

# **Poly Politics: Lessons from Queer Liberation**

by Pepper Mint, 2004

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## ***Similarities and Differences***

The polyamory movement and the various queer movements have much in common but at the same time there are very clear and significant differences between them. Let's start with the differences.

Polyamory does not have the hundred years of medical pathologization that queer activists have been working against. There were definite pathologies of overabundant sexuality during the same period (think nymphomania) but they are not well connected to modern nonmonogamy, nor are they as heavily present in the modern medical imagination. In contrast, before homosexuality was removed from the diagnostic manual, there was an unbroken history of the medicalization of homosexuality and other queer categories, stretching back through the sexual inverts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Similarly, polyamory does not face the same history of official and legal repression. Due to ongoing changes in our culture, actually holding down multiple relationships, even in the same house, is generally legal. (The exception is anti-cohabitation laws and the occasional "house of ill repute" law, neither of which are enforced.) Poly gatherings are typically not raided by the police, though again there is an exception in the recent raids of east coast BDSM parties, which are heavily poly-attended.

Instead, polyamory is building on a relatively recent and rich history of nonmonogamy, including that found in gay urban enclaves, lesbian-feminist communes, open marriages, swinging, free love, and wife-swapping.

Polyamory generally does not evoke the same disgust and fear that queer presentation has had to deal with, though every poly person has personal experience with counterexamples to this rule. Related to this, and the fact that there is very little poly presentation, poly people do not face much violence. (There is an argument that jealous violence, which is rampant in our culture, can be viewed as anti-poly violence, but this is stretching a bit since there is typically no poly identification involved.)

Most importantly, the current polyamory movement is occurring after much of the work of the queer movement has been done. Specifically, attitudes towards gay men and lesbians have greatly improved over the last thirty years, and are still on the upswing. (Bisexual liberation is much less clear, and transgender liberation is way behind.) As a result, much of the hard work in sexual minority liberation has been done, though of course there is still plenty to do. Once the door has been opened for one sexual minority, it gets much harder to close it against another.

So it seems clear that polyamory is in a much better place than the queer rights movement was when it was the same size, despite the significant culture-wide prejudice against nonmonogamy of any form. That said, there are a number of overlaps and synchronicities between the two movements.

Polyamory and LBG liberation both have at their core simple sexual and romantic freedoms: the freedom to love and have sex with a member of the same gender, and the freedom to love and have sex with multiple people. Similarly transgender liberation is the freedom to present or to be another gender or sex, or in the case of intersexed people, to be recognized as one's own sex. The simple freedoms at their core give these movements power and a certain wide reach.

There is also a large and notable overlap in actual community members. Polyamory is usually a queer-friendly place, and there is a huge overlap between bisexuality and polyamory. There also seems to be a large and growing group of poly lesbians or lesbian-leaning bisexuals.

However, the biggest similarity between the two movements is conceptual, and it arises because the poly movement is only recently started. Put simply, polyamory has appropriated ideology and conceptual structure wholesale from the queer movement. This appropriation is not a problem – if the tools work, they should be used wherever they can be – but it needs to be recognized. Let's go through the specifics:

- 1) Queer identities are heavily essentialized. In other words, queer people usually consider themselves to be queer since birth, and their particular queer identity is seen to be ingrained, natural, and unavoidable. Poly people often feel the same way, though the essentialization is not quite as strong, and there is more dissent on whether polyamory is natural or ingrained.
- 2) Both queer and poly people come out. Coming out is seen as an inevitable and desirable ritual, despite the fact that it often leads to strife within the family or community, with the queer or poly person in exile. Coming out is an inner truth which must be expressed, or the carrier of the secret is somehow not whole or settled. Note that this is a significant departure from the history of nonmonogamy: coming out was not a big directive in swinging or open marriages.
- 3) Polyamory has inherited a real sense of the political from queer liberation. Poly people usually know that what they are doing is in some way revolutionary, and they are interested in changing the world, and they do understand that this will take organization, legal changes, and significant cultural shifts.

## ***Lessons for Poly Activists***

### **Coming Out**

These days, coming out seems like a perfectly natural and understandable reaction to being a member of a sexual minority. People come out as poly, they come out as BDSM, and so on. In fact, the term has been accepted and highly generalized, so you can now come out as having liked the New Kids or come out as a porn addict.

However, this was not always the case. The AIDS crisis of the 80's really spurred the beginning of the current epidemic of coming out. It became clear that without visibility, gay men at least were quite literally doomed. The reaction of the queer activists was to push as hard as they could for visibility. ACT UP created the famous slogan "SILENCE=DEATH", which can be read as a directive to come out.

Most of a decade later, when I was doing queer activism in college, coming out was still the central theme of our activism. Our busiest week was National Coming Out Week. Our support group was the Coming Out Support Group. Note the hidden implications of the support group title – the purpose of the group was to help people come out, not simply to support them the way they were. Moreover, if you had no intention of coming out, the title makes it clear that it was not really the place for you. We had a strong sense that there were a lot of queer folks around who were not out, and we did actions on their behalf, but most of our interactions with them were based around helping them to come out.

And come out they did. Coming out is often a brutal process, involving the loss of friends, family, and support structures. At the same time it is personally very rewarding, enabling someone to stake out a claim for personal truth and live their life the way they want, in the open.

At the same time, coming out formed the backbone of the queer liberation movement. When people come out, they force a conversation about queerness on the people they come out to, encouraging understanding, tolerance, and more coming out. In other words, people who come out are the foot soldiers of the queer movement, literally winning the hearts of the people one person and one conversation at a time. There has been a huge shift in public acceptance of LBG folks at least over the last three decades (there's some question about the progress of transgender acceptance in the mainstream), and I attribute much of this to the fact that most people now know someone who is queer and out.

By tying an act that was ultimately political to a person's happiness, queer activists did something very smart. They ensured that the movement would grow, flourish, and insert itself in every nook and cranny that held a formerly closeted queer person.

The lesson for poly activists is clear. We need to encourage personal visibility as much as possible. It should be noted that the poly community is already strongly encouraging its members to come out, and they do already reap the rewards in terms of internet support structures. In addition to supporting people in coming out, other visibility enhancers are paramount, up to and including cheesy slogan t-shirts and wearable symbols. Also, we should consider other ways in which we can introduce conversion narratives involving visibility. One such narrative involves the conversion of cheaters to polyamory – we should be doing whatever we can to name and support this conversion.

## Backlash

At some point the radical religious right wing discovered direct-mail fundraising. Specifically, they discovered that if they sent around mailers warning of the horrible moral decay undergoing America, people would send money in direct proportion to their prejudice, bigotry, or state of moral panic. Homosexuality quickly became the favorite topic of these mailings, though we can imagine that in other times it might have been flappers or miscegenation.

The direct mailings fueled a general moral panic over the nascent queer rights movement. Backlash showed up at all levels. There had always been anti-queer harassment and violence (committed by acquaintances, strangers, and the authorities), but we suspect that it actually increased during this period. The donated money fueled a raft of new laws, opposition to discrimination protection, and anti-queer advocacy groups. Churches got into the act, with pastors decrying corruption from the pulpit.

Even worse, significant work was done at the conceptual and ideological level. Hatred is always covered by varying and contingent “logical” arguments. Weak points in the newfound acceptance of queers were prodded and tested. All the old fears and panics around homosexuality and queers resurfaced, tidied up in nice language and redeployed. Homosexuals and bisexuals were carriers of disease, gender deviants, broken or infirm, necrophiliacs, into bestiality, sexually insatiable, and, most importantly, corrupters of children. This last charge proved spectacularly successful. To this day, queer people can still expect setbacks as teachers or in parental custody simply due to their queerness. A fear for children is also one of the main obstacles to same-sex marriage.

In short, the backlash happened at all levels: personal, social, legal, governmental, media, religious, educational, physical, ideological, and in changes to conceptual structures. It happened in the classroom and on the Senate floor. It happened on the street, in the churches, and in the hospitals. There is a good argument that the recent round of backlash was not actually anything new, but was rather just a lessening of the past history of oppression, such as the medicalization of homosexuality during the early part of the century and the police repression of gay and dyke bars during the 60’s. However, this history does not make this era of backlash any less vicious and inventive, for all that it may be an improvement.

While polyamory does not have as heavy a history of institutional and moral oppression for our detractors to draw on, we can expect a similar sort of backlash. Old and unenforced laws will be polished off and used to block anti-discrimination legislation or to justify the removal of custody or in extreme circumstances sweeps. Legislators will think up new and creative ways to make our lives difficult, such as removing welfare or other benefits. We can expect a continuing stream of negative or questionable media, punctuated by the occasional panic over STDs and saving the children.

Polyamory is already on the right-wing radar. Stanley Kurtz has written about it in relation to the same-sex marriage “slippery slope” argument, which gives me the sense

that the right-wing think tanks are testing the waters with this issue. Recently polyamory and tantra showed up (and were creamed) on Penn & Teller's show, which is nothing more than a regular right-wing hit piece dressed up as debunking. Bill O'Reilly has been asking around for poly people. You get the idea. Whether we become a large concern to the radical right depends on whether they can raise money by scaring people about us, and that is not necessarily a sure thing. However, it is inevitable that they will try.

It may be that the anti-poly backlash will not contain as much direct violence as the queer rights struggle has. Certainly, we do not have a history of such physical repression. However, it is premature to conclude that we will not face such violence. For example, channeling the jealous violence in this country into anti-poly violence would not be all that much of a reach. However, whether we face direct violence or not, we will definitely face "nice" forms of oppression (such as losing jobs, children, or family), which can be easily as devastating. The backlash against polyamory may take the form of other family structure backlashes, such as the backlash against single mothers.

There was a definite bright side to the anti-queer backlash. It politicized queer communities. There is nothing quite like getting beaten up, being arrested, losing loved ones, or realizing that you don't have all those rights you thought you had. When this happens to people, they become radical activists.

In fact, we can actually trace much of queer political advancement back to attacks from the religious right. Acceptance of same-sex marriage has been rising steadily in this country in recent years, partly because the right wing cannot let the issue lie, so we are constantly discussing it. Anti-discrimination laws came about around the same time that the right wing was encouraging discrimination. Hate crime laws were written as a response to violence fueled by hateful direct mailings. The right wing prevented us from discussing homosexuality in classrooms, so we went out and created gay/straight alliances, politicizing a wave of young activists in the process.

So, attention from the right wing may in fact push the poly movement forward, albeit in a very painful way. Currently poly people are not particularly politicized. They generally hope to be left alone, and believe that they can live their lives the way they want in peace. They are currently correct in that belief. However, this lull may not last.

## **Reclaiming Terminology**

Reclaiming words has been a staple of the queer movement through all its eras. Reclaiming is the process of changing a word's usage from a negative connotation to a positive connotation without changing the meaning of the word. Members of an identity movement start using an epithet that was directed at them to describe themselves, first as a joke and then as a matter of course and then as a rallying cry. We started with the basics of homosexual, gay, and lesbian. (It may be that a similar process happened as far back as "sexual invert", but we would have to do some historical analysis to be sure.) And then in the last thirty years, we've added fag, dyke, queen, and now queer. In the

case of queer, the process was undertaken quite consciously, and the definition of the word was even altered somewhat.

Queer movements have been very effective at reclaiming, more so than most other liberation movements of the last half century, though the practice is common in most movements (think of “nigger”, “cunt”, “girl”, and “witch”). Perhaps this is because queer identity is formed more around behavior than physicality, so the words gain a greater importance. In any case, most or all of the queer epithets have had at least an attempt at reclaiming, with varied levels of success.

Certainly, there is a long ways to go. “Gay” is still commonly an insult in most U.S. high schools and middle schools, along with the rest of the above words. So the reclaiming has not penetrated well down into the schools. However, it has made significant strides in other areas: “dyke” hardly seems like an insult anymore, “gay” and “lesbian” are neutral descriptors, and “queer” is showing up in reclaimed form in the media.

Polyamory does not have the gaggle of specific insults aimed at it, but we will be subject to any word denoting promiscuity or infidelity. At some point we will need to acknowledge this and take these words on in some fashion: “adultery”, “bigamy”, “cheating”, “tramp”, “slut”, “hedonist”, “whore”, “nympho” and so on. However much we may think that these words do not apply to us, they will in fact be applied to us, and really they already are. We will have to develop a relationship (beyond simple denial) with these words and the concepts behind them if we want polyamory to spread as a movement. This does not mean that we necessarily have to claim these words as our own, but we must in some way reposition them.

Note that these mostly break down into two categories, monogamy-based and based around women’s sexuality. The feminist movement has already been hard at work on the women-specific insults, but these are still relevant and necessary for reclaiming by polyamory, because the position of women as major or central actors is part of what distinguishes polyamory from other nonmonogamous movements (excepting the attempts on lesbian-feminist communes of course).

So far, with the exception of “polygamy” and *The Ethical Slut*, there have been no major reclaiming attempts in polyamory, which is not too surprising given the age of the movement. Instead we have generally embarked on the unique course of making up new terminology, sidestepping older and more demonized terminology. This is innovative and very effective in the short term, but may not be effective over the long haul, because our words will be demonized in turn. We have already seen the rifts and endless arguments that have developed around “cheating” and “swinging”, and the confusion around “open relationships”. All of these are forms of nonmonogamy, and the latter two even qualify as “open and responsible” in most instances. These do not need to be our words, but we need to develop a constructive relationship with them.

There is a certain sub-class of negative words that we may not wish to use to describe ourselves: cheating, bigamy, and adultery are a few examples. However, simply denying

that these words apply to us will not be effective. Currently, the accepted mainstream usage of these words includes polyamory (along with other forms of nonmonogamy). The real project here is to redefine the common usage of these terms so that they do not include polyamory. This is already underway with cheating. If you talk to mainstream people, they will tell you that cheating is sleeping with someone other than your partner, girl/boyfriend, or spouse. However, if you ask poly people, they will emphasize lying or dishonesty.

## **Assimilationism**

Assimilation is, simply stated, the process by which a minority group becomes normative or mainstreamed. Assimilationism is the stance that this is the primary goal that the minority group should pursue. When the argument is directed from the minority group to the mainstream, it can be stated as “we are the same as everyone else, except for one thing, so you should treat us with the same respect and acceptance as everyone else.” In the case of queer movements, this one thing has been sexual object choice and/or gender presentation.

This is in fact a true argument, it speaks well to people’s sense of fairness, and it is very effective in certain situations (say, when coming out to family) or at certain points in a movement (say, same-sex marriage). Also, it carries a certain siren song of normality that is very enticing: at some near point this struggle will be over, and we can stop living at the fringes and return to the center where we can live our lives in peace whether or not we are queer. This is a central premise of queer politics, and a noble goal in its own right. Also, assimilation itself is inevitable as a movement matures and is one marker of its success.

Unfortunately, the process of mainstreaming requires the approval of the mainstream. Queer folk have not gotten that approval yet, except for certain segments of the community in certain capacities. We cannot simply insert ourselves into the mainstream by pretending that we are already there or by acting mainstream.

While we may only be different from the mainstream in one way or a couple ways, that difference is easily enough to provoke hatred and repression. We live in a culture that politicizes its relationships and family structures, and enforces them with a vengeance. As a result, making an assimilationist argument to the mainstream is generally ineffective.

Beyond being unconvincing, assimilationism has other basic problems as a political strategy. First of all, it has a self-policing effect: in order to be accepted as normal, we have to act normal. This is divisive, especially because in the queer or poly movement, if you get rid of all the odd, funky, outrageous, or outlandish people, there just aren’t that many left. In the queer movement, I’m thinking of flamers, queens, dykes, transfolk, and gym bunnies, among others. In the poly movement, we have pagans, goths, ravers, new agers, hippies, tantra aficionados, and folks associated with self-improvement groups

such as HAI. If you discount all these people as being too strange for the movement (or too strange to represent the movement), you just don't have that many people left in the movement. And of course any attempt to separate, divide, or represent along these lines is divisive, fracturing the movement. The assimilationist vision for a movement is therefore often simply inaccurate, discounting the very real differences within the movement and between the movement and the mainstream.

Even worse, the most devoted activists in a sexual minority movement tend to be fringe in some way. Something about the process of becoming a politicized activist is easier or faster if you are fringe or if you belong to multiple oppressed groups. Perhaps you get more pissed off. For example, my little college queer activist group was mostly composed of dykes, queer women and men of color, flaming queens, and bisexuals. None of these people had pretensions at being normal or mainstream. Assimilationist arguments fell flat in this group, and the occasional takeover attempt by assimilationists was roundly rebuffed, partly because they were never willing to put in the organizing effort that we were making.

The problems with assimilationism have borne themselves out in queer politics. Before Stonewall, there were fifty years of assimilationist arguments that accomplished very little in the way of actual progress. When we made progress, it was via the outrageous and the demanding revolutionaries among us. Some of the most effective queer propaganda depicted the fringe – think *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* and *Boys Don't Cry*. Some of the most effective groups have been fringe or pioneering groups, such as ACT UP, the Lesbian Avengers, or the Transsexual Menace. Even when more mainstream queer groups made accomplishments, the pressure exerted by fringe groups helped them appear more reasonable or as the lesser of two evils.

Also, when there have been assimilationist groups or movements within the queer movement, they have had a difficult time at best. The Log Cabin Republicans are everyone's favorite example. While they have been moderately successful at providing political cover for Republicans who do wish to support the queer movement, they have not made much of a dent in the party. Also, they seem to always be landing in difficult positions due to the basic fact that the Republican party is the party of bigots these days. For example, they were unable to endorse anyone in the presidential race this year, because Bush's record on gay rights is so horrific as to be unpalatable even to them, and their bylaws prevent them from endorsing a democrat.

Similarly, the Human Rights Campaign has had similar problems arising from its assimilationist stance. The march on DC they attempted to hold a couple years ago met with significant resistance from groups who did not feel indebted to them or included in any way. Also, they recently managed to piss off a significant part of the queer community with anti-nonmonogamy and anti-promiscuity arguments put forth to advance same-sex marriage, not to mention such gaffes as dis-inviting Margaret Cho from their DNC convention party. The entire same-sex marriage political movement got off to a slow start and has frankly been hamstrung due to distrust from large segments of queer

communities, who consider it to be assimilationist and are wary that it may turn on them in some way.

Assimilationist or mainstream groups within a movement are necessary in some ways – sometimes to play the good cop, sometimes because they simply could not achieve their goals without being so. HRC is a good example of the latter, as a national lobbying organization. However, it needs to be a basic recognition that assimilationist organizing and ideology typically do not form the hard core of a movement. That core is made up of grassroots radicals and the groups they form, and the actions they take.

If we want polyamory to be successful as a movement, we need to take this lesson to heart. We will not be effective by ignoring or hiding the pagans, radicals, sex party people, BDSM folk, the new agers, or self-help groups. Rather, we need to celebrate them as some of the more active and already organized parts of the community, and take their interests to heart as central to polyamory itself. Also, when they are members of other identity communities, they will be instrumental as bridge activists in building effective coalitions through which we will really advance our interests.

Furthermore, up to this point, it has been through subcultures and sub-communities that polyamory has most effectively spread. When we create visibility or coalition around these connections, we will speed up the rate of both conversion and acceptance, and grow the movement that much faster. We of course need to make it clear that there is room for anyone in our movement, including otherwise mainstream folks, but the way we make that clear is by forming umbrella organizations and conceptualizations. Some of this is already underway. For example, there was a brief move among my friends to define a term “poly\*”, pronounced “poly star”, which includes any open nonmonogamy, whether or not it identifies as polyamorous or shares other traits of the community, whatever those might be.

## **Direct Action**

One thing that I took from my experiences as a queer activist is that someone is always going to think that you are being too “loud”. Often this sentiment is expressed in other ways, such as asking the activist to tone down their rhetoric or avoid bringing up subjects that are politically inconvenient or not perfectly on topic. Usually these requests come from people who are not doing much activism of their own.

The stark truth of the matter is, direct action works (along with other forms of loud activism). In fact, the lesson that I learned over and over again as a queer activist is that people in power will smile and nod endlessly, and never do what you are asking them to do. The only thing that spurs them into action is loud activism. You will often not get anywhere by asking. In those situations, you must demand.

If we look at the history of queer activism, the times that are remembered as turning points are the ones where queers got loud, demanding, and even riotous. The Stonewall

Riots. The riots after the death of Harvey Milk. The early, heavily political Pride marches. The 1993 March on Washington DC. ACT UP.

At my college, they decided to stop providing anonymous AIDS tests one year, presumably because it was somehow bureaucratically uncomfortable. We discussed the matter with the staff of the medical center and numerous deans, and nothing changed. We proceeded to hold a series of “die-ins” in the main corridor of campus, illustrating the fact that not having anonymous AIDS tests would lead people to not get tested, aiding the spread of the disease. Soon after, anonymous testing was reinstated.

That said, direct action and other forms of loud activism do have a time and a place. They are much more meaningful (and well-attended) when there is a crisis of life or liberty at hand, such as AIDS. The poly community does not have a spreading epidemic to take on (we hope). However, we will have crises of our own, some of which are detailed in the section on backlash above. For example, if the authorities start removing children en masse from poly households, direct action would be appropriate and frankly inevitable. We should be prepared to use direct action in these circumstances.

We should make a point of celebrating our loud activists. They are performing a number of essential tasks. They present demands that we agree with but are not yet ready to voice. They push the boundaries at the fringe, and in doing so they make the demands of more mainstream activists seem reasonable. A good movement is well-balanced between mainstream, “reasonable” activists, and loud activists.

## **Coalition Politics**

Coalition building is central to sexual minority politics. We will probably never be a majority, and we live in a winner-take-all political system. As a result, if we are to move beyond nods and smiles to real political change, we must build coalitions. In fact, building coalitions should be the primary goal of our politics – without coalition, we will get nowhere.

Unfortunately, coalition-building is not simply a matter of raising up our hands and saying “hey, help us out over here!” Something about the nature of oppression encourages it to divide and conquer, and so we typically start from a position that is well-divided, not just in terms of community but also in terms of ideology, prejudice, and assumption. People and groups do not join coalitions unless they will get something out of the arrangement, and often it is difficult to see exactly what that something will be, from both sides. Also, there is a definite tendency for any movement to end up being defined by the members who belong to the least number of oppressive categories, for example feminism which has been largely defined by and for white middle-class women. Of course, when this happens, the people who are not defining the movement bail out, and the movement shrinks or disappears.

Queer movements have learned a series of lessons around coalition and tolerance. For example, the lesbian-feminist communes of the 70's were strongly self-policing, in order to ensure that no taint of patriarchy would enter their world. Masculine women, dildos, and bisexuals were not welcome. Of course the power dynamics of the policing itself were only imitation of patriarchy needed. To this day, I still read negative accounts of the lesbian-feminist movement from women and transfolk who were excluded at the time.

Later, the immediate violence of AIDS brought together queer communities as never before. Most of the lesbian community chipped in and did a significant amount of the organizing and aid work, despite holding the (perhaps incorrect) assumption that AIDS was not a lesbian problem. Inclusiveness became the watchword in the late eighties and early nineties, with bisexuals and transgendered people explicitly named in the titles and mission statements of most groups. Of course, this inclusion was often in name only. Again, the Human Rights Campaign is a good example: bisexuals and transfolk are nominally included in HRC's mission statement, but rarely in their actual agenda.

Currently, NGLTF (the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force) is setting the model for coalition politics at a national level. Recently NGLTF split with HRC over including transfolk in the national Employment Non-Discrimination Act, and NGLTF has been a significant force behind some of recent gains by the trans community. In addition, NGLTF has been seeking to build coalition by taking positions around class, immigrant rights, and similar issues which are not handled by mainstream groups.

We can take a number of lessons from this history. First, self-policing is divisive, weakens the movement, and will be remembered bitterly by history. Second, any time you take a position which is not inclusive, you will weaken your own movement because people will leave.

However, being inclusive is not just a matter of opening your doors to anyone who may wish to enter. Rather, being inclusive requires educating yourself about people who could be your allies, and then building organizations and ideological positions with them that will advance your joint interests. Inclusion cannot be handled as an afterthought – it needs to be considered from the beginning, and it takes real time and energy, and a willingness to step out of your own worldview and away from your usual priorities.

Third, true coalition building will take years. It should not be seen just as a stepping-stone to political gain, but as an end in itself. The process of coalition building is more important than the end result, because it is in the process that the real gains are made.

The polyamory movement has a number of potential allies that we should be considering for coalition. In addition to queer groups and subcultures, we need to consider swingers, cheaters/adulterers, people using open relationship ideology, BDSM communities, pagans, and people from non-mainstream ethnicities or other cultures who practice their own forms of nonmonogamy, to name just a few. We need to set ourselves to understand these communities and people, so that someday we can actually have a discussion about

coalition. Once we have some level of understanding, we need to include these communities in our organizing and ensure that the mechanisms we create are useful to them as well as us. This is not some sort of ideological goal, but a practical and immediate necessity if we are to be a political or social movement to be reckoned with.

## **Looking Forward by Looking Back**

I have presented six lessons from queer movement history here, out of my own experience. I tried to hit the big ones first, but really I am just scratching the surface here. I recommend reading up on queer history as essential for any sexual minority activist.

Also, the queer civil rights movement is just the beginning. Studying other civil rights movements, such as the racial justice movement of the 50's and 60's, or the various waves of feminism, will always yield insight. Power generally operates in similar ways, and so the resistance to power tends to follow matching patterns.

Of course, there are large and significant differences between any two liberation movements, so it is important to identify the similarities before drawing comparisons or conclusions. Different times and different oppressions will have different strategies and solutions for resistance.