

## Editors' Introduction

This issue of the *Radical History Review* assembles the voices of scholars and activists who engage with critiques of what Lisa Duggan has called “the new *homonormativity* . . . a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them.”<sup>1</sup> In the time that has elapsed since the *Radical History Review*’s last explicit foray into queer history—the “Queer” issue, *RHR* 62 (1995)—this process has been abundantly evident in numerous cultural and political scenes over the past four decades, as this issue’s contributors amply demonstrate. While we do not want to reinforce the notion that the concept of homonormativity originated with or is limited to the confines of academic work, the configuration of homonormativity in current circulation is part of a broader turn toward political economy in contemporary queer academic and activist work. It challenges the preoccupations and objectives of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender)/queer culture and community as many of its members move toward what Gayle Rubin identified, in 1984, as “the charmed circle” of sex—those practices and identities that receive social sanction.<sup>2</sup> This issue of *RHR* asks what this mainstreaming will mean for queer futures. But first, we want to glance backward at the recent queer past.

### A Day without Sunshine

No public figure is more renowned for fomenting antigay politics in the 1970s than Anita Bryant, whose image appears on the cover of this issue of *Radical History Review*. Bryant’s notorious 1977 “Save Our Children” campaign, which led to the repeal of a civil rights ordinance protecting gay and lesbian employees from discrimination in Dade County, Florida, raised the ire of many lesbian and gay political activists who pilloried her wholesome image as a pitchwoman of orange juice and performer of banal pop songs in an effort to counter a rising tide of antigay organiz-

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ing. Even today, thirty years later, it is difficult to extricate Bryant the pop singer from Bryant the political actor. While political leaders like San Francisco's Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected public official in the United States, were making history, activists throughout the United States decried Bryant as a pop icon of uncompassionate conservatism and as a symbol of the violence and exclusion that lay beneath the surface of her particular brand of normative American nationalism.

This mobilization against Bryant and against the campaign she spearheaded typified a form of representational and performative protest, at once both confrontational and camp, that animated post-Stonewall activism.<sup>3</sup> One need only watch the footage of the gay activist Thom Higgins, inspired by Yippie strategies of protest, throwing a pie in Bryant's face at a news conference held in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1977 to see this performative spirit in action.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, one could locate the pieing of Bryant as part of an impressive genealogy of queer protest that relied on the performative: from gay, lesbian, and trans activists in the 1960s and 1970s, to ACT UP, Queer Nation, and Transgender Nation in the 1980s and 1990s, to groups in the early twenty-first century such as Gay Shame and FIERCE (Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community Empowerment), both of which receive attention in this issue.

The brand of antigay politics perfected by Bryant and practiced by her followers in the late 1970s has proven more resilient perhaps than even Bryant herself could have imagined. Three decades later, the homophobic rhetoric that Bryant's campaign catapulted into public discourse in the United States remains immensely influential among social conservatives and their constituencies. The "Save Our Children" campaign also represented the first foray into organized politics by the recently departed evangelist Jerry Falwell, whose organization, the Moral Majority, mobilized the latent power of post-Watergate conservative Republicans and born-again Christians to build a large-scale and enormously well-funded network of antigay political activists. The success and popularity of the Moral Majority rested on its routine invocation of the "homosexual agenda," which, as Falwell and his followers argued, posed a dire threat to the reproduction of both the "traditional family" and national power.<sup>5</sup>

Committed to the idea that they were saving the families and children of the United States from an uncertain future, Bryant and Falwell believed that they were building a future for heterosexual Americans that would keep their families insulated from deviant sexualities. Bryant's protectionist crusade, rooted in her reading of the Bible and her self-identification as a mother, focused on the alleged threat that homosexuals—and especially the homosexual teacher—posed to children and thus to reproductive futurity: "I know that homosexuals cannot biologically reproduce children," she famously asserted, "therefore, they must recruit our children."<sup>6</sup> Bryant's and Falwell's campaigns in the 1970s to protect families and children from the homosexual menace remain a touchstone for social moderates and social conservatives alike, influencing everything from Bill Clinton's 1996 signing of the Defense of Marriage Act to bully-pulpit tactics of Rev. Fred Phelps and his organization Focus

on the Family to the meager allocation of federal dollars and local resources for HIV/AIDS education and prevention.

But perhaps most surprisingly, the rhetoric and goals of the 1970s antigay movement have also exercised a profound influence on contemporary movements to secure gay and lesbian rights. Bryant could not have been more wrong about the ability of homosexuals to reproduce, as demonstrated not only by the current baby boom among gay men and lesbians and the proliferation of assistive technologies that make reproduction possible for same-sex parents but also by the centrality of same-sex marriage and gay parenting in contemporary mainstream gay and lesbian movements. Of course, reproduction has never been owned or mandated by heterosexuals, just as reactionary and even authoritarian political practices have never been owned or mandated by heterosexuals, as Licia Fiol-Matta's study of the queer Chilean poet and educational reformer Gabriela Mistral makes clear.<sup>7</sup> Yet the current focus within gay and lesbian movements and culture on the family and reproduction as vehicles for claiming citizenship and rights works to suture reproduction to a privatizing neoliberal agenda, rather than to disrupt nationalist and heteronormative ideologies.

As scholars and activists in the early twenty-first century consider the various forms that a queer future might take, it may be useful to cast our gaze to the recent past to identify certain usable elements in the antagonistic countercultural rejections of normative family values evinced by the anti-Bryant activists. For example, a similar rejection of the normative politics of reproductive nationalism found expression in the 1970s punk movement, the iconography of which provides one of the referents for our cover. In the same year that activists pied Bryant, the Sex Pistols released their single "God Save the Queen," the original title of which was, in fact, "No Future." As Tavia Nyong'o writes in his essay in this issue, one must not conflate "punk as a mode of revolt" with the revolutionary politics of the seventies or with any other organized political formation, nor should one place punk unequivocally within a narrative of sexual or political progress. Yet even with these caveats, one cannot ignore the interpretive resonances between the Sex Pistols' negative political act of defacing the image of Queen Elizabeth II, herself a potent symbol of national reproduction, and the performative act of defacing the image of Anita Bryant, who positioned herself as the protector of a normative national future via the "saving" of the idealized child from homosexuality. The image on the cover of this issue of *RHR* represents our attempt to link these ideas and histories—between punk and family values, homosexual panic and the rise of the homonormative, and between a queer future and no future.

### Contemporary Realities and Queer Futures

Clearly, all queer futures are not alike, nor are they alike in whatever it is that makes them queer in the first place. But however surprised Bryant must be about the cen-

trality of marriage and parenting in current discourse about homosexuality, more surprising still is that proponents of same-sex marriage now deploy the very same rhetoric of the endangered child that Bryant and her adherents used in the “Save Our Children” campaign three decades ago. As Patrick McCreery shows in his contribution to this issue, mainstream gay rights organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign and conservative antigay religious groups such as Focus on the Family participate in a discourse on same-sex marriage that focuses not on civil or human rights but on the benefits or hazards of the institution of marriage for the child, who is almost always imagined in abstract terms. In centering the figure of the endangered child, McCreery argues, same-sex marriage proponents reinforce and reproduce a normative vision that confers rights “to and through the family.” The future imagined within this discourse can hardly be understood as queer. Rather, it works toward wholly normative and, one could argue, neoliberal ends, privileging the family unit as the premier site of consumption and social reproduction while simultaneously destabilizing the protections afforded to citizens’ rights outside of the mode of the reproductive.

What should we make of the ideological and tactical confluences between the family-first strategies of gay rights’ organizations and those of their opponents who have historically pathologized and criminalized homosexuals as “perverse” and “deviant” enemies of the family? What kind of historical amnesia produces and is produced by such alliances? It would appear that in the three decades since Bryant first emerged to sow the seeds of intolerance, some formerly non-normative categories of sexual identity are moving rapidly inside Rubin’s “charmed circle.” Many LGBT scholars and activists, including same-sex marriage proponents, have been at the forefront of a slow but steady normalizing process through which queers identify with, rather than challenge, the mainstream U.S. body politic. By positioning particular sexual identities as belonging to a timeless, universal, and even biological minority group, they have argued that certain categories of sexuality—especially those that are white, monogamous, gender-conforming, and middle-class—are more amenable than others to inclusion in Rubin’s “charmed circle.” Even in just the past five years, the North American cultural scene has manifested compelling evidence for the effectiveness of such normalizing strategies, given the tenor of the same-sex marriage debates, the successful promotion of queer consumer products in the pursuit of the “pink dollar,” and the popularity of representations that appeal to wide audiences such as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *The L Word*, and *Brokeback Mountain*.

As prominent and mainstream lesbian and gay rights organizations strategically embrace agendas that vie for acceptance within contemporary economic and political systems, one could argue that they have abandoned many of the political commitments of their LGBT activist predecessors, especially their foci on the redistribution of economic resources and the protection of sexual freedoms. This shift has made strange bedfellows out of lesbian and gay rights organizations and social

conservatives: both endorse normative and family-oriented formations associated with domestic partnership, adoption, military service, and gender-normative social roles; both work to marginalize and disempower those who challenge serial monogamy and those belonging to categories—including transgender, bisexual, pansexual, and intersex constituencies—that are seen as eccentric within a traditional binary gender or sex system. Moreover, much of contemporary mainstream lesbian and gay political and cultural activity is based in the neoliberal philosophy of consumer rights rather than that of citizen rights. This brand of lesbian and gay neoliberalism exercises an influence beyond borders of the United States and other Western countries through the global proliferation of so-called lavender tourism, gay- and lesbian-themed cultural productions, and economic and political interventions that claim to make “gay rights” (defined in Western terms but promoted as universal) a global human rights issue.

Some radical activists and scholars have challenged these moves, citing such developments as reactionary responses to the privatizing imperatives of a powerful, ascendant brand of neoliberal politics that coalesced in the 1990s. Along with Duggan, some queer and/or sex-positive radicals identify and reject neoliberal strategies, not because they undermine citizens' rights but because they threaten to erase the historic alliance between radical politics and lesbian and gay politics, at the core of which had been a struggle for sexual freedom. They argue that these neoliberal gains push existing sexual categories—including queer ones—toward the fixed and the exclusive. If gays and lesbians now fit comfortably within market niches and voting blocs, they ask, can these formerly marginalized sexualities also retain their radical potential? In short, activists and scholars criticize the new homonormativity because it privileges particular sexual minorities over others and because it fails to dismantle larger systems of power that position queers as threats to the economy, the nation-state, and the very fabric of civilized society.

### **History and the New Homonormativity**

This issue of *RHR* contributes to a small but growing body of scholarship that critically reexamines the trajectory of LGBT politics and scholarship over the past several decades. In particular, “Queer Futures” takes up the task of tracing and examining the interconnected and sometimes contradictory historical moments that have produced the current state of sexual politics. We seek to complicate and challenge normative narratives of queer progress (for example, from marginalization to inclusion; from invisible to visible), as well as narratives that imagine the queer past as one exclusively characterized by radical political resistance. The contributions to this issue explore the histories of homonormativity within those discourses (medical, political, activist, capitalist, academic, etc.) that have shaped stable, safe, and normalized identities with political and cultural cache out of formerly deviant categories. In doing so, they offer new historical and analytical frameworks for talking

about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer history that expand and challenge current models of identity and community formation.

The authors presented in this issue of *RHR* use the historian's tools to carve out of the recent past some of the precedents that have shaped the economic, political, and institutional sites responsible for bringing homonormativity into the world. In our "Features" section, for example, Regina Kunzel challenges an all-too-easy understanding of homonormative politics as a wholesale departure from the liberatory movement of the Stonewall era. Examining what many have understood as one of the more radical components of the 1970s and 1980s movement, Kunzel argues that gay activism on behalf of imprisoned gay and lesbian "brothers" and "sisters" worked to produce new gay norms. Confused by and often critical of the more ambiguous and capacious sexual and gender categories that operated within prison walls, activists worked to transform "punks," "jockers," and butch "daddies" into proper minority subjects defined within a binary classification of sexual identity. Characterizing prison sexual culture as primitive, some went so far as to produce a pedagogy of socialization into emerging norms of gay culture in order to remake the homosexual prisoner as "a gay we can be proud of."

Similar to Kunzel, Dan Irving makes an intervention into narratives of liberation by challenging conventional accounts of trans subjectivity in North America. Irving argues that studies of transsexualism and transgenderism in medical, psychological, and popular literatures talk almost exclusively about liberation and self-actualization but are oblivious to how normative discourses of economic productivity and social assimilation have become the markers by which many trans people from the 1950s onward measure themselves in transitioning from one gender identity to another. Irving argues that under the free market mandates of neoliberalism, many contemporary trans writers and activists have absorbed these markers, thereby sustaining the implicit assumption that trans bodies are only viable if they can be brought into submission by the dictates of global capitalism.

Locating the ideological roots of homonormativity is also an essential component of Christina Hanhardt's history of so-called safe streets patrols in Greenwich Village in New York City and the Castro neighborhood in San Francisco. She offers a compelling reexamination of these neighborhoods in the mid- to late 1970s, the formative years during which these model "gay ghettos" came into their own. Through innovative analyses of archival materials and oral histories with former street patrol members, Hanhardt shows how attempts to curtail homophobic violence in the 1970s and 1980s were shaped by "culture of poverty" discourses that pathologized poor people and people of color. Hanhardt demonstrates that safe streets patrols ultimately contributed to processes of urban gentrification as elite residents, including gay white men, transformed formerly marginal gay neighborhoods into wealthy enclaves and deployed oppressive quality-of-life policing strategies that disproportionately targeted people of color, including those who identified as queer.

Tracing a similar lineage to that of Hanhardt's genealogy of the homonorma-



tive in urban street activism, Margot D. Weiss contrasts two contemporary activist groups and finds surprisingly comparable results. She compares Gay Shame San Francisco, which seeks to disrupt lesbian and gay assimilation into the city's mainstream and challenges the very policing and gentrification practices that Hanhardt describes, with the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom, which disseminates a public image of practitioners of bondage/discipline/sadomasochism (BDSM), swingers, and polyamorous people as suburban minivan drivers who "look and dress like your neighbors." Weiss's study suggests that neoliberalism's relegation of sexuality into the realm of the private renders even kinky sexual practices like BDSM as normative, especially when practitioners actively work to detach potentially disruptive and deviant sexual practices from any form of radical or progressive politics.

Finally, Anna M. Agathangelou, Daniel Bassichis, and Tamara L. Spira return to themes explored by Kunzel in an essay that asserts that since September 11, 2001, imprisonment for the many and freedom for the few have come to characterize and classify the experiences of queer citizens in the era of global lockdown. Ranging from an examination of the landmark Supreme Court ruling in *Lawrence and Garner v. State of Texas* (2003) to an exegesis of a post-9/11 advertisement by the Human Rights Campaign, Agathangelou, Bassichis, and Spira trace the contours of our contemporary historical moment, one in which the liberation and protection of certain queer bodies and identities under neoliberalism coexists with the prosecution and incarceration of racialized queer bodies and identities deemed incompatible with the goals of the state.

In our "Interventions" section, Susan Stryker challenges queer studies to acknowledge the central roles that transgender communities have played in countering heteronormativity and those sexualities—including nonheterosexual ones—that it allows to access its power. Stryker turns to the history of the term *homonormativity* and its roots in transgender activism to intervene against contemporary critics that perpetuate the prioritizing of gay and lesbian subjectivities in their critiques of the homonormative. She also takes us back to the historic 1966 riot in San Francisco's Tenderloin District, in which drag queens and gay hustlers banded together at Gene Compton's Cafeteria "to fight back against police harassment and social oppression" to locate transgender action (and coalitions with other marginalized sexualities) at the very heart of LGBT history in the United States.

Sustaining Stryker's critique of institutionalized homonormativity in the space of the university, Roderick A. Ferguson provides a genealogy of the administrative embrace of difference in the post-civil rights university to show how the university aligns the homonormative with liberal discourses of diversity. Ferguson argues that such contemporary phenomena as domestic partner benefits, touted by LGBT activists as proof of social progress within mainstream academia, is a strategy to absorb gender and sexual difference by producing certain kinds of normative academic employees. Complicity with administrative recognition by LGBT people is but one example of a larger project that Ferguson identifies as the "will to institutionality."

The absorption of difference characterized by Ferguson is also readily apparent in the work of Maxime Cervulle, who examines the history of gay and lesbian political activism in France in the early 1970s. Cervulle traces how, even after the radical political upheavals of May 1968, many gay activists upheld familiar racialized tropes of the colonial French imagination and promoted the dual fetishization and subordination of men of Arab descent. Cervulle concludes his historical analysis with an assessment of the controversial Centre d'Archives et de Documentation Homosexuelles de Paris, a community history project that, as Cervulle argues, sustains many of the racist and colonial legacies of early gay activism by focusing on the contributions of white gay men.

Aaron Belkin, the director of a research institute at the University of California at Santa Barbara that studies the status of sexual minorities in the U.S. military, discusses the failure of activists who seek to repeal the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy—both within and outside of the military—to reckon with the high incidence of male-male rape in the U.S. armed forces. Belkin argues that this glaring omission among mainstream LGBT organizations calls into question the motives behind the repeal, which seems not to stem from direct challenges to discrimination and harassment but, instead, from a reactionary position that regards the military as a normative institution upholding patriotic values.

If controlling public relations spin remains an excessive but necessary component of the military's profile, it is equally weighty for those in the gay media industries who exert a powerful and normalizing influence in a competitive marketplace of gay representations and advertising revenues. Vincent Doyle's essay explores how the organizational amnesia—the willful forgetting of its activist roots—endemic to the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation (GLAAD) has impacted its intimate relations with the very media outlets that it purports to patrol. Using extensive ethnographic research with lesbian and gay media watchdogs, Doyle looks at GLAAD's response to the Showtime series *Queer as Folk*, which was initially critical of the show's content but eventually capitulated to Showtime's demands, and argues that many queer media advocates have lost their critical potential by being themselves so deeply immersed in media industries.

In a final essay that takes the idea of gay and lesbian niche markets to its logical conclusion, Nan Alamilla Boyd shows that the U.S.-based same-sex marriage movement has become a significant factor in the global gay travel market as cities seek to commodify marriage as part of a multibillion-dollar global tourism industry. Boyd argues that this process, which insists on both intelligible modern sexual categories and reinforces a neoliberal rhetoric of privatization, "produces a new kind of queer citizen, one that participates in civic life via the social rituals of marriage and the commercial rituals of conspicuous consumption."

Last but not least, in our "Interviews" section, Jason Ruiz speaks with Matilda aka Matt Bernstein Sycamore to discuss her history of activism and her ideas



for how to build a more queer future. One of the “instigators” behind Gay Shame San Francisco and a prolific writer and editor, Mattilda has long advocated an anti-assimilationist queer politics that builds alliances across the lines of race, class, ability, gender, and sexuality. Like Stryker, she demonstrates that a critique of what we are calling the homonormative in this issue is neither new nor limited to the gilded cage of queer theory. Rather, such a critique has long been the mission of intellectuals and activists bent on disrupting the normalization of queers within oppressive economic and political systems.

This issue of *RHR* has taken the better part of eighteen months to come to fruition and throughout the process has truly been a queer labor of love. The editors would like to thank the numerous external reviewers and members of the *RHR* editorial collective who gave our contributors and us such tremendously useful feedback. In particular, we would like to thank Duane Corpis, Ezra Davidson, Lisa Duggan, Van Gosse, Tom Harbison, Molly McGarry, Conor McGrady, and Richard Morrison, who gave their time and expertise so generously to this issue. They are vivid reminders that without the collaborative efforts of many, queer futures—or futures of any kind, for that matter—remain unimaginable.

—Kevin P. Murphy, Jason Ruiz, and David Serlin

## Notes

1. Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 2003), 50.
2. Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carol S. Vance (New York: Routledge, 1984), 283.
3. See, for example, Tina Fetner, “Working Anita Bryant: The Impact of Christian Anti-gay Activism on Lesbian and Gay Movement Claims,” *Social Problems* 48 (2001): 411–28; Molly McGarry and Fred Wasserman, *Becoming Visible: An Illustrated History of Gay Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: New York Public Library, 1998), 209–11; and Barry D. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* (Boston: Twayne, 1987), 102–5.
4. Film clip of Bryant being “pied,” 1977, director unknown, viewable at PlanetOut PopcornQ Movies, [www.planetout.com/popcornq/db/getfilm.html?104](http://www.planetout.com/popcornq/db/getfilm.html?104) (accessed May 29, 2007). On Thom Higgins, see Dylan Hicks, “Pride: An Anecdotal History,” *City Pages* (Minneapolis/St. Paul), June 23, 2004, [citypages.com/databank/25/1229/article12233.asp](http://citypages.com/databank/25/1229/article12233.asp) (accessed July 30, 2007).
5. See, for example, Kenneth J. Heineman, *God Is a Conservative: Religion, Politics, and Morality in Contemporary America* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).
6. Anita Bryant, quoted in “Anita Bryant’s Crusade,” *Newsweek* June 6, 1977, 22; see also Anita Bryant, *The Anita Bryant Story: The Survival of Our Nation’s Families and the Threat of Militant Homosexuality* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1977), 62.
7. Licia Fiol-Matta, *A Queer Mother for the Nation: Gabriela Mistral and the State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).