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Gay Studies and Men's Studies

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Gay studies, which had its genesis in the homosexual rights movement in Germany in the 1860s, has moved through several stages of development. The author contends that men's studies must incorporate the study of gay and bisexual men into its subject matter from the beginning, since questions of sexual identity and homophobia are important for all men. He suggests that men's studies offers a multidisciplinary approach that can serve as the intellectual base for future development in gay studies.

Gay studies is now in the third stage of its development. During the first stage, much work was done by members of the early homosexual rights movement in Germany, beginning with Karl Ulrichs in the 1860s. By the end of the century, Magnus Hirschfeld had founded the Institute for Sexual Research, which gathered together early sexologists, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and political activists, all of whom wrote articles and books challenging social prejudices. While many of these publications have survived, the bulk of the Institute's vast holdings was in unpublished manuscripts housed in their library in Berlin. In a 1935 Nazi book burning, a mob ransacked the Institute and destroyed practically everything.

After World War II, writers in America and Europe published many studies related to homosexuality, the most influential being the Kinsey studies of male and female sexuality. Biographies of individuals who were homosexual also appeared, though biographers often censored and distorted the facts about the subject's sexuality.

In 1953, the second stage in the development of gay studies was begun in Los Angeles with the founding of ONE Institute of Homophile Studies. This organization emerged from the homosexual activism that originated in Los Angeles after 1948; its goal was to provide a more accurate portrayal of homosexuals. Its leaders were not trained scholars, but rather homophile activists who had read widely in the writings of many

disciplines. They knew more about homosexuality than did academics who were narrowly trained in one field, and they approached their subject from a multidisciplinary perspective. ONE published the first nationally distributed gay magazine, organized lecture series and conferences, and held homophile studies classes. A comparable lesbian organization, the Daughters of Bilitis, began publishing its own magazine, *The Ladder*, in the late 1950s. Later, the Lesbian Herstory Archives was organized in New York. With such an archival base, scholarly research could proceed in a more organized way.

Academics followed, rather than led, this second stage of multidisciplinary homophile studies. Although American universities are still too often homophobic, before the 1970s they were extremely so. As a consequence, gay and lesbian professors were so fearful of losing their jobs they seldom directed their classes or research toward gay topics. However, the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City and the subsequent flowering of the gay liberation movement encouraged more academically trained scholars to begin researching related topics.

In 1973 in New York, a group of scholars organized the Gay Academic Union. Because their numbers were small, they united on a multidisciplinary basis. They were concerned with protecting their jobs if their homosexuality became known, decreasing homophobia in academia, offering each other personal support, and encouraging gay research. At this point, few academic publications would accept manuscripts on gay-related topics, so the early activists did most of their publishing in the gay and lesbian popular press and presented their papers at Gay Academic Union Conferences.

By the mid 1970s, as more professors came out on campus and won approval to teach gay studies classes, the climate began to change. Beginning with the field of psychology, and then in the new field of women's studies, the professional publications opened themselves to accepting manuscripts from a gay/lesbian perspective. Gay scholars began presenting papers at the conferences of their established disciplines. These changes marked the third stage, as gay/lesbian studies moved into accepted status within the academic disciplines.

By the early 1980s, gay and lesbian scholarship had emerged as established fields within several disciplines. Particularly active professional caucuses included the Gay/Lesbian Caucus of the American Psychological Association, the

Gay Caucus of the Modern Language Association, the Sociologists Gay Caucus, the Anthropological Research Group on Homosexuality, and the Committee on Lesbian and Gay History. As scholars became more active in their traditional disciplines, their participation in the interdisciplinary Gay Academic Union declined. In the 1980s, the GAU - has existed as functionally independent chapters in various cities. Probably the most valuable actions of the GAU on a national level have been the granting of fellowships and the making of awards for the best books published each year. But the focus of gay scholarship has clearly shifted to the caucuses of academic disciplines. There are two significant exceptions to this trend. First is the interdisciplinary Journal of Homosexuality, but even it has accommodated the new trend by publishing theme issues that reflect the perspective of a single discipline. The second exception is in the very active interdisciplinary field of women's studies.

It is to women's studies, and also to ethnic studies, that gay/lesbian studies should look as role models for future development. The disadvantage of the present state of development is that each discipline has become so isolated that scholars in one discipline are unaware of important findings in others. Although sexuality is a topic that is by its very nature interdisciplinary, even scholars in related social science caucuses do not generally read the newsletters of other caucuses or attend each other's meetings.

All such researchers are concerned about same-sex erotic roles and behaviors, whether in the past or the present, whether in this society or others. Their common interests are, or should be, more important than their disciplinary differences. In fact, it is evident that the traditional disciplines have already had their major impact, and that the most important advancements of knowledge in the future will come from scholars who take insights from different disciplines and combine them in new and original ways.

How then do we overcome the disciplinary boundaries which divide us? Lesbian scholars have the advantage of being part of the interdisciplinary women's studies movement; they can attend interdisciplinary women's conferences and publish in interdisciplinary journals like *Signs*. It is only in the newly emerging men's studies movement that gay male studies have a comparable interdisciplinary field of which to become a part. The likelihood that there will be independent gay studies programs at universities is slim; there is great potential for gay studies to find a home

in men's studies. Just as women's studies programs deal with lesbianism as an important and integral part of their subject, so could men's studies include gay male issues.

Men's studies needs to incorporate the study of gay and bisexual men into its subject matter from the very beginning, since questions of sexual identity and homophobia are important for all men. Gay Studies deal with more than just questions of sexuality, especially in contemporary society, where urban gay communities have become a notable social grouping. We cannot isolate this phenomenon as only a sexual matter. Men's studies offers the multidisciplinary focus which can serve as the intellectual base for the future development of gay studies. A men's studies group has already been formed as a part of the National Organization for Changing Men (NOCM). The NOCM national conferences on men and masculinity are already committed to homosexuality and homophobia as major topics in men's studies.

Another significant development is being pioneered by the University of Southern California, the first university in the nation to hire men's studies professors. Rather than focusing just on women, the USC Program for the Study of Women and Men in Society unites the study of both sexes into a comprehensive women's and men's studies program. This approach offers an additional advantage, since it allows gay studies to be part of a program that includes both men's studies and lesbian studies. Such a gender-studies approach offers the best potential for addressing homophile issues.

There is need for a periodical that assesses developments in the disciplines. The *Journal of Homosexuality* has been weak in this regard, reviewing only a handful of the myriad new books now being published. *The Cabirion and Gay Books Bulletin* has tried to meet this need, but it suffers from a low circulation and a limited circle of reviewers. In only a few issues of the Journal have abstracts of articles been published, and no one has attempted to summarize dissertations or papers delivered at scholarly conferences. What is needed is an annual review of important recent articles and books, which combines the perspectives of scholars from various disciplines. This type of publication is common in interdisciplinary ethnic studies and is needed in gay/lesbian studies.

The real intellectual dialogue is going on in the gay caucus newsletters, yet their readers are isolated from each other. There are few articles covering faculty appointments, anti-discrimination efforts in academia, news about library and research projects, news, information about research

in progress, jobs and fellowships, conferences, teaching syllabi, and statements by teachers of gay studies classes.

An annual gathering of scholars is also needed, to permit cross-fertilization of ideas. The Gay Academic Union annual conferences used to serve this need, but they have lately been dominated by professional therapists and social workers, not academic researchers.

What gay studies sorely needs is international conferences—based on the model of a medical society or bar association—at which leading gay studies specialists would present comprehensive papers on developments in their fields. The proceedings of such conferences could be published.

Another basic need for gay studies is a "think tank," or major research center. For example, the Newberry Library Center for the History of the American Indian, a major library and archives collection, permits scholars to be in residence for periods up to several months. While there, they interact with a multidisciplinary group of scholars working on topics related to American Indians. The Center provides housing, handles logistics, and sponsors seminars and conferences. In less than a decade, the Newberry Center has had a tremendous impact on the field of American Indian Studies and has helped improve the status of American Indian people. This field has become one of the most viable of the ethnic studies, and practically every major scholar working in this field has spent a fellowship period at the Newberry Center.

Such a center would clearly benefit gay/lesbian studies. Some preliminary steps have been taken in this direction. At Indiana University, there is the Kinsey Institute Library, and in San Francisco there is the Institute for the Advanced Study of Sexuality (with a particular focus on documentary film). Both focus on general sexuality rather than specifically on gay/lesbian studies. The two largest collections of lesbian materials are the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York and the West Coast Lesbian Collections in Oakland. In San Francisco, there is the Center for Education and Research in Sexuality, out of which the *Journal of Homosexuality* is published; it has no library. Although there are several gay collections in New York, they are generally not open to researchers nor set up to accommodate visiting scholars.

The greatest potential for a research center seems to be developing in Los Angeles. With the International Gay and Lesbian Archives, the ONE Institute Library, and the Homosexual Information Center in close proximity, Los Angeles currently offers the largest library and archives base for a major research center. ONE Institute has possession of a large

estate on which such a center could be based—it has rooms for visiting scholars, library carrels, seminars, and conferences. What ONE needs is an endowment to fund such a research center.

The gay studies movement has advanced rapidly over the past decade, but there is a limit as to how far it can go without a think tank and research center, to sponsor conferences and publications and the basic research the movement so desperately needs. Gay studies is an active, growing field, but it needs to evolve into a fourth stage. It must move in an interdisciplinary direction, as part of men's studies and with institutional support, if it is to have the influence women's studies, black studies, and American Indian studies have had.