait envisioned community service to take. But even as he made this clear, Strait's apologetic remark also presented it as a natural shape taking up one's responsibility to the gay community could assume.

Amidst enduring, vocal scepticism directed at Sarria's leadership, Sarria's camp used the idea of a gay community to ground gay responsibilities to support their campaign and their wider project of resisting state oppression. The idea of a gay community pointed to the common bonds uniting gender-conforming and gender-nonconforming gays rather than their differences. More than simply moving through a shared gay world, Sarria's campaign presented them as standing in a tight web of social relations that rendered each responsible to the good of the whole.

As the elections neared, Sarria's supporters were not only about to find out whether San Francisco would elect its first openly gay politician, but also whether their attempts to unite a fractured electorate had born fruit. The idea of a gay 'community' faced a stern, first test.

The complex record of Sarria's campaign

On 7 November 1961, election night events were held across the City's gay drinking establishment as patrons, employees, and staff congregated to celebrate Sarria's historic candidacy. At Sarria's campaign headquarters, an 'all excited' crowd of supporters met for the Black Cat's 'First Annual Voters Wake.'[153] In traditional Black Cat festive fashion, they were served free food, refreshments and entertainment, with the election results brought in via radio, telephone, and even television as the night progressed.[154] A photograph opens a window into the jubilant character of the

[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid; Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020).
[154] *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 2.

gathering.[155] In it, we see Sarria strike a pose in front of the Black Cat in his traditional campaign outfit of black tails complete with top hat, looking more camp than masculine. A crowd of at least several dozen seemingly light skinned masculine people has assembled around him. Many are clad in typical gay male outfits of their time, fuzzy sweaters and tight trousers. Their broad grins, expressions of glee and delight, and the clearly visible campaign banner in the background underscore the scene's celebratory nature.

Figure 1: Sarria and supporters in front of the Black Cat, 7 November 1961. Courtesy of Joe Castel.

A wave of excitement passed through the crowd when promising, initial figures arrived from gay-heavy districts.[156] As more districts announced their results, however, Sarria 'kind of sloughed off' and it became more and more evident that he was far from mounting a serious challenge for one of the five open seats.[157] In the end, Sarria won

[155] This extraordinary photograph, which appears to one of only two surviving photographs of that night's gay celebrations, is part of Joe Castel's private collection. The other, more blurry photo is a shot of the same scene but from a different angle, and shows several black men among the participants.
[156] Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020).
[157] Ibid.

5,613 votes to place twenty-ninth out of thirty-three candidates.[158] A total of 81,615 votes would have been necessary to overtake the fifth-placed candidate.

San Francisco's gays responded to the results with a mixture of joy and frustration. Sarria's immediate reaction was bitter disappointment. His supporter Bill Plath recounted that Sarria had been 'misled into thinking he might win'. As a consequence, he felt 'very let down' by the election outcome.[159] The entertainer would retain his frustration for many decades.[160] A more ambivalent initial reaction came out of *L.C.E. News.* Strait too expressed his exasperation at the results and reserved special criticism for 'the large number of the "community"' who had failed to vote.[161] He also related, however, how 'stunned and amazed' many of Sarria's supporters were at how well their candidate had performed in their eyes, sentiments many of them would echo in later oral histories.[162] The general mood at the Black Cat, Strait noted, was jubilant and defiant. '[T]he workers almost to a man were already planning for next year's election. One remark overheard time after time was "Next year we must start earlier."'[163]

These varied reactions reflected the campaign's complex record on its main objectives. Sarria had proven to many gay and heterosexual alike that a sizeable gay population existed in San Francisco who were ready to back a pro-gay politics. Gay bartender Bobby Pace regarded the campaign as 'the beginning of letting people know how many of us there were'.[164] His colleague James 'Robbie' Robinson, a frequent

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[158] *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 November 1961, p.1.
[159] Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 September 1996.
[160] See Sarria, interview by Shilts, 1980?, p.1; Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.207; Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movement*, p.29. For later testimony by Sarria on the successes of his campaign, see Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); José Sarria and Nicole Murray-Ramirez, interview by Lenora Fulani and Fred Newman, Fred Newman Ph.D. archive, 19 March 1994; 'A Tribute to José, March 31, 1984', *José Sarria Papers*, box 4, folder 1 (Awards and Honors, 1970-2010).
[161] 'The Elections', *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 3, November 13, 1961.
[162] Ibid. For later oral history testimony on the reactions of Sarria's supporters, see Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 September 1996; Lee, interview by Gabriel and Hong, 10 August 1995, p.53; Donaldson, interview by Gabriel, 2 September 1996, pp.10-11; Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.85.
[163] 'The Elections'.
[164] Pace, interview by Gabriel, 3 May 1998, p.70.

campaign volunteer in the 1960s, confirmed that 'every politician (and their campaign managers, analysts, and lobbyists, among others)' read Sarria's election results as evidence of 'a constituency that voted'.[165] At the next municipal elections, all three candidates for mayor displayed a novel sensitivity to the gay vote when they placed paid advertisements in *The News, L.C.E. News'* successor publication.[166] It was the first time in San Franciscan history that heterosexual politicians publicly sought out gay voters.[167] For observers like Robinson who understood 'that the vote for José was undoubtedly, understated' given the gay population's much larger size, Sarria's modest results only hinted at the vast potential of an under-tapped voting bloc.[168]

Sarria's camp recognized too what they had achieved in terms of fashioning a cohesive gay group fighting for their rights. It is in discussing the election results and promising that '[t]he drive to make the community politically aware has only yet begun' that *L.C.E. News* for the first time referred to 'the community' without quotation marks. Election night had offered first compelling evidence that a gay community did not merely exist in the imagination of Sarria's supporters.

Yet, the activists involved in the campaign also saw the limitations of their achievements. They were frustrated because Sarria's 'respectable' performance, as Plath called it, failed to demonstrate the full political potential of a united gay community.[169] In the first place, it did not successfully close down the space for harmful underestimations of the gay population's size. As Strait conceded, the campaign had provided neither an 'effective nor near effective count' of San Francisco's gays.[170] It had attracted fewer voters than the Lever 37a campaign which some homophile activists regarded as offering a more accurate picture of homophile voting potential.[171] Thousands

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[165] Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.86.
[166] Advertisements in *The News*, volume 3, number 2, 28 October 1963.
[167] 'The League', *The News,* volume 3, number 4, 25 November 1963.
[168] Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, p.86.
[169] Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 September 1996.
[170] 'Take A Count', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 26, 1 October 1962.
[171] Martin and Lyon, interview by Bishop, 1 May 1990, p.8.

of homosexuals had not gone to the poll and voted for Sarria. As a result, their number remained a subject of fierce debate post-election.[172] Sarria's campaign also failed to dispel perceptions that many homosexuals were not yet ready to unite behind their common cause. To Sarria, the results only underscored how divided the city's gays remained.[173] A few months after the campaign, an *L.C.E. News* reader could still note the stark contrast between 'the many cries of "Let's get organized!"' heard in gay circles and 'the many examples of our dissolution' that continued to mark gay life.[174]

Continuing police persecution delivered the clearest illustration that the campaign only represented one, albeit important, step toward a better future. Four days after election night, SFPD officers entered the Black Cat to arrest Sarria on a spurious charge in front of his audience. Public humiliation followed in the next day's newspapers.[175] Evidently, more work was required to consolidate and deepen the gains won by Sarria's campaign.

That Sarria himself would not play a major part in this next phase was owed to a series of personal and political setbacks that induced his gradual withdrawal from San Francisco gay politics after the campaign. Soon after the arrest, Sarria lost his beloved mother Dolores to a stroke in a second, even heavier blow on December 7, 1961.[176] Overtaken with grief, he spiralled into a depressive spell that lasted several weeks.[177] The Sarria who returned from his bed was no longer the hopeful, enthusiastic visionary at the heart of a historic campaign. Sarria had arrived at the painful conclusion that '[he]

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[172] 'Take A Count'.
[173] Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.207.
[174] 'A Reader Writes: A GOOD LOOK', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 19, 25 June 1962. See also, 'A Reader Writes', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 26, 1 October 1962; 'Community', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 26, 1 October 1962.
[175] For reporting on Sarria's arrest, see 'Candidate Booked on Sex Charge', *San Francisco Examiner*, 12 November 1961, p.21; 'Candidate Arrested', *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 4. On Sarria's interpretation of the arrest see Sarria, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, p.6; ———, 'Address to International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE)' (1989).
[176] See *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, numbers 5 and 6; José Sarria, interview by Joe Castel, Joe Castel Private Collection, date unknown, p.13.
[177] Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020).

was too far ahead of [his] time' to continue his political career.[178] Having missed several board meetings, he finally decided to step down from the LCE board of directors and his role as LCE's treasurer on March 5, 1962.[179]

The definitive revocation of the Black Cat's liquor license on Halloween 1963 stripped Sarria of his only remaining leadership platform.[180] For several weeks, Stoumen defiantly kept the bar afloat on cheap food and non-alcoholic drinks, but a sharp fall in patronage eventually forced him to close its doors for good.[181] The closure was a 'disaster' for Sarria and left him feeling alienated from the gay bar networks to which he had devoted so much of his life.[182] 'Nobody helped us' Sarria later bitterly commented.[183] '[T]he gay community at that point couldn't care less… what were we fighting for?'[184] Sarria's engagement at a new location, the Backstage, last only a few weeks before it was sold and converted into a heterosexual bar. Once more, Sarria found himself out of a job.[185]

Disillusioned, Sarria in February 1964 accepted the offer of his close friend Pierre to work for him at the 1964/65 New York World Fair.[186] His departure completed Sarria's gradual (and ultimately, temporary) removal from organised San Francisco gay politics.

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[178] Sarria, interview by Shilts, 1980?, p.1. On Sarria being too far ahead of his time, see also 'José', Mark Thompson, *The Advocate*, April 3, 1980, pp.31-32; Sarria, interview by Gabriel, 15 September 1996, p.14.
[179] Letter of 5 March 1962 by Sarria to LCE board of directors, *José Sarria Papers*, box 23, folder 1; 'José resigns', *L.C.E. News*, volume 1, number 12, 19 March 1962.
[180] On Sarria's dashed expectations to retire at the Black Cat, see Sarria, interview by Lockhart, 2001?.
[181] On the Black Cat's last few weeks as a lunch place and coffeehouse, see Ross, interview by Gabriel, 13 March 1998, p.61, and 'Halloween 1963,' *The News*, volume 3, number 3, 11 November 1963, p.3. On rumours of closures being a frequent cause of demise for gay bars see Christopher Lowen Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco: Policing and the Creation of a Cosmopolitan Liberal Politics, 1950-1972* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), p.102; Weightman, 'Gay Bars as Private Places', p.11. On the Black Cat's diminishing patronage, see Daley, interview by Gabriel, 19 February 1995, p.103; Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.135; Sarria, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, p.7.
[182] Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, pp.135, 150; Sarria, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, pp.7-8.
[183] Gorman, *The Empress is a Man*, p.135. See also Sarria, interview by Breeden, date unknown. For evidence of gay bar support the Black Cat received, see Ross, interview by Gabriel, 13 March 1998, p.63.
[184] Sarria, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, p.7.
[185] For Sarria's stint at the Backstage, see 'The Nightingale', *The News,* volume 3, number 6, 23 December 1963; 'San Francisco!' and 'José', *Citizens News*, volume 3, number 9, undated [Feb 1964].
[186] [Header], *Citizens' News*, volume 3, number 9, undated [February 1964]. For the next few years, Sarria would lead an itinerant life, serving and cooking food at Pierre's stall at the New York, Montreal (1967), and San Antonio (1968) World Fairs. Sarria returned to San Francisco only intermittently in this period. It was not until 1968 that Sarria finally made the city his permanent home again when he hired at Bill Plath's Opera Club for a revival of his iconic Black Cat operas.

With Sarria absent from the scene, the further course of the young idea of a gay community was left in other hands. It is within the pages of Guy Strait's publications that we can trace the next stage of its history.

Chapter 4

Guy Strait and the openness of early homophile theorizing of community

The dual legacy of José Sarria's campaign – as both a window into a broad coalitional politics bridging differences of gender and race, and, ultimately, an attempt to call into being a strictly gay constituency – would shape homophile interpretations of community in the decade to come. As many historians have noted, San Franciscan homophile activists were primarily drawn toward the latter tradition in the 1960s, pursuing the interests of a narrowly defined 'homophile community'.[1] A closer examination reveals, however, these activists were not as singularly invested in a one-issue gay politics as sometimes stated. Parallel to the consolidation of ideas of sexual community, and hitherto largely undetected by scholars, 1960s homophile activism offered – if tentatively and unevenly – a variety of ways of theorising community, including some that built on the intersectional promises of Sarria's campaign. Their entangled coexistence in the first half of the decade can be most clearly observed in the writing of Guy Strait, the period's most influential homophile activist-theorist of community.

As one of the League for Civil Education's co-founders, its first president, and editor of *L.C.E. News* (later *The News,* then *Citizens' News*), Strait had already played a vital part in LCE's first year. Sarria's resignation in March 1962 made Strait the League's undisputed kingpin. As his friend and fellow gay activist Herb Donaldson noted, 'LCE was really kind of Guy Strait's organization'.[2] It would remain so until the group's

[1] Most notably, John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, Second ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1983]), especially chapter 10. Boyd Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 230-231.

[2] Herbert Donaldson, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 2 September 1996, p.4. Donaldson's description is meant as a general comment on Strait's dominance over the organisation but is better suited as a more specific account of LCE's character in the post-Sarria period. Donaldson's oral histories suggest that this was the time when Donaldson was most closely involved with LCE.

dissolution in May 1964 and in spite of Strait's own attempts to diversify leadership.[3] During this two-year span, Strait continuously acted as the League's president and editor. He dedicated almost all his free time and modest income as a travelling salesman to the organisation.[4] Under his leadership, the League continued to act as a central hub for homophile resistance. It offered free legal support to hundreds of arrested gays, informed its increasingly national readership of their legal rights, boldly decried state oppression, and championed electoral politics as a vital gay resistance strategy.

This summary of LCE's activities may sound familiar. Multiple scholars of San Francisco LGBTIQ history have emphasized LCE's work as a key element of 1960s homophile activism.[5] Most accounts, however, have kept LCE's story on the margins, treating it as the mere backdrop to the more celebrated activism of the Tavern Guild of San Francisco (1962-c.1995), the Council for Religion and the Homosexual (CRH, *1964), and LCE's successor organisation, the Society for Individual Rights (SIR, 1964-1977). Historians' focus on these later, more successful groups is understandable to a degree. While they achieved unprecedented movement victories, LCE's most ambitious action was an outright disaster that directly led to the League's termination. Despite its democratic ambitions, LCE also remained throughout its existence the work of very few activists. Later organisations, especially SIR, were able to attract a much wider member base.[6] Finally, many of the later activists remained in sufficient health, social and financial standing to share their stories and documents with subsequent generations. Strait, on the other hand, served three years in prison in the late 1970s on the charge of

[3] See for example 'Important Notice', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 18, 11 June 1962; 'Meeting of the Board', *The News,* volume 2, number 16, 13 May 1963.
[4] Ibid.; 'Report to the Membership', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 15, 29 April 1963; 'Is your paper worthwhile?', *The News,* Vol 2, number 17, 27 May 1963; 'Dear Senator', *The News,* volume 3, number 2, 28 October 1963; 'Dear Senator', *Citizens' News,* Vol 3, number 8, 27 Jan 1964.
[5] See for instance D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, pp.188-189; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp.221-223; Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *gay by the bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996), p.43.
[6] See next chapter.

having had sex with a minor.[7] He died in 1987 in poverty, poor health, and isolated from the gay movement.[8] Apart from his newspapers, few sources document his ideas and work as a homophile activist.

In seeking to recover Strait's ideas of community as presented in *L.C.E. News* and its successor publications, this chapter places Strait and LCE at the centre of its analysis. This emphasis is not only warranted by Strait's position as the first published theorist of the concept of the community, it also bears two important benefits. First, a fuller recovery of Strait's thought further illustrates how homophile ideas of community enjoyed significant uptake already in the early 1960s. It hence helps correct widespread historical assumptions that the idea emerged in the mid-1960s. Second, and even more excitingly, a thorough examination of Strait's ideas changes not only *when* we see community emerge in homophile discourse, but also opens up new views on *what* we see it surface as. Strait's writing shows that homophiles did not singularly parse 'community' as sexual community, as historians have commonly assumed.[9] Quite to the contrary, the meaning of community was the site of vibrant intellectual exploration and debate in the concept's infant years. Its earliest homophile thinkers continuously grappled with the possibilities and limits of community, stretching and contracting the boundaries of community in their theorising and activism.

The chapter charts the development of Strait's notions of community between the end of Sarria's campaign in 1961 to LCE's dissolution in 1964. It opens with a summary of Strait's activism in this period. Strait's efforts to build a militant, mass-based organisation garnered a mixed reception among contemporary homophiles, as did the idea of the community around which this project evolved. While some homophiles joined the movement after they learned to see themselves as part of a sexual community,

[7] See footnote nineteen in chapter three.
[8] Donaldson, interview by Gabriel, 2 September 1996, p.5.
[9] The most relevant work here is D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*.

others strove toward wider imaginaries of community, worried that conceptions of sexual community would conceal the grievances of the most marginalised gay subgroups. A third, conservative camp refused to countenance ideas of homophile community altogether.

In this multivocal conversation, Strait sometimes became identified with ideas of sexual community. But in reality, his allegiance to this idea fluctuated. His articles presented a panoply of actors as involved in community life, some of whom, like women sex workers, were not necessarily gay. In his longest exposition of the term, Strait depicted the community as a 'community of interests' rooted not in shared forms of sexual desire but in shared resistance to state harassment of gender- and sexually-nonnormative populations. At other times, he retreated to less ambitious accounts in which gays formed a community on account of the fact that they cut across all societal groups and classes. The 1963 Birmingham Confrontation gave his ideas of community yet another turn, inspiring Strait to dream of a black-gay political alliance and a 'total minority community'. Electoral failure finally led him to return to the narrower, sexual imaginaries he had helped pioneer during Sarria's election. Strait's intellectual journey demonstrates not only his willingness to sacrifice doctrinal consistency to a more expedient changeability, but also the unexpected capaciousness of homophile ideas of community in the early 1960s.

LCE's 'militant' activism, its reception and strategic public presentation

In the year following Sarria's campaign, Strait often invoked the idea of the community in the familiar context of carving a cohesive gay voting bloc. After Sarria's withdrawal from organised gay politics in March 1962, Strait increasingly positioned himself as the project's new champion. In articles and at social occasions, he delivered passionate pleas to the gay bar set on the significance of proving their large numbers and unity to state authorities. He contended 'that the most important thing facing the Community is

to, by some method, make the legislators aware of the numbers of persons who want laws changed'.[10] Strait relied on a particular retelling of recent local history to demonstrate to his audiences that such coordinated collective action was a genuine possibility. Listing various communal feats like collective picnics, charity events, the votes for lever 37a and Sarria, and the printing of *L.C.E. News,* Strait argued that 'the idea of the Community not sticking together was a complete lie'.[11] It was nothing but a myth, deliberately 'circulated … by those in places that do not want you to get ahead'.[12] Recent events had proven that gay unity was already building. Having provided this wider historical framing, Strait then argued that the time had come for an unambiguous demonstration of gay numbers and intent. In a strong echo to Sarria's campaign, Strait urged gays to vote as a bloc for a hopeless heterosexual candidate at the autumn 1962 state elections. It was another attempt at conducting an unofficial gay census, demonstrating homosexuals' numbers and their readiness to act in concert.[13] The campaign, however, failed miserably.[14]

Strait's attempt to bring into being a unified gay voting bloc was inspired by his belief that only coordinated mass action would be able to overturn the tide of state persecution. 'The sole reason that the harassment of the individual continues in California', Strait asserted in relation to state oppression, is because its perpetrators 'know that there is no great unity of purpose in our "Community"'.[15] In the absence of coordinated mass resistance, state agents were left to 'do as they will' in their treatment of the city's gay population.[16] From Strait's vantage, this underlined the importance of LCE as a much-needed vessel for mass action. Only 'a strong surge of numbers' to LCE

[10] 'Dissent', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 1, 15 October 1962.
[11] 'Labor Day Picnic', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 25, 17 September 1962; 'L.C.E. One Year Old', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 14, 16 April 1962.
[12] 'Hula Shack Picnic', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 21, 23 July 1962.
[13] 'Take A Count', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 26, 1 October 1962.
[14] 'The Election', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 4, 26 November 1962.
[15] 'Justice', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 10, 19 February 1962.
[16] Ibid. See also, 'Possibly You!', *The News,* volume 2, number 25, 16 September 1963.

or other gay organisations would build the power to successfully resist and overturn state violence.[17] For Strait, the choice between joining LCE or watching from afar, between mass action or no mass action, ultimately boiled down to that of 'Justice or Jail'.[18]

LCE pursued a multi-pronged program for mass action in its push for justice. If electoral politics was a central avenue through which LCE sought to gather, prove the presence of, and call into being a community, it was not the only one. Strait also elicited the community's support for letter campaigns protesting police mistreatment to elected officials, the collection of data on police harassment, the patronising of more radical gay businesses, as well as boycotts of antigay businesses, media outlets, and their advertisers.[19] Such actions were expressions of what Strait referred to as the 'militant' style or tone of LCE's activism.[20] By militancy, Strait did not envision a literal taking-to-arm. Despite claiming at one point that he 'would not hesitate for half a moment to use any means at my disposal' to improve the community's situation, Strait publicly denounced the use of a violence as an activist tactic.[21] Instead, militancy for Strait, as for other gay activists of the early 1960s, meant a proud and avowed refusal to accept homosexuals' mistreatment as in any way justifiable.[22] Strait and other militants took a

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[17] 'Justice'.

[18] Ibid.

[19] For Strait advocating a gay electoral politics, see 'New Year's', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 4, [undated]; 'S.F. New Years', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 7, 8 January 1962; 'Now hear this', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 12, 19 March 1962; 'This is the Year', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 16, 14 May 1962; 'Unity!', *The News,* volume 3, number 1, 14 October 1963. For his advocacy of letter campaigns to public officials, see 'Law and Enforcement', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 7, 8 January 1962; 'S.F. New Years'; 'ABC', *The News,* volume 2, number 17, 27 May 1963; 'Changing Morality', *The News,* volume 2, number 25, 16 September 1963; 'Enticement', *The News,* volume 3, number 6, 23 December 1963. For his calls to gay readers to report instances of harassment to L.C.E. and/or higher authorities, see 'Fear or Respect, Mr Cahill?', *L.C.E. News,* volume. 1, number 14, 16 April 1962; 'Harassment must cease', *ibid.;* 'Short Subjects', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 14, 16 April 1962; 'The Police Image', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 20, 9 July 1962. For his encouragement of shopping at more radical gay businesses, see 'Roving Report', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 13, 2 April 1962. For his calls to boycott antigay businesses, media outlets and their advertisers, see for example 'Roving Report', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 12, 19 March 1962*;* 'Around', *Citizens News,* volume 3, number 8, 27 Jan 1964.

[20] For references to the 'militant' character of L.C.E.'s activism, see 'Note', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 7, 8 January 1962; 'Roving Reporter', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 5, 10 December 1962; 'A Time To Reflect'.

[21] 'Dear Senator', *The News,* volume 3, number 2, 28 October 1963. See also 'Dissent'. For Strait's condemnation of violence, see 'The Parade', *The News*, volume 2, number 18, 10 June 1963.

[22] On early 1960s homophile notions of gay militancy, see also Martin B. Duberman, *Stonewall: The Definitive Story of the LGBTQ Rights Uprising that Changed America* (New York: Plume, 2019), pp. 125, 133.

stance that was radical for the time: they publicly attacked antigay state-sponsored harassment and violence as instances of injustice and oppression. *LCE News'* issues were replete with exceptionally forceful criticisms of state discrimination and unapologetic demands for the recognition of gay people's rights, freedoms, and equality.

However, in its communication with other activists and the media, LCE presented itself and its goals very ambiguously. LCE was reluctant to publicly identify with the homophile cause. LCE's hesitancy permeated its public speech. In its statement of purpose, the League presented itself as an organisation formed

> to defend, safeguard and protect civil rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States and the State of California; to sponsor and promote a continuing education program in the field of civil rights and liberties; to provide financial aid for the defense or protection of persons whose constitutional rights have been violated or are threatened or imperiled [sic]; to provide and promote opportunities and referral services free from discrimination of any kind in connection with employment placement, housing, placement, and personal counselling, and to support and contribute to worthy charitable and civic endeavors.[23]

The failure to mention homosexuals contrasts strikingly with the equivalent statements of otherwise more cautious contemporary groups. The first line of the Daughters of Bilitis' policy statement identified them as a 'women's organization for the purpose of promoting the integration of the homosexual into society'.[24] Mattachine Society declared itself an 'organization of persons who are interested in the problem of the sex variant - especially the homosexual'.[25] Both, unlike LCE, did not shy away from openly expressing their orientation toward the homosexual cause. By the early 1960s, DOB even began openly identifying itself as a lesbian organisation.[26]

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[23] 'L.C.E. Applications', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 5, 11 December 1961.
[24] The policy statement is reprinted in *Marcia M. Gallo, Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement (New York: Seal Press, 2007), p.11.*
[25] *Mattachine Review*, volume 1, number 1, January/February 1955, p.32.
[26] Mattachine leaders, who still insisted on being a group for rather than by homosexuals, were aghast when DOB promoted their first, 1960 convention as the largest meeting by Lesbians in US history. (Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman* (Volcano, CA: Volcano Press, 1991), p.231; Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, p.61; Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 2 December 1992).

In its publication too, LCE adopted a language that obscured its nature as a group of gay bar activists even as it made strong criticisms of antigay police violence. For the first few years, Strait's publications only ever referred to their readers by such cryptic terms as 'variants', 'non-conformists', and, of course, 'the community'. As Strait acknowledged, his newspapers 'consistently refused to use several words in common usage while, at the same time, using other words not in common usage'.[27] It was not until autumn 1963 that the Board of Directors agreed to a more relaxed editorial policy and *The News* began to be more transparent about the nature of its advocacy and readership.[28]

While homosexual readers, as I argued in the previous chapter, appeared to have no issue decoding Strait's enigmatic language, other homophile activists resented LCE's hesitancy to openly carry the homophile banner. In early 1962, Strait was trying to build closer links to other West Coast homophile groups by attending Los Angeleno organisation ONE's tenth midwinter institute, an important annual meeting point for Western homophile groups. These efforts suffered a stinging setback when Strait's invitation to a ONE-affiliated conference which occurred parallel to the institute was rescinded. Enquiring upon the reasons for his exclusion, a ONE activist told Strait that his organisation had failed to meet ONE's standards for homophile organising. Only 'groups which are willing to publicly state that they are devoted entirely to work with the homophile' were invited. 'This is our field.'[29] In ONE's eyes, homophile activists were supposed to engage in an overt, one-issue struggle. LCE with its vague language of serving 'the community' and general unwillingness to commit itself publicly to the homophile cause had failed to meet the organisers' standards.

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[27] 'The League', *The News,* volume 3, number 4, 25 November 1963.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Letter from ONE [Dorr Legg?] to Guy Strait, 21 February 1962, *James Sears Papers*, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, box 169, folder 'Strait, Guy'.

Strait responded to such misgivings by suggesting that LCE was in fact a homophile-oriented group, but that it avoided openly presenting as such for strategic factors. In his exchange with ONE, he sought to make the case for LCE's future inclusion by illuminating the reasons behind its unusual editorial policies. He was adamant that the League's equivocal public image did not reflect a lack of commitment to homophile organising. The reason why the League had 'not and will not publicily [sic] state that we deal only in the problems of the homophile', Strait explained, had nothing to do with the group's direction. Quite to the contrary, it was born from the League's belief that this was the most effective way for it to engage in homophile activism. The Board of Directors felt that a public commitment to the homophile cause 'would minimize the amount of progress we could make'.[30] Other organisations might find that overtly homophile activism allowed them to meet their objectives more reliably. But they should not exclude LCE on the grounds that it had come to a different judgement. Behind its façade of fighting for such general goals as the protection of civil rights and liberties, LCE remained squarely and exclusively focused on the homophile cause.

Strait did not always, however, defend this particular image of LCE's operations. Only a few months later, in spring 1962, a New York homophile activist by the alias of Randy Wicker solicited Strait for advice on how to start his own gay newspaper. The two men struck up a cordial relationship and Wicker soon began publishing columns in *L.C.E. News* on New York gay life. They supply some of the earliest evidence of the language of community passing to New York City.[31] In his initial letter to Wicker, Strait painted a very different picture of the League than he had drawn in his correspondence with ONE. Where only several months earlier, he had insisted that the League was a homophile organisation in disguise, he now rejected Wicker's characterisation of the League as a

[30] Letter from Guy Strait to Dorr Legg, 23 February 1962, ibid.
[31] For Wicker's first column containing a reference to 'the community', see Randy Wicker, 'New York Scene', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 22, 6 August 1962.

homophile group. LCE, Strait asserted, were 'interested in the preservation of liberty and frankly do not care very much about the sexual preference of our readers'. As an organisation interested in a broad range of issues, it kept up 'constant correspondence with the various homosexual groups over the country as well as many other organizations'.[32] This embrace of a multi-issue orientation was no isolated incidence. Another few months down the line, Strait gave a very similar account of LCE's objectives in a letter to the editor of the New York newspaper *Village Voice* which he also forwarded to Wicker. In response to a recent article that had classified LCE as a homophile organisation, Strait protested that 'the League for Civil Education is not by any stretch of the imagination to be confused or to be considered as a homosexual organization. We are as interested in the personal liberties of all non-conformists'.[33] Depending on the time of the year, it seemed, LCE was either a one-issue group in coalitional clothing or a multi-issue organization that did not want to be pegged to any particular sexual group. How do we make sense of these contradictions?

Strait's letters to Wicker and ONE provide some important pointers. In them, Strait reveals that LCE's self-presentation was not guided by aspirations to transparency or consistency, but by contextual strategic judgements. In any situation, LCE leadership strove to promote those self-images that it expected would prove useful to their wider political project of building a gay mass movement. In his exchange with ONE, Strait already alluded to this facet of LCE's self-fashioning but did not indicate what kind of considerations were influencing the League's decisions. The extant Wicker correspondence is more explicit. There, Strait implied that he eschewed an open homophile orientation for LCE on two counts. The fear of state repression was one important factor. He told Wicker that 'the primary reason' he had sent his *Village Voice*

[32] Letter from Guy Strait to Randy Wicker, 16 May 1962, *Randy Wicker Papers*, New York Public Library, New York, box 1, folder 'Correspondence (general), 1961-1962'.
[33] Letter from Guy Strait to the editor of the Village Voice, 1 October 1962, ibid.

letter was to protect the publication and supporting bars in light of 'the law of the State of California regarding hs [homosexuals] in bars'.[34] As long as the state systematically persecuted gay bars, a gay bar publication could not be transparent about its purpose and audience without risking its own future and that of its advertisers.

The other reason Strait gave was the concern that an overt homophile orientation might jeopardize LCE's ambitions of mass mobilization. He advised Wicker to follow LCE in not using the word 'homosexual' in the title of his publication because '[throughout] the country inverts shy away from the word as if it were poison'.[35] In Strait's estimation, 'one of the big reasons' that previous homophile organizations 'have been so unsuccessful' in recruiting more members stemmed from 'their flagrant use of the word Homosexual' and the publicity that attracted to their cause.[36] 'A publicity seeking organization can hardly be considered a home for people who had rather not be in the spotlight.'[37] To be sure, all homophile groups would have an interest in not scaring off potential members. But this was especially crucial for an organisation as committed to building a mass movement as LCE. It is no wonder then that it went out of its way to avoid associations to homosexuality.

Strait's exchanges with ONE and Wicker give an early indication of how much this activist's thinking was guided by strategic calculations. Strait showed scant interest in developing consistent ideological positions in his public and private statements. Instead, the presentation of his thought was informed by calculations of the degree to which they would further his wider political ambitions for the League. Depending on the circumstances of the particular exchange, this could lead him to offer very contradictory accounts of his activities. LCE could emerge as either a strictly homophile organisation or as dedicated to a broad, diverse set of constituencies. With his eyes set on building

[34] Letter from Guy Strait to Charlie [Randy Wicker], 1 October 1962, ibid.
[35] Letter from Strait to Wicker, 16 May 1962.
[36] Ibid.; letter from Strait to [Wicker], 1 October 1962.
[37] Letter from Strait to [Wicker], 1 October 1962.

militant mass action, there is no indication that Strait was especially bothered by his own inconsistencies. His doctrinal flexibility was perhaps nowhere as apparent as in his thoughts on community.

Competing homophile conceptions of community

The novelty of LCE's militant approach left a deep impression on many other homophile activists. Already in late 1961, a New York Mattachine Society member characterised LCE with the words, 'If there was ever anything in the homosexual world purporting to be a mass movement, this is it'.[38] Hal Call, leader of the San Francisco Mattachine Society, listed the League's 'outspoken policies', 'indictments of police', and electoral campaigns as the organisation's idiosyncratic features.[39] Homophiles who remained invested in the gradual education of the heterosexual elite as the most promising vehicle for political change often perceived LCE's militant shift in tact and tactics as a menace to their movement. Even as they noted some of LCE's early achievements, neither of the above authors saw a space for LCE's militancy in homophile activism. Where the New York homophile speculated that LCE's confrontational politics might lead to a 'quick and ignominious death', Call, writing three years later, argued that LCE's radicalism was indeed partly to blame for the group's recent dissolution. As early as January 1962, Strait lamented that LCE's forthright politics put the League 'beyond the pale in many respects' in the eyes of other homophile organisations.[40]

The controversies this unusual organisation stimulated also extended to its conceptual tools. Some of the most vibrant inter-homophile debates LCE generated in the early 1960s centred around the intellectual cornerstone of its mass politics, the idea of the community. Contrary to what scholars have hitherto argued, the first years in the

[38] C.D., 'League for Civil Education', in *New York Mattachine Newsletter,* volume 6, number 12, December 1961, p.5.
[39] Hal Call, 'Breakthrough – When Will It Come', in *Mattachine Review*, April-September 1964, p.18.
[40] Letter from Guy Strait to Don Slater, January 30, 1962, in *James Sears Papers*, box 169, folder 'Strait, Guy'.

intellectual history of LGBTIQ community were not characterised by a single prevailing paradigm. Instead, we can observe an unexpected plasticity, with multiple, competing meanings circulating in homophile discourse.

As ideas of community spread among homophiles in the early 1960s, they often took the shape advanced by Sarria's campaign of a homosexual community grounded in common sexual interests and/or behaviours. Many homophile activists embraced this notion with great enthusiasm, recognizing the possibilities it offered for a different and better future. James 'Robbie' Robinson, a San Franciscan gay bartender, in his memoir attests to the salutary effects the 'discovery' and circulation of ideas of gay community had on the city's gay bar set. Considering themselves a community 'meant that we recognized ourselves as a "group". We were somebody. We were a "family" and could speak about our needs and demand that they be recognized. Most people today cannot understand how powerful that "discovery" was and what risks it required to implement .... It was, again, like standing up at the Black Cat and singing as a group so the cops could hear us from across the street. Wow!!'[41] Whether picked up in *LCE News*, shared across bar counters between friends, acquaintances, and strangers, or passing from lover to lover by night-time whisper, ideas of community could radically alter gays' self-perception. Robinson notes how they cloaked homosexuals in a new-found dignity and a sense of membership to a larger collective. These gifts then became the platform for many gays to demand change and the recognition of their needs in the face of intense societal hostility. A transformation of self and society that for many had begun at Black Cat found its next step in the circulation of a novel concept. In this process, the coinage of community had become part of the very ground on which a community could assemble.

[41] James (Robbie) Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, 2017, San Francisco Public Library, Unpublished manuscript, p.75.

Such impassioned embraces notwithstanding, notions of homosexual community did not always enjoy a positive reception among homophiles. Sceptics delivered several types of critiques. One influential set of critics was concerned that discourses of a sexual community would fail to address, if they did not exacerbate, the grievances of the most disadvantaged gay subgroups. This camp found one of its earliest and most cutting spokespersons in a Los Angeles-based activist going by the name of Cassandra. In winter 1963, Cassandra hit out at what she referred to as 'the ridiculous term made popular by our San Francisco brethren'.[42] Cassandra's opposition was fuelled partly by her perception that community's speakers were hypocrites. From her vantage, it was blatantly untrue that homophiles behaved as a community. Gays did not help each other find employment, treat each other respectfully in public, join homophile organisations, or contribute to a gay electoral politics. Far from a loving community, homosexuals through their actions revealed themselves to be 'about as communal as a school of starving piranhas'.

Ultimately, though, Cassandra's criticism was directed at more than merely gays' dishonesty. For, in unproblematically calling themselves a community, Cassandra implied, they also distorted the deep social divisions that continued to define gay social life. Gay social life remained marked by an array of pernicious prejudices and hierarchies. Many homophiles who proclaimed themselves a community in one breath, objected to the idea of showing solidarity with minority religious, racialized, or gender nonconforming gays in the next. '"Those Kikes?!", "Those niggers!" And God save us all: "Those queers!"' were left to fend for themselves. Facile assumptions of sexual community could cloud how much work was still needed to create a welcoming, diverse community, and hence de-prioritize such work. A dissembling rhetoric of equality replaced an urgent politics of solidarity. Cassandra hence found little reason to be

[42] It was common practice at this time for gay men, particularly if they dressed and acted effeminately, to adopt a feminine first name and to address each other with feminine pronouns. I follow this practice here.

cheerful about the arrival of ideas of gay community in her hometown. In fact, she was left feeling only revulsion. '[S]trange, isn't it,' she remarked, 'how an ordinary word used in a certain context can make you gag.'[43]

Cassandra's comments document the arrival of an influential camp of critics who strove for more expansive communities than sexual community allowed. Contrary to what their statements might at times have suggested, this group had no categorical objections to the project of community-building. In fact, they too felt community's pull. If we read Cassandra's broadside as a one-dimensional rejection of ideas of community, we would miss the fierce, underlying yearning for community that animated it. The discontent of Cassandra and her successors in this tradition was not targeted at aspirations of community, but at the failure of discourses of sexual community to deliver the kind of broad, diverse communities they imagined. In Cassandra's intersectional vision and that of her most prominent descendant, Mark Forrester, discussed in chapter five, this meant communities in which the experiences of the most marginalised gay subgroups were heard, respected, and foregrounded. Doubting whether same-sex sexual attraction alone could ever produce such communities, this camp became one of sexual community's loudest and most stubborn set of critics. Sometimes, as in Cassandra's case, this led them to seemingly dismiss all talk of community. At other times, as we shall see with Forrester below, they expressed their dreams in the very language of community, grappling for visions of community that reached beyond mere sexual community. As discourses of (homo)sexual community continued their dissemination across the United States, this set of critics travelled with them, steadily pushing for an extension of community's boundaries.

While one group of critics thus strove for more ambitious imaginaries of community, another took the opposite route, launching a full-blown assault on all ideas of gay

[43] 'Guest Editorial', *The News,* volume 3, number 6, 23 December 1963.

community. Led by Call's Mattachine Society of San Francisco, a long-standing ideological adversary of the League, this conservative camp objected to the confrontational, mass politics which ideas of gay community commonly served.[44] In July 1964, the San Francisco Mattachine launched their own newspaper, *Town Talk,* in an attempt to counteract the rising influence of Strait's vision. Mattachine leaders recognized that their more cautious politics was increasingly peripheral to homophile conversations dominated by newer publications with a 'popular readership', a thinly veiled reference to Strait's newspapers. They hoped that *Town Talk* would bring Mattachine's 'ethical conservatism' with its primary focus on winning the favour of 'behavioral scientists, professional persons, academicians, researchers' back into vogue. As part of this wider counteroffensive, Mattachine leaders Hall and Don Lucas also attacked the burgeoning idea of a gay community. Through *Town Talk,* they sought to persuade 'the homosexual minority … that it is not a community apart, but rather an integral part of the total community everywhere.'[45] Such statements attempted to reinstate the intellectual landscape of the 1950s, where groups like Mattachine had referred to 'the community' only as a synonym for the wider, heteronormative society into which they urged homosexuals to integrate themselves. Long opposed to ideas of a homosexual culture, the Mattachine leadership saw talk of a gay community as a threat to their vision for an elite-focused, assimilative homophile movement.

Contrary to what Mattachine insinuated, disagreements between activists in the early 1960s about the language and directions of the homophile movement did not revolve around whether to transform society or retreat into a form of gay separatism.

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[44] On the bitter Call-Strait rivalry, see Letter from Guy Strait to Randolfe Wicker, undated, *Randy Wicker Papers*, box 1, folder 'Correspondence (General), n.d.'; 'Sidney's Benefit', *The News,* volume 3, number 5, 6 December 1963; 'La Jolla', *Citizens News,* volume 3, number 9, 10 February 1964; Hal Call interview with Paul Cain, *James Sears Papers*, box 158, folder 'Call, Hall (by Paul Cain), 1994, 2000', pp.27-28. Call passed information on Strait's activities on to the FBI (Eric Cervini, *The Deviant's War: The Homosexual vs. the United States of America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), p.408).

[45] Undated letter from the Mattachine Society Office of the Board of Directors, *James Sears Papers*, box 174, folder 'Town Talk'.

Rather, they were animated by differing ideas over the kind of society homosexuals should seek to create and the means and strategies by which homophiles might legitimately and effectively pursue change. Depending on which positions particular homophile activists took on these questions at any particular time, they would invoke different and at times competing conceptions of community.

In this multifarious conversation, Strait's name was repeatedly associated with ideas of gay community. In a retrospective on the League, Hal Call in September 1964 attributed the coinage of 'the community' to Strait, a term that he read as a simple euphemism for 'homosexuals'.[46] As this influential gay activist acknowledged, discourses of gay community had started with Strait. Already a year prior, Strait had indicated his own recognition that fellow homophiles carved links between his person and the concept of gay community. When Cassandra rebuked her San Francisco brethren for promoting the idea of a sexual community, Strait stepped up to respond on behalf of the accused.[47] Depictions of Strait as a key vessel for ideas of gay community could draw strength not only from his pioneering role in coining ideas of a sexual community during Sarria's campaign, but also from a recent shift in his publications' vocabulary. From February 1964, Strait began occasionally substituting the term 'the homosexual Community' for 'the community' in his writing.[48] For those connecting him to ideas of sexual community, this might have further cemented a link they had already long drawn.

Strait's recurrent association to ideas of sexual community could be seen to vindicate a central thesis of dominant narratives of gay community's emergence that this chapter has sought to destabilize. For it raises the question whether D'Emilio's claim that early homophile discourses of community centred around the idea of a *sexual* community might find a redemptive figure in Strait. Even if, as I have argued, many different ways

[46] 'Breakthrough - When will it come', p.18.
[47] Editorial comments attached to 'Guest Editorial', *The News*, volume 3, number 6, 23 December 1963.
[48] For the first mention of 'the homosexual community' in Strait's publications, see 'Parks & Sex', *Citizens News,* volume 3, number 10, 24 February 1964.

of conceptualising community existed and competed with one another in the early 1960s, perhaps at least the period's most important homophile activist-theorist of community was squarely committed to notions of a sexual community. Other ideas of community, then, might well have circulated, but only as peripheral visions that those at the helm of the homophile movement found scarcely persuasive. In this case, the early period of homophile theorising of community would demonstrate a greater ideological coherence than this chapter has hitherto proposed.

Resting on assumptions of Strait's loyalty to ideas of a sexual community, this argument would be built on shaky foundations indeed. Taken as a whole, Strait's writing does not evince a consistent commitment to ideas of sexual community. As an activist invested in bringing about political change through a gay mass movement, Strait was very pragmatic about different traditions of theorising community. Rather than put his weight behind a particular conceptualisation, Strait mined the various available traditions for their usefulness. His deep ambivalence about ideas of sexual community and his curiosity for the rhetorical resources different conceptions of community provided becomes evident at three separate occasions: in the kind of groups Strait presented as participating in community life, his remarks on the nature of the community, and his response to the African American Civil Rights movement.

The community's diverse membership

Strait's frequent distance from ideas of sexual community is first suggested by which groups he presented as being involved in the community's life. Strait never explicitly spelled out who made up the membership of the community. Nevertheless, his publications' mission opens up a helpful path for reconstructing his understanding of the community's membership. Strait introduced his newspaper as an attempt to 'bring news

of the Community to the Community.'[49] At another point, he characterised *Citizens' News* as 'a method of communication for the Community.'[50] Such statements suggested that anyone interested in finding out who belonged to the community in Strait's view could simply note which groups his papers reported on. The emerging picture features both surprising omissions and inclusions as a diversity of groups assembles around the shared objective of fighting police harassment.

Not all groups that would make up a sexual community found a ready home in Strait's newspapers. While Strait never explicitly excluded upper-class gay men from membership in the community, anytime they were mentioned in Strait's publication it was only to stress their distance from the community's shared interests. Strait was well aware that upper-class gay men were largely protected from state harassment. He protested that laws which were used to oppress gays more generally '[were] not enforced against people who are financially in position to fight back'.[51] This group also did not have to defend their bars from antigay policing. The upper-class, male-only Oak Room of the St Francis Hotel was well-known as a bar where wealthy gay men could meet good-looking young men interested in exchanging sexual favours for gifts and other types of financial support. Yet, due to the owner's connections to Democratic party elites it enjoyed relative police immunity.[52] Strait frequently railed against this injustice.[53] From Strait's vantage, it was clear that 'persons in high places' had little interest in LCE's militant fight against antigay policing, an issue that largely did not affect them. LCE would have to 'sacrifice our objectives' if it sought to include them in its work.[54] On account of their diverging

[49] 'It is for you only,' *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 26, 1 October 1962.
[50] 'The Citizens News', *Citizens' News*, volume 3, number 7, 13 Jan 1964.
[51] 'Open Letter to a Judge', *The News,* volume 2, number 22, 5 August 1963. See also, 'Too Many Laws', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 26, 1 October 1962.
[52] Sarria's arrest was one of few exceptions.
[53] '585 Story', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 25, 17 September 1962; 'Radical?', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 14, 15 April 1963; 'ABC', *The News,* volume 2, number 23, 19 August 1963; 'Queen of the West', *Citizens News,* volume 3, number 11, 9 March 1964.
[54] 'Report to the Membership'.

treatment and politics, upper class gay men cut an at best fringe figure in Strait's image of the community.

Strait also marginalised lesbians in his presentations of the community. He almost exclusively reported on gay male bar circles, with scant mentions of the city's vibrant lesbian bar life.[55] Occasionally, Strait revealed his normatively male image of the gay community in very apparent ways. For instance, in an article on an LCE picnic, Strait claimed that 'the entire Community was well represented' yet named not a single woman or lesbian bar among the dozens of people and institutions attending.[56] Strait's consistent use of the pronoun 'he' for an imagined, typical member of the community further revealed his male imaginary.[57]

This gendered orientation appears to have been motivated by the misconception, widespread among gay men at that time, that the struggle against state discrimination was one that exclusively concerned gay men, not lesbians.[58] This is suggested by the timing of Strait's lesbian-themed reporting. Following an invitation from Phyllis Lyon to join DOB's events and 'see how the distaff side operates', Strait covered DOB events in spring and summer 1962.[59] Then, between July 1962 and December 1963, Strait did not mention the Daughters at all. It was not accidental that this silence coincided, as we shall see in the chapter's final section, with Strait's most ambitious campaign against state harassment. When Strait in winter 1963 at last came to terms with the campaign's failure, he re-established contact, offering DOB a column as part of his attempt to make the paper less militant again and include 'more varied news, without the strong emphasis on rights'.[60] Evidently, militant activism for Strait precluded a concern with lesbian life.

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[55] On San Francisco's extensive mid-century lesbian bar life, see Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, especially chapter two.
[56] 'Michelle's Picnic'.
[57] See for example, '1961 Review', volume 1, number 6, 25 December 1961; 'L.C.E. One Year Old'; 'This is the Year'; 'L.C.E. News and the Truth'.
[58] See discussion in chapter one.
[59] Letter from Phyllis Lyon to Guy Strait of 7 March 1962, *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco,* box 1, folder 6 ('Correspondence – Lyon, Phyllis (Treasurer, President)').
[60] 'The Citizens News', *Citizens News,* volume 3, number 7, 13 January 1964; 'The League'.

The assumption that this struggle was waged only by and for men not only obscured that many groups of gay women, particularly poor, gender-nonconforming gay women and gay women of colour, were frequently targeted with vicious forms of state harassment. It also overlooked how even the white, middle-class Daughters consistently showed up in the fight against state policing. Their priorities as white, middle-class lesbians might not have lain exclusively with pushing back against antigay policing, but they still reliably showed up as allies, as they often had to remind gay men.[61] Strait's male-biased image of the community was only to a limited extent reflective of the realities of antigay policing.

While some gay groups featured only peripherally in Strait's reporting on the community, other heterosexual parties received more attention than might be expected from an ostensible promoter of sexual community. In its generous support for gay defendants, the office of the San Francisco Public Defender proved that local government apparatuses could, as Anna Lvovsky has so persuasively argued, be more divided in their attitudes toward antigay policing than historians have often assumed.[62] Public Defender Edward Mancuso's office provided free legal representation for scores of gay defendants (and members of other minority groups) who were unable to afford a private attorney. In addition, members of Mancuso's office agreed to be interviewed by *LCE News* on legal questions, helping to increase bar patrons' familiarity with their rights.[63]

For the most part, however, the heterosexuals *LCE News* reported on as contributors to the struggle against antigay policing were not found in the halls of government but in the streets and commercial spaces police officers patrolled.

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[61] See for example Willer, 'The Lesbian, The Homosexual and the Homophile Movement'.
[62] Anna Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol: Cops, Courts, and the Struggle over Urban Gay Life before Stonewall* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).
[63] 'Tell Them Nothing', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 12, 19 March 1962; 'Halloween News', *The News,* volume 3, number 1, 14 October 1963.

Resembling Cathy Cohen's coalition of punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens in its breadth, they were made up of the employees of massage parlours and public baths, members of the beat subculture, nude models, operators of pinball machines, photo girls, teenagers, liquor vendors, immigrants, and sex workers.[64] All of these groups shared tangible interests in the gay struggle against law enforcement agencies due to their own vulnerability to police intimidation, domination, and extortion.[65]

While some of these groups were identified by Strait merely as potential allies, he reported on how others, such as women sex workers, made substantial contributions to the homophile cause. A 1962 legal challenge by sex worker Carole Lane managed to invalidate many municipal laws used to harass gays as well as women sex workers in public spaces. Lane successfully made the case that the State of California had pre-empted the field of sex laws, leading the California Supreme Court to void all such municipal laws in California. These included section 440 against the wearing of clothing of the opposite sex which Sarria had challenged during his campaign.[66] Lane's example showed how the 'nonnormative and marginal positions' of groups such as sex workers and homosexuals could often lead them, as Cohen suggested, to develop overlapping and at times identical interests.[67] Reconstructed on the basis of who Strait reported on, the boundaries of the community could prove at times surprisingly expansive. Groups

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[64] Cathy J. Cohen, 'Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?,' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* volume 3, number 4 (1997). On massage parlours and bathhouses, see 'Roving Report', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 11, 4 March 1962; on bathhouses, pinball operators, nude models and photo girls, see 'Licensing & Graft', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 12, 19 March 1962. On baths and nude models, see 'Short Subjects', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 15, 30 April 1962. On bathhouses, see 'T-Room Traps', *Citzens' News,* volume 3, number 8, 27 January 1964. On immigrants, see 'Liberty?', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 15, 30 April 1962. On teenagers, see 'And the Police' and 'Rafferty', *The News,* volume 3, number 5, 6 December 1963. On liquor vendors, see 'Overheard', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 1, 15 October 1962.

[65] Another group that Strait sought to develop political bonds to on the basis that their sexual preferences too were treated with social opprobrium were the men and women engaged in consensual 'wife swapping'. (See 'Wife Swapper', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 16, 14 May 1962; 'Overheard'; 'Now We Are Fighting', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 22, 6 August 1962).

[66]'Halowe'n [sic] News', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 22, 6 August 1962; Los Angeles, Citizens News, Vol 3, number 12, March 23, 1964

[67] Cohen, 'Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?', p.438.

like women sex workers suggested themselves at the very least as natural allies of the gay community, if not even as potential community members themselves.

The nature(s) of community

Although Strait's writing from the early 1960s is awash with references to the community, few of his texts comment directly on the nature of the community he envisioned. Those that do show him oscillate between more demanding, political, and less ambitious, representational conceptions of community. Strait most clearly set out the former vision in a September 1962 article titled 'The Community' that would become his longest surviving reflection on the subject.[68] At this stage, Strait had routinely, but only ever briefly, been referring to 'the community' for almost a year. The article at last offered his readers an expanded treatment of the term. It did not stipulate who Strait understood to hold membership in the community, but it did specify on what grounds he imagined members to form a community. The way it repeatedly characterised the community was as a 'Community of Interests'. Community members, Strait argued, shared interests across a range of issues involving job placement, legal aid and education, political organising, being kept informed on police activities, and access to blood donations. Together, these interests demarcated the 'field of community interests' around which the community coalesced.

Crucially, they held these interests not on account of their shared homosexuality but on the basis of the shared forms of state-sponsored oppression they experienced. As Strait emphasized in 'The Community', it was because gay men in particular were targeted by state harassment that they needed legal aid and education, knowledge of police operations, a gay electoral politics, and additional support for jobseekers.[69] Non-

[68] 'The Community', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 25, 17 September 1962. The subsequent quotations are from this article.

[69] Gay difficulties with finding and keeping jobs were frequently thematised in *L.C.E. News.* In 'The Community', Strait noted that many gay men needed help with job placements from a gay clothing bank because suspected homosexuals were discharged by the local Navy office with no suitable clothing for job

state organisations' dismissal of homosexual needs grounded further community interests. For instance, interest in the establishment of a gay blood bank sprang from homosexuals' experiences that the Red Cross ostensibly 'could [not] care less' about serving gay clientele several decades before they were officially barred from donating blood during the AIDS crisis. Similarly, the need for an organisation offering legal aid to gay men arose only because the American Civil Liberties Union in Strait's experience '[did] not wish to be disturbed' by the plight of arrested homosexuals.[70] By openly discriminating against and even attacking gays, state and non-state actors contributed to the formation of a population with concrete shared interests. Rather than a sexual community proper, the community as presented in this important text would be more accurately characterised as a political community, a community forged by their shared interests in resisting state harassment and providing for the needs of a marginalised group.

It is important to emphasize this point about the origins of community in 'The Community' because it once again opens up the question of which groups held these common interests and made up the community. Read within the wider body of Strait's writing, this framing clearly positions the gay male subject as the archetypical community member. Whereas Strait did not conceive of lesbians as holding strong investments in the fight against police harassment, he repeatedly argued in his publications that all gay men who were not protected by upper-class status shared common interests in this struggle. Many gay men at the time believed that they were unlikely to be arrested and that it was hence not in their interest to get involved in the risky business of gay

interviews. Prisons released them in the same state. Other articles reported on the difficulties gays faced in holding down jobs in antigay workplaces, especially amidst widespread police harassment and the common newspaper practice of printing the names of arrested homosexuals. To address these difficulties, *L.C.E. News* provided a job placement column where gay-friendly employers could advertise openings and jobseekers their own qualifications.

[70] For more on Strait's experiences with the ACLU, see Letter from Guy Strait to Randolfe Wicker, undated, *Randy Wicker Papers*, box 1, folder 'Correspondence (general), n.d.'.

activism.[71] 'Wake up, you <u>are</u> involved,' Strait exhorted these readers.[72] There were simply too many gays arrested each day for any lower- or middle-class gay man to justifiably feel safe. 'Tomorrow it might well be you.'[73] By printing figures and tables revealing the high numbers of suspected homosexuals detained by SFPD officers each week, Strait sought to shake gay men out of their complacency.[74] Even behaving in strict compliance with the law helped little when SFPD officers were ready to commit perjury to incriminate suspected homosexuals. Since police officer testimony 'in some cases [bore] no more relation to the truth than Watermelons do to Iron Ore', gay men would deny their affiliation to the community at their peril of their own self-interests.[75]

However, if the community was brought together by shared political rather than sexual interests, then, once more, a diversity of actors could qualify as potential community members. Indeed, like other homophile activists, Strait repeatedly argued that *all* heterosexual citizens had weighty reasons to be concerned about antigay policing.[76] He presented two main arguments to support this case. First, Strait maintained that the fervour with which the SFPD harassed minorities meant that important police tasks of interest to the general population lay increasingly neglected. Strait considered police officers to hold an important function within the US political system as 'protectors of Life, Liberty and Property'.[77] He suggested though that the SFPD increasingly failed to meet this task. 'Cases of women molestation are in the hundreds, strongarm robbery is rampant; There are thousands of beatings recorded in a year; banks have been

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[71] See for instance, 'The Public Image', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 11, 4 March 1962; 'L.C.E. One Year Old'.
[72] 'Justice'.
[73] 'We Must Fight Now,' *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 1, 15 October 1962.
[74] 'Short Subjects', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 15, 30 April 1962; 'The Police Dilemma', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 17, 28 May 1962; 'Too Many Laws', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 25, 17 September 1962.
[75] 'Police Too Honest?', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 17, 28 May 1962. For further Strait articles on law enforcement perjury, see 'ABC Asks More Power', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 6, 24 December 1962; 'We Charge Perjury', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 7, 7 January 1963, 'Enticement'.
[76] See for example Martin and Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, p. 265.
[77] 'The Police Dilemma'. See also 'And the Police', *The News,* volume 3, number 4, 25 November 1963; 'The Undesirables', *Citizens News,* volume 3, number 14, [April 1964].

robbed, but a policeman is a rare thing on the spot'.[78] Strait was not alone in the assessment that the police was more and more struggling to contain a perceived explosion of crime in the city. But where some municipal offices argued for more police hires to quell this problem, Strait joined other activists fighting police harassment in suggesting that the problem lay with how police officers were employed.[79] The city needed 'not more officers, just a better and a wiser use of the ones we have'.[80] Instead of dedicating extensive resources to types of policing that were either very lucrative for the city or enforced the moral codes 'of various religious leaders and moral do-gooders', the SFPD needed to re-focus on its core function of protecting life, liberty, and property. The zeal with which it persecuted the city's minorities threatened to neglect the safety of all of its citizens, heterosexuals and homosexuals alike.

The other reason Strait gave for why heterosexuals should join the fight against antigay policing was that they too risked becoming its targets. Strait printed multiple examples of heterosexuals who were questioned or arrested in the course of antigay police operations merely by virtue of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, accidentally mimicking gay social behavior, or performing actions that carried a faint hint of homosexuality, such as being 'just a little boisterous on Broadway'.[81] All of these stories showed that no one could feel safe from arbitrary arrest as long as the SFPD was fanatically hunting for suspected homosexuals. In a direct address to those belittling police violence as a minority issue, Strait warned that 'No citizen can afford to stand by and see the rights of another disregarded - YOU MAY BE NEXT.'[82] Antigay policing, in

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[78] 'S.F., Chicago, Denver and now Boston', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 6, 25 December 1961.
[79] For calls for more police hires, see 'S.F., Chicago, Denver and now Boston'. For defenders of the late 1950s beat culture employing a similar argument, see Christopher Lowen Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco: Policing and the Creation of a Cosmopolitan Liberal Politics, 1950-1972* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), p.52. For judges making similar arguments, see Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol*, p.118.
[80] 'S.F., Chicago, Denver and now Boston'.
[81] 'Too Many Laws', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 26, 1 October 1962. See also 'High Cost of Justice', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 16, 14 May 1962; 'Who's City?', *Citizens' News,* volume 3, number 11, 9 March 1964.
[82] 'Too Many Laws', volume 1, number 26.

other words, always threatened to overspill. Since the policing of homosexual lives restricted how heterosexuals could occupy public space as well, they too shared an interest in fighting antigay policing. If shared political interests grounded the community, it might show an unexpected capaciousness to link up with, and potentially incorporate, groups we would not associate with ideas of sexual community.

Strait was inconsistent in his advocacy of this suggestive vision of a political community. In a second prominent comment on the nature of community one year later, he puzzlingly offered a very different, even contradictory definition. After Cassandra admonished her 'San Francisco brethren' for coining the idea of a gay community, Strait, as already mentioned, quickly ventured to defuse the charges. He reprinted her broadside in the 1963 Christmas issue of his publication and attached an editorial note that responded to her claims. While agreeing that homosexuals needed to show greater solidarity with one another, Strait disingenuously asserted that Cassandra had misunderstood how San Franciscans employed the concept. 'We use the word "Community" in the sense that we have, in our ranks every facet of life necessary to qualify as a true community. We do not think of a "Community" as a place where one person looks after the other.' Here, Strait played on the sense that 'the community' held in standard, heteronormative discourse as a synonym for wider society. San Franciscan's homosexuals, he proposed, qualified for the title of community insofar they formed a social group with members from all walks of life. In this vision, what mattered was who made up the community, not how they acted. Homosexuals formed a community insofar as their membership was representative of the membership of the archetypical community, that is, society at large.

Of course, this understanding of the meaning of community stood in direct contradiction to the account Strait had given just a year earlier in 'The Community'. There, Strait had insisted that community arose from '[looking] after our own'. Now,

Cassandra had erred in supposing that anybody in San Francisco would think of the Community 'as a place where one person looks after the other'. A grave mistake, indeed. Strait's inconsistency might not only have bewildered Cassandra, it also poses a problem to any scholar seeking to reconstruct his views on the nature of community. How, we might ask, can his contradictory texts be squared? Tempting as it may be to strive to resolve the tension between Strait's statements, I would like to suggest another approach. Rather than excavating Strait's authentic doctrine on the nature of community, we might more fruitfully ask what Strait's contradictions tells us about the way he used ideas of community in his activism.

Once we stop searching for Strait the doctrinaire, we let Strait the pragmatist enter our field of vision. Strait was indeed consistent. He might not have been consistent in what he said about the nature of community, but he was in the way he consistently applied different conceptions of community to his present political advantage. As a variety of meanings of community held sway in the early 1960s, Strait can be observed putting community's very flexibility to good use. Instead of settling on any one meaning of community, he tapped into the rhetorical resources of the various traditions at his disposal, turning to whichever definition suited his present endeavours and wider political projects best. In 'The Community', Strait sought to recruit his readers to an unprecedented 'program of mutual assistance' that would begin with the creation of a gay clothes and a gay blood bank. Such a project would require significant support from many different homosexuals to become reality. In this context, discourses of political community forged in shared struggle served a particular purpose. They allowed Strait to use ideas of community as a carrot, promising potential supporters that through their voluntary labour and financial contributions they would experience a new level of community feeling, actualizing a 'complete community of interests'.

At other moments, different conceptions of community better served Strait's objectives. When political conceptions came under attack from Cassandra's cutting criticism, Strait retreated to less ambitious visions of community. He sought to save face by proposing a definition of community that few could take issue with. Overall, Strait's texts did not share a common vision of community as some of his readers have assumed, but a shared practice of creatively mining community's wealth of rhetorical resources. The plasticity of Strait's views on community became particularly evident in his approach to the African-American Civil Rights Movements.

The 1963 Birmingham Confrontation and the phantom of a 'total minority community'

The long shadow the Civil Rights movement cast on contemporary homophile activism has often been acknowledged by historians, even if it still remains very under-researched.[83] It is in his engagement with the Civil Rights movement that Strait's exploration of the potential of a political community found its deepest, boldest, and most tantalizing form. In the wake of the hugely successful 1963 Civil Rights protests in Birmingham, Alabama, Strait like other San Franciscan gay activists began to seriously entertain ideas of a local gay-black alliance based on shared political issues, such as police harassment. The autumn 1963 San Francisco municipal elections provided the testing ground for hopes of a 'total minority community'.

Before Strait could imagine gay and black struggles as closely intertwined, he first had to shed two inaccurate views of the early 1960s Civil Rights movement. Biased mainstream media coverage and ongoing racial segregation in employment, housing,

[83] Nikita Shepard, ""The Second Largest Minority": Analogies between Race and Sexuality in the American Homophile Movement, 1944-1968" (2018). For longer treatments of the connections between Civil Rights and homophile organising, see for example Kevin J. Mumford, *Not Straight, Not White: Black Gay Men from the March on Washington to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), Samuel Galen Ng, 'Trans Power! Sylvia Lee Rivera's STAR and the Black Panther Party,' *Left History,* volume 17, number 1 (2013).

and public spaces deeply affected white gays' perceptions of black organising. In the first place, they shaped how white gay activists imagined the geographical range of the Civil Rights movement. Even while reporting on local incidents of racist police violence, Strait initially perceived Civil Rights struggles as restricted to the American South.[84] In statements such as 'The battle of the South regarding integration are similar to our [i.e. gays'] battle', Strait followed deceptive Californian media representations in portraying racial discrimination as a Southern issue.[85] Strait's second misconception concerned the degree of the movement's success. Like other 1960s white gay activists, Strait originally held an inflated sense of the movement's achievements.[86] He preposterously sought to assure none other than the US Civil Rights Commission 'that the Civil Rights the racial minorities have been fighting for has [sic], to a large degree, been won'.[87]

This lack of familiarity with the realities of Civil Rights activism initially prevented the possibility for black-gay co-organising from entering Strait's view. In some of his first comparisons between black and gay struggles, Strait presented a naïve succession narrative. With African American grievances supposedly addressed, Strait expected gay issues to take their place as the most pressing social questions of the day. Equal rights for African Americans had been won, Strait ignorantly asserted. 'But how about the social variant?' he pressed.[88] Strait claimed that as police harassment of African Americans was purportedly fading, officers were moving on to oppressing gays with unprecedented ferocity. '[A]ll the tricks that the police learned while they are after the negroes, have

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[84] For reports on local acts of racist police brutality, see for example 'Heil! Seig [sic] Heil!" *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 18, 11 June 1962; 'SS', *The News,* volume 2, number 25, 16 September 1963. Strait also condemned the violent police treatment of African Americans in Los Angeles. See 'Brutality', *The News,* volume 2, number 16, 13 May 1963.

[85] 'Now We Are Fighting'. For deceptive media representations see Jeanne Theoharis, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: The Civil Rights Movement Outside the South,' in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, ed. Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.52; 'All Around', *Citizens News,* volume 3, number 12, 23 March 1964; and, more generally, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, 'The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,' *Journal of American History,* volume 91, number 4 (2005).

[86] Shepard, ""The Second Largest Minority": Analogies between Race and Sexuality in the American Homophile Movement, 1944-1968," pp.49-51.

[87] 'Open Letter to the US Civil Rights Commission', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 9, 3 February 1963.

[88] Ibid.

been refined in the treatment of social variants'.[89] In this representation of state harassment's development, there was little reason for black and gay organisations to mutually support each other. Rather, black organisations should reallocate their resources to the homophile cause. If black organisations like the NAACP were 'truly interested in discovering' the extent of state 'savagery', they should 'contact the L.C.E.', Strait preposterously quipped in April 1963. 'We could give them a few pointers.'[90]

The Birmingham Confrontation of April and May 1963 organised under the aegis of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) which was headed by Martin Luther King Jr. cleared away Strait's misconceptions of the Civil Rights movement.[91] After years of ground-level power-building, the SCLC in spring 1963 mobilized the black community of Birmingham, Alabama, a city that had come to be known as America's racist capital, for a hugely successful action. For over a month, African Americans boycotted the white-owned businesses in the city centre while also participating by the thousands in mass demonstrations against ongoing Jim Crow legislation, racial segregation, and the white supremacist power structure of their city. The Birmingham Confrontation, as the organisers referred to it, attracted vast media attention. Media outlets from around the world, including Strait's *The News,* printed pictures of police dogs attacking nonviolent protesters and reported on the events.[92] In the end, the protestors prevailed as the city's white economic elites reluctantly met their demands in early May. The campaign's victory set in motion hundreds of local movements that together won the passage of the federal 1964 Civil Rights Act, which outlawed a wide range of segregationist practices.

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[89] Ibid.
[90] 'Around the City', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 14, 15 April 1963.
[91] My account of the Birmingham Confrontation and its legacy is based on the influential treatment provided by Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1984), pp. 250-274.
[92] 'White Man's Best Friend', *The News,* volume 2, number 16, 13 May 1963.

During the Birmingham Confrontation, Strait came to understand the Civil Rights movement as both ongoing and national in scope. Largely sympathetic local news coverage made clear that Civil Rights movement struggles continued to remain urgent. Moreover, the Birmingham events created an opening for longstanding grievances of black San Franciscans to finally, if briefly, receive more media attention, too.[93] Such articles implied that, as James Baldwin put it during a visit to the Bay Area, there was 'no moral distance… between the facts of life in San Francisco and the facts of life in Birmingham'.[94] Even as Mayor George Christopher and Police Chief Thomas Cahill disingenuously positioned themselves as supporters of black liberation, some white San Franciscans had come to understand anti-black oppression as a national phenomenon that continued to take deep roots in their city as well.[95]

Strait belonged to this camp. He decried the hypocrisy of San Franciscan authorities and white residents protesting a form of discrimination that they upheld in their own city.

> We say how bad it is that in some parts of the country – the South – that people are deprived of their rights. Yet here in San Francisco at the insistence of the Chief of Police and his Capitans [sic]; and with the full knowledge and evidently consent of the Attorney General of the State and of the Governor, thousands of ordinary citizens are deprived of their rights each day. It is not only in Alabama nor in the South that Americans are deprived of the freedom of assembly and the freedom of press and the guarantee of equal treatment under the laws.[96]

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[93] On black grievances with the city administration, see Albert S. Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954* (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 1993); Daniel Edward Crowe, *Prophets of Rage: The Black Freedom Struggle in San Francisco, 1945-1969* (New York: Garland Pub., 2000); Aliyah Dunn-Salahuddin, 'A Forgotten Community, A Forgotten History: San Francisco's 1966 Urban Uprising,' in *The Strange Careers of the Jim Crow North: Segregation and Struggle Outside of the South*, ed. Brian Purnell, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2019). On them receiving media coverage, see for example 'The Big Rights March', *San Francisco Chronicle,* 27 May 1963, p.5.

[94] Richard O. Moore, *Take This Hammer* (1963), cited in Dunn-Salahuddin, 'A Forgotten Community, A Forgotten History: San Francisco's 1966 Urban Uprising,' pp.212-213.

[95] For an example of Christopher defending police brutality against African Americans, see 'Liberty?', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 23, 20 August 1962. On Cahill's responsibility for such treatment, see also 'Open Letter to US Civil Rights Commission'. For their attempt to paint themselves as supporters of black liberation, see Martin Kasindrof, 'S.F. Thousands March for "Rights"', *San Francisco Examiner,* 27 May 1963, pp. 1, 7.

[96] 'Hypocrites', *The News,* volume 2, number 16, 13 May 1963.

Strait further denied Cahill's claims that police brutality of Birmingham's ilk did not occur in San Francisco. He reported how SFPD officers with a history of racial violence were given police dogs with whom they visited majority-black areas of town. There, they '[strutted] down the streets and arrogantly [surveyed] the passersby with an attitude that would have done credit to "Uncle Tom's Cabin"', Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist novel set in the American South.[97] Strait argued to his readers that San Francisco showed no superior respect for the rights of African Americans than Birmingham. What differentiated the two cities was local politicians' degree of duplicity and the Civil Rights movement's relative strength. '[T]he politicians here are too smart to let an incident occur and the leaders of the minorities too weak to do what their brothers in Alabama have done'.[98]

As Strait learned to see the Civil Rights movement as ongoing and national in scope, he could start to look for more common ground, both conceptually and practically, on which gay and black activism might intersect. He found it on the subject of state and especially police harassment, the issue around which he was attempting to organise the community. After Strait became more familiar with how police violence continued to structure African American lives, he began to report on it in ways that emphasized the parallels between gay and black experiences. Instead of speaking as before of the separate struggles of 'negroes' and 'social variants', Strait from spring 1963 onwards increasingly framed state harassment as the oppression of 'minorities' or 'minority groups'.[99] When SFPD officers beat up African Americans, they attacked 'members of a minority group'.[100] When they harassed gay venues, they targeted 'bars where members of minority groups are congregated'.[101] The presence of the SFPD S-Squad made 'the

[97] 'White Man's Best Friend'.
[98] 'The Parade'.
[99] For references to 'negro' and 'social variant', see for example, 'It can happen to you', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 19, 25 June 1962; 'Open Letter to US Civil Rights Commission'.
[100] 'White Man's Best Friend'.
[101] 'White Man's Best Friend'.

minorities cringe' while the city's Municipal Court's complicity made it into an 'enemy of the Minority'.[102] The African American and gay activists fighting state harassment on the other hand formed 'the leaders of the minorities'.[103] Sometimes, it was not clear whether by 'the minorities' Strait referred to gays, African Americans or both. His minoritarian language carried the suggestion that their shared experiences with state violence may bind African Americans and gays together.

In an article published only a few weeks after the Birmingham events, Strait went one step further in proposing concrete political grounds for a potential gay-black alliance. He argued that police oppression of both black and gay populations rested on a set of laws that the two communities had a shared interest in overturning. Strait contended that deliberately vague injunctions against such crimes as public drunkenness, disorderly conduct, and vagrancy were included in the municipal legal code in order to facilitate the oppression of the two groups. They were 'exactly designed to "keep in line" any particular group that the Police Desire [sic]'.[104] This diagnosis hinted at the further common ground African Americans and gays might find not only in their lived experiences with police violence but also in a shared opposition to the unjust legal apparatus undergirding it.

In this context, the fall 1963 San Francisco municipal elections offered the stage at which these ideas of a black-gay political alliance could be brought to the test. They represented the first chance since Sarria's 1961 campaign to elect local officials with the power to revise the city's legal codes. Strait was intent not to miss this opportunity. As in the previous years, he published several articles in the election run-up to promote to his readers the unique opportunities elections presented.

That year, Strait's electoral advocacy was governed by two competing logics – one tested, one new. On the one hand, he urged gays to the polls by invoking the notion of

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[102] 'SS'; 'To Live as Free Americans'.
[103] 'The Parade'.
[104] 'To Live as Free Americans'

a gay bloc of voters who could decide elections on their own. This argument followed in the footsteps of Sarria's campaign and its attempt to prove the existence of a purely homosexual community. It could also hope to emulate the success Strait attributed, probably inaccurately, to gays at having voted George Christopher into office during the 1959 Wolden affair.[105] In this imaginary, gays presented a large and heterogenous group for whom their homosexuality represented the most salient feature of their identity, overriding their class, racial, and political affiliations. As such, they were both ready and able to elect whichever candidate proved the most amenable to gay political demands. In Strait's words, '[s]ince [our readers] do not belong, necessarily, to any racial group, nor do they belong to an economic group, and certainly they do not belong to any political machine, they are going to have the opportunity of naming the Mayor and the Supervisors of San Francisco.' Twenty thousand gay voters would lift into office 'the man who is willing to say that it is time for the Police to pay more attention to crime and to criminals and less time in enforcing the will and whim of the individual officer.' This account paid little attention to the opportunities that the convergence of minority agendas presented. Instead, Strait emphasized that 'the minority groups *individually* hold the balance of power'.[106]

Strait did not appear to fully trust that this strategy would prove successful. In his reports, he complimented it with a cautiously emerging, coalitional logic on how electoral success might be won. In this rationale, the 1963 elections offered a great chance for gay electoral victory because they delivered in Public Defender Edward Mancuso a mayoral candidate who would be able to unite multiple minorities around his history of

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[105] For Strait's attribution, see 'Roving Report', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 22, 6 August 1962; 'The Nightingale,' *The News*, volume 3, number 6, 23 December 1963. For other homophile activists making similar assessments, see 'S.I.R's Place in the Political Arena, *Vector,* volume 3, number 10, September 1967; H. Babbitt, 'and we forgive those who trespass against us', *Vector,* volume 4, number 12, December 1968. Wolden's attack on homosexuals won him the disapproval of many different groups, not just homosexuals. See for example the newspaper articles collected in *James Sears Papers*, box 182, folder 'Wolden Clippings'.

[106] All citations from 'We can Elect', *The News,* volume 2, number 23, 19 August 1963, my emphasis.

fighting state sponsored oppression. Strait was outspoken in his enthusiasm for the campaign of this long-standing ally of the League. His excitement was fanned in significant part by his perception that Mancuso would appeal to a wide variety of minority groups. In his first endorsement of Mancuso's candidacy, Strait emphasized that Mancuso was a man whose work had 'endeared him to many of the minorities'. His proposed policies deliberately appealed to diverse minority groups and 'undoubtedly would make for a better life for the minorities'.[107] The League was not the only homophile organisation which post-Birmingham held a keen interest in Mancuso's appeal to black voters. The Daughters of Bilitis likewise only became active on behalf of his campaign after they had been 'favorably impressed' by Mancuso's progressive views on the rights of 'other minority groups'.[108] A few months after ten thousands of San Franciscans had joined a parade in support of the Birmingham protestors, gay activists paid close attention to whether their favoured political candidates would also be able to tap into this other pool of potential voters.[109] The municipal elections offered an inviting test for a broader, coalitional gay electoral politics.

Even before election day, however, it had become clear that Mancuso would fail to live up to gays' coalitional aspirations. Despite claiming that he had 'tremendous support' among minority groups, Mancuso did not succeed at attracting significant black support.[110] African American political leaders instead put their weight behind Democratic Congressman John Shelley, a front-runner and eventual winner of the office.[111] In *The News'* final pre-election issue, Strait conceded that Mancuso was not going to capture

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[107] 'Roundup', *The News*, volume 2, number 25, 16 September 1963.
[108] DOB Board meeting minutes of 18 October 1963 meeting, *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers*, box 2, folder 6 ('Administrative Files, DOB SF Chapter').
[109] For news reports on the parade, see Kasindrof, 'S.F. Thousands March for "Rights"'; 'The Big Rights March'.
[110] Harry Johanesen, 'Ed Mancuso – A profile', *San Francisco Examiner,* 24 September 1963, p.25.
[111] Fred Martin, 'A Negro on Jobs Board – Shelley', *San Francisco Examiner,* 12 November 1963, pp.1, 18. Black support for Shelley was in part driven by the openly racist employment records of his closest competitor, Dobbs. See 'Editorials: Reflections on the Mayoralty Race', *Sun-Reporter,* 9 November 1963, p.12.

significant numbers of black voters.[112] As the coalitional hopes gave out, Strait was left with framing the elections exclusively as a chance to prove the presence of a gay 'bloc vote' large enough to put their preferred candidate 'over the top'.[113]

In the end, Mancuso fell well short of posing a serious challenge in the race for mayor. His 17,581 votes placed him only third and at a considerable distance to Shelley at 120,560 and the second-placed Republican Harold Dobbs at 92,627 votes. Mancuso's disappointing performance emphasized the limited effectiveness of one-issue gay electoral strategies. Strait sought to minimize the damage it inflicted on claims of a vast gay voting bloc by contending that 'about 90%' of Mancuso's votes should be credited to the community.[114] He provided no evidence to support this assertion. But even if Strait was correct, Mancuso's low numbers seemed to confirm – as Sarria's candidacy had suggested two years prior – that a campaign strategy primarily aimed at attracting gay voters could not mobilize the numbers needed to win municipal elections. Coalitional paths, on the other hand, evidently came with their own pitfalls. Gay organisers could not assume that other minority groups would unite behind their favoured candidates. Clearly, much more grassroots work was required to forge connections between black and gay organisers before a genuine coalitional candidacy could be launched.

Other results from the 1963 municipal elections indicated, however, that such work might indeed offer a road into City Hall. In the same elections, Percy Moore ran a low-budget campaign for San Francisco City Supervisor as the first major black candidate since 1947.[115] A long-time labour organiser, Moore sought to build a broad coalitional platform representing low- and middle-income groups from all racial backgrounds. He argued that it was 'to their advantage to vote for non-white qualified candidates on a

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[112] 'Dewey Elected', *The News,* volume 3, number 2, 28 October 1963.
[113] 'Bloc Vote', ibid.
[114] 'The Election', *The News,* volume 3, number 3, 11 Nov 1963.
[115] Michael Harris, 'Plan for Electing a Negro to the Board of Supervisors', *San Francisco Chronicle,* 31 May 1963, p.15.

common interest' basis.[116] Moore managed to win not only the support of the city's leading black newspaper, *Sun-Reporter,* but also endorsements from various labour and Democratic clubs, as well as the Mexican-American Political Association.[117] Strait supported Moore's candidacy too. He was attracted to Moore's candidacy on account of its broad coalitional imaginary and Moore's promise to be '[a] voice sensitive to the attitudes of the total minority community'.[118] Strait, however, only urged his readers to vote for Moore in the final pre-election issue. He spent considerably more resources promoting Mancuso's bid. Yet Moore's results proved that he would have been a much stronger candidate to rally behind. He recorded a total of 60,773 votes, more than any black candidate in San Franciscan politics before him, to come in tenth in the competition for six open positions. His numbers suggested the vast and unexhausted potential of a broad coalition politics serving the 'total minority community'.

Strait's advocacy for a broader coalitional community ended with the 1963 municipal elections. This was first indicated by changes in how he described his readers. At the next LCE Board Meeting, Strait requested and received permission to use words LCE had previously avoided, such as 'homosexual'. A few months later, in February 1964, Strait for the first time qualified the community as the 'homosexual Community' in *Citizens' News*.[119] But it was Strait's reaction to the San Francisco Sheraton-Palace Hotel protests that broke out in the same month that unambiguously signalled his departure from a coalitional gay politics.

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[116] 'Profiles: Supervisor Candidates', *San Francisco Examiner,* 11 October 1963, p.33.
[117] On the *Sun-Reporter's* support, see for example, 'Editorial Opinion: An Opportunity for Reciprocity', *Sun-Reporter,* 24 August 1963, p.12; 'Editorials: Reflections on the Mayoralty Race'. On Moore's endorsements, see 'An Indorsement for Shelley', *San Francisco Examiner,* 14 August 1963, p.9; Ray Christiansen, 'Split in Labor Politicking', *San Francisco Examiner,* 19 September 1963, p.20; 'Political Notes', *San Francisco Examiner,* 3 October 1963, p.52; 'Demo Group Backs Dobbs', *San Francisco Examiner,* 16 October 1963, p.10. The president of the Mexican-American Political Association (sometimes referred to as the Mexican-American Political Alliance) Robert Gonzales would two years later embark on his own run for city supervisor and very deliberately seek out the homophile vote (see the following chapter).
[118] 'Elect', *The News*, volume 3, number 2, 28 October 1963. The providence of this quote is unclear. Its earliest mention in a newspaper was in 'Moscone and McCarthy win', *San Francisco Examiner,* 6 November 1963.
[119] 'Parks & Sex'.

In February and March 1964, thousands of mainly young activists protested against the discriminatory, racist hiring practices of one of San Francisco's most prestigious hotels. They demonstrated, held pickets and a sit-in, saw hundreds of them arrested, and, finally, won concessions from the Hotel Employers Association of San Francisco, which represented many of the city's major hotels, to hire more racial minority employees and for higher positions, too. The protests were poorly received by many of the white authorities and white members of thepublic. Mayor Shelley called the protestors 'kids who resorted to irresponsible tactics', Governor Edmund Brown found them 'very disgraceful', and former Mayor Elmer Robinson even characterised them as 'a mob of youngsters'. Some white journalists and members of the public referred to them as 'distorted', 'maladjusted', 'repulsive', 'mentally retarded', 'deranged misfits' engaged in 'cheap farce', 'naked lawlessness' and rampant 'idiocy'.[120] There was at least one physical attack on the protestors.[121]

Unlike these compatriots, Strait expressed his sympathies for the protests. This was despite his own long-standing business relationships with the hotel, where Strait had hosted LCE business meetings.[122] In the first *Citizens' News* issue after the protests had grabbed public attention, Strait published a front-page article mocking claims by San Francisco's white population and political establishment to be 'racially tolerant' when they were responsible for upholding residential and employment segregation as well as anti-black police brutality in the city.[123] In the same issue, Strait voiced concerns over the harsh treatment the police directed at protesters.[124] The next issue continued to a large

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[120] 'Shelley suspicious of some pickets', *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 3, 1964, p.11; 'Brown Blasts The 'Shop-Ins', *San Francisco Examiner*, March 4, 1964, p.14; 'Shelley Blasted Over Hotel Pact', *Examiner*, March 9, 1964, p.17. Letters by Dorothy Ferguson, Oscar Turning, Fred Best, Mrs. A.R. Szekely, Eric Seward in 'Editor's Mail Box: Sheraton-Palace Sit-In', *Examiner*, March 11, 1964, p.34; Big 'Sit-In' at Palace Hotel', *Chronicle*, March 7, 1964, p.6; 'Comments from Hotel Employees', *Chronicle*, March 8, 1964, p.1a; Lucius Beebe, 'Martyrdom becomes low comedy', *Chronicle*, March 9, 1964, p.46; Charles Denton, 'A Little Child Leads Them, But Where?', *Examiner*, March 11, 1964, p.33.

[121] 'The Outraged Citizen', *San Francisco Examiner,* 8 March 1964, p.B.

[122] 'The League'.

[123] 'Queen of the West', *Citizens News,* volume 3, number 11, 9 March 1964.

[124] 'S.F.P. Too Rough!', ibid.

degree in the same vein. It printed a letter from an African American reader who lambasted the insincerity of San Francisco's newspapers. JJ recalled how the papers had celebrated San Franciscan Freedom Fighters' quest to liberate JJ's home state of Mississippi through civil disobedience practices. Now, however, they 'are opposed to that type [of] tactic in San Francisco.' And when a different, presumably white reader declared Strait a 'disgrace' for his presence at the demonstrations, Strait retorted in support of the protestors that he, unlike his reader, 'will give almost everyone the right to express themselves.'[125]

However, while Strait was generally sympathetic to the protests, he did not seize the invitation they offered for broader coalitional work around workplace discrimination, an issue that also effected many white homosexuals. Instead, Strait used the protests to draw a starker line between black and gay organising. While Strait defended the demonstrations, he also made it clear that he himself had only joined as an observer. 'The persons in whom I am interested do not have enough common background to demonstrate', Strait explained.[126] With this sentence, Strait represented blacks and gays as two discrete groups. They no longer belonged to the same group as minorities.

Strait's departure from a black-gay coalition politics was further underscored by his harsh dismissal of the protestors' innovative civil disobedience tactics. In an article entitled 'Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs', Strait accused the sit-in participants of protesting in ways which violated the right to 'life liberty property' of the Sheraton's owner and guests 'without the due process of the law'. Strait bizarrely suggested that by doing so they aligned themselves with Southern lynch mobs who, he argued, had similarly elevated themselves above the law. Whereas other sympathetic white observers compared the protestors to the Boston Tea party, Strait claimed that they had acted in

[125] 'All Around', *Citizens News,* volume 3, number 12, 23 March 1964.
[126] Ibid.

contravention of US patriotic traditions in denying 'the right of free men'.[127] In this picture, African American and homophile activism not only differed in their desired constituencies but also in the tactics – illegitimate in the case of the former, legitimate in the case of the latter – that the two movements employed. Previous claims that he 'would not hesitate for half a moment to use any means at my disposal' to improve the gay community's situation notwithstanding, Strait's treatment of the Sheraton protesters showcased the limits of his militarism and coalitional thinking.[128]

Strait's varied reactions to the Civil Rights movement once again underscores the malleability and tactical nature of his views of community. In 1961, Strait had promoted ideas of sexual community during Sarria's campaign. In the identical context of municipal elections, Strait two years later also advanced wider, coalitional visions of a 'total minority community'. This diversification in his discourse was motivated by shifting political circumstances. The Civil Rights movement's successes made a gay-black political alliance newly tantalising in autumn 1963. When Strait's attempt at a coalitional politics failed, he again recalibrated his rhetorical and political orientation toward a more narrow, gay-only agenda. As a savvy strategist, Strait mobilized whatever meaning of community he surmised might best serve his political work.

Reconstructing Strait's shifting visions of community not only gives us insight into the thought processes of gay community's first published theorist, it also opens a revealing window into the infant years of homophile ideas of community. Strait's intellectual journey perfectly demonstrates the early capaciousness of ideas of gay community. The fact that an activist so invested in what his statements would allow him to do could refer to community in such varied ways underlines how diverse imaginaries of community held traction in the early 1960s. Though some might have gathered more

[127] For the Tea Party comparison, see Arthur Hoppe, 'Protest is a Bum Deal', *San Francisco Chronicle,* 15 March 1964, p.32.
[128] 'Dear Senator', *The News,* volume 3, number 2, 28 October 1963.

advocates than others, Strait's varied manoeuvres suggest that multiple discourses of community could be expected to exert pull with his readers. Contrary to what D'Emilio has so influentially suggested, early homophile ideas of community did not circulate solely around the notion of a sexual community. Strait is most reflective of this unsettled, early stage of gay community's intellectual history in providing a hotbed for many of the competing traditions of community that characterised it.

The demise of the League for Civil Education

The heyday of Strait's reign as the most influential homophile speaker of community lasted only a relatively short time. Between Strait's first mention of 'the community' in October 1961 and the dissolution of the League for Civil Education in May 1964, Strait's principal power basis in the movement, a mere two-and-a-half years passed. LCE's demise illustrates how the life journeys of activist concepts are often shaped by their speakers' practical, strategic choices and their unforeseen consequences. No event had a bigger impact on LCE's disbandment than Strait's major tactical error to commence an overambitious legal campaign against the antigay state machinery in autumn 1962.

Strait launched the campaign in October 1962 when concerted SFPD, ABC, and court pressure threatened to close down Jack's Waterfront, a gay bar with a long history of resisting state harassment and supporting LCE's work. Jack's co-owner George Bauman, a key witness in the 1960 'Gayola' scandal in which gay bar owners had laid bare widespread SFPD and ABC blackmail, turned to Strait for support. Heeding Bauman's call, Strait initiated his most formidable attempt at enacting his vision of a militant gay community. In an *L.C.E. News* article titled 'We Must Fight Now', Strait announced an unprecedented lawsuit designed to save Jack's and push back against state harassment. It would charge the SFPD and ABC with repeated and ongoing violations of gay people's constitutionally enshrined rights and freedoms, including the freedoms of speech, press, and assembly, and the right to equal protection under the

law.[129] Just two weeks prior, Strait had warned a fellow activist that homophile groups should only pursue very public actions if they were likely to 'back it up' with victory, lest they scare off their potential members from joining.[130] That he nevertheless embarked on the campaign seems to suggest a confidence in its future success.

A victorious legal challenge to state harassment promised multiple benefits. In the first place, a lawsuit could hope to change whose views determined the extent and character of antigay policing in San Francisco. As we saw in chapter one, law enforcement agencies had broad, extra-legal powers to transform San Francisco into a police city for most gay groups. A lawsuit charging SFPD and ABC with constitutional infringements could force a broader, public reflection on this state of affairs. Gay legal activists knew from experience that 'the average citizen in San Francisco wasn't nearly as bigoted as the police'.[131] Strait in particular had long been invested in showing that San Franciscans were less supportive of stringent antigay policing than was commonly assumed. He believed that if citizens were made aware of the actual nature of ABC conduct, they would 'throw the whole passel of rascals out of the door'.[132] Ultimately, a judge or a jury of citizens, not police officers, would issue a verdict on how the City's gay population ought to be policed. The acquittal of the police officers accused in the 1960 Gayola scandal might have shown that the citizenry was far from certain to side with the City's gay population. But even so, there was a chance. And the courts, as Anna Lvovsky has documented, already had a long, if uneven history of resisting antigay police harassment they deemed excessive.[133]

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[129] 'We Must Fight Now,' *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 1, 15 October 1962.
[130] Letter from Guy Strait to Charlie [Randy Wicker], 1 October 1962, Wicker papers 1.
[131] Herbert Donaldson and Evander Smith, 'The Defenders,' in *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990*, ed. Eric Marcus (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 148. See also Del Martin, 'Report on Council on Religion and the Homosexual Activities in San Francisco, *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers*, box 6, folder 10 ('Correspondence re- Council on Religion and the Homosexual').
[132] 'ABC', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 25, 16 September 1963. See also 'Dear Senator', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 23, 19 August 1963.
[133] Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol*.

More than just compelling the public and courts to sit in judgement on antigay policing, the Jack's Waterfront case also provided an excellent opportunity to change *how* heterosexual citizens viewed the conflict between policing agencies and gay bars. Ordinarily, as chapter one discussed, court cases against bars were based on vague evidence collected over a period of twelve to eighteen months and did not give bars a good chance of presenting the gay bar life from their perspective. Unusually though, the case against Jack's Waterfront rested in part on fabricated evidence that had been 'collated' by ABC and SFPD agents over the period of three recent days.[134] Here, believable eyewitnesses might be found to contradict state evidence in court and remove some of the wool policing agents had pulled over the public's eyes. Strait immediately set on the search.[135]

While these potential benefits made a lawsuit attractive, the campaign from its inception faced two crucial and finally unsurmountable challenges. For one, LCE lacked both legal experience and staff to fight a court case of this scale. By autumn 1962, it could point to a proud record of providing minor legal aid. It had 'furnished attorneys without charge to dozens of persons … referred hundreds of persons to attorneys,' and 'informed thousands of their rights under the law'.[136] LCE had never, however, launched a legal case itself, let alone one as major as the one it was proposing. Nor had it gained the support of non-profit organisations who possessed the necessary experience and personnel like the NAACP or ACLU. When approached, the ACLU refused LCE's plea for help.[137] This left LCE relying on private law firms to advance their case, a dependence that would ultimately exact a steep price.

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134 'We charge Perjury', and 'Testimony about Jack's', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 7, 7 January 1963..
135 'Important Notice', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 1, 15 October 1962.
136 'L.C.E One Year Old'.
137 'Help from A.C.L.U.?', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 3, 12 November 1962. On the history of ACLU's stance toward homosexuality, see Eric Cervini, "The Proud Plaintiff: The Mattachine Society of Washington, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Invention of Gay Pride, 1957-1969" (PhD in History University of Cambridge, Emmanuel College, 2019); Marc Stein, *Sexual injustice: Supreme Court decisions from Griswold to Roe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), pp.158-162; Leigh Ann Wheeler, *How Sex Became a Civil Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.108-119. There are no records

But it was LCE's lack of financial power that posed the campaign's most significant hurdle. Familiar with the prohibitive costs of lengthy court battles, Strait announced that the campaign would need to raise $5,000 for the LCE War Chest over the first few weeks alone and $50,000 over the first year.[138] Even very successful gay businesses struggled to generate such sums. With Strait not owning a business, the Jack's Waterfront campaign from the beginning rested on the hope of an unprecedented groundswell of gay support. It could work, as Strait himself recognized, 'only with the help of the majority of the Community'.[139]

The campaign's first few weeks were filled with promise as leading community members answered LCE's call for support. As so often, San Francisco's female impersonators proved the group most ready to stand up to state oppression. In the campaign's biggest fundraising event, Michelle held three performances of a sold-out benefit program. Sarria appeared as a guest alongside three other well-known local female impersonators.[140] The buzz generated among the gay bar crowd further found expression in record sales figures of *L.C.E. News.*[141] The gay bar crowd also contributed to the campaign through small cash donations and attending other benefit events.[142] Within four weeks, the campaign had raised over $2,500.[143]

However, even with such engaged supporters the campaign's ambitious financial goals proved out of reach. In November, the campaign missed its vital $5,000 fundraising

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to indicate whether LCE reached out to the NAACP, some of whose white members were close friends of the League (Donaldson, interview by Gabriel, 2 September 1996, p.3).

138 'The Plan', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 1, 15 October 1962. For Strait's earlier estimation that '[t]o go to the Supreme Court could cost in the six figure bracket' see 'Law and Enforcement', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 7, 8 January 1962.

139 'The Plan'.

140 See 'Michelle International, Souvenir Program', *San Francisco Halloween History Project*, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, Subject Files, folder 'Montgomery Street Celebrations mid-1960s'; advertisement for performances in *L.C.E. News,* Volue 2, number 1, 15 October 1962. Sarria also became the first person to volunteer a stall for a gay fair Strait proposed in support of the campaign**.** (See 'Auction', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 8, 21 January 1963.

141 'From the President', *L.C.E. News,* Vol 2, number 14, 15 April 1963.

142 'Now We Are Fighting'; 'P P', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 6, 24 December 1962; 'Roving Report', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 3, 12 November 1962.

143 '$2,000', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 3, 12 November 1962.

deadline. Strait was forced to concede that due to a lack of funds 'our suit against repressive governmental action will not go forward to the extent that we had previously hoped and desired'.[144] With this failure, the campaign entered a lasting downward trajectory. Bereft of LCE's anticipated support, Jack's Waterfront ceased trading a few weeks later.[145] Community enthusiasm gradually soured into disappointment, then suspicion. In December, Strait for the first time felt pressed to address allegations of financial corruption and political misjudgement in his paper.[146]

1963 only delivered a short interval of hope before the campaign fizzled out for good. In January, Strait was finally able to print the opening letters of a more modest lawsuit. On account of his 'reputation for being a fighting liberal', Strait had opted for the private office of the well-known labour lawyer Richard Gladstein to advance the case.[147] The letters accused SFPD and ABC of undermining LCE's operations and the freedom of the press by pressurizing gay venues not to advertise in *L.C.E. News* and destroying copies of the paper. Spearheaded by Michelle, Sarria, and their friends, a March benefit auction raised another $634 for the War Chest.[148] The campaign, however, gradually petered out over the course of the year. After a February update had admitted a lack of 'new developments', the April annual report noted that police harassment was on the rise again after a temporary, three-month glib it interpreted as an effect of the Gladstein letters.[149] It became increasingly clear that Strait had little to show for all the money and time invested by the community. The letters' accomplishments were debatable, and Strait reported that the lawyers' offices had ceased answering his calls.[150] Accusations

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144 'Moment of Truth', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 4, 26 November 1962.
145 The first mention of Jack's closure can be found in 'Roving Reporter', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 6, 24 December 1962.
146 'No Bar to Profit From War Chest', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 5, 10 December 1962; 'Is it our fight?'.
147 'The League'.
148 'D'Oak Auction', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 11, 2 March 1963. Sarria's personal dedication to the cause was perhaps nowhere as clearly (or as hilariously) exhibited as when he acquired two umbrellas at the auction, forgetting for a moment that it was himself who had donated them in the first place.
149 'Fight Progress', *LC.E. News,* volume 2, number 10, 17 February 1963; 'Report to the Membership'.
150 'The League'.

of financial mismanagement grew ever louder.[151] Gay activists who had long been dissatisfied with the hierarchical structure of homophile organisations publicly criticized Strait's 'dictatorial' leadership style.[152]

While homophile support for LCE slumped, the campaign also had a devastating effect on LCE's financial position. The rise in circulation numbers it precipitated pushed up its newspaper's production costs. At the same time, advertisement revenue, LCE's largest source of income by far, fell as Strait's clients feared an impending police pushback.[153] Each issue began costing Strait two hundred dollars out of his own pockets.[154] It was an unsustainable situation for a modest travelling salesman. Strait tried to address it by more consistently charging for his paper, decreasing its size, and demanding that advertisement space be paid for in advance, but none of these measures proved sufficient.[155]

As the situation grew increasingly desperate, Strait decided that he could no longer carry both LCE and the publication. On November 11, 1963, he announced a formal meeting of LCE's membership to discuss whether the League should be continued.[156] For a few more months, the League continued to persist in its dysfunctional state before a final attempt to revitalize it was launched in spring 1964. In the end, its initiators decided that LCE's reputation and finances were beyond repair.[157] They went across the street to the house of another LCE member and founded a new group, the Society for Individual

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[151] 'L.C.E. Is No More', *Citizens News,* volume 3, number 17, 8 June 1964.
[152] Ibid.
[153] On the increase in sales, see 'From the President', *L.C.E. News,* Vol 2, number 14, 15 April 1963. On the decrease in advertisement revenue, see 'Is it our fight?', *L.C.E. News,* volume 2, number 6, 24 December 1962; 'Now We Are Fighting'. On the overall negative impact on LCE's finances, see 'The League'.
[154] 'Dear Senator', *Citizens News*, volume 3, number 8, 27 Jan 1964.
[155] 'Is your paper worthwhile?', *The News,* volume 2, number 17, 27 May 1963; 'News to continue!', *The News,* volume 2, number 19, 24 June 1963. On the failure of attempting to consistently charge buyers, see Letter from Guy Strait to Randolfe Wicker, undated, *Randy Wicker Papers*, box 1, folder 'Correspondence (General), n.d.'.
[156] 'Formal Notice', *The News,* volume 3, number 3, 11 November 1963.
[157] 'Breakthrough - When will it come ', p.18; Nancy May, 'The Best Kind of Friend,' in *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990: An Oral History*, ed. Eric Marcus (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), p.139; 'Editorial', *Vector,* volume 1, number 3, February 1965.

Rights (SIR). SIR was supposed to be everything that LCE had failed to be: financially responsible, more democratic, and genuinely mass-based.[158]

As for Strait, he was at last free to concentrate on his newspaper, even if he rued the mistakes that had led to the League's dissolution.[159] After relaunching *The News* under the new title of *Citizens' News* to liberate himself from the debts he had accrued, he continued his publishing activities for another few years. Expressing no public ill will toward his successors, whom he lauded as pursuing 'many new goals of great promise', he remained an influential, though increasingly isolated actor within the gay movement.[160] It was not until February 1967 when the magazine *US News and World Reports* sued Strait for using *Cruise News and World Reports* as the new title of his tabloid that his gay publishing career ended. Strait felt forced to destroy his list of subscribers before the imminent legal battle threatened to make it public. The publication never re-emerged.[161]

With LCE's demise, a formative era in the history of homophile ideas of community came to an end. Through the botched campaign, LCE had squandered the trust it had earned among gay San Franciscans, aggravated internal discontent with its hierarchical structure, and incited the founding of a new organisation, SIR. Often identified by historians as the inventors of gay discourses of community, SIR were in fact the inheritors of an earlier generation around Strait and Sarria. Yet, even as SIR continued LCE's

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[158] LCE's attempts at building a mass movement had met only with moderate success. A lack of extant documentation makes it hard to estimate LCE's membership numbers. A September 1961 Ladder article reported that the fledgling League had amassed two hundred fifty members, an impressive number for an early 1960s homophile organisation ('The List Grows', *The Ladder,* volume 5, number 12, September 1961, p.9). Unfortunately, with no further records of LCE's membership numbers surviving, it is difficult to have confidence in this figure, let alone chart the subsequent development of LCE's membership. For Strait's own disappointment over LCE's membership numbers, see '1961 Review'; 'Note'; 'Roving Report', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 11, 4 March 1962. SIR became the first San Francisco and US homophile group to mobilize a large number of active homophile activists.

[159] For Strait's regret, see 'L.C.E.', *Citizens News,* volume 3, number 13, 6 April 1964; 'L.C.E. Is No More'.

[160] 'L.C.E. Is No More'. On Strait's isolation, see Mark Forrester, interview by John D'Emilio, *IGIC Audiovisual Collection,* New York Public Library, New York, 9 December 1976; Duberman, *Stonewall: The Definitive Story of the LGBTQ Rights Uprising that Changed America*, p.185.

[161] Strait notifies his readership of the destruction of the subscription list in the final issue of *Cruise News and World Report,* volume 3, number 3, p.1.

discursive legacy in some important ways, they modified it in others. Under their leadership, homophile ideas of community increasingly narrowed, with the former multiplicity of meanings and traditions gradually giving way to the dominance of (homo)sexual community.

Chapter 5

SIR and the solidification of sexual community in the late 1960s

Two seemingly contradictory accounts of the late homophile years circulate in San Franciscan LGBTIQ history. Each present the second half of the 1960s as the tale of one of two very different gay balls. Historians approaching the period from an interest in earlier homophile organising have often described it as a time of unparalleled progress, ushered in by the dramatic success of the Council on Religion and the Homosexual's (CRH) 1965 New Year's Day Ball. Historians investigating it as the precursor to the more radical activism of the subsequent generation of 'gay liberationists' have pointed to the pickets of the 1969 Beaux Arts Ball as evidence of the period's conservative character.

A joint organisation of liberal clergy and homophile leaders, the CRH had been founded a few months previous with the goal of improving relations between homosexuals and the Protestant church. Supported by the gamut of San Francisco's homophile organisations, the ball sought to raise money for the fledging group. Over two hundred guests arrived for a night of festivities, only to find out that once again they had not been left alone. Despite promises to the contrary, dozens of police officers beleaguered the ball. They took pictures of anyone arriving, entered and inspected the hall at least eight times, and arrested six guests and organisers. Under fire, the ball ended two hours earlier than planned.[1]

[1] For accounts of CRH's formation, the lead-up to the ball, the events at the ball, and its aftermath see Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 231-236; John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, Second ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1983]), pp.192-195. For first-hand accounts of the events, see 'Chronology of Events Occurring in Connection with Arrest of Above Individuals on January 1, 1965', *Evander Smith - California Hall Papers, 1965-1973 (GLC 46)*, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, folder 4; 'Here's what REALLY happened', ibid., folder 5; 'Private Benefit Ball Invaded', *Vector,* volume 1, number 2, January 1965. For the expected 2 AM end time, see advertisement for ball in *Talk of the Town*, number 7, December 1964. For the actual 1 AM end time, see 'Chronology of Events Occurring'.

As historians like John D'Emilio and Nan Boyd have argued, the police action badly backfired to transform the night into a 'turning point' in San Franciscan LGBTIQ history.[2] The blatant harassment triggered unprecedented levels of heterosexual support for the movement. The next day, CRH clergy held a public press conference condemning the police's persecution of homosexuals. Press coverage, too, sided squarely with the victims. While the two arrested guests would be convicted on a spurious charge, the other four detainees, three lawyers and a heterosexual gay activist, were acquitted in a trial that had garnered international media attention. Outraged by the arrest of their colleagues, lawyers from the San Francisco Bar Association and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) had supported their defense. This legal victory shifted the power balance between those involved and the police department to lasting effect as the former could threaten a several million-dollar countersuit for the next fifteen years.[3] Under such pressure, the SFPD was forced to install a Community Relations officer to the gay community, and 'to retreat from the project of harassment and intimidation that had, for so long, held San Francisco's queer communities in its grip'.[4] Already by 1965, the city's homophile movement had won some of the very rights which would be at stake in the 1969 Stonewall rebellion, the catalyst of the next generation of gay liberationist activists.[5]

The same period is set in a very different light by historians invested in it as a prelude to the often more celebrated gay liberation activism of the 1970s and 1980s. They have portrayed it as an age of deep-rooted homophile conservatism.[6] For Emily

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[2] D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, p.194; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.236. For a gay activist describing the event as a 'turning point' in the San Franciscan homophile movement, see Bill Plath, 'The Empress' Military Ball', *Vector,* volume 4, number 3, February 1968.

[3] On the countersuit, see Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman* (Volcano, CA: Volcano Press, 1991), p.240; Gary Patterson [Leo Laurence], *Vector*, volume 4, number 11, November 1968; William Plath, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 18 April 1997, p.26; Bob Ross, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 13 March 1998, p.57; Rick Stokes, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 19 September 1996, p.27.

[4] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.236.

[5] Ibid.p.203; John D'Emilio, 'Gay Politics, Gay Community: San Francisco's Experience,' in *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

[6] See in addition to Hobson, Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), pp.55-57; Betty Luther Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture*

Hobson, the groups that held the widest sway over local gay politics post-1965, the Tavern Guild of San Francisco (TGSF) and the Society for Individual Rights (SIR) respectively represented 'a comparatively conservative force' and 'the moderate center of the "homophile" movement'.[7] She contrasts these organisations unfavourably to gay liberationists with their commitment to pursuing sexual freedom through a coalitional politics with anti-imperial, anti-racist, and anti-police violence groups. The chasm between the old and the new, the conservative homophiles and the radical gay liberationists is illustrated for Hobson by events such as the lead-up to the TGSF's 1969 Beaux Arts Halloween Ball. Gay liberationists picketed the ball in protest of the 'Gay Establishment' organising it, the exclusion of street queens, entry fee, private nature, and formal dress code of the event.[8] In their commitment to radical alliance on this occasion and at other times, Hobson describes gay liberationists as departing from their homophile predecessors and '[marking] the start of a new political current: a gay left'.[9]

How do we navigate these conflicting accounts of San Francisco's late 1960s homophile activism? Should we think of the period as one long stride toward greater sexual freedom, or as an age of conservative entrenchment? The answer, this chapter argues, is both. By way of synthesis, it offers a re-examination of the activism and ideas of SIR, the largest and most influential group of this period.

SIR was the successor organization to LCE and, as the chapter reconstructs, triggered nationwide homophile enthusiasm for its sensational achievements in the second half of the 1960s. Buoyed by the recent victory of the CRH New Year's Day Ball, the introduction of a novel committee structure, and a clever use of its rising political

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Wars : Style and the Politics of Self-Presentation in the 1960s and 1970s (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), p.94.

[7] Emily K. Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), pp. 19, 17.

[8] Ibid.p.27. On the picket, see also the more balanced treatment at Betty Luther Hillman, '"The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in": Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964–1972,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality,* volume 20, number 1 (2011), pp.169-170.

[9] Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left*, p.41.

capital, SIR became the first US homophile organisation with a large active membership, the first to open a gay community centre, as well as the first San Franciscan group to hold public dances. For many homophiles across the country, SIR turned into the 'the "model" which all homophile organizations should attempt to emulate'.[10] These unparalleled triumphs, however, went hand-in-hand with a process of conservative ideological realignment. As white, middle-class, gender-conforming gay men increasingly took the helm of the movement in San Francisco, they effected a narrowing of its ideas, ensuring that any gains would primarily benefit this most powerful subgroup.

To observe these changes, this chapter shows, we first have to direct our critical gaze away from a popular target. While SIR's notions of responsibility are often held up as examples of the group's moderatism, SIR communicated much more radical ideas of responsibility to its members than commonly assumed. It was in the conceptions of community SIR promoted that it had a conservative effect on the movement as a whole. Who SIR ought to serve was a subject of continued debate within the organisation. Conflicts between adherents of narrower, sexual, and broader, coalitional visions finally erupted over the orientation of the SIR Community Center opened in April 1966. As coalitionists advanced broad, multi-racial interpretations of community, SIR's dominant faction insisted that the centre only serve a limited clientele, the predominantly white, middle-class and -aged SIR members. The latter faction's victory would shape the direction and concepts of the US homophile movement for years to come. It prompted a lasting change in the terms in which multi-issue gay activists presented their ideas. Moving away from narrowing discourses of 'community', they turned toward the possibilities offered by 'liberation'. Community's conservative turn also had a disintegrating effect on the homophile movement in San Francisco as a whole. As less privileged groups were finding

[10] 'Letters', *Vector,* volume 2, number 1, December 1965.

it harder to have their concerns heard and taken seriously by SIR and similar thinking organisations, they turned to pursue their politics through new groups and alliances.

'The "model" which all homophile organizations should attempt to emulate'

SIR's initial generation of leaders had already accrued significant experience as homophile activists by the time they launched their own organisation. Some of them had active in setting up the Tavern Guild of San Francisco, others involved with the Mattachine Society of San Francisco.[11] Their biggest influence, however, came from the League for Civil Education, which almost all of them had been a part of at some point. In fact, SIR's first founding meeting SIR happened when several newly elected members to the LCE Board of Director in spring 1964 at last gave up on reforming the League. They walked out of an LCE meeting and went across the street to the house of William 'Bill' Plath, treasurer of the Tavern Guild, to begin making plans for a new organisation.[12]

This faction included William 'Bill' Beardemphl, who became the leading figure of the society's early years. Beardemphl came from a poor, working-class family in Tacoma, Washington.[13] He had trained as a chef and moved to San Francisco with his partner John DeLeon in the early 1960s.[14] Typifying LCE-SIR connections, Beardemphl's first documented foray into homophile activism was a guest editorial he wrote for *The News* in autumn 1963.[15] In summer 1964, he became SIR's first president, a role he filled with vigor, dedication, and imagination. He stepped down in spring 1967 and was elected to the only slightly less influential role as editor of SIR's publication *Vector.* After two more

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[11] For examples for Mattachine, see Larry Littlejohn, interview by John D'Emilio, *IGIC Audiovisual Collection,* New York Public Library, New York, 7 December 1976 and William Plath, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 18 September 1996. For a Tavern Guild example, see Bill Plath below.

[12] Nancy May, 'The Best Kind of Friend,' in *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990: An Oral History*, ed. Eric Marcus (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), p.139; Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 September 1996.

[13] William Beardemphl and John DeLeon, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, July, 1997, pp. 8, 142.

[14] Ibid.p.86.

[15] Bill Beardemphl, 'Unity!', *The News,* volume 3, number 1, 14 October 1963.

years of committed service, Beardemphl finally ended his involvement with SIR in March 1969 to concentrate on his private affairs and the gay nightclub he had acquired.[16]

Like LCE, SIR's leaders hoped to build a mass organisation. They held two, interrelated motivations. First, they shared with Guy Strait the conviction that only a mass-based movement would be able to win significant concessions from the antigay authorities. Beardemphl believed that organised groups could amass social power by two main channels: through demonstrating great wealth or large membership numbers. A group, such as the homophiles, which for the most part lacked the former, was 'important in accordance to its size'. In societal circumstances where 'the only things that homosexuals will ever get is what they are strong enough to get', assembling a large membership offered the only route to winning political change.[17] Correspondingly, Beardemphl diagnosed the inability of preceding homophile organisations to attract a large membership and their tendency to '[shut out] the very people we need' as the reason why they had brought about 'only illusory change'.[18] The SIR constitution echoed this belief, proclaiming that 'there is no strength but through organization'.[19]

Second, SIR's founders thought that only in a welcoming group environment would homosexuals be able to leave self-hatred behind and move toward more positive views of themselves. In their pursuit of greater gay self-respect, SIR continued a legacy it shared not just with LCE, but also DOB, Mattachine Society, and Sarria's performances, all of which had set themselves the goal of improving gays' self-image.[20] SIR gave this

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[16] Beardemphl and DeLeon, interview by Gabriel, July, 1997, p.139; 'Letters to the Editor', *Vector,* volume 5, number 1, January 1969.
[17] Bill Beardemphl, 'President Speaks,' *Vector,* volume 2, number 5, April 1966. For other SIR leaders expressing this belief, see Perry George, 'Small Activities', *Vector,* volume 4, number 1, December 1967; and -----, 'Small Activity', *Vector,* volume 4, number 9, September 1968; Larry Littlejohn, 'The President's Corner', *Vector,* volume 5, number 5, May 1969.
[18] Bill Beardemphl, 'Mr President,' *Vector,* volume 1, number 1, December 1964. See also Bill Beardemphl, 'On Leadership', *Vector,* volume 1, number 2, January 1965.
[19] See for example, *Vector,* volume 1, number 1, December 1964.
[20] On DOB, see for example Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Seal Press, 2007), pp. 11-13; Martin and Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, p.229. On Mattachine, see Hal Call, interview by Jim Breeden, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, Undated, p.15.

common homophile endeavour a new direction and emphasis.[21] In his first *Vector* column, Beardemphl noted how life in a conformist, heteronormative social structure was burdening many homophiles with severe self-esteem issues. They developed visions of themselves as 'oriented to unreasonable sin' as well as 'a tendency to the acceptance of unjust punishment'.[22] SIR sought to help gays move away from such self-images. The Society's leaders argued that since this issue arose from the individual's interaction with a hostile social structure, only the creation of an alternative, gay-friendly social environment would be able to resolve it. 'In these areas we are individually ineffectual', Beardemphl opined.[23] Some of SIR's drive to build a mass organisation was inspired by the hope of offering 'an attractive, meaningful and healthy social fabric for the well-being of our Members'.[24] A large membership organisation would be able to provide space for personal healing as well as wider, political transformation. [25]

SIR theorised these two goals as distinct but intertwined. SIR directors often argued that only homosexuals who had been brought to see themselves as 'worthwhile' could then arrive at the belief 'that we can do something in those areas that need changes'.[26] So firm was their belief in this relationship that they sometimes even identified SIR's success at improving homophiles' self-image as the primary catalyst for the gay community's rapid political gains in the mid-1960s.[27] Other SIR members postulated a different, but similarly knotted relationship between personal and political transformation. They emphasized the beneficial effect SIR's political activism had on the

[21] For a Frank Kameny, an influential Eastern homophile activist commenting on SIR's pioneering focus on improving gay self-respect, see Toby Marotta, *The Politics of Homosexuality* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), p.62.
[22] 'Mr President'.
[23] Ibid.
[24] 'SIR's Statement of Policy', *Vector,* volume 1, number 1, December 1964.
[25] See also Bill Beardemphl, '1965 Directional Report' and 'SIR By-Laws' in *Collection of Society for Individual Rights papers*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, folder 'Constitution, Articles, Bylaws'.
[26] Bill Beardemphl, 'President's Column', *Vector,* volume 2, number 9, August 1966. See also Dorr Jones, 'President's Corner', *Vector,* volume 3, number 6, May 1967; and 'Behavioral Perception', *Vector*, volume 4, number 1, December 1967.
[27] Beardemphl, 'President's Column'.

participants' self-image. As one member maintained, 'the more we assert ourselves and stand up for our rights with quiet dignity and self-respect, the more likely we will begin to respect ourselves'.[28] From either perspective, SIR was pursuing two separate but intertwined aims in seeking to build a mass organisation.

They proved exceptionally successful in this pursuit. SIR's greatest contribution to US homophile activism was its status as the first organisation with a large, active membership. As early as winter 1964/65, when SIR had eighty-six paying members, it claimed to be 'the largest organized group of homosexuals ever to exist as an active group'.[29] Two years later, the rightfulness of this title was beyond a doubt. With almost six hundred members, SIR had by far surpassed all other US gay organisations in size. By the end of the decade, this number would grow to nearly a thousand.[30] Most of the members were white, middle-class gay men.[31] SIR's rapid, unparalleled expansion invoked considerable pride in its leaders and members.[32]

SIR's success in attracting a large active membership and overcoming gay fears of the possible consequences of joining a homophile organisation was owed to two key factors. First, it was a credit to SIR's participatory committee structure. SIR's founders had been left deeply dissatisfied with other gay male groups' reluctance to allow for meaningful member participation.[33] In a thinly veiled critique of Guy Strait and, especially,

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[28] Letter from Jack Parrish, *Vector,* volume 2, number 8, July 1966. See also Beardemphl, 'President's Message' in Program for Second SIRlebrity Capades, *Collection of Society for Individual Rights papers*, folder 'Shows, Programs'.
[29] Beardemphl, '1965 Directional Report'. See also J. Graham, 'The Membership Committee', *Vector,* number 4, number 1, October 1967.
[30] Graham, 'The Membership Committee'; Bill Plath, 'Address from President', *Collection of Society for Individual Rights papers*, folder '1972 Directional Report'; Plath, 'President's Address', ibid., folder '1973 Directional Report'.
[31] Stokes, interview by Gabriel, 19 September 1996, p.24; Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 2 December 1992; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.196.
[32] Beardemphl, 'On Leadership'; 'Community Center Opens', *Vector,* volume 2, number 6, May 1966; 'About S.I.R.', *Vector,* volume 3, number 6, May 1967; *Vector* mastheads from volume 3, number 9, August 1967 onwards; Larry Carlson, 'Open Forum: Organizations', in same number; Letter by Beardemphl to Dr. Elias and Mitch, *Vector,* volume 3, number 11, October 1967.
[33] 'SIR's statement of Policy'; Beardemphl, 'President Speaks'; Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 September 1996; Littlejohn, interview by D'Emilio, 7 December 1976.

Hal Call at Mattachine, they asserted that 'societies have not been able to get the support needed for growth from the Homosexual Community' because of their 'strong dictatorial control'.[34] 'Homosexuals have always been told, never asked, about homophile organizational directions'.[35] SIR leaders sought to rectify this mistake by actively involving their members in the running of their group. They sought to cultivate leadership 'from within the Community through democratic organization'.[36]

For this purpose, they established an organisational structure that offered many ways for members to help shape SIR's direction. At the heart of this structure stood the society's initially six but soon growing number of committees.[37] Alongside SIR's four officers (president, vice-president, treasurer, secretary), the committee heads formed the Society's entirely elected board of directors. Members were keenly encouraged to help stir SIR by involving themselves in one or several committees. As SIR member Donald Miesen sought to summarize the society's ethos, committees were expected to provide the thrust of the organisation and 'ORIGINATE policies and projects'. The board granted them 'broad, discretionary authority' and would at the end merely 'REVIEW' the committees' initiatives.[38] While this distribution of labour did not always materialize to the hoped-for extent, SIR members nevertheless prided themselves on being a membership-led organisation.[39]

SIR activists often identified the membership's close involvement in the society's daily life and direction as a key reason for its rapid growth. Miesen concluded his article with the claim that 'SIR has grown precisely because many talented people have been

[34]'Mr President', 'SIR's statement of Policy'.
[35] '1965 Directional Report'.
[36] Beardemphl, 'On Leadership'. See also, 'SIR's statement of Policy'.
[37] The original committees were: political, social activities, publications, community services, legal, and membership (See 'SIR By-laws').
[38] Donald L. Miesen, 'Membership Participation Resolution', *Vector,* volume 2, number 6, May 1966. On the role and power of committees see also Beardemphl, 'President's Column', *Vector*, volume 2, number 11, October 1966.
[39] That this vision did not always materialize is indicated in Pat Kelly, 'Semi-Annual Board Retreat', *Vector,* volume 3, number 7, June 1967, and in George Mendenhall's letter, 'Letter to the Editors', *Vector,* volume 4, number 2, January 1968.

able to share in its decisions.'[40] Other organisations emulating SIR's participatory model experienced a similar growth in membership numbers. Beardemphl contently observed how a Vancouver group that had adopted SIR's 'membership controlled and involvement' model had expanded from two to two hundred sixty members within the space of only eighteen months.[41]

The second major factor behind SIR's success was its ability to convert an unexpected, one-off movement breakthrough into a long-lasting boon for the Society. The leadership's engaged and thoughtful work in SIR's first six months certainly set up a sound basis for future growth. But it was only after the events surrounding the 1965 California Hall raid gave the city's homophile activism an immense injection of momentum that SIR's membership numbers reached unprecedented heights. Then-political committee chair Nancy May, one of the six arrested, recounts how 'SIR blossomed after the ball'. Furnished with positive national and international media coverage, SIR succeeded at multiplying its membership several times over in the following months.[42]

This evolution was made possible not only by the powerful allies the homophile movement suddenly attracted, but, equally, by the SIR leaders' aptitude at turning its newly elevated political standing to good use. In the wake of the California Hall raid, SIR leaders won crucial concessions from one of the most virulently antigay state agencies, the SFPD. In addition to being pressured into hiring a gay-focused community relations officer, high-ranking SFPD officers after many meetings also reluctantly acceded to SIR requests to hold public dances.[43] Even before the New Year's ball, SIR had sponsored two clandestine dances advocated for by DeLeon, Beardemphl's partner, a professional

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[40] 'Membership Participation Resolution'. See also Beardemphl, 'President Speaks', *Vector,* volume 2, number 6, May 1966.
[41] Beardemphl, 'Seattle hosts Western Regional Conference', *Vector,* volume 1, number 1, December 1967.
[42] May, 'The Best Kind of Friend,' , p.145.
[43] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.196; Bill Plath, 'The Empress' Military Ball', *Vector,* volume 4, number 3, February-March 1968; Martin and Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, p.242.

dancer.[44] Now, homosexuals for the first time in post-WWII San Franciscan history had a place to engage in same-sex dancing free from the threat of arrest. Every Saturday night, SIR held dances in its community centre. The dances became a major gay event with hundreds of partygoers flocking to the centre each week.

This victory set the platform for the spectacular expansion of SIR's membership numbers. For, when the hall became too crowded, only members still had guaranteed access. Everyone else had to wait outside until space freed up. Queues regularly spanned several blocks.[45] 'So it's much smarter to just buy a membership and you could go right in', Plath recalled the thought process of many new members.[46] Especially after the social committee in spring 1967 put in place more restrictions on the prerogatives of members to take in guests, the number of new members skyrocketed.[47] Between March and August, membership nearly doubled from 550 to 951.[48] The popularity of SIR dances propelled this dramatic increase.[49] SIR had found a hook by which it could slowly pull homosexually active people into the orbit of the homophile movement.

It is difficult to overstate the waves of excitement SIR's progress sent through the world of US homophile activism. Word passed quickly along the homophile grapevine about this new group and its unparalleled success in building a democratic, mass base, publicly standing up to police harassment, and opening the nation's first gay community centre. As early as late 1965, SIR was widely recognized by fellow North American homophile activists across the nation as 'the "model" which all homophile organizations should attempt to emulate', a status it would hold for the next several years.[50] From Los Angeles to Florida, from Vancouver to New York, homophile activists vowed to emulate

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[44] '1965 Directional Report'; Beardemphl and DeLeon, interview by Gabriel, July, 1997, p.35.
[45] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.196.
[46] Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 April 1997, p.25.
[47] J. Miller, 'Social Committee Policy', *Vector,* volume 3, number 5, April 1967.
[48] J. Bradley, 'Election', *Vector*, volume 3, number 4, March 1967; 'Happy Third Anniversary', *Vector*, volume 3, number 9, August 1967.
[49] On the effect of access restrictions on SIR membership see also Plath, interview by Gabriel, 18 April 1997, pp.24-25.
[50] 'Letters', *Vector,* volume 2, number 1, December 1965.

SIR's template and 'try what you people have made the fact in San Francisco.'[51] Even conservative homophile leaders felt compelled to recognize SIR's status and, with some reservations, advised new groups to follow in the Society's footsteps.[52]

SIR leaders, in turn, did all they could to stoke the excitement. Not satisfied with merely 'instituting a new approach for homophile organizations' in San Francisco, they were deeply invested in inspiring a sea change in homophile activism across the United States.[53] Beardemphl urged fellow society members to help the SIR model proliferate across the nation. 'If attempted on a national basis', he promised, it could make the dream of a homophile movement a reality and 'put a full scale "Homophile Revolution" into operation'.[54] Wherever the opportunity presented itself, SIR members heeded the call. When homophile unrest broke out in Los Angeles in Winter 1967 after a particularly brutal wave of police oppression, SIR leaders travelled to Southern California and sent monetary contribution in the hope of using the events as catalysts for a similar resistance movement as SIR headed in San Francisco.[55] They also accepted invitations to present SIR on television, hoping to 'encourage homosexuals across the country to organize similar groups in their localities.'[56]

Where the opportunity did not yet exist, SIR worked to create it. In autumn 1965, SIR leaders headed a San Francisco delegation to the Third Annual Conference of East Coast Homophile Organisations (ECHO) in New York, intent on launching a new era of national homophile cooperation.[57] There, they successfully lobbied for the future

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[51] Ibid.; Beardemphl, 'Seattle hosts Western Regional Conference'; Neil Hutchins, 'The Portland Forum', *Vector* volume 5, number 10, Oct 1969; 'Letters to the Editor', *Vector,* volume 4, number 4, March 1968.
[52] Martin B. Duberman, *Stonewall: The Definitive Story of the LGBTQ Rights Uprising that Changed America* (New York: Plume, 2019), p.128.
[53] '1965 Directional Report'.
[54] Beardemphl, 'President's Column', *Vector,* volume 2, number 9, August 1966. See also '1965 Directional Report'.
[55] Herb Donaldson, 'L.A. Gay Bar Harassment', *Vector,* volume 3, number 3, February 1967; Pat Kelley, 'Secretary's Corner', *Vector,* volume 3, number 4, March 1967.
[56] 'The Political Committee', *Vector*, volume 4, number 7, June 1968.
[57] 'New York Conference Heralds Future National Cooperation', *Vector,* volume 1, number 11, October 1965; 'Kansas City Conference of Homophile Leaders Set', *Vector,* volume 2, number 3, February 1966.

institution of national conferences. Over the next years, the Northern American Conference of Homophile Organizations (NACHO), as it became known, met in Kansas City, San Francisco, Chicago, and Washington DC. As they had first done in New York, SIR activists used each of these occasions to introduce their model very persuasively to fellow homophiles and recruit new disciples among the attendees.[58] In a move that angered many of the established activists in these cities, SIR delegates also went one step further. They went into local gay venues to stir the bar crowd to found SIR-type groups that would compete with the existing, more elitist homophile organisations.[59] After Eastern groups reacted to SIR's pressure by marginalising the Society within NACHO, Beardemphl threatened that SIR would continue its proselytizing activity. It would send a team of organisers to tour the country and organise homophiles into groups along the SIR model.[60] Despite conservative homophile resistance, SIR remained set on launching a nationwide 'Homophile Revolution'.[61]

Responsible action by responsible people in responsible ways

For such a provocative organisation that many of its homophile contemporaries considered 'astonishing progressives', SIR has garnered a surprisingly conservative reputation among some historians.[62] This is particularly true for historians of the gay liberation era. Looking back at the homophiles through the eyes of a generation that was

[58] 'Kepner interview, pt 8, 9/29/76', Jim Kepner, interview by John D'Emilio, *IGIC Audiovisual Collection,* New York Public Library, New York, 23-30 September 1976; 'Kansas City Conference Finds: Specific Immediate Reliable Goals', *Vector,* volume 2, number 4, March 1966; *Collection of Society for Individual Rights papers*, folder 'Information packet for ECHO 1965' – these are actually the materials SIR handed out to all delegates of the 1966 San Francisco conference; Piaf, 'LaFayette Square', *Vector,* volume 3, number 11, October 1967; Letter by Piaf, 'Letters to the Editor', *Vector,* volume 4, number 8b, August 1968; Beardemphl, 'Conference Trip at Trip: A Bummer', Ron Warren, 'the warren report', and Richard Gayer 'The NACHO – Present and Future', all in *Vector,* volume 4, number 9, September 1968.
[59] Piaf, 'LaFayette Square'; Warren, 'the warren report'.
[60] Beardemphl, 'Conference Trip at Trip'; ----, 'Parries & Thrusts', *Vector*, volume 4, number 10, October 1968.
[61] Beardemphl, 'President's Column', *Vector,* volume 2, number 9, August 1966. SIR inspired groups often also adopted this emphasis. See for example, Phoenix, 'The Stimulation of New Organizations', *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, box 19, folder 7 ('Society for Individual Rights, General, 1964-1972').
[62] 'Kepner interview, pt 8, 9/29/76'.

deeply invested in proving their own credentials as radicals by denouncing their homophile predecessors as conservatives, these scholars have tended to break from earlier, celebratory accounts of SIR's activities.[63] For historians like Emily Hobson or Christina Hanhardt, SIR 'exemplified the moderate center of the "homophile" movement' that liberationists were rightly sceptical of.[64] Building on the groundwork of the previous section, this section attempts to correct some of these more one-sided historical portrayals through a rereading of SIR's ideas of gay responsibility. SIR's notions of responsibility have often been cited as evidence of the group's conservative orientation. James Sears is exemplary of this trend when he writes that SIR's 'emphasis on "responsibility" certainly paralleled Mattachine's philosophy', that is, San Francisco's most conservative homophile group.[65] A closer look at how SIR theorized homophile responsibility, however, belies claims to SIR's monolithic conservatism. It reveals SIR as a group of astute strategists who hid a radical philosophy of responsibility behind a deliberately deceptive veneer of respectability.[66]

Ideas of responsibility occupied the centre of SIR's self-understanding and public image. The group chose for its maxim the often-repeated slogan, 'Responsible action by

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[63] On gay liberationist treatment of homophiles, see D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, p.x; Luther Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars : Style and the Politics of Self-Presentation in the 1960s and 1970s*, pp.97-98; Jack Nichols, 'DICK LEITSCH: Happy New Year to an Old Comrade', 29 December 1997, *James Sears Papers*, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, box 169, folder 'Leitsch, Dick'. For earlier, positive renditions of SIR's achievements, see D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, pp.190-192; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, pp.227-228.

[64] Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left*, p.17; Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, pp.55-57. See also Luther Hillman, *Dressing for the Culture Wars : Style and the Politics of Self-Presentation in the 1960s and 1970s*, p.94.

[65] James T. Sears, *Behind the Mask of the Mattachine: The Hal Call Chronicles and the Early Movement for Homosexual Emancipation* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2006), p.521. See also Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, p.55.

[66] Even more conservative homophile organisations engaged in such dissimulation as Martin Meeker has shown in respect to Mattachine Society (see Martin Meeker, 'Behind the Mask of Respectability: Reconsidering the Mattachine Society and Male Homophile Practice, 1950s and 1960s,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality,* volume 10, number 1 (2001)). Accurate reconstructions of homophile activities have to be closely attuned to the political pressures these activists were navigating, what public images they could feasibly present within their political context, and to what extent these images are a faithful reflection of their actual activities.

responsible people in responsible ways'.[67] In its reports, articles of incorporation, letters, and *Vector,* too, SIR painted an image of a thoroughly responsible organisation. SIR's purpose was 'to support and encourage responsible public conduct', 'establish outlets for responsible activities', advocate 'Responsible sexual fulfilment', change 'our social setting from the city streets and "tea rooms" [public bathrooms] to a responsible environment', 'help the homosexual increase his responsibilities to the community', and 'project a proper image of the responsible homosexual in our community'.[68] Where SIR sought to address 'injustices', it would do so 'in a responsible manner'.[69] An example of this was its opposition as 'responsible homosexuals' to cruising in a local theatre.[70]

This chorus of claims to responsibility may help explain why some historians have been drawn to presenting SIR as an organisation in the mould of earlier, conservative homophile groups with their emphasis on gay respectability.[71] However, such one-dimensional portraits fail to pick up on the complexities of SIR's thought and statements on responsibility. Like Guy Strait, SIR leaders were skilled tacticians who put discourses of responsibility to multiple uses.

In the first place, claims to responsibility helped SIR erect a façade as a respectable, compliant partner organisation in their interactions with municipal authorities. SIR's public posturing as a responsible homosexual organisation allowed it to gain a relatively high standing among public authorities, especially among more gay-friendly sections of the SFPD. When officers of the SFPD community relations unit

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[67] For the earliest mention in Vector, see 'Responsibility', *Vector,* volume 1, number 1, December 1964. This motto was also cited prominently in much of SIR's outward facing publications. See for example, *Collection of Society for Individual Rights papers*, folder 'Information packet for ECHO 1965'.

[68] See respectively 'Articles of Incorporation of the Society of Individual Rights', ibid., folder 'Constitution, Articles, Bylaws'; Beardemphl, 'President speaks', *Vector,* volume 2, number 6, May 1966; ----, 'President's Column', *Vector,* volume 3, number 1, December 1966; ----, Beardemphl, 'President's Column', volume 3, number 2, January 1967; Letter from Beardemphl and Mark Forrester to all churches in San Francisco, 9 November 1964, *Don Lucas Papers*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, box 11, folder 3 ('Correspondence, 1964-1971'); 'Editorial', *Vector,* volume 2, number 2, January 1966.

[69] Beardemphl, 'President's Column', *Vector,* volume 2, number 9, August 1966

[70] '1965 Directional Report'.

[71] See the discussion of Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis in the introduction.

addressed SIR crowds, they praised it as the most 'responsible homophile organisation' and a role model for other homosexual group. [72] On account of its ostensible responsibility, SIR qualified as a potential partner organisation in the eyes of these officers. They sought to win its support with its projects, such as policing the 'indiscretion' of publicly effeminate gay men, restricting public sex and cruising, and '[convincing] the broader community that homophiles can be responsible and mature'.[73]

SIR leaders cultivated a partner relationship with government agencies because of what this allowed them to do in turn. On the one hand, SIR's good reputation meant that it was able to protect many homosexually active men from arrest. Gay friendly police officers started to alert SIR leaders whenever the department began preparing for crackdowns at popular cruising sites. Before this could happen, SIR leaders would then visit the sites with their SFPD partners and suggest alternative solutions. Such simple measures as the instalment of flood lights or a padlock, or the replacement of bathroom stall doors prevented many arrests.[74] On the other, SIR mobilized its responsible public self-presentation to win positive concessions from the department. SIR board member George Mendenhall related how SIR's 'very respectable' public image was one of the factors that persuaded the SFPD to give it permission to hold public dances.[75]

Respectability was, however, primarily a mask SIR activists wore in public. In their interactions with their members, SIR leaders promoted a very different understanding of gay responsibility. Echoing Strait and Sarria rather than Mattachine, SIR leaders advocated that every gay person bore a responsibility to become involved in homophile activism. This responsibility could take a variety of shapes, including, for example, a

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[72] 'Blackstone Meets the Discussion Group', *Vector,* volume 3, number 4, March 1967.
[73] Ibid. For other public authorities issuing similar calls to SIR, see George Mendenhall, '150 Attend SFHL / SIR Psychiatric forum', *Vector,* volume 4, number 7, June 1968.
[74] Kepner, interview by D'Emilio, 23-30 September 1976; Dorrwyn Jones, interview by John D'Emilio, *IGIC Audiovisual Collection,* New York Public Library, New York, 10 & 20 December 1976; Beardemphl, 'No, Mona ... Mattachine Inc. of San Francisco is NOT Santa Claus', *Vector,* volume 3, number 10, September 1967.
[75] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.196.

venereal diseases check-up or reliably paying the gay-friendly professionals to which SIR referred its members.[76] Most often, however, SIR leaders and members emphasized the duties gay people bore toward their community in the political domain. They argued that changing public opinion of homosexuality constituted part 'of the homophile community's responsibility to itself', that SIR members bore a responsibility to participate in SIR elections in order to '[maintain] a dynamic organization', and that gay people held a 'responsibility and privilege to vote' in state elections.[77] These duties belonged first and foremost to homosexuals, but SIR's leaders implied that heterosexuals too bore a share of the responsibility to end antigay state oppression. They commended 'responsible' heterosexuals who advocated for increased ACLU legal support of homosexuals, supported SIR's call for a police review board, protested antigay street violence, reported fairly on gay events, provided adequate legal counsel, or educated the public on matters pertaining to homosexuality.[78]

As this thesis showed, SIR was not the first organisation to make the case for a homophile responsibility to get involved with the movement. However, SIR activists often claimed that they were the first group to also create the democratic structures in which this responsibility could in fact be exercised. In the words of a SIR member, 'responsible action can be expected only when responsible members are treated as such'.[79] This message also shone through in Beardemphl's 1965 SIR directional report, the first such report known to be published to a San Francisco homophile group's entire membership.

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[76] 'v33', *Vector,* volume 1, number 4, March 1965; 'Secretary's Corner', *Vector,* volume 2, number 7, June 1966.

[77] See respectively John Bradley, 'The "Sick", "Unhappy" Homosexual .... Time to get well', *Vector,* volume 3, number 7, June 1967; Beardemphl, 'President's Column', *Vector,* volume 3, number 2, January 1967; Articles of Incorporation of the Society of Individual Rights. For an earlier Beardemphl statement on homophile political responsibilities, see also Beardemphl, 'Unity!', *The News,* volume 3, number 1, 14 October 1963.

[78] See respectively 'Sex and Civil Rights Reports', *Vector,* volume 1, number 5, April 1965 (ACLU support); 'Police Review Board Needed', *Vector,* volume 1, number 12, November 1965 (police review board); Beardemphl, 'Parries & Thrusts', *Vector,* volume 4, number 6, May 1968 (protested antigay violence); ----, 'Parries & Thrusts', *Vector,* volume 4, number 5, April-May 1968 (responsible news coverage); ----, 'A.M.A. attacks homosexuals as psych-pathological', *Vector,* volume 4, number 8a, July 1968 (responsible news coverage, public education); 'SIR Statement of Policy' (legal counsel).

[79] Miesen, 'Membership Participation Resolution'.

Having laid out SIR's history, activities, and future plans, Beardemphl concluded by telling the SIR members that '[t]he homophile movement is now your responsibility also and every homosexual can now join in and help.'[80] With the advent of SIR's democratic channels, gays were no longer barred from meaningful, active participation in the movement. Now, every homosexual could, and was expected to, join in and take up their share of responsibility.

In presenting these demands of a gay political responsibility, SIR leaders did not seek to compliment but to destabilise and displace the more conservative visions of responsibility they gave lip service to in public and their interactions with state agents. In their conversations with their members, SIR leaders actively resisted claims that to be responsible gays had to eschew any non-normative sexual and gender expressions or, at the very least, limit them to the private home. They did so in the first place by defending the rights of gays to engage in public gender nonconformity. The legitimacy of appearing in 'drag' in public was highly contested among SIR members. Many joined the SFPD in asking SIR to police gays' public gender expression. In an informal survey, 94 of 170 members declared that they believed drag was detrimental to the homophile community and 104 that drags should not be tolerated in public places. One member even ventured that gender nonconforming gay men should be rejected from SIR membership altogether. In his view, any man engaging in drag 'is not a responsible person' and 'should not be allowed to damage our image as responsible men'.[81]

The SIR leadership spurned this framing of responsible gay conduct. The next *Vector* issue after the publication of the survey opened with the 'Homophile Movement Policy Statement' adopted at the Western Regional Planning Conference of Homophile Organization which SIR had helped orchestrate. The statement rejected arguments that 'drag, sado-masochism, and other aspects of sexual behavior can be summarily

[80] '1965 Direction Report'.
[81] Larry Carlson, 'Open Forum: The Wearing of Drag', *Vector,* volume 3, number 5, April 1967.

dismissed as necessarily invalid expressions of human love' and asserted 'the right of individuals to be what they are and do what they wish so long as it does not infringe on the rights of others'.[82] *Vector's* conference report lauded the statement's unanimous adoption as 'the most important long-range value' the conference contributed to the movement.[83] In a separate article in the same issue, Beardemphl even went one step further, defending drag as 'a wonderful world of creative art that will bring pleasure to all who will open their eyes and see.' He criticized fellow homosexuals' 'hang up' with gender nonconformity, ridiculed attempts to win heterosexual favour through compliance to 'socially imposed' gender roles and norms, and foresaw the arrival of a new social order in which diverse gender expressions and experiments would become a regular source of joy and individuality to all.[84] For the SIR leadership, maturity lay in showing acceptance and even curiosity about gender nonconformity, not in condemning it in the name of a fragile gay public image that had to be defended.

SIR leaders also showed themselves highly critical of the view that responsible gays restricted their sexual expressions to the private sphere. This position was advocated not only by law enforcement agents but also many SIR members who argued that public sex 'would not be "responsible action by responsible people"'.[85] Notwithstanding SIR's public avowals to the contrary, SIR leaders in their own writing revealed themselves deeply ambivalent about crusades against public gay sex. Beardemphl publicly described the willingness of more conservative gays to condemn cruising as 'public sex hang-ups'.[86] In his view, gay critics of cruising had 'been brainwashed by the "right of privacy" into believing that liberty means... get in your little

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[82] 'Homophile Movement Policy Statement', *Vector,* volume 3, number 6, May 1967.
[83] George Mendenhall, 'A Great Success: WPCHO'*, ibid.*
[84] Beardemphl, 'Drag – is it drab, despicable, divine?', *ibid.* For further defences of drag issued by the SIR leadership, see 'Letters', *Vector,* volume 3, number 9, August 1967; 'Letters to the Editor', *Vector,* volume 3, number 11, October 1967.
[85] Carlson, 'Open Forum: Sex in Public Places', *Vector*, volume 3, number 6, May 1967.
[86] Beardemphl, 'No, Mona ... Mattachine Inc. of San Francisco is NOT Santa Claus'. See also 'Letters', *Vector,* volume 3, number 9, August 1967.

cubicle baby, lock your door behind you and stay there and ONLY there have you the right to be a human being'. What added insult to injury was that this was another instance of discriminatory policing. 'Public heterosexual acts', Beardemphl lambasted, 'are flagrant and constant and they are unpunished by our system of law enforcement.' Rather than acquiesce 'to this kind of a social order', Beardemphl urged fellow gays to 'change the simpering rationales and sexual taboos that are the basis for our society's sexual attitudes'.[87] SIR leaders were far more supportive of public cruising than political expediency allowed them to be in public.[88]

SIR activists took deep delight in their success at duping law enforcement officers with their 'facade' of respectability, as they referred to it themselves.[89] In moments where the balance of power between gays and the police had temporarily shifted, SIR leaders could let the mask slip and publicly mock their performances of responsibility and police gullibility. Such was the case after SFPD officers had arrested two stars of the prestigious Royal Ballet company as part of a routine raid in the Haight-Ashbury district, the centre of Hippie culture, in the early morning hours of July 11, 1967. Dame Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev were charged with disturbing the peace and visiting a place where the drug marijuana was being used.[90] The events were a source of great mirth in the homophile community. Some of them had been present at the party. They recounted

[87] All quotations above from Beardemphl, 'Public Sex is Sex is Sex is Sex', *Vector,* volume 3, number 7, June 1967.
[88] For a longer treatment of the sexually transgressive elements of the homophile movement, see Marc Stein, 'Canonizing Homophile Sexual Respectability: Archives, History, and Memory,' *Radical History Review,* volume 2014, number 120 (2014).
[89] 'Vector: A Re-Cap', *Vector,* volume 4, number 1, December 1967. See also Beardemphl, 'Conference Trip at Trip: A Bummer', *Vector,* volume 4, number 9, September 1967.
[90] Baron Muller, 'Hippie Raid Jails Top Ballet Stars', *San Francisco Examiner*, July 11, 1967, p.1; Keith Power, 'Dancers' Rooftop Arrest – Charges Are Dropped', *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 12, 1967, p.1.

with great gusto and camp flamboyance the rooftop chase that had preceded the arrests.[91] Gay people derived much joy from the public ridicule the SFPD's eager moral policing had earned them in this instance.[92] In his report on the event, Beardemphl could not resist heaping further mockery on the department. He urged the gay community 'to support our local police', only to smugly continue, 'But may we add a S.I.R.-ism to this motto and add the word "responsibly"'. The large, bold letters at the bottom of the page, 'Support your local police responsibly – join citizens alert', clarified what Beardemphl meant. For gays to exercise responsible behavior in relation to the SFPD was not to actually abide by the police's standards of responsibility or contribute to their projects, but to join an organization that had been co-founded by homophile and antiracist activists to monitor police harassment and brutality.[93] Responsible gays joined the fight against police harassment, not the SFPD itself. In later oral histories, SIR leaders would break into laughter as they remembered police officers' fantasies about the supposedly responsible conduct of SIR leaders.[94]

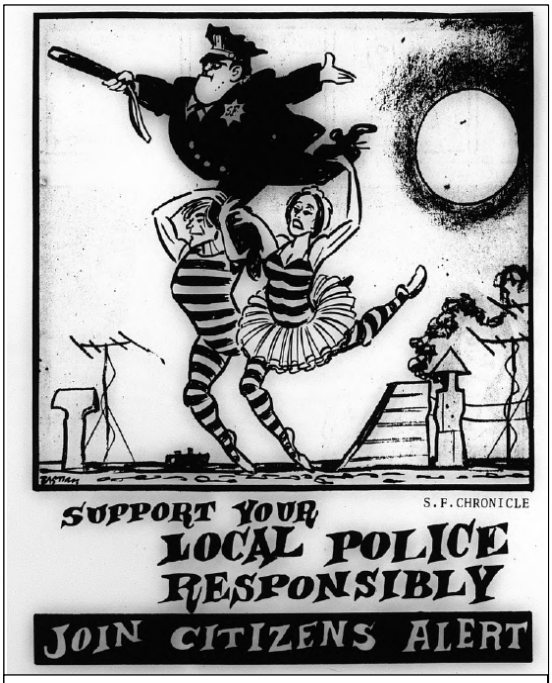

Figure 2. Beardemphl's article also included a reprint of this San Francisco Chronicle cartoon. The words printed underneath are SIR's.

Source: *Vector*, volume 3, number 9, August 1967, p.5.

More than just proposing novel standards of responsibility by which individual gay people ought to abide, SIR also sought to model new benchmarks for responsible homophile organisations. It is in this domain that SIR sought to differentiate itself most

[91] Beardemphl, 'Don't Mess with Mona', *Vector,* volume 3, number 9, August 1967.
[92] For mockery of the SFPD, see advertisement for The Committee, *San Francisco Examiner,* 21 July 1967, p.26; Herb Caen, 'These Foolish Things', *San Francisco Chronicle,* July 12, 1967, p.29; 'The Sunday Unreadable,' *San Francisco Chronicle,* July 16, 1967, p.103.
[93] Beardemphl, 'Don't Mess with Mona'.
[94] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.196.

clearly from its predecessors. SIR leaders argued that homophile groups should exercise responsibility on two crucial counts. At its core, responsible organising meant letting the community lead and decide the directions of the group. Community participation was conceived by SIR leaders as not just a way of inspiring growth in membership numbers, but also as a means of guaranteeing responsible leadership. From the very first *Vector* issue, SIR leaders explained that SIR's status as a responsible organisation rested on 'Democratic action and decisions' being 'cornerstones' of its operations.[95] For the SIR founders, being responsible leaders meant proving oneself responsive to one's followers. Summarizing this conception of responsibility, Beardemphl wrote that 'a person who is responsible has response to other persons. Those who do not have response to people's needs are not responsible.'[96] Beardemphl saw building leadership 'from within the Community through democratic organization' as 'the only practical way for man to establish and support any political fabric that will be responsive to the individuals involved'.[97]

By promoting this conception of responsible organising, SIR sought to establish a new ethical standard for homophile groups. SIR leaders were particularly appalled at Hal Call's immoral approach to leadership of the Mattachine Society of San Francisco. The first written record of their disapproval can be found in Beardemphl's 1965 Directional Report. It noted that '[t]here have arisen stories, in many cases justified, of homosexual leaders taking advantage of homosexuals who go to homophile groups when they are in trouble.' While the report did not explicitly name Call, a scribbled note by Beardemphl in the marginalia of the GLBT Historical Society's copy – 'Hal! Sex with every one who enters office' – suggests that he was the understood target of the accusation.[98] SIR's

[95] 'Responsibility'.
[96] Beardemphl, 'President's Corner', *Vector,* volume 1, number 11, October 1965.
[97] ----, 'On Leadership'.
[98] '1965 Directional Report'. Call's habit of having sex with young men who came to Mattachine for support was well known among homophile activists. See also Paul D. Cain, *Leading the Parade: Conversations with America's Most Influential Lesbians and Gay Men* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2007), p.30.

reframing of responsibility provided it with a means of challenging such abuse of power. This is best illustrated by an article Beardemphl published in September 1967. Having passed on SIR's presidency, Beardemphl no longer felt any need to hide his disdain for Call's conduct. In an explosive *Vector* article, he described Call as an 'evil organizational hustler' who ran Mattachine as a vehicle 'for personal glory, business profits, and exploitation of homosexuals'. Beardemphl's ire had been lit when Call had set SFPD officers loose on a popular cruising site with the result that two men were arrested, fired, and stigmatized for life, all for the purpose of '[scoring] points for Mattachine in that he was cooperating with the police in eliminating the problem of public sex by homosexuals'. It was only when SIR and the Tavern Guild became involved that a solution was found – securing the bathroom door with a lock – that would stop more lives from being ruined. Beardemphl argued that the episode illustrated the 'terrifying dangers of organizations that are not controlled by intelligent, honest leadership which is directly responsible and responsive to the homosexual community'.[99] For unlike SIR's, Mattachine's ruling body was not elected and not 'directly responsible to the Membership'.[100] Because of Mattachine's unaccountable structure, discontent members could not vote Call out of office no matter how irresponsibly he acted. Once responsibility was reframed to emphasize democratic accountability of gay organisations toward their membership, it could be used to enforce higher standards of homophile leadership.

The second count on which responsible homophile organising rested according to SIR activists was on practicing 'fiscal responsibility', that is, in spending funds in an effective and accountable manner.[101] Fundraising posed a challenge to all homophile organisations. addressing this issue, homophile organisations walked a number of paths,

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[99] All quotations above from Beardemphl, 'No, Mona ... Mattachine Inc. of San Francisco is NOT Santa Claus'.
[100] '1965 Directional Report'.
[101] Beardemphl, 'President's Corner', *Vector,* volume 2, number 4, March 1966. On the importance SIR attributed to 'responsible fiscal policy', see also Dorr Jones, 'President's Column', *Vector,* volume 3, number 4, March 1967; Kevin Macre, 'The President's Corner', volume 4, number 1, December 1967; 'Introduction', *Collection of Society for Individual Rights papers*, folder 'Information Packet for E.C.H.O. 1965'.

none of which were easily available to SIR. Unlike DOB, SIR lacked a rich benefactor.[102] Nor did SIR build up a business to sustain itself like the leaders Mattachine Society of San Francisco had with the creation of Dorian Press, a commercial, homophile printing company, or like the bar owners running the Tavern Guild of San Francisco already possessed.[103] Like LCE, SIR therefore depended on the continued support of the wider community to stay financially operative. As the SIR directors had learned from the financial calamity that precipitated LCE's ending, this made it crucial that the group had something to show for the financial backing it received from its members.[104] 'No one is going to support a cause if no results or if destructive results are realized', Beardemphl reflected on the importance of effective and trustworthy financial management. 'People want something for their money; they work hard for it'.[105] SIR leaders put in place structures that they hoped would ensure the accountable, purposeful handling of SIR money. They set up a separate committee, the Ways and Means committee, whose approval was required for all expenditures. Outlays exceeding $50 further needed to win the support of either the executive board or the membership.[106] Any members wishing to scrutinize SIR expenditure could apply to join the committee, as well as attend the membership and executive board meetings at which the larger expenditures were debated.[107]

The degree to which the SIR leadership in fact exercised financial responsibility was a subject of fierce and repeated controversy among the membership. In 1966, the

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[102] Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, p.83.
[103] On the dependence of Mattachine Society of San Francisco's leadership on Dorian Press's income, see for example Call, interview by Breeden, Undated, p.30.
[104] '1965 Directional Report'.
[105] Beardemphl, 'President Speaks', *Vector,* volume 2, number 5, April 1966.
[106] On the Ways and Means Committee, see Beardemphl, 'President's Corner', *Vector,* volume 2, number 4, March 1966; '1965 Directional Report'.
[107] Pete Brandt, 'Secretary's Corner', *Vector,* volume 4, number 5, April-May 1968. The Ways and Means Committee appears to have been initially open to any member to join. After board members raised concerns, the membership appears to have been restricted to an elected body. (See 1965 Directional Report for original vision; 'Secretary's Corner', *Vector,* volume 3, number 5, April 1967 for concerns about composition of committee; and Beardemphl, 'S.I.R. Elections are held', *Vector,* volume 4, number 4, March 1968, for election of committee members).

disappearance of money raised at a social function led to allegations that the SIR leadership had 'shirked its duty to properly handle the finances of the Society in a responsible manner'.[108] In the wake of this scandal, the membership approved a resolution to establish a 'watch dog committee' to 'supervise the handling of all money received from any type of social function'.[109] Allegations of financial irresponsibility only temporarily subsided. When SIR faced a financial crisis in summer 1968, Beardemphl himself, then still editor of *Vector*, accused the SIR directors of falling short in the performance of their fiscal duties.[110]

If the SIR leadership did not always to live up to their own standards, the vision they set forth for individual and collective homophile responsibilities has not lost in lustre over the decades. SIR eloquently made the case that each individual held responsibilities to support the wider homophile movement, that responsible homosexuals would not join their oppressors but fight them, and that responsible organisations treated their members with care, commitment, and accountability. In its ideas of responsibility, SIR did not prove itself a bulwark of conservative homophile thought as has often been suggested and, certainly, did not '[parallel] Mattachine's philosophy'.[111] Rather, it showed itself the flagbearer for a proud, confrontational faction of the movement which, in Beardemphl's words, sought 'respect, but never respectability' and increasingly characterised homophile activism as the 1960s progressed.[112] This is not to say that we might not have good reasons to remain critical of aspects of SIR's work. But our sceptical gaze is more appropriately directed at an element of SIR's legacy that has received scarce attention: its interpretation of notions of community.

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[108] 'Secretary's Corner', *Vector,* volume 3, number 5, April 1967.
[109] Ibid. See also 'Letters', *Vector,* volume 2, number 10, September 1966; 'Why?', *Vector,* volume 2, number 12, Nov 1966; 'Chatter Matter', *Vector,* volume 3, number 1, December 1966; Pat Kelley, 'Secretary's Corner', *Vector,* volume 3, number 4, March 1967; Larry Carlson, 'The Homosexual Speaks', *Vector,* volume 3, number 10, September 1967.
[110] 'Letters', *Vector,* volume 4, number 7, June 1968.
[111] Sears, *Behind the Mask of the Mattachine: The Hal Call Chronicles and the Early Movement for Homosexual Emancipation*, p.521. See also Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, p.55.
[112] Speech by Beardemphl, 25 August 1966, *Don Lucas Papers*, box 11, folder 15 ('NACHO 1966'), p.3.

Conflicting visions for the SIR Community Centre

Where SIR's ideas of responsibility have often been received with more scepticism than their content warranted, commentators have greeted another distinguishing contribution of SIR's, its advancement of ideas of community, with an equally unbalanced enthusiasm. Both John D'Emilio and Nan Alamilla Boyd credited SIR with coining the concept of a gay community.[113] D'Emilio further celebrated SIR's ability to 'translate' the concept 'into a recognition of the social needs of gay men', and Boyd commended SIR's capacity to 'shape the notion of a "gay community" into an effective political tool'.[114] Closer scrutiny of SIR's intervention into long running homophile conversations around community reveals a more ambivalent legacy. While SIR did much to promote the notion, it also gave it a conservative slant.

As the Society came to life, some SIR founding members expressed a keen interest in picking up the thread of a coalitional gay politics. One of the most vocal advocates of this camp was Nancy May, the first chair of SIR's political committee and the only woman arrested during the 1965 New Year's Day Ball. May already embodied a coalitional commitment through her involvement in the movement as a heterosexual woman. Convinced that 'whenever the rest of society persecutes any individual or member of a minority group, this is also my problem,' she had come to SIR through her bisexual husband Bill May, another SIR founding member.[115] May saw the various civil rights battles of her time as deeply connected. She believed that the fate of each minoritarian struggle hinged in part on the successes and failures of the others. 'When one minority group gains anything from the majority group, you find that a greater battle

[113] Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, p.231; D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, p.190.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Nancy May, 'Speaking Out', *Vector,* volume 1, number 6, May 1965; May, 'The Best Kind of Friend,' p.139.

has been won than you started out to fight'.[116] In this sense then, she understood herself as involved in many causes through the prism of homophile activism.

May was not satisfied, however, with a gay politics that did not also deliberately cultivate cross-issue alliances and throw its weight behind other movements. Addressing fellow SIR activists in a *Vector* article of June 1965, she professed that the Society's failure to practice a coalitional politics meant that '[s]o far, SIR has not lived up to my expectations.' Exhorting her group to get involved in black freedom, environmental and feminist labour struggles, she prodded,

> How about Selma, San Francisco? Haven't we any concern at all about the problems faced here in the City by the Negro who cannot live where he wishes or work wherever he is qualified? How about the scheme set out by the Scavenger Service to dump garbage in our beautiful bay? Couldn't we just write a letter to Senator MacAteer and tell him that we think his stopping this was a good idea and more power to him? how [sic] about [Police Chief] Cahill's Boobie Bobbies [police officers patrolling topless drinking establishments] in North Beach? Can't we see that this is another attempt to legislate our morals? Can't we see the relationship of freedom of choice to watch or not watch the shows there relates in a very real way to our freedom of choice as regards our love objects? Whether you approve of bare bosoms in public places or not, let Mayor Shelly and Chief Cahill know that you do not approve of Blue Noses [police officers] in public places.[117]

In her public address, May moved between different ways of conceptualising the relationship between the homophile movement and other contemporary political movements. She initially characterised her list of struggles that gay activists should get engaged in as 'social problems that do not directly concern us in some way.' And indeed, she offered nothing to suggest why SIR's silence on the March 1965 Selma marches and the environmental protection of the San Francisco Bay was not just a failure of solidarity but also a failure to defend gay interests. We know, however, from May's testimony on the knotted trajectories of minoritarian battles that she thought homophiles

[116] May, 'Speaking Out'.
[117] May,' Speaking Out … cont. from last month', *Vector,* volume 1, number 7, June 1965.

held a direct investment in other movements. But it was only during the discussion of her final example that she ceased treating another group's struggle as distinct and articulated an account of why the gay community too held an immediate interest in it. Here, she argued that whatever gay activists thought of topless waitressing, they ought to defend these workers from police harassment if they wanted to resist the multi-pronged police project of legislating public morals. Echoing Strait's treatment of women sex workers, May suggested that the interests of topless waitresses and homosexuals were intimately intertwined. May's example illustrates that even after LCE had returned to a one-issue gay politics, eloquent, high-ranking SIR leaders continued to promote coalitional trajectories for the homophile movement. These activists demonstrated an abiding homophile interest in theorising gay struggles as connected to other political movements by stronger ties than just threads of solidarity.

The biggest achievement of early SIR coalitionists was the founding of Citizens Alert in autumn 1965. Citizens Alert was a multiracial police watchdog group staffed by activists from 'the Negro, Mexican-American, Japanese, Chinese, Jewish, homophile and religious communities'.[118] It distributed legal information to thousands of members of the public, collected information on police brutality, entrapment and harassment, and filed dozens of concrete citizens' complaints with police authorities each year.[119] Citizens Alert had been founded on the initiative of homophile activists, originating at CRH as the idea of a 'Homophile Alert System'.[120] The Watts Uprising of August 1965, a six-day period of civil unrest in Los Angeles in protest of anti-black police brutality and wider racial injustice, however, spurred the initiators to change tack. It illustrated to them that a broader coalition might be assembled in the fight against discriminatory policing. 'Watts

[118] 'Citizens Alert', *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers*, box 42, folder 24 ('Police Oversight: Reports and Histories, 1965-1968'), cited in Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, p.68.
[119] On the history and activity of Citizens Alert, see ———, *Safe Space*, pp.64-73.
[120] Martin and Lyon, interview by Boyd, 2 December 1992; 'Homophile Alert System', *Vector,* volume 1, number 10, September 1965.

happened and we decided this isn't just our problem,' Del Martin remembers.[121] The well-known Civil Rights activist and CRH member Reverend Cecil Williams agreed to head the project, opening up avenues for wider minority-ethnic and religious participation in a homophile initiative.[122] That SIR would become one of Citizens Alert's earliest and most influential sponsors did not go without saying.[123] Coalitional activists only ever comprised one of multiple ideological factions within SIR. As we will see below, Beardemphl in particular opposed multi-issue conceptions of homophile activism. But Nancy May succeeded in tapping into Beardemphl's vanity as a source for political change, convincing him that Citizens Alert had originally been his idea. This smoothed the path for Beardemphl's acquiescence and SIR's involvement.[124]

Intriguingly, early SIR activists did not simply sustain coalitional visions of gay activism through the mid-1960s. Some also followed Strait in pursuing them through expansive notions of community. The most important figure in these regards is Mark Forrester. Forrester was a young, unemployed, white gay man who had been travelling around the country until he settled in San Francisco in 1961, taking up various odd jobs and getting involved in the homophile movement through SIR.[125] Forrester cut an incredibly engaged figure across mid-1960s homophile activism. As one of SIR's founding members and its first secretary, Forrester played a leading role in the Society's first two years. Forrester interpreted his position rather liberally, forming a special interest for programmatic work. Together with Beardemphl, he authored many of SIR's earliest

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[121] Martin and Lyon, interview by Boyd.
[122] Ibid.
[123] For SIR support of Citizens Alert, see 'Citizen's Alert Needed Now', *Vector,* volume 1, number 11, October 1965; 'Citizen [sic] Alert Goals & Purposes Ready', *Vector,* volume 1, number 12, November 1965; Beardemphl, 'President's Corner', *Vector,* volume 2, number 2, January 1966; 'Citizens Alert', *Vector,* volume 2, number 6, May 1966; Beardemphl, 'President's Column', *Vector,* volume 2, number 10, September 1966; 'SIR Members Urged to Join Citizens Alert', *Vector,* volume 3, number 1, December 1966; Beardemphl, 'Don't Mess with Mona'.
[124] Martin and Lyon, interview by Boyd.
[125] Mark Forrester, interview by John D'Emilio, *IGIC Audiovisual Collection,* New York Public Library, New York, 9 December 1976.

policy statements.[126] Forrester was also a leading member of the Council for Religion and the Homosexual. He wrote the original draft of their pamphlet 'A Brief of Injustices', CRH's official statement on the wrongs society committed against the homosexual.[127] Forrester proved, too, a key early backer of the radical gay youth organisation Vanguard (1965-1967), whom he supported with their eponymous publication.[128]

In all arenas of his activities, Forrester evinced an acute sensibility for the struggles of particularly disadvantaged social groups. The flagship project through which he sought to realise his expansive political vision within SIR was through the establishment of a half way house. Forrester began advocating with his fellow SIR members for the creation of such a house sometime in SIR's first year of existence.[129] It was to provide a home for some of the city's most marginalized residents, 'the so-called "rejects" of society, the unloved, the unwanted, those who do not seem to fit into society's general idea of a productive citizenship'. Forrester's project proposal still took as its paradigmatic case 'a homosexual man'. But, unlike many other SIR activists, Forrester pictured the archetypical movement beneficiary as sitting at the intersections of multiple vectors of disadvantage and oppression. Forrester's typical half way house occupant was 'jobless, broke, hungry, dirty, tired, emotionally sick, on dope or drink, in short … out of it by conventional standards'. The 'young and confused', the 'old and useless', the 'homosexual dope addicts' all would be greeted with open arms.[130] The halfway house occupant was also likely to be of a minority ethnicity. For Forrester believed that 'if you were gay and you were white, you could certainly survive,' whereas this was 'not necessarily true if you were black or some other minority group'.[131] At the half way house,

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[126] See the documents and correspondence in *Don Lucas Papers*, box 11, folder 3 ('SIR Correspondence 1964-1971').
[127] 'CRH "A Brief of Injustices" published', *Vector,* volume 1, number 10, September 1965.
[128] Mark Forrester, 'Central City: Profile of Despair', *Vanguard,* volume 1, number 1, August 1966.
[129] 'Community House Proposed', *Vector,* volume 1, number 6, May 1965; Mark Forrester, 'A Halfway House', undated, *Don Lucas Papers*, box 11, folder 4 ('Correspondence, n.d.').
[130] All Forrester quotations above are from 'A Halfway House', undated, *ibid.*, box 11, folder 4 ('Correspondence, n.d.').
[131] Forrester, interview by D'Emilio, 9 December 1976.

gays would find food, shelter, sanitary access, clean clothing, as well as people to listen to them, take care of them, and, if they so wished, help them move in a new personal direction. Forrester's proposal carried strong echoes to Strait's call in 'The Community' for homophiles to expand community institutions and take comprehensive care of gay needs. Where Strait had challenged his readers to 'look after our own', Forrester presented the halfway house as a way 'to help the homosexual take care of his own'.[132] With its intent to serve a broad clientele, and particularly some of the gay community's most disadvantaged members, Forrester's proposal found a warm reception among SIR's other multi-issue advocates, including Nancy May.[133]

As the proposal made its way through SIR's committees, however, its outline began to shift under the input of another set of SIR activists. By May 1965, the project had undergone subtle changes that were indicative of its future direction. Larry Littlejohn, chairman of the Community Services Committee and future SIR president, had been tasked to explore the implementation of Forrester's proposal.[134] Littlejohn's rebranded concept for a 'Community House' stayed largely true to Forrester's vision. It further suggested, though, that the house could also serve as a community centre. This new impulse emanated from a prominent source. The creation of a 'homophile community center' had been Beardemphl's dream since SIR's inception.[135] The novel dimension soon overshadowed all elements of Forrester's original plan.[136] Already three months later, the project had ossified into its final form as the 'SIR Community Centre'. The difference from Forrester's proposal was startling. The centre no longer drew its core mission from serving some of the most marginalized community members. Instead, it would provide a 'social center, information center, and community services center'

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[132] 'A Halfway House'; 'The Community', *L.C.E. News,* volume 1, number 25, 17 September 1962.
[133] May,' Speaking Out … cont. from last month'.
[134] 'Community House Proposed'; 'Prospectus for Community House, 5/5/1965', *James Sears Papers*, box 175, folder 'Society for Individual Rights'.
[135] '1965 Directional Report'.
[136] 'Community House Proposed'.

ostensibly for all homosexuals.[137] Guided by visions of a single-issue homophile community, the limited services it would provide were those which SIR leaders like Beardemphl and Littlejohn understood as strictly gay and which most closely reflected their own lived experiences as middle-class, middle-aged, gender conforming white gay men. No elements of the halfway house had been preserved. The SIR Community Center opened its doors on April 17, 1966, as the first homophile community centre in the United States.[138]

By this point, Forrester was no longer sitting on SIR's board of directors. Even before his stint as Secretary had elapsed in early 1966, his attention had increasingly been consumed by two new organizations, the Tenderloin Committee and the Central City Citizens' Council.[139] These partner organisations had been formed by multiracial groups of residents of the deprived Tenderloin district. Each advocated for the integration of the zone around the Tenderloin into the San Francisco Economic Opportunity Council's (EOC) programs, the local arm of President Lyndon Johnson's national War on Poverty.[140] The two organisations termed this area 'Central City'. It was home to a wide array of disadvantaged, low-income populations – white homosexuals, sex workers, homeless and other transient populations, drug users, Filipino families, elderly residents, dockworkers, African Americans and new immigrants, from which the groups recruited their leadership.[141] Importantly, the SIR Community Centre was also located in Central City. Forrester was involved with both groups, assumed the role as the Council's first vice-chair at one point, and was eventually hired as a Central City community organiser when the bid to be recognized as the EOC's fifth local target area was successful.[142]

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[137] 'Community Center to be Discussed', *Vector,* volume 1, number 8, [July] 1965.
[138] 'Community Center to Open', *Vector,* volume 2, number 5, April 1966.
[139] J.H., 'Secretary's Corner, *Vector*, volume 2, number 4, March 1966.
[140] For more on the history of the Committee, see Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, pp.35-80.
[141] Don Lucas, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 30 December 1996 through 28 February 1998, pp.241-251; Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, pp. 36, 40.
[142] The Tenderloin Committee, 'Proposal for Confronting the Tenderloin Problem', *Don Lucas Papers*, box 15, folder 1 ('Central City Citizen's Council Target Area Campaign'), p.5; Mark Forrester, 'Report to the

Informed by these experiences, Forrester launched one final attempt to reroute the SIR Community Centre toward a multi-issue orientation on the eve of its opening. His letter to *Vector* documents the perseverance of coalitional homophile imaginaries of community into the mid-1960s. Forrester's letter did not strike out at the idea of a community centre. Instead, it pursued a different tactic, promoting a broad vision for the community the centre might serve. Forrester framed the present as a uniquely propitious moment for grassroots activism. Aided by the funds of the War on Property programs, several minority groups, in particular African Americans, were organising 'for real political power'. Areas of relative disadvantage like the black-dominated Fillmore and Hunters Point districts would within few years 'constitute a definite power block with enormous power within the establishment in this city'. Central City similarly harboured vast political potential as 'a body of unorganised power' that was just waiting for activists to galvanise it. If this occurred, it 'may very well be the fulcrum upon which whole elections turn' in the future, benefitting whichever group had played this vital part. This, of course, was the role Forrester asked SIR to step into. 'Using its Community Center as a base,' he proposed, 'SIR could organize the North and South of Market [i.e. the Center's surrounding area] in a potent way'. However, before SIR could assume this part, it would have to divorce itself from its sexual imaginary and learn to rethink community more expansively.

For, Forrester's vision for the centre rested on a wide understanding of community. This became clear in the way he described how SIR would have to proceed. The 'organization of a community' in Central City would have to advance 'on a street, block, or intra-community level', targeting the variety of local constituencies that resided in the Centre's vicinity, not just homosexuals. It would require involving more than just

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Central City Citizens Council Concerning Area Needs', *ibid.;* box 20, folder 4 ('Forrester, Mark, Personnel File, Legal Size, 1968-1969').

homophile groups to become 'a broad based community organization in which SIR would be but one focal point'.[143]

The expansive sense of community operative in Forrester's letter most likely originated with his experiences in the Tenderloin. Within Forrester's archive, we first see it articulated in his 'Workplan for Community Organization', the document his letter proposed could serve as a blueprint for SIR organising in the Market Street area. Forrester had developed the Workplan on behalf of the Central City Citizens Council to guide its work and bolster its ambitions to have Central City declared a fifth EOC target area. It presented Central City as home to a diverse 'Inner City Community', composed of various populations that collectively belonged to the 'the minority group called "The Poor"' whose 'sense of community and identity' the Council sought to strengthen.[144] The plan was inspired by the teachings of radical organiser Saul Alinsky, who had imparted on Forrester the importance of creating 'mass-based' organisations which drew their 'strength, leadership, and funds from as many small minority groups as possible'.[145] Forrester's letter transplanted these teachings and experiences to the context of homophile activism, arguing that new SIR Community Center should seek to serve a wide coalition of different, disadvantaged populations. As a whole, Forrester's writing in this period testifies to how coalitional homophile thinkers continued to imagine community along expansive lines into the second half of the 1960s.

That the opening of the first homophile community centre was the occasion for sustained reflection on which kind of community gay activists should serve is also corroborated by a second reaction. In his address at the Center's opening ceremony, Reverend John Moore, a long-time homophile supporter, joined Forrester in seizing the

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[143] All quotations above are from Forrester letter in 'Letters, *Vector,* volume 2, number 6, May 1966.
[144] Mark Forrester, 'A Workplan for Community Organization', May 24, 1966, *Don Lucas Papers,* box 15, folder 4 ('Central City Citizen's *[sic]* Council Feasibility Study').
[145] ----, 'Alinsky Says "Act"', *Vector,* volume 1, number 12, November 1965; Forrester, 'A Workplan for Community Oragnization'.

moment to advocate that SIR dedicate itself to wide conceptions of community. Moore urged SIR activists to look beyond themselves in exercising their hard-fought freedom and power. 'The Reverend pointed out that it is easy for members to become lost in a small community which is apart from the world,' *Vector* reported. 'Thus it is not enough merely to dedicate the center to the "community" in the restricted sense; it must also be dedicated in the service of "the larger community - the community which includes us all."'[146] Weighty voices among both homophile activists and their allies carried on developing and offering expansive registers of community in the mid-1960s.

These appeals, however, never became dominant, let alone hegemonic. They formed part of a multifarious conversation between advocates for narrower and broader conceptions of community, in which the former ultimately prevailed. Whereas SIR's original Statement of Purpose still spoke of 'The Community' in the open-ended term Strait had introduced, subsequent *Vector* articles indicate an emerging consensus within SIR toward narrower, more specific interpretations of community.[147] They consistently speak about the 'homophile', 'gay', or 'homosexual community', indexing the notion of a sexual community.[148] Forrester was one of a minority of SIR activists who resisted these terms.[149] But SIR's most influential leaders expressed their ideas of community in these and not in coalitional terms.

Beardemphl was the first of a row of SIR presidents who expressed their support for other minorities' struggles but who regarded them as distinct from homophile activism, moving on parallel but separate tracks.[150] Beardemphl was sympathetic to the

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[146] 'Community Center Opens'.
[147] The statement is printed in *Vector,* volume 1, number 1, December 1964.
[148] See for example, 'Private Benefit Ball Invaded,' *Vector,* volume 1, number 2, January 1965; 'Conversation Group', *Vector,* volume 1, number 6, May 1965; 'CBS Reports', *Vector*, volume 1, number 7, June 1965; Bill Beardemphl, 'President's Corner', volume 2, number 1, Dec 1965; 'Need for Communication Stressed: S.F.P.D. Blackstone Addresses SIR', volume 2, number 8, July 1966.
[149] For another example, see letter from Robert Koch printed in 'Open Forum', *Vector*, volume 3, number 8, July 1967, p.14.
[150] For statements from other leaders, see in addition to those cited below, Don Collins, 'This Month: Interview with Dorr Jones', *Vector,* volume 5, number 9, Sept 1969; Littlejohn, interview by D'Emilio, 7 December 1976.

Watts Riots (even as he condemned violence as a resistance strategy), supported anti-Vietnam protests, defended the Hippie movement, and argued that '[t]he union movement, the Alinsky social thrusts, the Negro movement should be required study for homosexuals'.[151] His own support of these movements did not stop him though from drawing a sharp line between gay concerns that SIR should dedicate itself to, and ostensibly non-gay concerns that he suggested fell outside of its remit. As Beardemphl wrote in a later article, '[o]ur directions must take cognizance of the bastardly social upheavals over war, race and religion, but we must not become embroiled in these controversies as organized homosexuals'.[152] Beardemphl could count on the support of other influential SIR leaders to establish this removed attitude as SIR's dominant stance toward other political movements. Littlejohn, for instance, agreed that SIR should concern itself solely 'with those issues that pertain to the homosexual as homosexual'.[153] The fact that SIR was an organisation primarily composed of middle-class, middle-aged, white, gender-conforming gay men definitely informed and bolstered this view.

But there were also further considerations that guided such thinking. One justification this camp often gave for their position was that a more explicit support for what they theorised as non-gay issues would undermine SIR's attempt to build a large umbrella organisation. One-issue advocates like Littlejohn thought that 'SIR [belonged] to everybody' and that '[t]here should be as much a place in S.I.R. for conservatives as well as militants, for Tenderloin drag queens as well as Montgomery Street brokers'.[154] They argued that resolutions expressing solidarity with political struggles they thought of as non-gay would drive members opposing those struggles out of SIR. 'They are now

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[151] See respectively, Bill Beardemphl, 'President's Corner', *Vector,* volume 1, number 10, September 1965; 'President's Corner', *Vector,* volume 1, number 12, November 1965; 'Being Hip is a Very Old Cool', *Vector,* volume 3, number 9, August 1967; 'Conference Trip at Trip: A Bummer', *Vector,* number 4, number 9, September 1968.
[152] 'Vector: A Re-Cap', *Vector,* volume 4, number 1, December 1967.
[153] Larry Littlejohn, 'the president's corner', *Vector,* volume 5, number 7, July 1969.
[154] Larry Littlejohn, 'president's column', *Vector,* volume 5, number 11, November 1969; Littlejohn, interview by D'Emilio, 7 December 1976.

gonna start dropping away', Littlejohn imagined their reaction. 'They are gonna say, that's not my organisation, that's not my kind of organisation. That's a radical left organisation.'[155] This was not an entirely unreasonable assumption. When SIR leaders did express their support for other movements, some of SIR's more conservative members took to *Vector* to publicly air their dismay.[156] Concerned with retaining the broadest possible appeal through a narrow, one-issue gay politics, this powerful faction around Beardemphl and Littlejohn was responsible for redirecting the project of an intersectional halfway house toward the more moderate end of '[serving] as a "community home" for all members' of SIR.[157]

The commanding position of their adversaries ultimately prevented coalitional advocates from gaining the upper hand over SIR's conception of community. After the opening of the SIR Community Center, disagreements between Forrester and Beardemphl on interpretations of community and the usages of the centre escalated into heated conflict. At an explosive one-on-one meeting in the new centre that had the whole office staff listen in, Beardemphl dismissed his former collaborator's plans. He refused to host Forrester's community organising projects in the centre, stating that they 'were not gay projects'.[158] Beardemphl reiterated his position 'that combining the homophile, homosexual revolution … with the black community or the Asian community or with anything else or any other level except homosexual rights is wrong. You don't have time in your life to do anything else but that.'[159] Forrester was left feeling deeply betrayed by Beardemphl's refusal, cursing him as he left the building.[160] The clash ended Forrester's engagement with SIR for good.

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[155] Littlejohn, interview by D'Emilio.
[156] See for example 'Letters to the Editor', *Vector,* volume 3, number 8, July 1967; 'Letters', *Vector,* volume 3, number 9, August 1967.
[157] 'Community Center Opens'.
[158] Beardemphl and DeLeon, interview by Gabriel, July, 1997, p.3.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Beardemphl and DeLeon, interview by Gabriel, July, 1997, pp.3-4; Forrester, interview by D'Emilio, 9 December 1976.

From Community to Liberation

The conflict over the SIR Community Center had a lasting influence on how homophiles conceived of community on both a local and national level. As the country's largest and most successful homophile group, SIR had long held great sway over the homophile movement's imaginary and direction. The Society had garnered a special reputation for its distinctive, 'highly developed philosophy' that was 'specifically concerned with building a gay community' and impressed many of their fellow activists from other cities.[161] Groups (re)fashioning themselves along the SIR model were among the first who adopted these conceptual tools and began speaking of 'community'.[162] After the opening of the Community Center, they once more followed SIR in the new direction it had taken. Before long, groups in Sacramento, Kansas, Los Angeles, and Vancouver announced that they were planning to open gay community centres of their own.[163] The direction taken by San Franciscan homophiles was soon replicated by groups across the country.

In San Francisco, the resolution of the struggle over the Center produced its own set of afterwaves. In the first place, it temporarily set back coalitional arguments. In February 1967, a few months after Forrester's exit, Nancy May, SIR's second stalwart of coalitional thinking, too, stood down from her leadership position. May's decision was informed by disappointment with the organisation's conservative political direction as well as her newborn's medical issues.[164] The gap left behind by these two influential early figures was, however, not vacant for long. By the late 1960s, a new generation of gay

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[161] 'Kepner interview, pt 8, 9/29/76'

[162] See for example, 'CRH Accepts ARC proposal for State Fair Booth', *ARC News,* volume 1, number 5, June 1966'; Mattachine Midwest newsletters in *James Sears Papers*, box 174; Beardemphl, 'Seattle hosts Western Regional Conference'; ----, 'Parries & Thrusts', *Vector,* volume 4, number 7, June 1968; 'Gay Life in Other Cities', *Vector,* volume 4, number 9, September 1968; Piaff, 'LaFayette Square: S.I.R. and Nacho', *Vector,* volume 4, number 12, December 1968.

[163] 'Open Meeting Hosted by Public Relations Committee', *Vector,* volume 2, number 12, Nov 1966; Beardemphl, 'Parries & Thrusts', *Vector,* volume 4, number 7, June 1968; 'ARC Endorses Community Center', *ARC News,* volume 1, number 5, June 1966'; Beardemphl, 'Seattle hosts Western Regional Conference'.

[164] May, 'The Best Kind of Friend,' p.145; 'Chatter Matter', *Vector,* volume 3, number 2, January 1967; J. Bradley, 'Election', *Vector,* volume 3, number 4, March 1967.

liberationist activists began to fill their shoes. Before they eventually found their own groups, some of them joined SIR and pushed for a more multi-issue orientation from within. These included most prominently Leo Laurence, Beardemphl's brief successor as editor of the *Vector* in 1969. These attempts never succeeded on a long-term basis with Laurence himself soon forced out of his position.[165] But these episodes were only the most visible manifestations of the survival of coalitional thinking within SIR. As then SIR president Larry Littlejohn, the principal architect of the rewriting of Forrester's proposal, noted in June 1969, 'many discussions' continued to take place within SIR on 'the question of taking political stands on issues other than those directly related to homosexuality'. [166] Even the disappointment of the SIR Community Center's orientation could not exorcize coalitional thinking from SIR.

Moreover, it was not just activists with an express commitment to multi-issue struggle that pushed SIR down coalitional paths in the late 1960s. Even staunch believers in a one-issue gay politics became amenable to coalitional action when tempted in the right way. Here, SIR's continued involvement with Citizens Alert is only the most well-known example. It is within the institutional context of municipal elections, however, that the SIR leadership experienced the most enduring pressure to reconsider the fruitfulness of a one-issue gay politics. Here, they showed that they had learnt from Sarria's failure. Rather than pursuing a purely gay electoral politics, they supported Latino, women, and African American outsiders who promised to build broad, successful coalitions of marginalised groups of voters. With SIR's backing, candidates like Willie Brown, later the first African-American mayor of San Francisco, Robert Gonzales, president of the Mexican-American Political Association, and Dianne Feinstein won

[165] On Laurence becoming editor, see 'Letters to the Editor', *Vector,* volume 5, number 1, January 1969. On Laurence's struggles with and eventual dismissal from SIR see Laurence, 'gay revolution', *Vector,* volume 5, number 5, May 1969; 'vector moves', ibid.; Littlejohn, 'President's Corner', volume 5, number 6, June 1969; 'Gold Sheet', May 1969, *Bois Burk Papers*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, box 31, folder 'Society for Individual Rights'.
[166] Littlejohn, 'President's Corner', *Vector,* volume 5, number 6, June 1969.

seats in the California State Assembly (Brown) and on the board of San Francisco City Supervisors (Gonzales, Feinstein).[167]

To be sure, SIR's support for these coalitional endeavours did not come forth easily or wholeheartedly. It was the candidates who solicited SIR's support for their broad electoral projects, rather than the other way around.[168] And when first attempts at building these coalitions failed at the poll, one-issue advocates like Beardemphl were quick to denounce the shortcoming of this electoral strategy. It allowed SIR to 'influence a more diverse group', *Vector's* editor granted, but also meant that SIR '[lost] many of those that had been supporting our position previously'.[169] Such trials notwithstanding, the advocates of a coalitionist electoral strategy ultimately prevailed within SIR. It certainly helped that their arguments soon proved their worth. By the close of the 1960s, the city's homosexuals began reaping public acclaim for their track record of propelling outsider candidates into office.[170] Even die-hard advocates of a one-issue gay politics were swept up by these successes. Beardemphl celebrated Gonzales' election with the words that 'all the work and time devoted to S.I.R. have been worthwhile.'[171] In the face of the unique set of opportunities and pressures the electoral system offered, the popularity of coalitional pathways surged. The SIR leadership's public resistance to such visions can at times cloud the degree to which they continued to hold traction within the Society.

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[167] On Gonzales, see Nancy May, 'SIR endorses Attorney Gonzales for San Francisco Supervisor', *Vector,* volume 1, number 12, November 1965; Jim Hardcastle, 'Supervisorial Election Analysis', *Vector,* volume 2, number 1, December 1965; Beardemphl, 'parries and thrusts', *Vector,* volume 5, number 1, January 1969. On Brown, see 'Candidates Seek Homosexual's Vote', *Vector,* volume 4, number 10, October 1968; H.Babbitt, 'and we forgive those who trespass against us', *Vector,* volume 4, number 12, December 1968. On Feinstein, see Connie Haines and George Mendenhall, 'A Liberal for Supervisor?', *Vector,* volume 5, number 9, September 1969; 'Candidate Night Speakers Receive Stamps of Approval', *Vector,* volume 5, number 11, November 1969; Mendenhall, 'S.I.R. Political Campaign Sweeps Feinstein into presidency', *Vector,* volume 5, number 12, December 1969.

[168] SIR's candidates' nights and general meetings offered a regular platform at which political candidates could present their electoral promises and appeal to SIR's membership. Gonzales, Brown, and Feinstein all attended candidates' nights to solicit gay votes (see footnove above).

[169] Beardemphl, 'S.I.R. Sabotaged', *Vector,* volume 4, number 1, December 1967.

[170] See Mendenhall, 'S.I.R. Political Campaign Sweeps Feinstein into presidency'; Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1982), pp.59-60.

[171] Beardemphl, 'parries and thrusts'.

While the clash over the SIR Community Centre did not end debates over the prospective merits of one- and multi-issue interpretations of homophile activism in San Francisco, it effected a lasting resignification of their terms. In the future, even such stubborn and imaginative challengers of a narrow, single-issue gay politics as Laurence could only conceive themselves as part of a gay, homosexual, or homophile community.[172] Their project hence became to build bridges to other marginalised communities. That community could also be conceived differently and more ambitiously, as a project that brought together a variety of political constituencies in shared, coalitional struggle, was largely no longer imaginable to this later generation. Within the space of just a few years, more radical homophile traditions of theorizing community had for the most part become discredited, if not forgotten. In their place, the new generation of multi-issue advocates found a new language in which to express their demands and envision broader political struggles: liberation.[173]

The splintering of the San Francisco homophile community

One final consequence of the narrowing of homophile ideas of community worth investigating in some detail is the effect it had on the ohesiveness of the movement in San Francisco. As we have seen, proponents of a one-issue homophile gay politics in San Francisco had argued that only a focus on 'those issues that pertain to the homosexual as homosexual' would be able to unite a diverse gay community with otherwise divergent, and often conflicting, political interests.[174] Ironically, the ascendancy of this faction over the second half of the 1960s had the opposite effect. In the subsequent years, local homophile activism witnessed a gradual splintering of the

[172] For a Laurence reference to (homo)sexual community, see for example 'Editorial', *Vector,* volume 5, number 4, March 1969.
[173] Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left*; Samuel Galen Ng, 'Trans Power! Sylvia Lee Rivera's STAR and the Black Panther Party,' *Left History,* volume 17, number 1 (2013).
[174] Larry Littlejohn, 'the president's corner', *Vector,* volume 5, number 7, July 1969.

movement. What the single-issue faction had failed to appreciate was that it was not making room 'for Tenderloin drag queens as well as Montgomery Street brokers, for women as well as men' by ignoring the needs and demands of gay subgroups who experienced multiple, intersecting forms of oppression.[175] It was merely privileging the needs of more advantaged groups over those of these groups. Soon, the Tenderloin street kids, drag queens, and Lesbians all decided that their politics was better served by working outside the organisational channels SIR and similar thinking homophile organisations provided.

The first gay subgroup to form its own organisation were the gay and trans street youth. With its reputation as a wide-open town, the city had long harboured a large population of gender or sexually nonconforming adolescents. Many of them had been thrown out by their families and had made a new home for themselves in the streets of San Francisco.[176] In the summer of 1966, a group of these teenagers came together to found the earliest known US gay and trans youth organisation, Vanguard. Vanguard and its eponymous magazine became a central channel for radical, coalitional queer thought in the Bay Area. Its members soon redefined the meaning of gay militancy through their rallying call for 'Street Power', by threatening organised fightbacks to antigay street attacks, and orchestrating a picket of a Tenderloin restaurant, Compton's Cafeteria, that discriminated against local trans women and street queens.[177] A few weeks later, Compton's became the site of the first collective act of physical resistance by queer people to police harassment in the United States when fifty to sixty patrons rose up to

[175] Littlejohn, 'president's column', *Vector,* volume 5, number 11, November 1969.
[176] Lucas, interview by Gabriel, 30 December 1996 through 28 February 1998, pp.146ff; Lewis Durham, interview by Paul Gabriel, *Oral History Collection,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 18 July 1998, p.2.
[177] On Vanguard, see Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*, Second ed. (New York: Seal Press, 2017), pp.93-96; Jennifer Worley, '"Street Power" and the Claiming of Public Space: San Francisco's "Vanguard" and Pre-Stonewall Queer Radicalism,' in *Captive Genders : Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*, ed. Eric A. Stanley and Nat Smith (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2015).

resist an attempted arrest inside the restaurant and fought SFPD officers in the restaurant and the streets.[178]

Perhaps predictably, Vanguard garnered the backing of more radical homophile figures like Mark Forrester, who already had a long history of advocacy on behalf of adolescent queers. Forrester wrote an article in its inaugural issue, introducing himself as Vanguard's 'lay assistant'.[179] But more moderate homophile activists, too, came to Vanguard's side. Groups like SIR and even Mattachine Society supported the trailblazing organisation. They mentored the young activists, provided them with logistical and financial aid, printed and placed advertisements in their magazine, encouraged Vanguard to attend the 1966 NACHO conference they hosted, and successfully fought other delegates to get Vanguard accredited at the conference.[180] Vanguard recognized the importance of this wider network for its success. One editor ventured so far as to suggest that 'without the help of these organizations Vanguard might not exist today'.[181]

These forms of support notwithstanding, the very fact of Vanguard's existence also underscored the failure of SIR's middle-class, one-issue gay politics. SIR's refusal to concern itself with the problems of the gay youth reached beyond the rejection of Forrester's half way house as a home for underage gays. It most consistently expressed itself in the twenty-one-years age limit SIR instituted on its membership. Even moves to lower the age limit to eighteen were rejected by the membership out of fear that SIR would be charged with 'contributing to the delinquency of a minor'.[182] SIR leaders like Beardemphl and Dorrwyn Jones, his successor, could complain that the resistance of homophile groups to integrating gay minors was 'one of the movement's greatest

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[178] On the Compton's Cafeteria Riot, see Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*, pp.84-98; Susan Stryker and Victor Silverman, *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria* (2015).
[179] Mark Forrester, 'Central City: Profile of Despair', *Vanguard,* volume 1, number 1.
[180] *Vanguard,* volume 1, number 6, p.30; Beardemphl, 'Open Forum, Homosexual and the Youth', *Vector,* volume 4, number 11, November 1968; Kepner, interview by D'Emilio, 23-30 September 1976, part eight.
[181] *Vanguard,* volume 1, number 4, p.2.
[182] 'The Life Style of the Homosexual Succeeds', *Vector,* volume 4, number 12, December 1968; W.E. Beardemphl, 'Open Forum, Homosexual and the Youth'

failures'.[183] However, as architects of SIR's one-issue gay politics they were partly at fault for this exclusion.

As time wore on, Vanguard grew increasingly disenchanted with the adult homophile groups. Many Vanguard activists ultimately felt deeply let down by SIR and other homophile organisations. They complained that they found 'little support' with SIR and 'that organizations like S.I.R. are "copping out" on you'.[184] Their disappointment stemmed not just from being refused membership, but also from the political priorities SIR set for itself. '[T]he law changes that organizations like S.I.R. are supporting are also not going to help the teenage homosexual' one Vanguard member complained in regard to SIR's emphasis on legalizing private sex acts between consenting adults.[185] Another member agreed that SIR pursued projects of little importance to the gay street youth. He opined that 'the main difference between SIR and Vanguard is that Vanguard's people are basically concerned with essentials. SIR members reflect a more financially secure crowd. SIR is dominated by people who need sex.'[186] Vanguard's members repeatedly articulated their criticism through SIR's language of community. 'What is the homosexual community doing for me', one disillusioned Vanguard members asked of SIR.[187] And when *Vector* first reported on Vanguard's founding, it noted that the group had 'been formed of and by downtown youth of the Tenderloin area to "build a community" for themselves'.[188] Clearly, SIR members were well aware that the youth activists did not feel included in SIR's vision and practices of community. Disheartened and frustrated, Vanguard members set about realizing their dreams of community elsewhere.

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[183] Don Collins, 'This Month: Interview with Dorr Jones', *Vector,* number 5, number 9, September 1969, p.21. On Beardemphl's regret, see W.E. Beardemphl, 'Open Forum, Homosexual and the Youth'.
[184] 'The Life Style of the Homosexual Succeeds'; W.E. Beardemphl, 'Open Forum, Homosexual and the Youth'.
[185] 'The Life Style of the Homosexual Succeeds'.
[186] 'Camp Stamp', *Vanguard*, volume 1, number 5, March 1967.
[187] 'The Life Style of the Homosexual Succeeds'.
[188] 'Secretary's Corner', *Vector,* volume 2, number 8, July 1966, p.4

The city's queer youth were gradually succeeded by San Francisco's female impersonators as the second subgroup to break off and form their own organisation, the Imperial Court. In autumn 1965, SIR's sister organisation, the Tavern Guild of San Francisco was preparing to host its second annual Beaux Arts Ball, the new centre of the city's annual Halloween festivities. The 1965 ball would be the first after the New Year's Day Raid. To ensure good and high-spirited attendance, the organisers set out to recruit none other than José Sarria to attend as their star guest. Sarria had rejected a similar invitation the year prior. To change his mind about this year's ball, the Tavern Guild offered to hold an election for queen of the ball that Sarria would undoubtedly win. Sarria agreed to come under one condition.[189] Everyone knew that he was a queen. In true high camp, he wanted to be elected Empress of San Francisco.[190] The organisers granted Sarria's demands. The winner would be free to reign in her own style and hold her title until the next year's ball when a new Empress would be crowned.[191] To no one's surprise, Sarria won. She immediately began setting up her court, granting noble titles to its appointed members, ushering royal decrees, carving out plans for various charitable activities to be conducted under its aegis, and pronouncing herself Empress Norton I, the long-lost wife of Emperor Norton, a beloved local citizen who had declared himself Emperor of the United States in 1859.[192]

The Empress Norton was soon forced to realise that there was no longer a ready space for gender transgressive leadership in mid-1960s homophile activism, notably SIR. Sarria originally conceived of his court as a means to 'continue the unification' of

[189] For the invitation, see Letter from Hal Call to José Sarria, 10 October 1964, *José Sarria Papers*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, box 6, folder 1 ('Correspondence 1961-1965'). For Sarria's rejection of the invitation, see José Sarria, interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town History Project,* GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, 20 May 1992, p.10.
[190] Joe Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020); José Sarria, interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open History Town,* GLBT Historical Society, 15 April 1992, p.11.
[191] 'Why Not Try Humor as an Antidote to Bigotry?', *Citizens' News,* volume V, number 2, December 1965, p.10; Nancy May, 'ARC Benefit Features "Empress Jose"', *Vector,* volume 2, number 8, July 1966, p.7.
[192] 'Why Not Try Humor as an Antidote to Bigotry?'

the gay community and bring the various homophile leaders together under its roof.[193] But when Sarria appeared at a SIR general meeting to receive the membership's approval, she was met with more hostility than fanfare. 'Most of the gay community,' Beardemphl recounted, 'hated Jose with a purple passion … and when I introduced him as the Empress … they came up to me and just read my beads [chastised him] behind the scene.'[194] The legitimacy of Sarria's rule became the subject of multiple, heated SIR membership meetings.[195] Evander Smith, the head of SIR's legal committee and one of the attorneys arrested at the New Year's Day raid, sent a damning letter to all local homophile groups. Smith charged that Sarria's rule would be 'a real disservice to the homophile community'. It would confirm society's 'truly deplorable prejudices' that all male homosexuals 'are effeminate, weak, pusilanimous, [sic] and worst all that he is a frustrated female'. A drag queen, Smith insisted, could never rightfully speak for the largely gender normative community.[196] In his rejection of Sarria's femininity, Smith appeared to have the majority of SIR members on his side. An attendee of one of the meetings estimated that three quarters of those present disapproved of Sarria's leadership claim.[197] Gay male outrage ran so deep that even regular attendees of Sarria's performances became infected.[198] At the third meeting, Sarria's patience had finally run out. She offered the SIR membership a compromise. Sarria would restrict herself to wearing men's clothing with her crown and cape during public appearances. In addition, she would appoint a privy council with representatives from all the local homophile organisations to advise the court, and receive no personal financial

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193 José Sarria and Nicole Murray-Ramirez, interview by Lenora Fulani and Fred Newman, Fred Newman Ph.D. archive, 19 March 1994. See also Sarria, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, p.11; 'Nouveau Reports, June '84', *José Sarria Papers*, box 1, folder 10 ('Writings about Jose Sarria, 1984-2002').
194 Beardemphl and DeLeon, interview by Gabriel, July, 1997, p.2.
195 José Sarria, 'Address to International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE)' (1989); ———, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, p.12.
196 Open letter by Evander Smith to José Sarria, 21 November 1965, *Tavern Guild of San Francisco Records*, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, box 4, folder 12 ('Correspondence 1964-1965').
197 'Letters', *Vector,* volume 2, number 3, February 1966, p.10. See also Beardemphl quote above.
198 George Mendenhall, interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open History Town,* GLBT Historical Society, 13 November 1991, p.2.

assistance. But she would no longer wait for SIR's approval. No one could order Sarria not to parade in her royal regalia and call herself the Empress.[199] With these short-lived concessions, her majesty's rule truly began.[200]

Half a year after the Empress controversy, Sarria made one final attempt to reinstall gender nonconforming leadership to the city's biggest homophile organisation. In spring 1966, Sarria ran for Vice-President in SIR's annual elections. Despite framing his candidacy as that of 'Mr. José Sarria' and not of 'Empress Jose de San Francisco, Empress Norton, or anyone else', Sarria lost to Nancy May's husband Bill.[201] It was Sarria's last attempt to re-integrate himself into the existing gay bar groups. For a few more years, Sarria watched on as various empresses were elected, making only occasional appearances as the Widow Norton. After he had set up home again in San Francisco in 1968, Sarria eventually worked to formalise the court into its own organisation, the Imperial Court of San Francisco, and 'declared independence' from the Tavern Guild.[202] SIR's pursuit of a narrowly defined gay community had driven off another faction of its ostensible constituency.

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[199] 'Privy Council Formed', volume 2, number 2, January 1966, p.2; Cain, *Leading the Parade: Conversations with America's Most Influential Lesbians and Gay Men*, p.40; Sarria, interview by Boyd, 20 May 1992, p.12.
[200] Before long, the Empress Norton began appearing in full, feminine attire. (José Sarria and Bob Ross, interview by Randy Alfred, *The Gay Life Radio Series,* GLBT Historical Society, 18 January 1981). Sarria was especially clear to his Privy Council that he was not going to follow anyone's orders. They did not receive invitations but directives to appear at the court's first meetings. In the correspondence, Sarria '[demanded] their presence'. When they arrived, Sarria would waive to them from his balcony. Once they had proceeded into the stripped living room, they had to stand and wait for her majesty's arrival. After she had taken up her throne, the only seat in the room, she announced her plans and asked her Privy Council for their approval and, often, financial assistance. If they acquiesced, they were invited into the next, lavishly decorated room for coffee and dinner. Otherwise, they had to go home hungry. It is unclear how long the Privy Council functioned. The final invitation in Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin's papers is dated with December 6, 1965. For descriptions and evidence of the Privy Council meetings, see *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers*, box 21, folder 27 ('Correspondence, Sarria Jose (Empress Norton) 1965'); Sarria, 'Address to International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE)'; Sarria and Ross, interview by Alfred, 18 January 1981; Castel, *Nelly Queen: The Life and Times of José Sarria* (2020).
[201] José Sarria campaign speech, *José Sarria Papers*, box 23, folder 9 ('José Sarria candidacy, SIR V.P., 1966'); 'Bill Beardemphl Re-Elected SIR President, Pledges "Honest Deal" as Homophile Goal', *Vector,* volume 2, number 4, March 1966.
[202] Sarria, interview by Boyd, 15 April 1992, p.12. See also Matthew Brown and Paul Gabriel, 'The Imperial Court of San Francisco: An Introduction,' in *Imperial Council of San Francisco, 1965-2005*, ed. Imperial Council of San Francisco (2005).

The lesbians became the third group to break with SIR and other gay male homophile organisations. The collaboration between gay men and women activists had been a steady but fragile feature of the homophile movement in San Francisco since its inception.[203] Although activists of the lesbian Daughters of Bilitis often fought side by side with gay men on issues that primarily affected the latter, male homosexuals rarely treated them as equals. Instead, the Daughters recurrently met with ignorance, marginalisation, and condescension in the predominantly male spaces of the movement. For instance, where LCE seemed not to recognize DOB's contribution to central homophile struggles, Mattachine Society infamously disparaged the independent DOB as its 'ladies auxiliary'.[204] SIR's own, haphazard attempts at becoming a mixed, gay male and lesbian organisation failed due to lack of backing from its membership and leadership.[205]

Over the second half of the 1960s, leading lesbian activists became increasingly disillusioned with the possibility and effectiveness of continued cooperation with gay male activists. In her speech to the 1966 NACHO conference in San Francisco, DOB national president Sherley Willer warned her predominantly male audience that the apathy of gay men toward women's concerns was tearing the movement asunder.[206]

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[203] See for example, Martin and Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, p.229; D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, pp.103-105; Kristin G. Esterberg, 'From Accommodation to Liberation: A Social Movement Analysis of Lesbians in the Homophile Movement,' *Gender & Society,* volume 8, number 3 (1994).

[204] This belittling misnomer already found its way into the first, 1956 FBI report on the Daughters and re-emerged in press coverage of the Wolden Affair. (See respectively, Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, p.xix, and 'Sex Deviates Make SF Headquarters', *Mattachine Review*, volume 5, number 11, November 1959, p.23). As Call readily reported to state surveillance agencies on the formation of other groups, it is possible that the FBI adopted this description from Mattachine leaders (see Eric Cervini, *The Deviant's War: The Homosexual vs. the United States of America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), p.408). DOB founder Del Martin addressed the insult as early as 1957 in a letter published in *Mattachine Review,* volume 3, number 8, August 1957, pp.33-34, and again at the 1959 Mattachine Convention (D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, p.105). On Hal Call's unrepentant attitude toward this jibe, see Hal Call, 'A Decade of Progress in the Homophile Movement, *Mattachine Review,* volume 8, number 10, October 1962, p.17, and also 'Breakthrough: When will it come?', *Mattachine Review,* volume 10, numbers 4-9, April-September 1964, p.18.

[205] On SIR's chequered history of making lesbians feel welcome in the organisation, see Martha Chase, 'SIR Moves to Involve Women', *Vector,* volume 4, number 6, May 1968; Sandy Johnson, 'Women in S.I.R.', *Vector,* volume 4, number 8b, August 1968; Jeanette O'Connell, 'Lesbian Action', *Vector,* volume 5, number 4, March 1969; Rona, 'Lesbian News: Rona Rolls Over', *Vector,* volume 5, number 5, May 1969; Del Martin, 'The Police Beat: Women's Rights and S.I.R.', *Vector,* volume 5, number 9, September 1969.

[206] For a full print of Willer's speech, see Sherley Willer, 'What Concrete Steps Can Be Taken To Further The Homophile Movement', *The Ladder*, volume 11, number 2, November 1966, pp.17-20. Copies of the

Whereas lesbians had a long history of solidarity with gay male battles against discriminatory policing, Willer lamented that gay men had never shown similar concern for lesbian battles for job security, career advancement, continued custody over their children and support from their families. There was 'little evidence … that the male homosexual has any intention of making common cause with us'.[207] Building on her earlier remark that lesbian interests were more closely aligned with the burgeoning women's liberation movement than the male-dominated homophile movement, Willer ended her speech by urging the conference to issue a public statement expressing its equal concern 'about women's civil rights as about homosexuals' civil liberties'.[208] The fact that no such statement was made by the conference will only have confirmed lesbian suspicions.

By the end of the decade, the fissures of the mid-1960s had grown into unbridgeable abysses. In autumn 1970, Del Martin, with her partner and fellow DOB co-founder Phyllis Lyon the most important lesbian homophile figure in San Francisco, decided to cut her ties to the movement she had helped bring into existence. After suffering another humiliating, public example of gay male sexism at the hands of the then SIR president, Tom Maurer, Martin published a blistering critique of male homophiles. Her article 'If That's All There Is' was an astonishing and eloquent reckoning with gay male hypocrisy, calling time on her attempts to interest gay men in lesbian issues, '[f]ifteen years of masochism'.[209] It was also a goodbye to SIR specifically, for whom Martin had been writing regular columns on predominantly gay male issues since

speech can also be found in *Vector,* volume 2, number 11, October 1966 and *Don Lucas Papers*, box 11, folder 15 ('NACHO 1966').

[207] Willer, 'What Concrete Steps', p.18.

[208] Ibid, p.20.

[209] The article first appeared in *Vector,* volume 6, number 10, October 1970, pp.35-37, 53. The reference is from page 37. It also appeared in *The Ladder,* volume 15, numbers 3 and 4, December 1970/January 1971, pp.4-6. Original manuscripts of Martin's article can be found in *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers*, box 35, folder 12 ('"If that's all there is", Martin').

August 1969.[210] Martin excoriated the disparity between SIR's ambitions to organise '"community" project[s]' that kindle 'the forces of coalition in the gay community' and its actual, exclusive interest in white, middle-class gay men like themselves.[211] In 'If That's All There Is' and a follow-up article, she called on lesbians to leave the 'male-dominated homophile community' in search for more intersectional places to conduct activism.[212] They needed to find spaces that prioritized not only the needs of white, gay men but of a much broader constituency that included the 'Black Lesbian who is also blind'.[213] For Martin and Lyon, as for many other lesbians, this meant dedicating themselves to the women's liberation movement. SIR's investment in a gay politics that prioritized the problems of white, middle-class and -aged, gender conforming gay men increasingly led another faction of the homophile movement to seek community elsewhere.

In another, untold chapter of this history, these diverse groups fought their battles against exclusion from the homophile community not only separately but also in tandem. In their struggles with the exclusionary focus of other homophile groups, Vanguard activists took courage from Sarria's maxim, 'United we stand, divided we fall one by one.'[214] Sarria in turn was deeply invested in the welfare of the Tenderloin youth, and spent considerable time fundraising for them, especially around Christmas.[215] In 1980, the Court would also become the first and only homophile organisation to elect a Tenderloin queen, 'Tenderloin Tessy', as she became known, as its leader.[216]

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[210] For Martin's first column, see Del Martin, 'The Police Beat: Williams Pledges Help', *Vector*, volume 5, number 8, August 1969.
[211] Ibid, p.36.
[212] Del Martin, 'What can we do?', 16 December 1970, *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers*, box 35, folder 12.
[213] Ibid. This was also a specific reference to Pat Walker, President of DOB's San Francisco chapter in the early 1960s (on Walker, see Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, pp. 57-59, 201-202).
[214] *Vanguard*, volume 1, number 5, p.1.
[215] John Gieske, 'José: A Portrait', *The Sentinel,* volume 7, number 2, January 1980, in *José Sarria Papers*, box 1, folder 12 ('Clippings 1980-1989'); Tequilla Mockingbird, 'the bar tour', *Vector,* volume 5, number 1, January 1969.
[216] 1965-2005 Imperial Council of San Francisco, *Imperial Council of San Francisco* (2005); Sarria, 'Address to International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE)'.

The paragons of solidarity were, however, the lesbians. DOB not only lowered its age barrier to eight-teen for some of their functions, they were also among the most vocal advocates for greater incorporation of young gays into the movement.[217] Castigating the exclusionary attitudes of fellow homophile activists, Del Martin argued that the gay street youth 'should be a part of the homophile community where they can attain a sense of belonging and where they can be guided into constructive and creative channels'.[218] Contrary to what some gay male activists claimed, perhaps to hide their own shame, DOB were also firmly on the side of the female impersonators in their struggle with bigoted gay male activists.[219] In a private response to Evander Smith's public condemnation of Sarria's imperial ambitions, Martin made it very clear that she considered Smith, not Sarria, the perpetrator of harm 'upon the homophile community'. Sarria, she argued, was a 'respected community [leader]' who did not deserve Smith's harsh criticism. Moreover, Martin condemned Smith's attempt to foist a 'middle class, "respectable" image' upon the movement. The extent to which Martin saw common cause with Sarria was the most obvious when she wondered whether Smith's attack might have been driven by a reluctance to 'accept the feminine side of your nature'.[220] DOB also publicly affirmed Sarria's rule. It became the first homophile group to officially recognize Empress Norton's reign and gifted her the throne from which she would address her Privy Council.[221] DOB acted in solidarity even as Sarria herself remained more invested in the gay male organisations which had excluded her than the lesbian group that had come to her side.[222] In their mutual support for each other, these groups

[217] Del Martin letter in Beardemphl, 'Open Forum, Homosexual and the Youth'.
[218] Ibid.
[219] For these claims, see for example Bob Ross in Sarria and Ross, interview by Alfred, 18 January 1981.
[220] Letter from Del Martin to Evander Smith, 3 December 1965, *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers*, box 6, folder 10 ('Correspondence re: Council of Religion and the Homosexual, 1964-1967').
[221] 'Empress Norton takes the reigns over her rein', *Daughters of Bilitis San Francisco Chapter Newsletter*, December 1965; Letter from Del Martin to Jose Sarria, 29 April 1966, *Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers*, box 6, folder 13 ('Correspondence - General, 1966'); Sarria, 'Address to International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE)'.
[222] Letter from Martin to Sarria, 29 April 1966.

illustrated that efforts for a united homophile movement could begin to bloom where the barren land of single-issue thinking ended.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that homophile ideas of community have an older genesis and a more pluralistic early history than has previously been assumed. These ideas find their roots in the mid-century gay bar cultures of San Francisco, a city that was in the process of transforming into the United States' gay capital. In the bars, a rising number of self-identifying homosexuals were making a home for themselves, and, in the face of brutal police harassment, pioneering new ways of defending their spaces from state oppression.

Female impersonator José Sarria turned himself into the most important early leader of this resistance movement. His notorious Black Cat operas sought to change how audience members viewed themselves, transforming 'normal' men into homosexuals and self-identifying gays into committed activists. During Sarria's historic 1961 campaign for San Francisco City Supervisor, his supporters went one step further, arguing that the city's gender and sexual non-conformists in fact formed a gay 'community'. Through this conceptual innovation, Sarria's camp sought to convince conservative gay sceptics that they held a responsibility to cast a vote for Sarria and their community. Thus, homophile ideas of community were born in the early rather than the mid-1960s.

Over the following years, 'community' became a widely spoken language within gay bar circles, primarily in San Francisco, but gradually in other cities as well. The texts of gay publisher Guy Strait, one of Sarria's collaborators, reveal that homophiles imagined community in a variety of ways in this early, unsettled period of the concept's history. Rather than being singularly drawn to ideas of a (homo)sexual community, as John D'Emilio famously proposed, Strait mobilized a wealth of different interpretations in his attempts to build a gay mass movement. Most suggestively, he was drawn toward

gay-black electoral alliances and imaginaries of a 'total minority community' in the wake of the successful 1963 Birmingham Confrontation.

In the second half of the 1960s, homophile ideas increasingly narrowed and solidified around the notion of a (homo)sexual community. In San Francisco, this move was spearheaded by the Society for Individual Rights (SIR), the first mass-based homophile group. Conflicts between advocates of coalitional and one-issue approaches to homophile activism erupted over the orientation of the SIR Community Center. The rejection of a broader community orientation for the Center strengthened single-issue conceptions across the country and drove coalitionists to alter their rhetorical strategies. Instead of continuing to frame their appeals in the language of community, they turned toward the surging discourse of liberation.

The history of gay ideas of community does not end here, of course. Through its study of the early life of homophile ideas of community, this thesis hopes to open up space for further examination of LGBTIQ community's rich intellectual history. We still know very little about how we moved from the coinage of homophile ideas of community in the local San Francisco context to the present situation, where ideas of a global gay community have taken hold in many parts of the world. What, we might ask, were the processes by which this idea was translated from the local to the national to the global context? Which actors were the key protagonists in these developments? What were the wider political projects they pursued? And what alternative worldmaking projects and imaginaries did these projects come up against and, always incompletely, win out over? While answering these questions is beyond this thesis' scope, research conducted for this thesis has hinted that a fascinating story about the rise of an imagined national gay community, and the role of the North American Conferences of Homophile Organisations (NACHO) in particular, still remains untold.

Finding answers to these questions matters not only to our understanding of the past, but also in terms of our ability to re-imagine and build a better future. In the 2007 preface of *The Invention of Heterosexuality,* gay historian Jonathan Ned Katz comments on his rising appreciation for the worldmaking powers of concepts. He notes that human beings 'use words to create particular perceptions of the world, on which they then act, and alter the social institutions around them'. For Katz, this means that we cannot treat the meaning and history of our concepts lightly. Echoing Marx, he contends that 'words, ideas, and ideals (like "heterosexual" [or "community", we might add]) are among our major means of production. Our struggle over the ownership, control, and shaping of those means is key to the future of heterosexuality, the other existing sexualities, and the new sexualities to come'.[1]

The activists examined in this thesis knew very intimately what words can do both to and for a person. Many of them had been subjected to taunts since their early childhood. Being labelled a 'sissy', a 'lesbian', or a 'queer' made them a target for horrendous forms of abuse and violence in their families, churches, and schools that they would carry with them in one way or another for the rest of their lives. But they were never just victims. Especially as they got older, they became more confident in their ability to turn ideas to their own advantage, to find words which brought healing and allowed them to work toward a better world for both themselves and future generations. *Community*, of course, was just such a word. James 'Robbie' Robinson, a victim of childhood familial abuse, left us perhaps the most stunning testimony of just how transformative the claiming of 'community' could be for members of this oppressed minority. To him, discovering community 'meant that we recognized ourselves as a "group". We were somebody. We were a "family" and could speak about our needs and demand that they be recognized. Most people today cannot understand how powerful

[1] Jonathan Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p.ix.

that "discovery" was'.[2] By recovering the history of the invention of community, this thesis has sought to help fulfil Robinson's hope that his testimony would assist historians in '[telling] the whole story more fully', to recover and preserve the history of his generation of homophile activists in its richness, depth, and complexity.[3]

This thesis has also hoped to provide grounds for reflection on the kinds of communities we envision, enable, and enact. If words 'are among our major means of production', what worlds are we creating with 'community'? Dissatisfaction with superficial assumptions of sexual community remains rife but has come up against the obstacle of an incomplete, one-sided historiography of community's beginnings. It has long been assumed that the intellectual horizon of the inventors of homophile ideas of community did not stretch beyond homosexual community, that they could only imagine a community based on shared sexual interests and behaviours. However, by the 1960s many homophiles were already expressing their dissatisfaction with such ideals. Intersectional thinkers like Cassandra, Mark Forrester, and Del Martin condemned how facile assumptions of sexual community elided the experiences of some of the most marginalised gay subgroups and closed down space for political coalitions with other disadvantaged populations. At some times, this analysis led them to reject community as a governing ideal for homophile activism. At others, they put forward their own, coalitional visions of community in which, following Cathy Cohen, 'one's relation to power, and not some homogenized identity, is privileged in determining one's political comrades'.[4]

By recovering a multiplicity of historical traditions, this thesis has attempted to expand our resources for rethinking community as a liberatory tool in the present.

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[2] James (Robbie) Robinson, My Story, One Gay's Fight: From Hate To Acceptance, 2017, San Francisco Public Library, Unpublished manuscript, p.75.
[3] Ibid., p.4
[4] Cathy J. Cohen, 'Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?,' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* volume 3, number 4 (1997), p.438.

Community, as I have sought to show, need not be an instrument that predominantly serves the most privileged gay subgroup: white, middle- or upper-class, middle-aged gay men. The knowledge that community 'does not necessarily have to be that way', that community has been imagined more ambitiously before, can help us fight back against what we might term, with Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, the 'elite capture' of this still very potent concept.[5] As Amia Srinivasan has argued, historical work that reveals how agential power has created and is upholding the representations that structure our lives allows us to discover our own power 'to make our representations, and thus our world, anew'.[6] That we can rethink the very cornerstones of the queer intellectual landscape in the service of a broad, emancipatory politics has been demonstrated by our queer ancestors time and time again, not least by black queer feminists like Cathy Cohen and the Combahee River Collective.[7]

What is at stake, then, in reconstructing paths not taken is not necessarily the ability to walk these very same paths in the exact way our intellectual ancestors had envisioned. Not only would this be impossible, it would also neglect that we are finding ourselves in a moment very different – and more globalized – than that of 1960s homophile activists. In a time of escalating climate crisis, the threat of nuclear war, the rise of neofascist regimes worldwide, and an ongoing global pandemic, we are pressed not simply to revive, but also to reimagine our intellectual traditions in order to meet the present moment well.[8] In the case of community, this might mean nothing less than envisioning and pursuing new kinds of communities with hope, solidarity, courage, and imagination.

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[5] 'Guest Editorial', *The News,* volume 3, number 6, 23 December 1963; Olúfẹmi O. Táíwò, *Elite Capture: How the Powerful took over Identity Politics (and Everything Else)* (London: Pluto Press, 2022).
[6] Amia Srinivasan, 'Genealogy, Epistemology and Worldmaking,' *Proceedings Of The Aristotelian Society,* volume CXIX, Part 2 (2019): p.145.
[7] See especially Cohen, 'Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?' and Combahee River Collective, *Combahee River Collective Statement* (1977).
[8] Erin R. Pineda, *Seeing Like an Activist: Civil Disobedience and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), p.201.

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Danke.

List of Abbreviations

ABC	Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control
CRH	Council on Religion and the Homosexual
DOB	Daughters of Bilitis
LCE	League for Civil Education
NACHO	North American Conference of Homophile Organizations
SFPD	San Francisco Police Department
SIR	Society for Individual Rights
TGSF	Tavern Guild of San Francisco

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