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**Between Repression, Resistance and
Visibility: LGBTQ+ Activism in the U.S.
from 1950 to 1990**

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Abstract

This work explores LGBTQ+ activism in the United States between 1950 and 1990, and how it evolved from a movement seeking respectability and validation to a more inclusive and confrontational one. Beginning with the homophile movement, where organizations such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis emerged when homosexuality was conceived as pathological, it moves on to the Stonewall Riots as a turning point in the history of activism, which led to groups such as the Gay Liberation Front, Gay Activist Alliance, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries and Radicalesbians. The study closes with the AIDS epidemic, discussing activist organizations like Gay Men's Health Crisis and ACT UP that emerged at the time. While emphasizing the role of activism in fostering resilience, this work explores the different periods of activism by putting in conversation various activists' accounts from inside these movements along with academic sources.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, Community, Homosexuality, Activism, Stonewall, movement(s)

Resumen

Este trabajo explora el activismo LGBTIQ+ en Estados Unidos entre 1950 y 1990, y cómo evolucionó de un movimiento que buscaba respetabilidad y validación a uno más inclusivo y confrontativo. Comienza con el movimiento homófilo, cuando surgieron organizaciones como la Mattachine Society y Daughters of Bilitis, en un contexto en el que la homosexualidad se concebía como patológica. Luego se abordan los disturbios de Stonewall como un punto de inflexión en la historia del activismo, que dio lugar a grupos como el Gay Liberation Front, Gay Activist Alliance, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries y Radicalesbians. El estudio concluye con la epidemia del sida, analizando organizaciones activistas como Gay Men's Health Crisis y ACT UP que surgieron en ese periodo. Mientras se enfatiza el papel del activismo en el fomento de la resiliencia, este trabajo explora las distintas etapas del activismo mediante los testimonios de activistas desde dentro de los movimientos con fuentes académicas.

Palabras clave: LGTBIQ+, Comunidad, Homosexualidad, Activismo, Stonewall, Movimiento(s)

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Introduction

Although discrimination continues to be present in some sectors of society, solid legislation that protects the rights of queer individuals is fundamentally necessary to combat the stigmatization they still face. The United States is a clear example of the inequalities and differences among states with respect to LGBTQ+¹ human rights. There is currently no federal law in the United States that protects the entire LGBTQ+ community from discrimination, whether in the workplace or in personal life. Each state has its own legislation, revealing significant differences and inequalities. According to the Movement Advancement Project (2025), 31 states, 3 territories and the District of Columbia have public employment nondiscrimination policies that include both sexual orientation and gender identity. However, 16 states and 1 territory lack any public policy or measure on the matter. Furthermore, 3 states and 1 territory only consider discrimination in relation to sexual orientation but not gender identity.

During the year 2023, the Human Rights Campaign declared a national state of emergency for LGBTQ+ people in the United States, due to the introduction of more than 525 state bills. Out of those, 220 specifically affected the transgender community and 70 became official laws. These measures were fostered by an anti-LGBTQ+ Republican establishment and supported by other extremist groups. As a response, the Human Rights Campaign issued an announcement encouraging not only the LGBTQ+ community, but all people to practice allyship and continue fighting non-violently for the right to live free from discrimination (Human Rights Campaign, 2025).

This work aims to analyze some of the main activist organizations related to the LGBTQ+ community in the United States between 1950 and 1990, focusing on how they emerged and responded to specific social, political and cultural contexts of the time. It also includes other key expressions of activism that played a crucial role in shaping resistance within the community, such as the Stonewall riots, which were spontaneous rather than organized. Activism is conceived here as a set of collective actions carried out

¹ Throughout this work, LGBTQ+ is used as a contemporary and inclusive term that encompasses a wide range of sexual orientations and gender identities. Although the acronym itself was not in use during the historical periods discussed, it serves as a unifying label for individuals who would today be included under this umbrella term.

by groups aimed at reaching visibility, promoting change, resisting oppression and advocating for the rights of marginalized groups. In this context, activism served as a powerful tool for developing a collective identity in order to face stigmatization.

Activist movements were decisive for the LGBTQ+ community in the United States, as they functioned as one of the main sources of resilience. Several studies have confirmed the correlation between social support networks and the development of resistance to oppression (Scheidler et al., 2022; Libero et al., 2021). These networks, meaning the connections between people, were not only essential for initiating a pioneering organized form of activism in the 1950s, but also for facing tumultuous events such as the AIDS health crisis. Moreover, rights that are now taken for granted, like marriage equality, healthcare access, adoption rights... are the result of many decades of effort and direct action. Therefore, these generations left a legacy that is evident not only in the freedoms and legal protections recognized, but also in the ongoing fight for equality.

When one of the first activist groups, the Mattachine Society, was founded in 1950, homosexuality was regarded as unnatural and immoral by mainstream society. In fact, the American Psychiatric Association classified it as a disorder in the first edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) in 1952. As a result, the pathologization and criminalization of LGBTQ+ individuals was justified and normalized. According to Erin Owens, the U.S. government targeted LGBTQ+ individuals as security risks, and “purged the federal government of anybody who did not fit the ideals of American morality” (2020, p. 115).

This resulted in a period of fear and repression known as the Lavender Scare, during which the U.S. administration defended discrimination based on perceived sexual perversion and immorality. U.S. Senator Joe McCarthy declared that “[s]ome of them have that unusual affliction because of no fault of their own – most, of course, because they are morally weak . . . we’re not disturbed about them because of their morals, but because they are dangerous to this country” (McCarthy, 1952, as cited in Owens, 2020, p. 119). As this shows, the LGBTQ+ community was seen as a threat to American values and associated with Communism, as it also did not follow mainstream American ideals and social norms.

In this sense, gender equality was also seen as a threat. After World War II, many women who had sustained the economy during the war gained access to jobs and education. Hence, some did not follow conventional gender roles and refused to be the ideal housewife, and were consequently often suspected of being lesbians. This illustrates the main objective of the measures carried out during the period of the Lavender Scare: to promote traditional values and a conservative way of life, which excluded many American citizens, especially the LGBTQ+ community and women who did not want to conform solely to their domestic roles (Owens, 2020, pp. 120-21).

In order to explore how this period of repression (as well as those of the following decades) was confronted, this project explores three key moments in the history of LGBTQ+ activism in the United States by combining the accounts of activists and other individuals within various activist groups with some scholars and their academic sources. The first chapter focuses on the homophile movement and the creation of early activist groups, such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis. While there were differing views within the movement regarding the pathological perception of homosexuality and the use of science to legitimize it, many intended to present the LGBTQ+ community as respectable. It did not yet encompass the wide range of sexual orientations and gender identities recognized today.

The second examines the Stonewall riots, considered a turning point in activism, and includes the groups that emerged from it, such as the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), Gay Activist Alliance (GAA), Radicalesbians, and Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR). Despite the disagreements on whether to focus only on LGBTQ+ issues or align with other social movements, tensions led to the creation of new groups, some centered specifically on the struggles of lesbians and transgender people. Overall, all these groups did not advocate for tolerance, respectability or validation from mainstream society, but for radical change.

Finally, the third section addresses the HIV/AIDS crisis in the USA during the 1980s, and reflects on some of the most well-known organizations, such as Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) and AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). These groups not only fought for equality, but also demanded proper access to medical treatment, in response to the inaction of President Reagan's conservative government.

Chapter I: Activism within the Homophile Movement

Roots of the Homophile Movement and Its First Challenges: Scientific and Social Background

Although there had been previous attempts, the homophile² movement is considered the first enduring political organization to advocate for gay rights in the United States, lasting from the early 1950s to the late 1960s. This terminological shift was accompanied by some scientific contributions. In 1948, and again in 1953, the renowned sexologist Alfred Kinsey conducted influential studies on male and female sexuality that helped combat the stigmatized view of homosexuality. In his 1948 study (reprinted in 1998), *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Kinsey reported that over a third of American men had engaged in sexual activity with other men, and around ten percent had done so exclusively. He also created what is known as the Kinsey scale, which conceptualized sexuality as fluid. This scale ranged from 0 to 6, with 0 representing “exclusively heterosexual” and 6 “exclusively homosexual” (Kinsey, 1953/1998).

Alternatively, Donald Webster Cory, a prominent professor, published *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach* in 1951, in which he advocated for the decriminalization of homosexuality and demanded civil rights for the community. Nevertheless, Cory still viewed this sexual orientation as a pathology that required treatment. Although this perspective may seem regressive nowadays, he was nonetheless considered “the godfather of the homophile movement” due to his meaningful message of acceptance in society (Cory, 1951).

The homophile movement emerged as a result of the return of soldiers from World War II, which had enabled the development of a homosexual subculture within the armed forces. At the same time, the agrarian lifestyle model was replaced by the industrial one, causing many people to migrate to urban areas, providing greater opportunities to “live outside of the nuclear family mode” (Wuest, 2019, p. 61). With the Cold War and McCarthyism during the early 1950s, sexual repression was exacerbated to the point that

² Due to the discrimination and stigmatization that characterized that period, the term *homophile* was used instead of *homosexual*, as the latter carried pathological connotations. In contrast, *homophile* was more humanizing and facilitated the promotion of social acceptance within society.

homosexuality was linked not only to psychopathy but also to communism, leading to a narrative in which this sexual orientation was conceived as a threat to national security. In this politically radical atmosphere, police raids on emerging gay bars led to an increased collective awareness and provided a source of support among members of the LGBTQ+ community. This contributed to the creation of the first and most well-known organization of the homophile movement: the Mattachine Society, established in 1950 in Los Angeles by activist Harry Hay and a group of members who belonged to the Communist Party of the United States. The organization aimed to confront the hostile climate faced by the community.

Initially, the perception of homosexual identity within the Mattachine Society was predominantly shaped by the Marxist principles, which recognized homosexual men and women as an oppressed cultural minority who did not fit in the mainstream society. Members of the Mattachine Society believed that homosexuals should take pride in themselves and build a mobilized community to fight for their rights. They compared themselves to other American minorities to “take the actions necessary to elevate themselves from the social ostracism an unsympathetic culture has perpetuated upon them” (Mattachine Society, 1997, p. 283).

In 1952, Dale Jennings, a member of the Mattachine Society, was arrested for apparently seeking sexual encounters in a park in Los Angeles. This incident emphasized the lack of safe spaces for the LGBTQ+ community to interact. According to scholar John D’Emilio, during the trial, Jennings “admitted that he was a homosexual” but argued that the charges were unclear, leading the jury to drop the case (1998, p. 71). The propaganda in favor of Jennings’ case and his brave attitude confirming his sexual orientation greatly impacted the Mattachine Society, increasing its membership and “estimat[ing] two thousand members and one hundred discussion groups” by 1953 (Engel, 2001, p. 32). This allowed them to create the Mattachine Foundation, a nonprofit with the objective of conducting research to provide scientific legitimization to the community and, with work done by Evelyn Hooker, a UCLA psychologist, combat the pathological model.

Internal Struggles: Assimilation Into Mainstream Society vs. Pursuit of Authenticity and Recognition of Plurality

Throughout his research on the Mattachine Society, D'Emilio (1998) explains that there were tensions between those who preferred a more democratic and less clandestine organization, and those who wanted to abandon the left-wing sympathies and receive public validation. In 1953, the organization reoriented itself to adapt to a heterosexual culture, rather than pursuing groundbreaking measures. For instance, Marilyn Reiger, a member of the Mattachine Society, expressed her traditional view of homosexual identity, suggesting that the community should fit into mainstream society without drawing attention to their sexual orientation, which should neither define nor be a visible part of one's identity. Reiger highlighted the importance of "declaring ourselves, by integrating . . . not as homosexuals, but as people, as men and women whose homosexuality is irrelevant to our ideals, our principles, our hopes and aspirations" (Reiger, 1953, as cited in D'Emilio, 1998, p. 79).

In 1953, tensions within the Mattachine Society led to internal divisions. More radical members, rejecting the organization's increasingly conservative approach and its adherence to the medical model of homosexuality, decided to break away and create the ONE organization. By doing so, they distanced themselves from the more cautious stance of the Mattachine Society and fully rejected the pathologization of homosexuality. ONE even published articles with titles such as "I Am Glad I Am Homosexual" (D'Emilio, 1998). In the mid to late 1950s, the Mattachine Society started to distance itself from the pathological conception of gay identity. By 1958, a majority of members rejected reorientation therapies, arguing that they did not need treatment and had no willingness to modify their sexualities, as stated by Ronald Bayer in *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The politics of Diagnosis* (1981). This change in perspective reveals an evolution in the members' way of thinking, despite the long-standing conservative viewpoint held since 1953.

In 1955, the first lesbian homophile organization, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), was founded in San Francisco by two middle-class women, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon. The dynamics of this organization were similar to the Mattachine Society in 1953, as it relied on integration and adaptability to heteronormative society, rather than trying to

implement revolutionary measures. Even though they initially accepted the pathological view of homosexuality, their aim was to achieve scientific legitimation, which led to the publication of their own journal, *The Ladder*, which enabled them to participate actively in the spread of scientific research. Nevertheless, there was a disparity of opinions between those who preferred to adopt strategies of assimilation and those who defended a distinct lesbian identity (Anderson, 1994). In 1959, the DOB started to reject the medical model of homosexuality, as reflected in *The Ladder*, which stated: “generally established by the experts in the field that the cause of homosexuality is still an unknown quantity and that it is a process of development and not a matter of choice” (Daughters of Bilitis, 1959, p. 330). This marked a shift away from the pathological model, meaning that the theory of innateness became more prominent, reducing the focus on the need to *correct* sexuality.

Towards the Depathologization of Homosexuality, yet a Limited and Non-Inclusive Homophile Movement

The mid-to-late 1960s entailed a progressive stance in the homophile movement, along with the initiation of a civil rights political movement. During this time, the phrase “gay is good” was used by members of the LGBTQ+ community to symbolize the legitimacy and empowerment of gay and lesbian identities, as can be seen in the title given to Kameny’s text discussing his view on homosexuality in the perspectives compiled by Mark Blasius and Shane Phelan in *We are Everywhere* (1997). As a consequence, the conservative views within the movement were gradually replaced by a discourse in which homosexual people were perceived as an oppressed class, echoing the Marxist principles on which the Mattachine Society was founded. According to David K. Johnson (2002), a significant turning point in moving away from the pathological perception was motivated by Frank Kameny, an astronomer who became a homophile activist after being fired by the Civil Service Commission due to his homosexuality. Along with other activists, he contributed to the founding of the Mattachine Society of Washington (MSW) in 1961. One of their strategies was to move away from the traditional, pathological approach that had characterised the Mattachine Society since 1953. Kameny was one of the first to advocate for solid social rights, supporting visible and revolutionary activism.

Kameny also defended the conception of gay identity as positive and something that should be accompanied by dignity, pride and self-awareness. Shortly after its creation, the Mattachine Society of Washington (MSW) became the first to publicly state that homosexuality was a valid preference or orientation, just like heterosexuality. In the early 1960s, Kameny and other progressive members of the MSW sought to replace the conservative leadership from power in the homophile movement. In 1964, he gave a speech and referred to Martin Luther King Jr. to illustrate and compare the civil rights movement with the homophile one and distanced itself from the immoral and pathological image of homosexuality. Kameny and other activists saw their cause as one of basic human rights, similar to the African American civil rights struggle, and they argued that homosexuality was a legitimate form of identity that should not only be, but respected too (Johnson, 2004).

This led to internal strife in the early to mid-1960s, as militant activists took control of homophile organizations, such as the Mattachine Society of New York (MSNY) and the DOB. In 1962, activist Barbara Gittins took control of *The Ladder*, where she published articles opposing the pathological conception. In 1963, the MSW, the MSNY and the DOB founded the East Coast Homophile Organisations (ECHO), consolidating political power for progressives and finally discarding the medical perception of homosexuality. In this way, the more conservative members of the Mattachine Society gradually lost influence within the organisation, as their discourses rendered outdated, with many eventually leaving the organization (Wuest, 2019).

In 1966, the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations (NACHO) was formed, defending the idea that homosexual men and women were part of a distinct minority class deserving of civil rights. In 1968, during a conference, NACHO adopted the slogan “*gay is good*”, emphasizing that homosexual individuals had the freedom and right to be gay without facing criminalization or the pressure of trying to be heterosexual (North American Conference of Homophile Organizations, 1968). Overall, NACHO was able to provide a legal defense fund and facilitated the emergence of new organizations aiming to challenge discriminatory laws.

In the mid-1960s, the Society for Individual Rights (SIR) was founded in San Francisco, becoming the largest homophile organization by the end of the decade. From

1965 to 1970, the Annual Reminders took place at Independence Hall on July 4th, where members of the Mattachine Society, SIR, and the DOB demanded civil rights for homosexual people, emphasizing American ideals of equality and freedom while presenting an image of normality. The first Annual Reminder, held on July 4, 1965, was the first organized demonstration focused on homosexual issues. Thirty-nine people attended, aiming to present themselves as respectable individuals deserving of rights (Noland, 2016).

Although the homophile movement became less conservative in the 1960s, it remained largely focused on a politics of respectability, based on an assimilation into heteronormative society, as evidenced by activist Frank Kameny's request during the first Annual Reminder, when he stated that men should wear suits and women should wear dresses at protests in order to avoid controversy, thereby projecting a white, heterosexual and middle-class image (Mattachine Society of Washington, n.d.). Most activists agreed to use science to legitimize their identity, which is why many committed themselves to participating in scientific studies. One of the most important milestones in this field was the work of the psychologist Evelyn Hooker. Although the Mattachine Society contacted her in 1952, it was not until 1956 and 1957 when Hooker published her studies: *A Preliminary Analysis of Group Behavior of Homosexuals*, and *The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual*. Both studies contributed to the understanding that homosexuality was not related to any particular personality disorder or mental condition, and that there were no psychological differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals (Hooker, 1956; Hooker, 1957). Furthermore, Hooker stressed that homosexual people were more likely to experience mental illness due to job discrimination, difficulty in finding housing, and social stigma.

In the wake of these studies, throughout the 1960s, more doctors and psychoanalysts questioned the medical model in which homosexuality was rooted. For instance, psychoanalyst Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek (1963) criticized the role of psychologists in studying homosexuality, arguing that this task should be assigned to sociologists, who would be less inclined to seek treatment or cure for homosexuality. Furthermore, psychiatrist Judd Marmor (1965) described homosexuality as a complex identity conditioned by social, biological, and psychological factors, distancing himself

from the perception that categorized homosexuality as a disorder. Later, Martin Hoffman (1968) suggested that the problem was the stigmatization and condemnation of homosexuality, not the sexual orientation itself. Meanwhile, in the mid-1960s, Richard Inman, the founder of the Mattachine Society in Florida, contacted researchers at the Kinsey Institute, through whom the idea that homosexuality could be genetically determined gained prominence. Additionally, this helped to reinforce the notion that the gay identity is something individuals are born with and cannot be modified. Conversely, this notion could also strengthen the perception of homosexuality as a hereditary disease.

Since the late 1960s, numerous protests had taken place against the DSM classification, maintained by the APA (American Psychiatric Association), which still recognized homosexuality as a disorder at that time. However, because of political mobilization and prior collaboration with scientists, the second edition of the DSM in 1968 reformulated homosexuality as a sexual deviation and no longer as a personality disorder (Waidzun, 2015). This was a tactic to prevent the refutation of Evelyn Hooker, who had shown that both heterosexual and homosexual individuals exhibit no psychological variation. In 1969, the Task Force on Homosexuality's report was released by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), led by Evelyn Hooker. This committee determined that homosexuality was not a mental disorder and took a position in favor of civil rights and legal reform, arguing that the discrimination suffered was unfounded, as homosexual people posed no risk to the social order (National Institute of Mental Health, 1969). This was a milestone in the conception of homosexual identity, as these discourses from scientific and reputable institutions helped to progressively destigmatize it.

To conclude, the homophile movement experienced internal struggles due to differing views on homosexual identity. Initially, its members adhered to a Marxist approach, rejecting science and seeing themselves as an oppressed minority class rather than seeking scientific approval. By 1953, this perspective shifted to a more conservative one, in which science was used to legitimize homosexual identity. In contrast, some viewed this scientific research as a tool to cure themselves of an illness, or to assimilate into heteronormative society. However, by the mid-1960s, there was a gradual, widespread rejection of homosexuality as a pathology, largely through collaboration with

scientific institutions and figures who legitimized it, such as the psychologist Evelyn Hooker (Wuest, 2019). Notwithstanding the advancement and evolution in the perception of homosexuality within the homophile movement, key figures, such as Frank Kameny, advocated for the importance of homosexual men and women presenting themselves as normal and heterosexual in appearance. In many cases, some members believed that by doing so, they would gain rights and legitimation from mainstream society. However, this shows that many members followed traditional gender roles without questioning them, based on assimilation into a traditional, heteronormative and homogeneous society.

Moreover, under the guise of an apparently tolerant movement, the social activism of the time was not fully inclusive of the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities. This is reflected in the fact that physical appearance and gender roles linked to male and female categories were expected to conform to one's biological sex. Thus, individuals whose gender expression did not align with the sex assigned at birth were considered abnormal or deviant for not following traditional social norms. Additionally, although some scientists and doctors aimed to promote acceptance of homosexual people, they continued to defend the belief that male and female gender roles should align with fixed rules based on biological sex. The movement mainly focused on the rights of the white, non-effeminate homosexual men, excluding bisexual and transgender identities. This emphasizes the limited perspective of what it meant to be gay from the early 1950s to the late 1960s in the United States.

Chapter II: The Stonewall Riots: Origins, Development, and Legacy

Origins and causes of the Stonewall Riots

The Stonewall riots marked a turning point in LGBTQ+ activism during the 1970s, moving from ideas of assimilation in a society that prioritized normality, toward the pursuit of authenticity and recognition of difference. This shift facilitated greater inclusion of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Before analyzing the events of that night, it is necessary to explore the causes that led to this revolutionary event, including the rise and radicalization of civil rights, feminist and anti-war movements.

One reason these riots took place in New York City was its status as a center of business, production and immigration, due to its location on the bank of the Hudson River. This made the city a more tolerant space where citizens tended to be less judgmental. Some gay couples even lived together in the same apartment, which was uncommon at that time (Varga et al., 2019). Additionally, the Stonewall riots occurred at the Stonewall Inn nightclub on Christopher Street, in Greenwich Village, a neighborhood that had historically been associated with the LGBTQ+ movement, the Beat Generation and anti-conformist movements of the 1960s (Matthews, 2015). According to Bronski (2011), in the 1960s there was an increasing radicalization of the gay and lesbian movement, fueled by the advancement of feminism and other ethnic rights movements. Furthermore, opposition to the Vietnam War contributed to this, as many LGBTQ+ individuals saw it as a fight against a system that marginalized and persecuted them, because of the patriarchal and heteronormative norms of the military, clashing with their pacifist values and anti-imperialist viewpoint.

An important precursor to the Stonewall riots was an incident at a bar called Julius in 1966, now known as the Julius *sip-in*, a protest in which participants remained in a place to challenge public opinion, a tactic rooted in the African American civil rights movement. In response to regulations banning bars from serving alcohol to LGBTQ+ individuals, three homosexual activists entered Julius bar, openly declared their sexual orientation, and waited for service. Although the bartender prepared the drinks, he ultimately refused to serve them (Simon, 2008). The incident was photographed and published in *The New York Times* (Farber, 2016), prompting the activists to sue the bars.

In 1967, the court ruled that service could not be denied to “well-behaved homosexuals.” The New York Supreme Court described LGBTQ+ individuals as unfortunate, although it clarified they were not criminals. Media coverage of LGBTQ+ issues in the late 1960s marked a turning point, as they began entering mainstream public debate, rather than remaining limited to the community itself.

The course of the Riots

Although there are different versions of what happened in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, the event will be narrated and analyzed through *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution* (2004), by historian David Carter, who gathered exhaustive evidence on this turning point in LGBTQ+ activism. Additionally, Field’s (2018) analysis, which examines the implications and context of the riots, will also be considered.

The riots occurred at the Stonewall Inn, located at 53 Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, a predominantly gay neighborhood. The bar was controlled by the Genovese crime family (Siodmak, 2018), and it was one of the few gay bars in the city, which made it particularly significant. The lack of safe spaces for the community and the difficulty of avoiding public scandal, explains why the Stonewall Inn was idealized. As LGBTQ+ activist Marle Becker explained:

We would have been happier checking into a hotel like any other couple... There wasn’t any place for us to go. If you didn’t have an apartment . . . [the only option] was to have sex in Central Park or the trucks... where hopefully you didn’t get caught or arrested. Even an invitation to his place could be problematic: would the other person turn violent or turn out to be plainclothes policeman? (Carter, as cited in Field, 2018, p. 41).

Selling alcohol to LGBTQ+ individuals was illegal and could lead to bar closures or the withdrawal of licenses, as it was considered to foster immoral and lustful behavior. However, the mafia bribed the police to avoid shutdowns and continued profiting from patrons that had no other alternative. Additionally, the Stonewall Inn allowed drag queens, apart from dancing, which was not common in other bars (Field, 2018). Despite the high prices and regular police raids that occurred there before the outbreak of the riots, the bar continued to be important for the community. Usually, the mafia was warned,

which allowed them to hide the alcohol. Most of these raids often happened during hours when there were fewer patrons, and after them, the Stonewall Inn would reopen the next day. However, on June 28, 1969, no prior warning was given to the staff of the bar.

According to Carter (2004), Pine sent four plainclothes officers to enter the Stonewall Inn and gather evidence of the serving of alcohol, while he and two others waited outside. Around 1:20 a.m. on the night of the riots, the bar was crowded. When the police entered, they ordered patrons to show their IDs. Once identified, each person was pushed outside the club (Carter, 2004). Furthermore, the police examined whether non-conforming women had undergone gender reassignment surgery, since “if they had had the operation they would not be arrested” (Carter, 2004, p. 153).

Unlike previous raids, this night was different. When police officers asked patrons to form a line, “Usually they would just sit there and not say a word but now they’re acting up: “get your hands off me . . . it was a question of pushing them in, fighting them” (Carter, 2004, p. 163). Many of those who resisted were drag queens, people of color, as well as homeless and young individuals, those with less to lose compared to middle-class white men with families or distinguished jobs, who feared the consequences of their sexual orientation being exposed (Field, 2018). When the first patrol car arrived at the Stonewall Inn, around 100 to 150 people were outside, waiting for the others to be released. Suddenly, when a drag queen was struck by a police officer while trying to escape, she retaliated by hitting him with her purse. This incident, along with a lesbian who attempted to flee from the police when the police pushed her into the car, led her to shout at the crowd: “Why don’t you guys do something!” (Carter 2004, p. 175-176). At that moment the crowd responded by hurling coins and cans at the police vehicles, even attempting to flip a car over.

As the crowd counterattacked, the police were forced to take refuge inside the Stonewall Inn. The fury of the crowd was so intense that they threw objects at the bar, attempted to set it on fire, and even used a parking meter as a battering ram (Carter, 2004). However, one of the two policewomen managed to escape via the roof and informed the firefighters and the TPF (Tactical Patrol Force), despite no fire having occurred. Given the large crowd, the patrol car could not reach Pine and the officers, so they walked to the intersection with Seventh Avenue where the car was waiting. Meanwhile, the arrival of

the TPF made the protesters stop fighting. Tensions continued when the police tried to use batons and other weapons. However, the protesters mocked their masculinity and fought back by throwing trash or other objects. After two hours, the crowd grew tired as the situation was not changing.

The night of the Stonewall riots changed everything, as the “fairies” that “were not supposed to riot” lost “that wounded look that fags all had ten years [before]” (Carter, 2004, as cited in Field, 2018, p. 46). Members of the LGBTQ+ community were exasperated by the harassment and discrimination they had endured. However, real progress was not only made on June 28, 1969, but through the political and social activism that followed, which changed millions of lives. Overall, the Stonewall riots were a turning point, helping individuals lose their fear and fostering the creation of LGBTQ+ organizations dedicated to confronting discrimination and stigmatization.

Impact and Legacy: The Formation of New Activist Groups

Before the Stonewall riots, the legal and political situation of the LGBTQ+ community remained mostly unaltered. However, activists began adopting a more transgressive mindset, which encouraged them to openly express their identity and fight actively for their rights, rather than seeking approval or tolerance. Even though fear was still present, many saw this as an opportunity to overcome previous traumas and pursue freedom. Activist Carl Wittman’s *A Gay Manifesto* reflects this shift: “To pretend to be straight . . . is probably the most harmful pattern of behavior . . . If we are liberated, we are open with our sexuality. Closet queenery must end . . . Being open is the foundation of freedom” (Hall, 2011, p. 36).

The Stonewall riots triggered a change in mindset, leading to the formation of activist organizations, such as the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), Gay Activist Alliance (GAA), Radicalesbians, and Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR). Despite their differences, these groups shared a confrontational and rebellious attitude, unlike the more moderate Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis. This activism allowed LGBTQ+ individuals to live more authentically and fight for their rights, since coming out, combined with activism, strengthened their resilience. As Sylvia Rivera, a pioneering transgender activist, stated:

The initial fear is being outed. But also, after you come out and announce to the world that you're queer, there's a self-identifying process that isn't quick. It takes years and years, and I feel like being involved when it's the forefront of fighting for your rights and the rights of other people helps speed that process up in that . . . you're in a space where everyone [supports you]. (Scheidler et al. 2022, p. 12)

After the First Greenwich Village Lesbian and Gay March on July 24, 1969, where between 200 and 300 activists gathered to protest the police raid at Stonewall, the GLF was officially founded one week later. Its name held diverse meanings. *Gay* aimed to move away from the euphemistic term homophile. *Liberation* referred to its wide-ranging and revolutionary plan, echoing contemporary social movements. And *Front* symbolized an inclusive group of people, regardless of class, age, race or any other factor (Gay Liberation Front Foundation, 2024). According to Lauritsen (2019), besides advocating for gay rights, the organization was also allied with feminist and antiracist activist groups. In fact, the GLF came to an end in 1972 due to some tensions among its members: some preferred to cooperate with the Antiwar Movement, while others wanted to focus exclusively on LGBTQ+ issues.

The GLF organized its first independent public demonstration in July 1969, known as the Village Voice Protest, in response to the publication of a discriminatory article and the newspaper's refusal to publish ads for a proposed GLF dance. The group successfully imposed its demands. Shortly after, the GLF held its first dance to raise funds while providing a better alternative to the LGBTQ+ bars, which were mostly controlled by the mafia. Additionally, regular meetings took place every Sunday, encouraging debate on political goals and actions, which fostered participation and led to a considerable increase in membership by the end of 1969 (Lauritsen, 2019). Furthermore, GLF released its official newspaper. "As always, photos of out-and-proud GLF members were featured throughout—combating the concept of a 'closet' mentality" (GLF Foundation, 2024, n.p.). This helped them achieve public recognition and inspired more people to live authentically. In December 1969, a division within the organization led to the creation of a new group, Gay Activist Alliance, which focused exclusively on gay rights. As mentioned earlier, the GLF was aligned with several social movements from the New Left. Consequently, some members could not reach an agreement on whether to focus

solely on gay rights or be part of a broader revolution with other activist groups (Lauritsen, 2019).

Despite their differences, both organizations participated in the first Pride March in 1970, commemorating the one-year anniversary of the Stonewall riots. Activist Karla Jay explained the reason: “It was our desire not to let any of this [the Stonewall riots] be forgotten. Sticking our torches in the ashes of the Stonewall, to say we are walking away from the darkness of the bars, and we can have another life together” (Gwist, 2013). Nevertheless, this first gay pride parade was not like those seen today, as Jerry Hoose reflected:

We had threats. We were scared. We often referred to this as the first run because we went so fast, by the time that we got to the [Central] park and I turned around, it was unbelievable . . . In one year, we went from a bunch of hidden people who fought back one night . . . to thousands of people marching in the sunlight into Central Park as proud openly gay and lesbian people. (Gwist, 2013)

According to the first president of the GAA, its main purpose was “to secure basic human rights, dignity, and freedom for all gay people” (International Gay Information Center, 1990, p. 4). Additionally, the GAA aimed to attract individuals from diverse political views, as opposed to the GLF, which publicly supported politicians. By doing so, they avoided internal disagreements and focused exclusively on LGBTQ+ rights. Although the group was dissolved in October 1981, it was especially active between 1970 and 1974. It did not differ from the GLF, in that they also organized sponsored dances, meetings, musical or theatrical events, which helped some members come out of the closet and engage in political activism.

Furthermore, the primary method used by the GAA was the *zap*, public demonstrations aimed at confronting politicians and celebrities, by asking them questions related to the LGBTQ+ community, sometimes resulting in arrests or physical abuse by authorities. One of its main goals was the passage of a bill to ensure gay rights in both the City Council and state legislature. Although it was not passed, this attempt represented a push for protection of human gay rights against discrimination in employment, housing and other areas. In 1974, the GAA’s political activism began to decrease, partly due to a firebombing that destroyed its building, along with a loss of membership and funds.

Nevertheless, Lauritsen emphasizes the enormous efforts of the GLF and GAA compared to current activism, stating “. . . in none of the mainstream ‘LGBTQ’ organizations [he sees] any of the spirit and vision of GLF or GAA” (2019, p. 21).

Considering that the GLF and GAA were organizations predominantly composed of cisgender, white and gay men, this led to a lack of representation and voice for transgender women, lesbians, and racialized individuals, that was addressed by groups like STAR and Radicalesbians. STAR was founded in 1970 by two transgender activists, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. Their aim was to provide accommodation and food to transgender people and other members of the LGBTQ+ community, emphasizing the inclusion of various gender identities and sexual orientations. Many transgender individuals were usually forced into prostitution, so Marsha and Sylvia created a shelter in an abandoned trailer and later, in a burned-out building on the Lower East Side. Due to a lack of funds, STAR disbanded in the mid-seventies. Nevertheless, it paved the way for future transgender activists (The New York Public Library, 2019).

In parallel, a group of lesbian women within the GLF split to form their own group, named Radicalesbians. The reasons were similar to those behind the creation of STAR, as both groups felt that, although the GLF included them, certain issues were not addressed to the extent they considered necessary. When Betty Friedan, the president of the National Organization for Women (NOW), referred to lesbian women as the “*lavender menace*” that was negatively affecting the Women’s Liberation Movement in the US (Gordon, 2014, p. 91). Radicalesbians decided to interrupt the 2nd Congress to Unite Women advocating for the inclusion of lesbians in the fight for their rights. They also distributed “The Woman-Identified Woman”, a manifesto rejecting heterosexuality and societal norms that oppressed women (Gay Liberation Front Foundation, 2024).

The Stonewall riots marked a decisive moment in the history of the fight for LGBTQ+ rights. The subsequent activism, organized by the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA), the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) and the Radicalesbians also had a tremendous impact. Despite their differences and internal struggles, it is undeniable that “Activism increased their awareness of the systematic oppression they commonly experienced, allowing them to decrease the self-blame they previously misattributed to their self-worth” (Scheidler et al., 2022, p. 1677).

These organizations facilitated the resilience of the LGBTQ+ community, showing how outness, activism and resilience are interrelated. They “cultivated a supportive environment which encouraged all members to freely express who they are and not feel like they had to commit to one specific identity at any given moment.” (Scheidler et al., 2022, p. 1684). In contrast to the Mattachine Society or the Daughters of Bilitis, these more recent organizations finally understood that there was not a single way of living your sexual orientation or gender identity, but a wide range of possibilities.

The activists and community created safe and open spaces where LGBTQ+ individuals could express themselves freely. According to Scheidler et al. (2022), “being openly LGBTQ+ allowed participants to live more authentically, inspired them to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, and connected them with other people and spaces that encouraged activism” (p. 1683), ultimately helping them overcome the fear that had previously been their greatest constraint.

Chapter III: Reagan's Inaction and the Emergence of HIV/AIDS Activism

Social and Political Context in the HIV/AIDS Epidemic Facing Governmental Neglect

Although there were undiagnosed cases of patients with HIV/AIDS in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the USA, it was not until June 1981, when the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) announced in its Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), that there were five gay men who had developed a rare lung infection, referred to as the *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia (PCP), which affected their immune systems. In fact, *The New York Times* published an article describing the health crisis as a “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals” (Altman, 1981).

The beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic not only signified a health risk, but triggered the creation of different activist organizations that would fight for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, not only to eliminate discrimination, but also to secure adequate medical assistance, in response to the lack of proper measures and the inaction of Reagan's administration. Therefore, activist groups such as Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) and AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (henceforth ACT UP) played a crucial role in developing resilience within members of the LGBTQ+ community, who were able to face the wide-ranging stigmatization (Liboro et al., 2021).

According to the CDC (1991), in 1981, authorities reported 189 cases of AIDS, mostly in New York and California. By 1990, more than 43,000 cases were accounted for, with two-thirds reported from outside these states. Homosexual and bisexual men, together with intravenous (IV) drug users were the most vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, from the mid-80s to 1990, the number of reported cases increased among heterosexual individuals and women (CDC, 1991). According to the Department of Health and Human Services (n.d.), AIDS mainly affected Black and Hispanic men, who were between 30 and 49 years old. In addition, AIDS became one of the leading causes of death for men and women under 45 years old. From 1981 to 1990, more than 179,000 individuals were reported to have AIDS with a mortality rate of 63% (CDC, 1991).

In 1982, the CDC referred to the term “AIDS” (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) for the first time and defined it as “A disease at least moderately predictive of a defect in cell-mediated immunity, occurring in a person with no known cause for diminished resistance to that disease” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). In 1983, Dr. Françoise Barré-Sinoussi and her colleagues at the Pasteur Institute in France discovered that the cause of AIDS could be a retrovirus, i.e., HIV, attacking the immune system. Despite shedding light on medical research, the lack of response from the government propelled the mobilization of different activist organizations.

Scholars Perez and Dionisopoulos (1995) noted that AIDS disproportionately affected marginalized groups, such as homosexual individuals and people who inject drugs, which transformed this public health crisis into a political issue, and a matter of conflict and misunderstanding. Due to this, President Ronald Reagan did not deliver his first speech on the matter until 1987, after six years in charge of the nation, revealing his moral disgust and aversion to the lifestyles of the risk groups. In fact, when he first talked to the public about it, he did it with the aim of preventing Americans, those who followed conventional norms, from contracting the disease. As Reagan stated in 1985, “Well, I’m sure that when you – AIDS is probably going to tie in somewhat with the prevalence of sex education in the schools today” (Pimm, 2021, p. 24). The linking of AIDS with sexual education, as opposed to traditional values, defined clearly the conflict between the gay rights movement and the conservative resurgence Reagan symbolized.

After the Stonewall riots, the creation of safe spaces for the community, together with activist organizations, newspapers and other resources allowed the LGBTQ+ individuals to express their disagreement with the traditional and dominant American way of life. In 1970, activist Kiyoshi Kuromiya stated in an article for the GLF: “Homosexuals have burst their chains and abandoned their closets...we come battle-scarred and angry to topple your sexist, racist, hateful society...to challenge the incredible hypocrisy of your sexual monogamy, your oppressive sexual role-playing, (and) your nuclear family” (Hall 2010, p. 549). With these discourses, a segment of the older, white and conservative Americans began to feel that their lifestyle was at stake. As a result, the traditional values endorsed by Reagan clashed with the rights of the LGBTQ+ movement, which had been gaining prominence throughout the 1970s.

Furthermore, the reason why Reagan did not address AIDS publicly until 1987 was due to the “fear that explicit discussion of homosexuality and IV (intravenous) drug practice would be interpreted as officially sanctioning such behavior” (Perez & Dionisopoulos, 1995, p. 22). As a result of Reagan’s silence on the matter, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop decided to inform the American public by publishing his Report on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Even though he was conservative, he also wanted to raise awareness in the public about the use of barrier methods, along with sex education. Nevertheless, Secretary of Education William Bennett and Domestic Policy Assistant Gary Baue, part of Reagan’s presidency, strongly disagree with educating children about the disease; instead, they advocated for abstinence and conceived sex as part of marriage, while prioritizing heterosexual interactions, and considering AIDS as an issue of morality, that led to the stigmatization of homosexuality (Perez & Dionisopoulos, 1995).

ACT UP and GMHC: A Way of Surviving and Developing Resilience

Liboro et al. (2021) conducted a study for their article *Protective Factors That Foster Resilience to HIV/AIDS: Insights and Lived Experiences of Older Gay, Bisexual, and Other Men Who Have Sex with Men*. The research focuses on 41 gay, bisexual or other men who have sex with men (gbMSM). All of them were more than 40 years old, lived with VIH and belonged to diverse ethnic groups. This study highlights some of the factors that have allowed this vulnerable community to develop resilience in order to face discrimination, stigmatization, lack of information and the loss of their loved ones. Among the protective factors identified, HIV education emerged as a key element in fostering resilience, i.e., it enabled these men to make better decisions in terms of their physical and mental health. Peter, a participant in the study, stated, “Well, knowledge is power. If people are able to get the information and knowledge, they need from HIV education, they would be able to manage their health more easily and have more peace of mind” (Peter, as cited in Liboro et al., 2021, p.4). In line with this perspective, Dr. C. Everett Koop played a crucial role and contributed by spreading scientific information and promoting ways to prevent this disease, despite his conservative view and the inaction of the government.

Another established protective factor for developing resilience was social support from family and friends. However, not all participants had this support. As a result, many of them relied on their gbMSM friends. In this context, among the behavioral protective factors, volunteering was found to play a crucial role in fostering resilience, providing numerous benefits:

By volunteering, they were able to gain abundant opportunities to mentor others whom they felt could benefit from their knowledge and lived experiences, a feeling of being able to give back or pay it forward to their community, and a greater sense of productivity. Volunteering also provided them with many opportunities to socialize and build their networks, learn new information about HIV science and treatments, and gain easier access to services and programs at community-based organizations that were relevant to them. (Liboro et al., 2021, p. 6)

Most of the individuals who participated in volunteering found a sense of purpose in life and were able to strengthen their confidence. Moreover, some of the most well-known activist organizations, such as GMHC and ACT UP, not only worked to defend the rights of the LGBTQ+ community but also established powerful support networks among volunteers. GMHC was the first organization established to address the HIV epidemic, created in 1982 by Dr. Larry Mass, writer Larry Kramer, and four other men. However, before that, the two former activists decided to arrange a meeting, in which, according to Dr. Larry Mass:

There was a very real sense of panic, and we needed to figure out what to do. It was an epidemic that appeared to affect marginal groups – sexually active gay men and drug users, both disenfranchised minorities whom society considered disposable. (GMHC, 2024, n.p.)

In that same meeting, eighty homosexual men facilitated the first fundraising for the epidemic, by contributing \$6,635 to support research on AIDS. Considering that Mass was the medical writer for *New York Native*, he published the report “Disease Rumors Largely Unfounded” combating the disinformation that was widely spread among the public. Nevertheless, although the disease was not identified yet as AIDS, activist Mass stated: “We didn’t know what we were dealing with, but we realized from the get-go that we were at Ground Zero, and we had to organize, educate, and raise money for research”

(GMHC, 2024). Therefore, even though activists did not know what was causing AIDS, they were aware that they had to warn people within the community to stop this health crisis, and at the same time, refuting and debunking the homophobia that could arise due to the nature of this disease, affecting marginalized groups.

Mass described the initial situation in this activist group as follows: “We were on our own, in the dark, didn’t know what we were dealing with, had no allies or resources, and we had to find a way to move forward on all these different fronts – that’s what GMHC was” (GMHC, 2024). The early years of GMHC, as described by the New York Times, were marked by a climate of uncertainty and fear. The writer and activist Michael Petrelis declared that “It was a pioneering organization in the midst of darkness and ignorance,” (The New York Times, 2013). Despite these challenges, this organization achieved several key milestones. They were able to initiate a Buddy Program where volunteers visit individuals affected by AIDS, as care assistants and providing meals in some cases.

Once in 1983 HIV was identified as the cause of AIDS, Mass wrote Medical Answers About AIDS, some extremely useful guidelines for the prevention of being infected by this disease, advocating for the use of barrier methods. Additionally, he completely defended the gay civil rights and the normalization of relationships among individuals of the same sex. As Mass declared: “We are resilient — as LGBTQ+ people, people living with HIV/AIDS, and as an organization. We started out with no civil rights and achieved changes we never could have dreamed of . . . That’s our legacy” (GMHC, 2024).

Moving along in time, the already mentioned ACT UP was another crucial organization, which was founded by the former activist Larry Kramer in 1987. The group is described by itself as a non-partisan group with powerful energy that implemented non-violent, but radical and politically active actions. Their first march took place on Wall Street to confront the pharmaceutical companies that were raising the prices of AIDS medicine. Furthermore, the prolonged drug approval process by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) resulted in thousands of deaths due to long delays in the approval process. And not only that, ACT UP also protested the lack of representation of women and people of color both in the conception of AIDS, and in clinical trials. Overall, the

main concern of this organization was to provide everyone with the same opportunities to access prevention and health care for HIV/AIDS, while also advocating for investment in research for medicines and treatments (ACT UP, 2025).

As Ordower (2022) highlights, ACT UP was able to portray people with AIDS as if they were not passive victims, but brave individuals fighting for decent access healthcare. Its radical approach made the group win many of its demands, such as access to experimental treatments and drug approval processes, while fighting against the homophobia, misogyny and racism that characterized the government's inaction around this health crisis.

In comparison to GMHC, which focused primarily on community support, ACT UP adopted a more revolutionary approach, based on direct action and confrontational tactics, usually turning into protests against the pharmaceutical companies and the lack of intervention from the governments' administration, or any other institution, by advocating for health rights for people living with AIDS, as exemplified in the March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, where the organization demanded that Reagan's administration should dedicate enough funds to cover life-threatening issues, such as in this case (ACT UP, 2025). Overall, GMHC focused on providing services to individuals, while ACT UP sought to ensure equal access to treatment and medicines.

Although the HIV/AIDS crisis in the USA during the 1980s signified a serious epidemic, it also functioned as a way of demonstrating how resilient and strong some of the activist organizations were, such as GMHC and ACT UP. Despite the silence of Reagan's government on the issue until 1987, and the lack of resources for demanding human rights and access to medical care, these groups of volunteers were able to not only fight for their rights but also reinforce their identity.

In their study, Liboro et al. (2021) proved through interviews the rewarding and positive effects of activism and social support, serving as protective factors which fostered resilience in the LGBTQ+ community. Moreover, obtaining information about HIV/AIDS was also crucial for making better decisions regarding individuals' physical and mental health. As a result, activism did not only influence the political and social

context regarding human rights, but it entailed a life-changing effect on those who had to face fear, pain or uncertainty about their future.

Francesca Polletta and James Jasper define the concept of collective identity as “individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution” (2001, p. 285). This, in turn, provides individuals with a sense of belonging to a group, which enhances resilience and helps them cope with difficult situations. Therefore, collective identity gives volunteers a shared purpose in life that encourages them to go on, despite the institutional barriers or any other adverse social condition.

Consequently, social mobilization through activism was able to consolidate LGBTQ+ collective identity by creating safe spaces and raising awareness about the disease. Despite the lack of intervention from Reagan’s administration and the generalized fear surrounding the health crisis, some activist organizations such as GMHC and ACT UP demonstrated how knowledge about the topic and support among members were crucial to survive and move forward. Moreover, the resilience within the community grew as a result of the connection with other individuals who were in a similar situation, and due to the commitment to a shared cause, not only addressing the AIDS/HIV crisis, but also reinforcing the LGBTQ+ rights that were under threat.

Conclusion

LGBTQ+ activism in the United States between the 1950 and 1990 functioned not only as a strategy of survival, but also as a revolutionary political force. This final degree project has explored the emergence and development of some activist organizations across three historical periods: the homophile movement, the Stonewall Riots together with its impact, and the HIV/AIDS crisis. Even though each activist group had its own principles and tactics, all of them were able to face repression and acquire resilience and a sense of collective identity.

In the first chapter, the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis were the earliest organizations of the homophile movement, lasting from 1950 to the outbreak of the Stonewall Riots in 1969. These activist groups were shaped by an era of tremendous social stigma, criminalization and pathologization of homosexuality, due to the Lavender Scare, which portrayed LGBTQ+ individuals as morally weak and suspects of being communists, vulnerable to extortion and as a threat to national security. Although these organizations seek respectability and assimilation into mainstream society, their collaboration with researchers such as Evelyn Hooker contributed to scientific legitimacy that helped to dismantle the conception of homosexuality as a mental disorder. It also provided the foundation for the depathologization of LGBTQ+ identities. Nevertheless, the analysis proves the homophile movement prioritized the representation of white, cisgender, non-effeminate gay men, excluding bisexual, transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Despite this, it paved the way for future activist groups.

The second chapter focuses on the Stonewall Riots in 1969, along with its causes, as a spontaneous and resilient form of activism, resulting in a catalyst that changed the course toward confrontation and look for authenticity, without the necessity of mainstream society validation. It also prompted the rise of new organizations immediately and in the 1970s, such as the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA), the Radicalesbians, and the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR). These groups were more inclusive, and recognized not only gay men, but also lesbians, transgender individuals, people of color and the young. However, disagreements whether to focus only on LGBTQ+ issues, or joining with other social movements, led to the split and creation of different groups, responding also to the necessities of the different

members that composed the queer community. Furthermore, events such as the first Pride March helped individuals to foster collective identity and improved their resilience. The impact of the Stonewall Riots and the following activism helped the community to endorse visibility, pride, resistance and a sense of belonging to a group.

The third chapter discusses the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s. In response, organizations such as Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) and ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) emerged to combat the inaction of Reagan's government. Despite the efforts that had been made by previous activist groups, stigmatization and lack of information regarding sexual education and how the epidemic was spread, continue to be present. While GMHC focused on community support, ACT UP used a confrontational strategy, demanding pharmaceutical companies' equitable access and treatment for all patients. Even though LGBTQ+ activists lack knowledge and resources for addressing the epidemic, these organizations demonstrated despite all the constraints and the no intervention of the administration, the powerful sense of solidarity and resilience that they gained through activism.

Throughout all three chapters, the role of activism was key for fostering resilience. As demonstrated in diverse studies, such as those by Liboro et al. (2021) and Sheadler et al. (2022), social support networks can provide LGBTQ+ individuals with the tools for combating discrimination. Whether by means of scientific legitimization, street activism or community support, activism did not only become a political strategy, but also an emotional and existential practice that shaped the identity of individuals and allowed them to move forward. Between 1950 and 1990, LGBTQ+ activism evolved from a fixed and constrained assimilationist view to a more plural and inclusive one. While the homophile movement looked for achieving tolerance from mainstream society through their validation and scientific legitimization, the following activists sought authenticity and distanced themselves from conforming to social norms. In fact, they understood that freedom could only be reached through embracing diversity in gender expression, sexual orientation, class and race. This supposed an alternate perspective of what it meant to be LGBTQ+, since it did not only refer to a private identity, but to a political position rooted in visibility, solidarity and resistance.

Even though meaningful progress has been made, discrimination in different forms and anti-LGTBQ+ legislation together with homophobic and transphobic discourses continues to be present, questioning the advancement and putting at risk the lives of individuals within the community, not only in the United States but in the whole world. Many of the rights and freedoms that are currently taken for granted, such as the right to marry, access to healthcare, and protection from discrimination are the result of decades of continuous efforts of activists. Therefore, the past activism is key for current and future generations, as it offers lessons and it is a source of inspiration. This work has displayed how activism, whether institutional, spontaneous or scientific, has been fundamental for fostering resilience, achieving visibility and building strong relationships among the LGBTQ+ community, as this is the only way to advance and serve as an example and impulse for future generations.

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