

PROTEST AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS



Guillaume Marche

# Sexuality, Subjectivity, and LGBTQ Militancy in the United States

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

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# Protest and Social Movements

Recent years have seen an explosion of protest movements around the world, and academic theories are racing to catch up with them. This series aims to further our understanding of the origins, dealings, decisions, and outcomes of social movements by fostering dialogue among many traditions of thought, across European nations and across continents. All theoretical perspectives are welcome. Books in the series typically combine theory with empirical research, dealing with various types of mobilization, from neighborhood groups to revolutions. We especially welcome work that synthesizes or compares different approaches to social movements, such as cultural and structural traditions, micro- and macro-social, economic and ideal, or qualitative and quantitative. Books in the series will be published in English. One goal is to encourage non-native speakers to introduce their work to Anglophone audiences. Another is to maximize accessibility: all books will be available in open access within a year after printed publication.

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# Sexuality, Subjectivity, and LGBTQ Militancy in the United States

*Guillaume Marche*

*Preface by Michel Wieviorka*

*Translated by Katharine Throssell*

Amsterdam University Press



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Translated by Katharine Throssell

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*To Éric*

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## Preface

Arguably, institutional boundaries between academic disciplines can hamper researchers' creativity and ability to innovate, and simply bridle their curiosity. The tension between approaches by cultural areas – i.e., by countries or regions of the world – and approaches by theme, issue, discipline, or theoretical orientation certainly has a tendency to become a gap, a chasm. Scholars who follow the former approach risk leaning toward cultural relativism, while those who follow the latter risk espousing an abstract universalism that is blind to the reality of different cultures and histories.

With this study of the LGBTQ movement in the United States, Guillaume Marche offers us reassuring evidence that it is possible to accommodate the best of both sociology and American studies, of which he is evidently a remarkable specialist. His book is bound to become a reference for anyone who is interested in the United States, wishes to know the history of the LGBTQ movement, or thinks, as I do, that social and cultural movements are at the heart of the production of collective existence.

The history of the LGBTQ movement is close to three quarters of a century long. It burgeoned after the end of World War II, crystallized with the Stonewall riots in New York, following a police raid in a Greenwich Village gay bar, and has not stopped transforming and diversifying itself ever since.

As a keen observer and a researcher whose fieldwork spans a good 20 years, Guillaume Marche develops an analysis that springs from below – from the individuals, the singular subjects, and their experience whose core is undeniably sexual – to show how collective action emerges and evolves. His work situates itself at the crossroads between a sociology of the subject and processes of subjectivation, for which the meaning of action is the heart of the analysis, and an interactionism that is attentive to the interpersonal encounters through which the movement takes shape. Contrary to the premises of the resource mobilization paradigm, which is more interested in rational calculations and strategies, this study offers a rigorous and highly paradoxical demonstration of what can become of a protest movement that achieves great success. In succeeding, the LGBTQ movement has lost (perhaps only temporarily?) a good deal of its capacity for grassroots mobilization.

At the beginning, despite differences between the three cities where Guillaume Marche did fieldwork, there was a tension in collective action on homosexuality between those who would see it as an identity that creates perceptible difference, and those who would rather minimize differences and do away with exclusion, disqualification, and discrimination. Then the movement grew more complex over the course of struggles that deeply

reshaped it: in the late 1980s, in the context of the shifting understanding of AIDS transmission through sex; then around various discriminatory situations, especially in the army; then around same-sex marriage. Some demand specific rights, others instead want to transform American society's deep-seated sexual norms, and still others aim to make the community as a whole more visible.

As with the African American community, things most frequently move from the bottom up, from activism to court decisions. In the beginning, militant mobilization calls American society's attention to an issue; in the end, a Supreme Court ruling settles the case. The overall outcome is undisputable: on the whole, the movement has gained a lot, but at the expense of a considerable waning of its grassroots militant base.

In order for rights to be gained and homosexuality to be better accepted, the movement has institutionalized and professionalized its action, just as the market has massively taken advantage of its existence to produce a "simulacrum" of a movement. Sexuality in turn has ceased to be the core of the movement's most contemporary demands – to the point where protest seems to have become depoliticized and disconnected from its foundations in LGBTQ culture. In succeeding, the movement has lost some of its capacity for offensive protest and given way to the privatization of sexuality – or at any rate its depoliticization and its estrangement from the protest movement. Militancy and personal gratification have grown apart. This, I think, is the core of the book's argument: sexuality, which is inherently at the foundation of the LGBTQ movement, has stopped being the fuel of action. Political and legal successes can keep flowing in, but the movement is no longer the great engine of protest, and hence social change, that it once was.

This book is not merely based on Guillaume Marche's seasoned knowledge of both American society as a whole and the social actors he is more particularly studying. It is also well written, free of academic stylistic ponderousness, and it attests to its author's outstanding command of theoretical, sociological, and philosophical analytic tools. The ending is equally remarkable, with the presentation of atypical organizations like the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. Let me say no more and let readers immerse themselves in this great piece of scholarship, which is an invitation to think critically about the workings of American society, the paradoxes of a social and cultural movement that dwindles because of its success, and the place of sexuality – at the crossroads between nature and culture – in the long struggle for the rights of LGBTQ people as well as, most likely, other collective social actors.

*Michel Wieviorka*

# 1 Introduction

## Abstract

This LGBTQ movement in the United States has won decisive victories, but it has become institutionalized and less reliant on grassroots mobilization, an evolution that can be correlated to the disappearance of sexuality from its claims. Hence the need to study the intersection of actors' individual aspirations and the movement's collective orientations. The introduction presents the book's longitudinal perspective on the fluctuating fortunes of sexuality in LGBTQ mobilizations and their impact on the movement's degree of proactiveness and offensiveness. It presents the book's microsociological approach "from below" and its emphasis on actors' subjectivity and emotions, as well as the empirical and other material on which the study is based, provides a note on terminology, and summarizes the subsequent chapters.

**Keywords:** LGBTQ movement, United States, movement institutionalization and demobilization, sociology of actors, subjectivity and emotions

For more than 40 years, the social movement that is now known as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) movement has been challenging American society's views on homosexuality and the expression of nonconforming sexual desires and sex, gender, and sexuality-based identities. LGBTQ mobilizations are among the greatest social transformations that Western societies experienced in the twentieth century. Emerging in the wake of the various protest movements that appeared following the postwar economic boom, these movements have deeply changed the experience of homosexuality, reduced its stigmatization, reinforced its acceptance, and even helped to redefine heterosexuality, conjugality, the family, and the expression of desire.

The movement has gained considerable vitality since the 1960s and 1970s, which helped to withstand even the onset of AIDS in the 1980s. In many ways, gay mobilization against AIDS facilitated the recognition of gays and lesbians and the legitimization of the movement that speaks for them. In the

United States, the LGBTQ question gained political centrality in the late 1980s. Indeed, the acute sexual, sanitary, and moral issues raised by the AIDS epidemic, the harsh political debates that resulted from them, and the vitality of LGBTQ militancy mobilized in response meant that the 1980s were a key turning point in the history of this movement. It is therefore worth focusing in more detail on the period that began with AIDS. The visibility and legitimacy of the LGBTQ movement have since increased to the point where one of its claims – the legalization of same-sex marriage – has become a major political issue not only in the United States, but also in Europe, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and several Latin American countries.

However, the issue of marriage does not by any means encompass the full range of goals and claims of LGBTQ mobilizations. Broader issues, such as the transformation of sexual norms in light of the experience of nonheterosexuality have indeed been somewhat obscured by the marriage question. The recognition of many sexual, economic, and social rights for LGBTQ people have de facto been placed on the back burner due to the prominence of demands for equal formal recognition for same-sex couples, which is often perceived as the final hurdle on the path to full equality among citizens regardless of their sexual orientation and intimate life choices. In 2013, the United States Supreme Court issued two landmark decisions. Firstly, *Hollingsworth v. Perry* upheld a lower federal court decision that struck down California's Proposition 8 ban on same-sex marriage,<sup>1</sup> in effect making it legal again in that state. Secondly, *United States v. Windsor* struck down a key provision of the federal law preventing recognition of same-sex marriages, the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Finally, in its 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling, the Supreme Court legalized marriage between two people of the same sex by declaring unconstitutional any state statute or constitutional provision prohibiting it.

As of the early twenty-first century, the LGBTQ movement in the United States has thus won decisive victories and made significant progress for LGBTQ people who now enjoy a degree of freedom and recognition unimaginable only a decade ago. This is all the more reason to take a step backward and address LGBTQ militancy through the lens of its relation to its support base and to sexuality. Indeed, for a long time this relationship seemed consubstantial, but it is in fact deeply problematic. Since the 1980s and 1990s, in particular, LGBTQ militancy in the United States has been

1 In 2008, same-sex marriage was legalized in California, but was suspended a few months later after a ballot initiative, Proposition 8, amended the California constitution so that only marriage between one man and one woman was valid or recognized.

profoundly transformed with respect to its scale, but also its form, content, and substance. Studying these transformations provides the opportunity to gauge the correlation between the movement's institutionalization, the normalization of its identities, and the disappearance of sexuality from its claims. It also allows us to observe the connection between this disappearance and a noticeable decline in militancy within the LGBTQ movement.

## **Subjectivity, militancy, and political opportunities**

According to the theory of political opportunity structures, and political process theory more generally – a paradigm that still has a strong influence on the sociology of social movements – we might expect the greater political openness to LGBTQ claims in the United States to have resulted in greater mobilization within the LGBTQ movement.<sup>2</sup> The political recognition that this movement has gained in the United States since the 1990s is such that LGBTQ rights are now among the key issues upon which the two major political parties oppose each other. However, far from leading to a stronger grassroots mobilization, this increase in visibility has intensified the movement's professionalization. This is understandable – for any kind of movement – given that the recognition of certain claims allows the leaders to take action at the institutional level. Moreover, a more amenable political and cultural climate can give social actors the feeling that victory is now simply a matter of time, which is a disincentive to mobilize.

This situation thus encourages us to examine the dynamics of mobilization and demobilization among LGBTQ activists more closely. This may yield not only a better understanding of why individuals come to participate in collective action, but also of the forms of participation to which they aspire, the direction in which they hope to see the movement evolve, and the meaning with which they invest the politicization of their personal, intimate lives. Consequently, this book focuses on the intersection of the individual aspirations of actors and the collective orientations of the LGBTQ movement. Given this movement's strong trend toward institutionalization over the last 20 years, the question of the role of the grassroots support base is increasingly pressing. Although long driven by a desire to claim respect for the dignity of sexually marginalized identities, lifestyles, and

2 In the wake of Doug McAdam's work on the African American protest movement (1982), political process theory identifies the structural conditions favorable to the emergence of collective protest movements.

subcultures – i.e., in what has now become common parlance, “gay pride” – this oppositional and sexualized dimension has fallen substantially in the LGBTQ movement’s list of priorities.

Sexuality is an intimate experience and it lies, almost by definition, at the very heart of the political issues raised by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer mobilizations. At the same time, it pertains to the desires and aspirations that underlie subjectivity, i.e., the ability of social actors to mobilize in order to influence their own situations, living circumstances, and destinies. This book therefore takes a longitudinal perspective on the fluctuating fortunes of sexuality in LGBTQ mobilizations – both in terms of goals and forms of action – so as to better understand what determines its greater or lesser importance, and what the political consequences of this are for activists. There is indeed a correlation between the sexualization of LGBTQ mobilizations, the involvement of the grassroots in the politicization of homosexuality, the importance of subjectivity in the identities mobilized, and the extent to which the resulting movement is proactive and on the offensive.

This book thus invites the reader to reflect upon a paradox, because it focuses on a movement that has largely succeeded but which has also lost a great deal. If we look at the number and extent of its victories since the 1960s, the LGBTQ movement in the United States is equaled only by the civil rights movement, to which it is often compared – though sometimes to its detriment. On the one hand, this comparison is based on the civil rights movement’s paradigmatic place in the history of the recognition of minorities in the United States, and on the other, it results from the importance that LGBTQ questions have acquired in public debate over the last 20 or 30 years. Some LGBTQ militants like to say that “Gay is the new black,” latching on to the undisputed legitimacy of the struggle for the rights of African Americans, whose oppression is often described as America’s “original sin.”<sup>3</sup> The LGBTQ movement is ultimately a success story, but it also has its failures, its deficiencies, and its blind spots. This book does not purport to downplay the movement’s achievements, but rather to confront the narrative of a movement that has become increasingly institutionalized – in order to pursue objective, tangible goals – with the narrative of a movement that has become increasingly desexualized, to the point of suppressing some of its more offensive, cutting-edge activism.

3 However, in opposition to this, more conservative spokespeople for the African American community – particularly church representatives – have taken a stand against a comparison that they consider incongruous and insulting for black dignity. They have also controversially come out in opposition to the legalization of same sex marriage in the name of the African American community.



## **A microsociological approach “from below”**

This book stands at the crossroads of the sociology of homosexualities and the sociology of social movements. While drawing on the European sociology of “new” social movements, subjectivity, and experience (Alberto Melucci, Alain Touraine, François Dubet, Michel Wieviorka), it also follows in the footsteps of studies exploring the cultural forms of collective action (Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, Hank Johnston, Bert Klandermans, Francesca Polletta). On a theoretical level, this book is therefore situated within an interactionist paradigm, a sociology of actors, their practices, and the ways they interpret their action. Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, in particular, break with approaches that see culture either as a structural frame that is imposed onto and restricts collective mobilizations, or as one of the many resources movements mobilize for specific strategic ends. These authors instead consider the way in which culture is used in social movements based on actors’ sensitivity – including their emotional sensitivity – and their deep-seated aspirations, rather than their short- or medium-term objectives (2000: 69-73).

In this, these scholars break away from the rationalist, even utilitarian, bias of approaches such as political process theory (on which political opportunity structure theory is based) or framing theory, both of which tend to take an outside perspective on the goals of social movements and thus reify movements while seeking to objectivize them. In contrast to this, Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta emphasize biographical experience, emotions, inventiveness, and moral convictions (2000: 73-77). By centering its analysis on the question of the politicization of sexualities and the relations between subjective experience and social movements, this book aims to emphasize that militancy is not necessarily synonymous with visibility in the media or in political arenas. On the contrary, this study is attentive to forms of action that have become marginal, that are often cultural, sometimes verging on infrapolitical, in which the relationship between militancy and sexuality is fundamental.

This book takes a resolutely microsociological approach in order to situate itself at the intersection between subjectivity and participation in social movements. What this book does not do, is describe and analyze how social actors construct their individual involvement in a preexisting movement with a view to assessing that movement’s cohesion. As the focus here is on activists and their subjectivity, I will instead look at the way in which participants (and some former participants) in the LGBTQ movement interpret the place of sexuality in the politicization of homosexuality.

The goal is therefore not to assess the achievements and shortcomings of LGBTQ politics in the United States: the facts are well-known, if sometimes controversial. Instead, I approach the question of engagement from the vantage point of individual practices, while situating it in the context of the evolutions in the movement and in the politicization of homosexuality that have occurred over the past three decades. Thus, the book does not seek to provide an all-encompassing panorama of LGBTQ mobilizations, but rather to study particular trajectories by situating them in their historical, political, and ideological context. Indeed, I will show that this context is particularly problematic for the politicization of homosexuality.

The following analysis is based on a qualitative study conducted through a total of 22 weeks of fieldwork in Boston, New York, and San Francisco between 1993 and 1998. It is also based on my work as a sociologist over the last 20 years. New York and San Francisco were chosen for the original fieldwork because of their large and active LGBTQ communities, their significant historical contribution to the development of the LGBTQ movement (both in the United States and globally), and thus their status as “Gay Meccas.” These two fieldwork sites differ, however, in cultural, political, and economic terms, resulting in considerable differences in the way in which the LGBTQ movement developed in each city. New York is a metropolis of global importance, where the LGBTQ population is segmented, both spatially and symbolically, according to class and race. The more modest size of San Francisco and its less individualistic, more liberal, pluralist culture mean that the LGBTQ community there is more cohesive but also more decentralized. Boston was chosen because it contrasts strongly with the other two cases. Its LGBTQ movement and community are by no means global (or even national) leaders in gay culture, but it remains the political, economic, and cultural capital of a state that stands out for its progressive action in matters of redistribution, social protection, and recognition of minority rights, particularly for LGBTQ people. These three sites are all places where the LGBTQ community and movement are relatively powerful, recognized, and influential, which situates the study in an environment that is quite favorable to LGBTQ mobilizations and where the obstacles to militant participation are relatively low, compared to the United States as a whole.

The fieldwork yielded 173 nondirective interviews between 45 and 90 minutes long, with 187 activists and former activists whose political and ideological orientations put them among the most progressive elements of

the movement.<sup>4</sup> I intentionally excluded the study of groups and activists that are socially liberal but economically conservative – for example, organizations like the Log Cabin Club, the Republican Party’s LGBTQ group, which are typically favorable to the recognition of LGBTQ rights but opposed to government intervention for poverty reduction. Instead, this study focuses on the trend within the LGBTQ movement that sees this mobilization as the opportunity to deeply transform American society (with varying degrees of radicalism). The interviewees were initially contacted through LGBTQ militant, cultural, or political associations and organizations, identified locally in the three cities studied. The number of interviewees then grew through a snowball effect based on successive personal recommendations. The construction of the interview corpus was also designed to reflect fair gender representation and a diversity of profiles in terms of age, type of participation, as well as ethnicity and race.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1    Distribution of respondents by sex and ethnicity/race**

	Women	Men	Transgender	Total
<b>White</b>	45 (24%)	86 (46%)	2 (1.1%)	133 (71.1%)
<b>African American</b>	6 (3.2%)	17 (9%)	1 (0.55%)	24 (12.75%)
<b>Latino</b>	4 (2.15%)	13 (7%)	1 (0.55%)	18 (9.7%)
<b>Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander</b>	5 (2.7%)	7 (3.75%)	0	12 (6.45%)
<b>Total</b>	60 (32.05%)	123 (65.75%)	4 (2.2%)	187

My subsequent research has studied the evolutions of the LGBTQ movement between the 1990s and 2010s and primarily relies on published or online documents, whether academic studies or official, militant, and journalistic primary sources. Since 1998, I have also conducted several smaller-scale fieldwork studies on themes such as the link between homosexuality and ethnicity and race, the relation between feminist and LGBTQ movements, and the place of nonheterosexual families and young people’s sexuality in LGBTQ mobilizations. Even when these studies are not referred to directly, they implicitly inform the observations made here.

Similarly, out of a concern for readability, this book uses fieldwork data as parsimoniously as possible. As a result, only the most significant or the

4    The list of interviews quoted in the text can be found at the end of the book (pp. 179-180).  
5    Note: although the age range extends from 15 to over 60 years old, the vast majority of respondents are between 25 and 50 years old.

most revealing of the militant trajectories and comments are explicitly presented and analyzed. Based on these data, I conduct a close analysis of activists' discourse, paying particular attention to forms of expression, with a view to capturing the ways in which actors construct their identities, in order to compare them to the identities that are publicly deployed in LGBTQ movements. This approach allows me to shed light on the sometimes discreet, even imperceptible, expression of militant subjectivities that are not always able to be collectively expressed, depending on the state of the movement. The respondents' comments are also situated within their individual biographical trajectory in order to understand the foundations of their militant participation or their disengagement, where relevant. Once again, their individual careers are contextualized and historicized in order to identify – based on individual examples – what a purely macro-sociological analysis of the LGBTQ movement does not always manage to reveal. In particular, I focus on the relations between collective initiatives and individual motivations, between objective strategies and symbolic interpretations, between politics and intimacy.

This book therefore takes a retrospective approach. The fundamental premise that runs through it is that the current phase of LGBTQ militancy in the United States began in the 1990s and that, as a result, the data collected then may tell us about the driving forces and issues of today. Far from taking an anachronistic or teleological perspective on the historical, political, social, and cultural evolutions at the heart of this book, I aim to shed light on the present situation of the movement by using data that was collected (a) at a time when this situation was emerging, and (b) as closely as possible to the field and to the subjectivity of grassroots activists. What can we learn about the relationship between sexuality and LGBTQ militancy from the actors who were involved in the movement 20 years ago, at the time when this connection was beginning a substantial and long-lasting transformation? What can we learn from the expression of the desires and frustrations that emerged in the militant consciousness of those who had previously witnessed a period of aggressive activism at the end of the 1980s, a time when LGBTQ erotics and politics were intrinsically connected? What can we learn from the testimonies of those who experienced this shift, this increasing estrangement between sexuality and the politicization of LGBTQ identities? This book therefore encourages readers to grasp the circumstances, the modalities, and the effects of the withdrawal of LGBTQ sexualities into the private sphere and the deployment of intentionally inoffensive, or even sanitized, identity constructions in the public sphere.

## Why the United States?

The LGBTQ movement in the United States is the focus of much attention from scholars, commentators, and activists alike. For example, since the 2000s, many important works in LGBTQ studies and queer theory, written by American authors such as George Chauncey, Laud Humphreys, David Halperin, Eve K. Sedgwick, and Judith Butler, have been translated into several languages. European historians, sociologists, and political scientists have also made significant contributions to gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ studies, sometimes by drawing comparisons between Europe and the United States. In spite of this, the specificities of the American LGBTQ movement are not always well-known or understood outside the United States. Since the emergence of ACT UP in the late 1980s, however, the American LGBTQ movement has more or less become a model that queer activists throughout the world look to, either to align themselves with or distinguish themselves from. Furthermore, in the context of globalization, queer culture in America has indeed become considerably more transnational since the 1990s (Altman 2001: 86-100). Yet the globalization of LGBTQ culture, movements, and lifestyles is not as univocal or homogeneous as we might think. It does not always appear in the guise of an Americanization, or even “Westernization,” of political and identity models in the countries of the global South, for example, from Latin America to Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Adam, Duyvendak & Krouwel 1999; Encarnación 2016). In France, in 1989, at a time when ACT UP/Paris was consciously and voluntarily importing the model of activism of its American predecessor, the structuration of the gay and lesbian movement relied much more on a decentralized local-level associative network than on an institutionalized movement, and major national demands were instead defended by left-wing political parties (Prearo 2014: 231-275).

Yet the economic, political, and cultural predominance of the United States, particularly through cinema and television, is such that the US-based models, practices, images, and vocabulary have become paradigmatic to a certain extent. This book focuses on the politicization of sexuality in the American LGBTQ movement in order to draw attention to aspects that are less visible in the political debates and media abroad. Analyzing the American LGBTQ movement indeed offers useful comparisons and an insight into how these issues play themselves out, for example, in the European context. Thus, the evolution of legislation and regulations relating to homosexualities and transgenerness is dependent on specific national contexts and political traditions. It has also contributed to the construction

of a European continental identity (Ayoub & Paternotte 2014). But the European landscape is particularly contrasted on this issue. On the one hand, as of this writing, 16 European countries (14 of which are members of the European Union) have legalized same-sex marriage, and 26 European countries (22 of which are members of the European Union) provide some other form of recognition for same-sex couples. Moreover, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union grants substantial legal protections for fair treatment regardless of sexual orientation and gender expression. Yet homophobic and transphobic discrimination and violence are frequent and widespread, as the situations in Russia, Serbia, or Hungary demonstrate – to name but a few European countries where these violations are especially blatant. Similar disparities also exist within the United States, as we can see in the very contrasting results of the successive elections of the early twenty-first century, or in the extremely varied treatment of LGBTQ rights depending on states, counties, and municipalities. While the method is not comparative, this book seeks to provide perspective on the empirical reality of the field, which may prove useful at a time when the United States is both a model and an antimodel in the eyes of many Europeans.

## Terminology

Vocabulary matters and, as a rule, this book uses the terms of identification that were in vernacular and mainstream usage at the various times under study. For example, I use the somewhat clinical sounding “homosexual” when referring to periods when this term (whether noun or adjective) had not yet fallen out of fashion. In the 1950s, for example, vernacular terms like “gay” were already widespread within the subculture, but outside it was not yet the most prevalent shorthand for homosexuality. This use of “homosexual” should not be construed to imply endorsement of a pathological conception of homosexuality. However, I do also use it either to address such pathologizing views, or to contrast external, objectivizing, or scientific discourses on homosexuality with discourses that reflect gay culture, sensibilities, and points of view.

From the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, “gay” indifferently referred to men and women identifying with the sexual liberation movement and the resulting communitarian movement. It was only from the end of the 1970s and especially the early 1980s that the use of “gay and lesbian” gradually became widespread. Since the early 1990s, those who did not recognize themselves in an exclusively gay or lesbian collective identity challenged the use of this

expression and this gave rise to the now standard expression “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender,” or LGBT, and subsequently, in the 2010s, to the more and more frequent addition of “queer,” hence LGBTQ.

Rather than a profound challenge to the collective identity around which the movement organizes itself, however, this change in vocabulary often reflects a desire to include bisexual and transgender people in a movement largely defined by homosexuality. This is especially true of the inclusion of bisexuality, often viewed as a variation of homosexuality. It is less true of transgenerness, which has increasingly been the basis of specific claims, particularly in terms of antidiscrimination and civil, legal, social, and medical rights.

This study is more concerned with sexuality than sex and gender as a foundation for identity-based social movement activism: hence an imbalance will be noted between the treatment of homosexuality and transgenderness. This imbalance also reflects the dominance of homosexuality in the identities and claims put forward by the LGBTQ community and movement, despite the increasingly numerous debates, challenges, and questionings which go beyond the scope of this study.

Since 2010, the use of the acronym LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex) has also spread. Whereas the question of intersexuality is not covered as such in the book, the identity and political dynamics of the queer movement are discussed. However, I do not focus so much on the theoretical deconstruction of gender and sex categories that has arisen since the 1990s, in the wake of queer theory, even though this is rich in theoretical lessons regarding the situatedness of sex, gender, and sexuality-based identities that also inform the constructionist foundations of this study. The queer movement will instead be covered from the angle of its connection with the politicization of sexualities that diverge from the heterosexual norm, and the mobilizations that stem from them. The standard term used in these pages will therefore be LGBTQ, rather than the increasingly frequent LGBTQI. This is by no means intended to validate an essentialist or exclusively binary conception of sex, but rather to preserve lexical consistency while respecting the usage that reflects the historical, political, and militant configurations in which it occurs.

The next two chapters of the book present lesbian and gay mobilizations in the United States chronologically from the mid-twentieth century and identify a major pivotal moment that occurred in the 1990s. The chronological approach of Chapter 2 is broad, extending from the post-World War II period to the early twenty-first century. This chapter demonstrates



that LGBTQ movements are characterized by the existence of two parallel pendulums, one swinging between politicization and depoliticization, and the other between sexualization and desexualization. The 1980s are analyzed as a crucial period, the provocative activism of the time echoing that of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Chapter 3 zooms in on the 1980s and 1990s, and emphasizes the fact that the current movement is situated in the continuation of the political moment that began in the 1990s. This chapter discusses the changes that occurred around the 1990s, and, in particular, the political mainstreaming and institutionalization of the movement. These changes had a profound impact on the movement's attitudes toward sexuality and explain the current paradoxical situation around which this study is built: the objective, instrumental success of the movement and the subjective, symbolic failure of its grassroots militancy.

The three subsequent chapters are more directly grounded in fieldwork, testimonies of respondents, interview quotations, microlevel analysis, and empirical evidence. Chapter 4 analyzes individual examples of disillusionment, withdrawal, and demobilization. On the one hand, this chapter rests upon the confrontation between the privatization and commodification of public LGBTQ identities and, on the other hand, the ways in which subjectivity plays itself out in private identities. It thus emphasizes activists' perspectives on the relative normalization of the LGBTQ movement, in order to show that, from their point of view, there is a connection between demobilization and the evacuation of sexual themes. It also focuses on what this connection means for them: a feeling of frustration, alienation and a loss of meaning. Chapter 5 shows how the sexualization of grassroots practices resists against the desexualization of the institutionalized movement. It studies how activists reappropriate forms of sexualization in order to give meaning to their militant participation by repoliticizing sexuality. These practices may be decentralized, dissident, or even marginal, yet they "reenchant" LGBTQ mobilizations. Though they may seem of little significance compared to the dominant trend in the movement, such practices convey a politics of emotions that is in keeping with the role of desire and pleasure in the politicization of LGBTQ sexualities. Chapter 6 focuses on the "how" – and demonstrates the importance of the symbolic aspects of LGBTQ activism. Here I analyze the initiatives whose form – rather than content – situates them on the margins or the fringes of "the" movement. While the LGBTQ movement paradoxically pays scant attention to sexuality, these initiatives perpetuate the expression of an activism that seeks to challenge dominant norms. These infrapolitical forms of action resort to culture, humor, and pleasure in order to mobilize a dimension that has all but disappeared from the visible face of the LGBTQ movement.