GIFT GIVING AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION:
THE AIDS MEMORIAL QUILT AS SOCIAL MOVEMENT CULTURE

DISSERTATION

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By

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt is an historic community-based art project that was begun by a gay activist in San Francisco when it seemed that no other form of expression could allow for movement beyond the devastation, paralysis, and isolation caused by the AIDS epidemic. This dissertation makes use of a rare research opportunity to study the AIDS Memorial Quilt as a cultural expression having this mobilizing capacity, therefore having important implications for gay\(^1\) and other forms of political activism. Thus I explore links between culture, politics and social movement activity in this particular context.

As a form of cultural expression, the AIDS Memorial Quilt is a prop, of sorts, through which meaning is constructed intersubjectively. That meaning has changed over time and context, especially as people of various backgrounds and histories have contributed to the constructed meaning of the quilt. But the original meaning and form of the quilt is tied to the particular historical and cultural context out of which

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\(^1\) In my writing, I do not assume that the quilt has similar effects for gay men and for lesbians. Based on responses to this issue in interviews, there are times when it seems appropriate to speak of the quilt's impact on both gays and lesbians, and there are times when its relevance is more confined to gay men. Therefore, in this text, the use of the term "gay" is in reference to gay men, while the explicit inclusion of lesbians at times is deliberate when it seems most appropriate.
the need for this expression arose. It is within this context that the tie between the quilt and gay activism becomes most obvious, even though this connection also transcends the original context. Consequently, this study of the quilt highlights especially the origination of the quilt and the setting in which this took place - the predominantly white (but ethnically diverse\textsuperscript{2}), middle-class, gay, male community centered in the Castro area in San Francisco in the mid-1980s.

As will be demonstrated throughout this work, a central feature of the constructed meaning of the quilt has to do with the fact that, from the beginning, the quilt has been regarded and treated as a gift. Gift giving can be seen as a special form of communication that relies upon the exchange of material things to communicate an intended message. It is through the movement of a gift, or the interaction between giver and recipient, that communication happens. Yet the fact that this avenue of expression is chosen is itself part of the message. In other words, the form of the exchange, as well as its content, together are essential elements of the constructed meaning of the quilt.

Those who are most directly effected by the cultural significance of the quilt are those who share in its meaning to one degree or another. And those who share its meaning therefore can be thought of as those who give or receive it in some way and are part of the gift circle. Although the quilt originated in a predominantly gay, male community, many different people and groups make up the gift circle of the quilt.

\textsuperscript{2} See Murray 1992, Table One, for "gay community characteristics" in San Francisco, as compared to other gay communities.
This is especially the case because the quilt is intended to be an avenue of expression for all who are effected by AIDS, not just gays. Further, this circle does not necessarily include all gays. For this reason, it should be clear that, as I refer in this research to the constructed meaning of the quilt, those responsible for this meaning include many gay men, but also many whose link to AIDS and to the quilt is very different from that of gay men. Still, because so much of the constructed meaning of the quilt not only defines what it means to have AIDS but also what it means to be gay, the cultural impact of the quilt on gay activism becomes significant.

Therefore, the primary focus of this dissertation is on how meaning constructed within the quilt is conducive to social change and gay activism, especially among those who construct and share that meaning. However, in considering the quilt as a form of cultural resistance, it is also important to note that, for one reason or another, there are groups whose gay or AIDS activist interests are not represented or are even denied by the quilt’s constructions. In other words, some of those who are intended recipients of the quilt cannot receive it, either because it is not made structurally or culturally accessible to them, or because its meaning denies their experiences and priorities. Consequently, in order to get a larger perspective on the quilt’s implications for social change, I examine the limits that are suggested when viewing the quilt from meaning systems that are incompatible with the quilt’s constructed meaning. I do this by considering direct criticisms voiced against the quilt. I also use Aptheker’s (1989) method of "pivoting the center" to shift our focus to accounts of what it means to have AIDS that are quite different from the experiences of gay,
white, middle-class men. In these ways I bring the politics of the quilt and implications for social change into fuller view.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL CONTEXTING OF THE AIDS MEMORIAL QUILT

On the night of November 27, 1985, thousands took part in an annual candlelight march down Market Street in San Francisco to commemorate the assassinations of Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone. It was in this setting that the idea of a quilt to memorialize those who had died of AIDS was first conceived.

Harvey Milk, the first openly gay supervisor of the city, had been a central figure in the recent history of dramatic turns for gays and lesbians and for gay political activism in San Francisco. After two losses in previous campaigns for city supervisor, Milk’s success in 1977 was facilitated by the restructuring of the city’s electoral politics to election by districts. Moscone, whose pro-gay voting record in the state senate had earned him decisive gay support in his election as mayor, had helped orchestrate this restructuring. Milk was elected in District 5, which included the heavily gay populated Castro area. His victory, like Moscone’s, was contingent upon the growing political presence of gays and lesbians of different political persuasions in San Francisco, even though the political positions of many were at odds with Milk’s. Still, Milk’s brief term in office became practically and symbolically vital to some important political gains for lesbians and gays.
Milk's pet project, a local gay rights ordinance, was passed with near-unanimous support by the Board of Supervisors at a time when the rise of the New Right resulted in many other cities blocking or repealing initiatives for such ordinances. Also at the same time the Briggs Initiative, a proposition put before statewide voters to ban gays and lesbians from teaching in public schools, resulted in what D'Emilio (1989, p. 469) characterizes as "the most far-reaching and sustained gay organizing campaign in history", ending in the initiative's defeat. There was an exuberant sense of power and promise that came with this victory, one that D'Emilio suggests was essential to renewed hope for lesbians and gays throughout the country. But this sense of power was quickly put in check that same month when former supervisor Dan White, a disillusioned traditionalist who had served as a police officer and a firefighter in San Francisco, assassinated Moscone and Milk. The night of the assassinations, as thousands of mourners filled blocks and blocks of Market Street with candlelight and eerie silence, little did anyone know that another far more dreadful devastation lay ahead. Within three years the first signs of AIDS would be obvious in San Francisco.

The candlelight march became an annual event. Cleve Jones, a gay activist and protege of Harvey Milk, had been one of its organizers from the beginning. Jones had been involved in various forms of gay activism. He had not only organized marches of this kind, but had also organized the march to City Hall the night of Dan White's sentencing to only six years in prison for the assassinations. This first march came to be known as the White Night Riot, resulting in property damage and physical injuries to both gays and police officers. Later Jones took another tack, working as a
legislative consultant to the Speaker of the California Assembly and to Assemblymember Art Agnos. Throughout, Jones gained the reputation of being the most skillful media manipulator since Harvey Milk (Shilts 1987, p. 17).

By the time of the 1985 candlelight march, one thousand San Franciscans had died of AIDS, most of whom had lived within a ten block radius in the Castro area. Cleve Jones had lost many of his closest friends. In the frustration of overwhelming grief and tragedy unacknowledged by the rest of the country, Jones and other organizers instructed marchers to carry placards that night bearing names of those who had died of AIDS. Meanwhile, ladders had been hidden in the bushes around the old Federal Building, and as marchers arrived there, hundreds of names were taped to the building’s walls. As Cleve looked on, the placards reminded him of patchwork, and the idea of a quilt to memorialize those who had died of AIDS began to stir in him. Struck by the image of people standing in wind and rain to read names and mourn, Cleve Jones left the march that night convinced of the need for such a monument.3

After over a year of considering the idea, on February 20, 1987, Jones fashioned the first quilt panel in remembrance of actor Marvin Feldman, Cleve’s best friend who had died of AIDS four months earlier. The quilt gained momentum that spring when Mike Smith, a recent graduate of Stanford Business School, teamed up with Cleve to organize local sewing bees and to promote at that year’s Gay Freedom Day

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3 For more detailed accounts of these historical events in the gay community in San Francisco, see Adam 1987; D’Emilio 1983, 1989 and Shilts 1982, 1987.
Parade the idea of a massive quilt display to take place at the March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights in October of that year. By the time of the march, almost two thousand quilt panels covered an area the size of two football fields on the Capitol Mall, and more panels were arriving daily at what came to be called the NAMES Project workshop in San Francisco.

In the spring of 1988, a seven-person road crew took the quilt on a national tour that involved displays in twenty cities. With the addition of new panels in each city, the quilt grew to 6,000 panels by the end of the four month tour. Another tour in 1989 reached nineteen cities in the U.S. and Canada. Meanwhile, in October of 1988, 1989 and 1992, the quilt was again displayed in its entirety in Washington, D.C.

Presently, the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt includes over 21,000 panels that cover an area the size of at least twelve football fields. Each panel is three feet by six feet in size, the dimensions of a human grave, and each commemorates at least one person who has died of AIDS. Some panels simply have a single name on them, and sometimes only a first name to avoid the stigmatizing of gays that characterizes this society. Some involve elaborate applique, embroidery, silkscreening, painting, beading, and many other types of artwork. Fabrics and materials of all types and colors appear in the panels, including burlap, silk, leather, denim, taffeta, lace, fur, feather boas, flags, rhine stones, pearls, glitter and sequins. Many panels have items constructed into them that uniquely portray the individual who died, items such as photographs, letters, signatures, articles of clothing, toys, buttons and badges, and
even hair and cremation ashes. Panels express love, rage, commitment, fear, passion, hope, humor, despair, and gratitude.

Sections of the quilt are now sent out across the nation to local NAMES Project chapters who organize displays. There have been over 700 such displays of portions of the quilt since its inception, resulting in the raising of over $1.5 million in contributions for AIDS service organizations across the U.S. These displays ritualize the quilt’s unfolding and the reading of names of those who are memorialized, a process that now takes several hours to complete. Numerous workshops, conventions and educational presentations on AIDS have taken place in the path of the quilt as it has traveled throughout the country. There are also NAMES Project chapters in thirteen countries outside the U.S.⁴

The AIDS Memorial Quilt has been called the largest community-based art project in history. Some of its panels are displayed in the Smithsonian Institute. In early 1989, the quilt was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. And in 1990, an HBO tribute to five panelmakers and their loved ones entitled Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt was awarded an Oscar, selected as the year’s best documentary.

⁴ These countries include Australia, Canada, Dominican Republic, Germany, Great Britain, Israel, Italy, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Senegal, Spain, and Sweden.
OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

This dissertation focuses on the quilt as social movement culture. Chapter Two summarizes the theoretical perspectives and the prior research that frame the study. I begin with a statement of my most basic metatheoretical starting points, which are founded in postmodern feminism. I then review the current social movement literature, giving particular attention to the treatment of culture in the perspectives that dominate social movement research in the U.S. I specifically bring to the foreground the literatures that treat social movement culture, including ritual, as discourse. I also give special attention to those literatures originating in Europe on "new social movements," because these writings use a rich post-marxian theoretical heritage to situate social movements in relationship to the cultural, as well as economic and political, facets of their historical contexts. Chapter Two concludes with a summary and review of sociological and anthropological theories on gift giving, highlighting connections between gift giving, culture, social identity, politics and social change.

Chapter Three summarizes the research methods I used to investigate the shared meaning of the quilt and its consequences for social change. This chapter also designates the methods I used to pivot the center of focus to other meaning systems, and specifies links between my methodology and my feminist metatheoretical starting points.
In Chapter Four I demonstrate how the quilt has been constructed to be a gift and the significance this has for its meaning, its exchange, and its impact on those who give and receive it. The fifth chapter examines the consequences that the quilt and its constructed meaning have for social change and for gay activism. This chapter focuses on the quilt as a response to particular discourses of the dominant culture, especially biomedical discourse about AIDS. It then documents how the quilt impacts social change among those who subscribe to the dominant culture, and how the quilt constructs and preserves collective identity for gays and mobilizes them toward activism.

The final chapter summarizes my findings about the consequences of the quilt for those who share its meaning in one way or another. I discuss implications of these findings for sociological theories and research. Then I pivot the center of focus to writings that describe some of the experiences of AIDS among black women. I use these perspectives and other direct criticisms of the quilt to gain insight into the politics of the quilt and the implied limits for social change.
Chapter II

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

METATHEORETICAL STARTING POINTS: POSTMODERN FEMINISM

The metatheoretical orientation that guides this research takes its most fundamental direction in accord with postmodern feminism. Although "postmodernism" is a label that is rather loosely assigned to a wide variety of critical orientations across several disciplines, there are some basic common commitments within the diversity. Perhaps most central is a position which finds its roots in the critique of positivism articulated by the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, the contention that it is not possible to perceive, much less theorize about, the world from a neutral stance. Consequently, there is no ultimate leverage point from which to claim "objective truth" and thus to separate "knowledge" from "myth". All knowledge is founded upon interaction that is meaningfully constructed through language. There is always this mediating context within which "subject" and "object", knower and known, both get defined. Therefore subject and object are inextricably linked to one another, and knowledge is relative to a specific context of meaning in which the knowing takes place and to the political forces at work in that
context. Because all perception is specific to social location, knowledge is always partial.

The implications of this view for social theorizing suggest why some postmodern writers are sometimes more specifically referred to as "poststructuralist" in their orientation. One implication is that any theory which claims to have identified the most essential structuring dynamic operating in society must be questioned and qualified, at the least. Such universalizing theories fail to recognize that their own conception of one aspect of the social realm as most significant is itself relative to the interpretive context in which this significance becomes so compelling. Peller (1987, p. 29) summarizes this central poststructuralist position, arguing that structuralists such as Freud, Levi-Strauss and Marx each can be critiqued for professing to "have found a unified, underlying scheme of social life that itself stands outside the play of rhetoric and metaphor."

A common response among social theorists to the notion that there are no grand, universal truths to render the social realm ultimately intelligible is an uneasiness that might be called relativistic despair. The disturbing conclusion seems to be that, if all knowledge is relative to its intersubjective context of meaning and there is no unmistakable reference point upon which to ground and unify theory, then why theorize at all? There can be no denial that the traditional positivistic concept of theory building as an ever-more-encompassing explanation for the social realm is shaken to the core if one takes seriously postmodern critique. The most fundamental assumptions about the nature and purposes of knowledge and truth are thrown into
question. But an ultimate relativism is not the only (or the preferred) alternative to ultimate universalism. Haraway (1988, p. 584) explains that relativism "is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally," and therefore is a totalizing twin of universalism. Both of these approaches employ "'god tricks' promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully" (Haraway 1988, p. 584). Haraway argues that only partial perspectives that recognize their own locations offer the possibility of objective inquiry. Thus to disclaim universal truth is not necessarily to disclaim "truths" altogether. On the contrary, the postmodern project, and the project of this research, is the recognition and cultivation of socially constructed "local truths" or local knowledge, the partial perspectives referred to by Haraway.

How and why postmodernism takes this route has to do with the power-knowledge link addressed in the writings of a chief herald of postmodernism, social historian Michel Foucault. Foucault maintains that global theories always involve a display of power which inevitably subjugates any theories, interpretations or knowledges that threaten the "logic" or unity of the totalizing scheme. In other words, the sweeping generalizations that characterize universalizing theories imply a power to speak on the part of some, which involves the institutional silencing of the voices of others. According to Foucault (1980, p. 82), subjugated knowledges "...have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity." Such knowledges are dismissed in many ways, as "fad," "pop," superstitious, exotic, primitive, or downright heretical. What these
knowledges often document is a set of historical "truths" about struggles that are systematically repressed within totalizing theories, truths that are accessible, nonetheless, within the immediate lives of those engaged in these struggles.

Thus for Foucault and other postmodernists such as Barthes (1975), Bourdieu (1984) and Lyotard (1984), interpretation is an ongoing discursive process that is inherently political. It is this insight that is brought to bear on the social sciences, themselves. To surrender the practice of global theorizing is to question the power to decide whether knowledge is legitimate or illegitimate. This perhaps at least partially accounts for the reluctance within the social sciences to abandon universals and the traditional notion of objectivity that justifies them. A postmodern perspective calls for the deconstruction of universalizing theories in order to privilege the subjugated knowledges and discourses glossed over and denied by global schemes. The postmodern focus therefore is on local interpretations and knowledges and upon the immediate historical context within which they have been constructed. Postmodern theory is actually anti-theory-in-the-traditional-form. So at least on the surface it can appear to be more of a method than a theory, a technique for cultivating subjugated knowledges. Its emphasis is upon diversity, struggle, historical context, and the link between power and truth. Most of all, a postmodern approach does not propose to construct its own unified, comprehensive scheme. Instead, theorizing becomes an ongoing process that allows for the continual articulation of hidden truths and is therefore never ending, never closed, and always partial and situated.
Some have argued that the phrase "postmodern feminism" is a contradiction in terms.\(^1\) This is certainly possible, but not inevitable, depending upon how one defines both feminism and postmodernism. For example, if one's postmodern leanings culminate in a relativist trap that claims all positions to be equal, then the privileging of certain subjugated knowledges, such as those of particular groups of women, will appear incongruent. Another way to look at this is that there is the potential within postmodern perspective to allow the pervasiveness of certain systems of oppression to go unrecognized because of an overcompensated resistance to universalizing. If this happens, then the outcry within many forms of feminism against what appears to be the near ubiquitous effects of patriarchy might be denied. Here postmodernists must be careful to recognize the politics of their own perspectives on local truths. That is, there are political consequences of emphasizing local contexts at the expense of recognizing larger systems of oppression that in some ways span many local contexts. Haraway (1988, p. 588) addresses this point as well, contending that local knowledges "have also to be in tension with the productive structurings that force unequal translations and exchanges - material and semiotic - within the webs of knowledge and power." She proposes that these webs can be systemic and even global in their effects. Therefore, the postmodern inclination to focus on local contexts must also remain open to knowledges that articulate how larger systems of oppression operate, especially when those knowledges are the very ones that have been subjugated. Postmodern feminism therefore focuses on how especially the

\(^1\) See Balbus 1987 for an example of this type of argument.
knowledges and discourses of women have been silenced by patriarchal systems of oppression. Postmodern feminists also emphasize how these oppressive workings of power can be and have been resisted (Smith 1987, 1990; Haraway 1988; Nicholson 1990; Harding 1991; Richardson 1991).

However, the warning that postmodernism issues about the dangers of universalizing and decontextualizing is urgently appropriate in critique of especially some of the white, middle-class versions of feminism that pose gender oppression as the most essential structuring dynamic in society. As third world feminists such as Hooks (1989) and Sandoval (1990) assert, these versions of feminism have replicated some of the very same politically oppressive structurings that underlie the sexist oppression feminists intend to resist. The singular focus on gender has led to the notion that all women share some essential commonality (e.g., Firestone 1970; Daly 1975; Chodorow 1978). There has been a failure to recognize that this conceptual and discursive move, which has the effect of erasing diversity so that one group can claim the power to speak for all, is a mechanism that reinforces all forms of oppression. Those of us with race and class privileges who have too quickly generalized about women's experiences have ignored our own and other women's race and class positionings, as if these were irrelevant. We have used power that has often been institutionally secured in racist and classist ways to speak about sexism, and then we have ignored the realities of women at whose expense we have acquired this power. Accordingly, we have become complicit in racism and classism, as versions of feminism that ignore lesbian differences also have become complicit in
heterosexism. The overall effect within white, Western feminism has been the attempted erasure of women’s lives that are quite different from white, middle-class, heterosexual experiences. Thus many groups of women have had to resist emphatically the disappearance of their lives within Western feminism.

Part of this resistance by third world feminists has involved painstaking efforts to call attention to the ways that white, middle-class feminism has betrayed many groups of women. In the writings of third world feminists such as Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981); Hull, Bell Scott and Smith (1982); Davis (1981, 1984); Lorde (1984); Hooks (1981, 1984, 1989); Trinh (1989); Anzaldúa (1990); Hill Collins (1990); Mohanty (1990), Uttal (1990) and many others, it has been further demonstrated that the implications of taking all systems of oppression seriously involve much more than simple inclusion.² Fundamental theoretical and methodological shifts are implied. Patriarchy is to be seen as inextricable from capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism as these major "webs of knowledge and power" reinforce one another, and are resisted, in contextually specific ways across the globe. Thus racism, classism, sexism and homophobia are manifested in intersected forms that vary tremendously with context. These intersections, and the modes of resistance to them, are therefore continually unfolding.

From this view it is no longer possible to locate power or any other construct or essence within unidimensionally and statically defined identities - individual or group.

² The political analysis that has revealed the racism and classism within white, middle-class feminism has come first from third world feminists. For a similar scrutiny of white feminism by a white feminist, see Spellman 1988.
Power, and what might appear to be essential characteristics of identity such as gender and race, are not carried around inside individual entities, but are constituted differently from one context to another. They are constituted in intersubjective practices that are at once institutional and conceptual. And often these practices constitute different dimensions of identity to be in conflict with one another, resulting in conflict between differently identified groups but also within a single individual. For example, as Davis (1981, 1984) has pointed out, black women in the U.S. have often been pressured to choose between race and gender as the basis for political alignments. However, as Lorde repeatedly warns throughout her writings, especially in *Sister Outsider* (Lorde 1984), to yield to social pressures to ultimately claim one dimension of self identity at the expense of others holds the potential for both political and personal catastrophe. Because systems of oppression reinforce one another, to attempt to resist one while denying another leaves the root of both intact. Meanwhile, to claim all dimensions of identity at once is then to have multiple leverage points from which to exert power for change.

In sum, identities and power are relational, and therefore are constituted differently, depending upon context. No one is inherently woman, of color,

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3 For an excellent demonstration of how "conceptual practices of power" operate within sociology, itself, see Smith 1990.

4 Many writings by third world feminists have addressed such identity conflicts. See, for example, the writings of Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa for very poignant dealings with these dynamics in their lives (Moraga 1983; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983; Anzaldúa 1987, 1990).

5 Further discussion of the implications of identity politics, as well as further citations, appear in the section on "new social movement" theory below.
oppressor or oppressed, but can simultaneously hold apparently contradictory statuses in the same context, depending upon how that context is constituted. Power and identity only appear to be inherent to individuals or groups when political structurings repeatedly reconstitute relationships and cultural conceptions of them in consistent ways. While these constructed appearances have very real consequences, the understanding that they are socially constituted allows for the possibility of change from every relational vantage point.

In her introduction to *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Mohanty (1991) summarizes common points of focus in writings by third world feminists. She notes their emphasis on the "simultaneity of oppressions as fundamental to the experience of social and political marginality" and their call for "the grounding of feminist politics in the histories of racism and imperialism." Mohanty also underscores the insistence in these writings of the recognition of "complex interrelationships between feminist, antiracist and nationalist struggles" (Mohanty 1991, p.10). She proceeds to stress how crucial it is that the histories and resistances of third world peoples be rewritten in accord with their specific locations and contexts.

As Mohanty also points out, this approach to feminism is more one of "philosophy" than the limited, women's rights focus of white, middle-class feminism. It is this philosophical grounding which I hope to bring to bear on my understanding of the oppression experienced by those affected by AIDS and the type of resistance exemplified by the AIDS Memorial Quilt.
CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

Resource Mobilization Perspective

The purpose of this research is to study the AIDS Memorial Quilt in context with, and as a cultural expression of, gay activism. The theoretical orientation that has dominated the study of social movements in the U.S. since the mid-1970s is currently being critiqued precisely for its inability to accommodate an understanding of the cultural dynamics of social movements, and is therefore of limited value to this effort (Ferree and Miller 1986; Snow et al. 1986; Morris and Mueller 1992; Taylor and Whittier unpublished; Whittier forthcoming).

That orientation, the resource mobilization perspective, originally steered away from focus on what was perceived to be the social psychological realm of meaning, valuation and emotions so as to avoid the pitfalls of the approach that preceded it, the classical "hearts and minds of the people" approach (Leites and Wolf 1970). The classical view depicted social movements as one form of collective behavior sharing common characteristics with other forms such as panics, crazes, mass hysteria, fads and crowds. All such instances of collective behavior were seen to be rather dramatic departures from conventional social interaction, resulting from stress or strain in the social order. They were depicted as relatively spontaneous and impulsive, emotional and irrational eruptions in the social fabric that precipitated social change. Thus social movements took on the appearance of unorganized and somewhat primitive manifestations of social unrest, as reflected most blatantly in Hoffer's elitist view of
movement participants as society's outcasts (Hoffer 1951), and as more subtly suggested in Smelser's characterization of the mobilizing myths of social movements as a type of "short-circuited" rationality (Gamson 1975, p.132). From this view, social movements were discontinuous with "normal" social interaction and movement members were different from non-members. Questions centered on what went on in the "hearts and minds" of activists whose common experiences of deprivation gave rise to "grievances" thought to motivate movement participation.

Attempting to avoid the study of social movements as a type of social psychology of deviance, original proponents of the resource mobilization perspective, such as McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977), Oberschall (1973), Gamson (1975) and Tilly (1973, 1975), stressed that social movements should be seen as continuous with other types of social organization and, thus, as involving strategic planning on the part of rational actors. Because these authors tended to be more in sympathy with social movement goals, they proposed organizational analysis as the means by which not only to understand social movements, but to render them more effective and successful. There was a basic shift in attention from internal dynamics and the social psychological realm to the social and political context of movements-as-organizations. What was regarded as key to the success, survival or decline of a movement was its relationship to its environment, particularly the political/economic environment, and the resources to be found there.

The issues, concerns and questions that have become central for resource mobilization proponents have varied markedly from those of the classical approach.
Defining and categorizing resources has become important (Jenkins 1983; Freeman 1979), but because organizational analysis has been the fundamental orientation of these theorists, they have not focused on symbolic or cultural resources. Questions about how movement structure relates to strategy and the accomplishment of goals have also been of primary concern (cf. Gamson 1975; McCarthy and Zald 1973; 1977; Gerlach and Hine 1970).

Another debate has considered whether social movements follow an invariant trend toward greater centralization and bureaucratization, as suggested by the classic Weber-Michels model of organizational development. And another significant structure-related question has had to do with whether movements are mass-based or not. For example, McCarthy and Zald (1973) have argued that the "professional social movement" model more accurately describes contemporary social movements since they tend to consist of full-time professional leadership who actually rely upon outside elites, but attempt to create the image that they represent a large constituency. According to these writers, membership in these social movements is in reality small in number or even nonexistent, except in the form of names on paper. Meanwhile, Morris (1984) has issued a strong challenge to the unqualified use of the "professional social movement" model, and he has cautioned that such a view exaggerates the role of outside elites, overlooks the importance of a well organized indigenous base, and does not take into account the crucial role played by shared symbols and beliefs within movements. Rupp and Taylor (1987) have supported this position in their study of the "elite-sustained" women's movement of the 1950s.
Thus, while the resource mobilization perspective has provided a much needed shift away from the elitism within the collective behavior tradition and toward the analysis of social movement structure and of the political and economic context, this approach still ignores or obscures several important dimensions of social movements. The shortcomings of resource mobilization theory become clearer with a critical look at the rational choice model underlying the perspective and with consideration of the contrasting literature on "new social movements" recently originating in Europe.

In Critique of the Rational Choice Model

Despite the popularity of the resource mobilization approach, warnings have been issued by various social movement analysts about what has been overlooked or obscured by this orientation. Killian (1984) argued that the assumed link between spontaneity and irrationality in resource mobilization writings should be questioned. Perrow (1979), Fireman and Gamson (1979), Killian (1984), Morris (1984), Ferree and Miller (1986), Snow et al. (1986), Taylor (1988), Whittier (1991), Morris and Mueller (1992) and others each pointed to missing aspects of cultural or symbolic dimensions of social movements, among these, values, emotions, and any sense of passionate ideological commitment on the part of political activists. As demonstrated in a recent extensive critique of the rational choice model by Ferree (1992), these omissions are all related to the most basic assumptions of the model.
In relying upon an organizational approach to social movements, the resource mobilization theorists suggest that movement behavior, like other organizational behavior, can and should be viewed in economic terms. That is, collective action is seen as rational, and therefore, by definition, efficient and effective in minimizing costs and maximizing gains for the individual. These assumptions are especially apparent in preoccupations in the literature with Olsen's (1968) "free-rider" problem, an argument that, if prospective movement participants will benefit from the movement whether or not they actually take part, then they will choose not to expend their energy and resources. Defined in economic terms, to be rational is to be unaffected by emotions, values, ambiguity, socially constructed meaning or beliefs that are not cost/benefit oriented. This suggests why resource mobilization writers commonly refer to both grievances and ideology as nonproblematic constants. For the most part, these phenomena take on a flattened, meaningless role in this scheme. The same leveling effect can be seen in reference to "resources", since the qualitative (socially significant) difference between copying machines and charismatic leaders is minimized through the treatment of both under the same label.

As Ferree (1992) explains, in their eagerness to disassociate social movements with irrationality, resource mobilization writers fail to recognize the severe limits of their definition of rationality. They assume that all social behavior is guided by only one of many potential values, that of personal gain. Further, it is assumed that social actors begin from the stance of independent adults who then "rationally" choose whether they will engage in collective action or not on the basis of this ultimate
criteria of individual gain. Thus, in a sense, all actors are regarded as the same, and interchangeable, by virtue of the fact that what motivates them is the same. Social differences in race, class, gender, age, etc., are rendered irrelevant. Indeed, sociality itself is rendered less than fundamental as this model, in the tradition of Hobbesian contract theory, turns social interdependence into the simple matter of individual choice.

In effect, all that can only be recognized as inherent to the realm of the social beyond the "individual" becomes ignored or obscured in the rational choice model - intersubjective definitions of what is real and of value, power relations, social conflict, socially constructed individual and collective identity, etc. Most importantly, the social construction of "rationality" itself is not acknowledged as an ongoing social process that is itself shaped by political and historical dynamics. In other words, the rational choice model fails to see that its definition of rationality cannot simply be posited as "natural", but instead must be understood to be primarily a white, male, middle-class construction that holds political advantages for that group, and maintains oppressive implications for "others".

One way that the definition of rationality in the rational choice model helps to construct the oppression of particular social groups is in setting up of a false opposition between rationality and emotionality. As Ferree (1992) observes, this separation of the rational and the emotional characterizes the collective behavior literature and the resource mobilization literature, alike. Whereas in the classical tradition social movements are denigrated for being too emotional, the resource
mobilization perspective legitimizes social movements by declaring them not to be emotional. In either case, passion and reason are separated and passion is assumed to be inferior.

Objection to this false dualism has been a strong element of feminist theory. As argued by many feminist writers, such as Griffin (1982), Keller (1985), Harding (1986), Young (1987) and Jagger (1989), the separation of emotion and reason coincides with the notion that one can control the uncontrollable by rising above it and separating from it through logic or reason. Meanwhile, those groups in society that are assumed to be less rational and more emotional, and thus in need of control, are not only women generally, but also people of color, lower class "masses", the young and old, the sexually "deviant", and those who are differently-abled developmentally. In short, the separation of emotion and reason is much more than it appears to be on the surface. It is part of a much larger cultural construct that legitimizes oppressive power relations by identifying rationality with superiority and idealizing it as the province of white, middle or upper class, middle-aged, heterosexual men.

Other assumptions underlying the rational choice model also reveal it to be a predominantly white, middle or upper-class, male construction. The image of organizational actors as atomized, independent individuals seeking personal gain coincides with what the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School would see as the prototypical product of "advanced" capitalism as both Weber and Marx described it. But the critical theorists would caution that any theory that explicitly or implicitly
universalizes this view of the social actor fails to recognize it as an historically specific construction resulting form the type of commodity exchange occurring in bureaucratic, capitalistic societies. Feminist theorists take this a step further, maintaining that this conceptualization of the typical social actor is not only relative to historical context, but is also relative to one’s interactional position within that context. In other words, feminist theorists claim that those who maintain that all social interaction is of this nature are blind to the different interactional patterns and experiences of oppressed groups and to the power relations impacting these experiences.

For example, Chodorow (1978) proposes that, while men may tend to hold images of themselves as isolated, independent entities with clearly defined, individualistic boundaries, women tend to conceive of identity in more expanded, relational terms. Gilligan (1982) concurs and further contends that, as a result of a more relational and contextual orientation, women’s moral standards tend not to be individualistically defined in terms of “rights”, as men’s are, but instead reflect more of a sense of responsibility to the whole. From a marxist-feminist perspective, Davis (1971) and Vogel (1973) argue that women’s work in some ways has been less alienated than men’s, giving women more of an experiential foundation for critical consciousness.

It is imperative that each of these statements be contextualized so that it is clear specifically which women in what particular social settings are being referred to here. Otherwise there is the danger of an essentialistic location of difference in gender,
itself, rather than in the social, political and cultural fabric that constructs gender relations simultaneous with race, class and other placements. In other words, decontextualized generalizations about the "typical" female or male social actor are just as problematic as such generalizations about "the social actor". The overall point is a crucial one, that any attempt to universalize "the social actor" contributes to the denial of differences, power relations and oppression, and legitimizes the interests of those using this power of social construction. Meanwhile, in universalizing the social actor as it does, the rational choice model leaves no room for the consideration of social movements as arenas of meaning construction, thus ignoring cultural dimensions of social movements.

Perspectives Considering Cultural Elements of Movements

Although the study of social movements has been dominated by approaches that overlook cultural dimensions of activism, there have been some recent efforts to reincorporate cultural analysis into social movement theory. As noted by Taylor and Whittier (1992), current writings on various facets of culture such as ritual (Kemper 1981; Wuthnow 1987) and discourse (Wuthnow 1989; Gamson 1990; Johnston 1991; Hunt and Benford, unpublished;) suggest important directions for analyses of culture and activism. Two approaches that have attempted to reintegrate emphasis upon culture are the literatures on frame analysis and on "new social movements."
Frame Analysis. In the latest of one series of efforts to move beyond the deficiencies of resource mobilization perspective⁶, Snow and Benford (1988b, p.5) critique the treatment of ideas and meanings (or lack thereof) by the resource mobilization perspective as "misguided." They point out that this perspective approaches meanings as given, failing to see them as socially produced in interactive processes. They also note that resource mobilization writers fail to recognize that social movements are struggles over the production of meanings. As a corrective, these authors propose to look at social movements as active agents of meaning construction. To do so, they build upon Goffman's (1974) notions about framing to suggest the concept of "collective action frames", defined as "emergent action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns"(Snow and Benford 1988b, p.6). They introduce the concept of master frames to describe generic paradigm-like modes of interpretation that function to connect and make sense of patterns and events on a relatively large scale, thus having mobilizing potential for different movements at the same time. With the use of the concept of master frames, Snow and Benford move the utility of the concept of framing to the macro level, suggesting that there are interconnections to be made among master frames, cycles of protest, and the availability of economic and political resources.

⁶ Earlier essays leading in this direction include Snow, et al., 1986 and Snow and Benford 1988a.
One of the functions served by master frames is the attribution of blame for the problems suffered by the aggrieved group in question. According to Snow and Benford, a crucial factor effecting movement mobilization is whether blame is constructed to be personal and individual, or to be structural. With this notion, Snow and Benford join several other social movement writers in recognizing the importance of considering the attribution of blame in understanding how, why and when social movements mobilize (Turner 1969; Gamson 1975; Piven and Cloward 1977; Mueller 1987; Melucci 1985; Taylor and Whittier 1992). Although similar considerations within marxian traditions have revolved around the notion of ideology, these writers choose the concept of collective action frames over ideology, first of all critiquing the treatment of ideology in the social movement literature as too descriptive, static, and inconsequential. They then propose what they see to be important gains in the avoidance of the concept of ideology. Such gains include more focus upon the emergent and processual dimensions of meaning construction.

This application of the concept of framing to movement activity takes the study of social movements in several critical directions. The focus on movements as ongoing processes of meaning construction accomplished in interaction with other agents of construction is invaluable. The articulation of concepts such as "master frames" not only begins to provide a framework with which to approach cultural factors, but does so in such a way as to recognize meaning construction as macro level phenomena, and not solely the province of social psychology. Further, Snow and Benford make important connections between their own insights and those of the resource
mobilization perspective by suggesting potential ways in which cultural factors interact with economic and political ones.

Still, this approach represents only a beginning, leaving fundamental questions as yet unanswered. For example, there is no accounting for where frames come from or how they "emerge". How and why the actual content of collective action frames take the shape that they do, and how power enters into their construction, are other questions that are not addressed. There are no connections made between collective action frames and the relational forms or modes of exchange that characterize their interactive context, as is the case in the marxian reference to ideology. In other words, important links between cultural and structural forms are not made. Consequently, although Snow and Benford invoke Hall's (1982) notion of the "politics of signification" as relevant to the meaning construction taking place in social movements, their theory does not offer any assessment of how meaning construction becomes political. Furthermore, in the concept of framing there is no deliberate reintegration of the emotional, as well as the cognitive, facets of meaning construction.

New Social Movement Theory. The close interrelationship between cultural forms and their economic/political, historical contexts has been the focus of those who might be called "post-marxian" political analysts of Western Europe. These writers have identified trends within contemporary capitalist industrial societies that, according to analysts such as Melucci (1980; 1985; 1989), Pizzorno (1978; 1985), Touraine (1985), Cohen (1985), Offe (1985), and Klandermans (1986), have given
rise to "new social movements". Key to understanding why these writers characterize some contemporary movements as "new" is a close look at what they see to be new facets of Western capitalist industrial (or referred to by Touraine and Melucci as "postindustrial") societies.

What the new social movement theorists emphasize as the most consequential dimension of contemporary Western industrial societies is the increasing encroachment of political regulation and control within what were previously thought to be more independent realms of social life. This invasion of "private" realms is especially accomplished through the politics of cultural representation, articulated through institutions such as the media, law, education, medicine and psychiatry, and science. Melucci (1980, pp. 217-218) points out that production in this context becomes the production and control of information and "symbol-formation", resulting even in "the production of the individual's biological and interpersonal identity". He suggests that such trends correspond to the fact that production and consumption within postindustrial societies is mediated by immense and intricate informational and symbolic systems, requiring the acute integration of economic, political and cultural structures. These societies ironically depend upon the construction of autonomous individuals and groups who can receive and produce information, but also upon the ever more intimate manipulation and control of the everyday thoughts, desires and motivations of individuals (Melucci 1985, pp. 795-796).

Offe (1985, pp. 844-847) summarizes three relevant processes associated with late capitalism: the "broadening" of political regulation beyond class-specific realms to
the everyday lives of all members of society, thus causing deprivation for citizens, clients and consumers as well as workers; the "deepening" of social control into the most intimate spheres of life; and the "irreversibility" of this process due to the fact that economic and political institutions effecting such control have lost any capacity for self-limitation or correction. Offe suggests that these trends are connected to the fact that contemporary Western political economies respond to conflicts with "solutions" that simply shift the cost to other groups in society, as in shifting the costs of wage conflicts to cuts in social programs. With this, locuses of deprivation are dispersed, avenues of regulation are extended, and the inability of the system to anticipate the consequences of the use of such power puts the system continuously on the verge of catastrophe.

Given this economic and political context, new social movement theorists propose that today's movements are primarily directed at the reconstruction of cultural and symbolic systems of representation, focusing on issues of identity, among others. Melucci (1985, pp. 799-801) maintains that these movements represent a "morphological shift in the structure of collective action", displaying multiple membership, part-time and short-term militantism and affective solidarity. He emphasizes that new movements are typically a network of separate small groups engaged in cultural innovation, who visibly emerge only as they mobilize around specific issues. Meanwhile, new cultural constructions are latently created and experienced through a submerged network that exchanges books, magazines, radio

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7 This point is originally made by Habermas (1981, p. 513).
programs, etc. Cultural constructions defining identity are of central concern. And because it is recognized within contemporary movements that how identities get defined has everything to do with how group processes are structured, the new organizational form of movements is itself as much a deliberate goal as any other. The movement is self-reflexively structured to be a challenge to dominant codes and practices that result in oppressive constructions of identity. Because these organizational forms are quite different from more traditional ones, encompassing both formal and informal relationships, Melucci prefers to characterize them as movement networks instead of social movements.

Pizzorno’s (1978) treatment of the identity orientation of new social movements takes shape by way of a dichotomy he sets up between new social movements and more established collective actors such as unions and parties. He characterizes one in contrast to the other, suggesting that new social movements involve "expressive" action, nonnegotiable demands and direct participation, while more established collective actors usually engage instrumental rationality, negotiation and representation. Pizzorno suggests that identity formation is necessary in early stages of collective action and that, once identity is established, the "expressiveness" that marks this stage gives way to more strategic, rational action. Pizzorno’s argument is a relatively early discussion of new social movements that serves the purpose of beginning to qualify the single-mindedness of resource mobilization perspective. However, several writers, including Touraine (1985) and Cohen (1985), then critique Pizzorno’s thesis as too simplistic, dualistic and linear.
In this regard, Cohen (1985, p. 694) suggests that the characterizing feature of new social movements is "that they involve actors who have become aware of their capacity to create identities and of power relations involved in their social construction." Thus Cohen, following Touraine and in agreement with Melucci, emphasizes reflexivity with regard to identity construction as being a central component of new social movements.

Offe (1985, p. 829) proposes that these movements involve modes of action that often blur lines of demarcation between former dualisms, such as expressive/instrumental. With reference to relationships internal to the collectivity, itself, Offe contends that new social movements are structured so as to fuse expressive and instrumental behavior, as well as public and private roles, community and organization, and membership and leadership. He further characterizes the internal structure of new social movements as "highly informal, ad hoc, discontinuous, context-sensitive and egalitarian."

More generally, Offe (1985, p. 826) maintains that these movements "politicize themes which cannot easily be 'coded' within the binary code of the universe of social action that underlies liberal political theory". They direct themselves to issues that can neither be considered purely public or private, and therefore act to reconstitute the intermediate sphere of 'civil society'. For example, significant issues include the social construction of sexuality, health, cultural and ethnic heritage, conditions for overall survival, and the implications within all these for definitions of identity. Meanwhile, according to Offe, the values that guide responses to these issues are not
really new. They center upon personal autonomy and dignity, emphasizing
decentralization and deregulation, values that are of "modern", not "postmodern"
ways of thinking. And like Pizzorno, Offe suggests that, because they have to do
with the process of identity formation, the corresponding demands of new social
movements tend to be nonnegotiable. Several new social movement theorists speak
of contemporary movements as self-limiting. According to these writers, movement
goals tend to stand in contrast to the revolutionary intentions of the New Left,
focusing instead upon the renewal of democracy and its political culture. Cohen
(1985) points out that contemporary movement actors therefore do not necessarily
renounce the egalitarian and democratic principles of civil society, but struggle to
extend autonomy within this context. Cohen also submits that social movement actors
are self-limiting as a result of their willingness to relativize their values in relationship
to one another during the course of constructing goals together.

Within new movement writings, there is attention given to the social
characteristics of those who become involved in this political work. It is suggested
that new social movement actors tend not to be the most deprived groups in society,
often consisting of members of the new middle class who have experienced strong
educational backgrounds and histories of relative economic security (Offe 1985;
Cohen 1985). Certain elements of the old middle class, such as the self-employed,
also find themselves in alliance within these movements. And according to Offe
(1985, p.834), an important component is a group which he refers to as "peripheral"
or "decommodified", actors who are not defined in relationship to the labor market,
such as students, middle-class homemakers and the unemployed. Even though there is some consistency with regard to class representation in new movements, a common observation is that these movements do not view themselves in terms of class. With civil society being the focus of collective action instead of the economy or the state, their identities take shape in issue-specific ways. Cohen (1985) warns, however, that there is a great deal of heterogeneity in contemporary movements, and that it would be misleading to over-generalize about them.

The writings of new social movement theorists offer a multitude of insights that come when movements are placed within a broad historical context, and the economic, political and symbolic/cultural elements of that context are seen in interrelationship to one another. The fact that new social movement theory restores attention to culture, symbols and meaning in movement activity, without the elitist trappings of the classical approach, represents an invaluable gain for social movement research. Resulting considerations of such issues as identity formation within movements, self-reflexivity, attempts for consistency between movement structure and message, and implications of these and other issues for how theorists define social movements all suggest promising directions.

At the same time, new social movement theory carries some of the same hazards that can be found in its marxist and neomarxist lineage. It poses broad generalizations about the impact of socio-historical developments within society, suggesting that the consequences are experienced in common by all members of society. Positional differences having to do with ongoing constructions around race,
class, gender, sexuality and other lines of demarcation are not recognized as significant in their implications for how socio-historical developments are both experienced and resisted. Although Cohen (1985) warns of the potential in the "identity-oriented paradigm" to impose homogeneity where there is actually a great deal of heterogeneity, and he emphasizes the importance of approaching the study of movements hermeneutically so as to allow differences of experience within movements to become a topic of study, most new social movement writers are not as careful in their approaches. The general tendency is to make an immediate link between "new" historical forms and common characteristics of "new" social movements.

The implications of this type of glossing are significant. This discursive move on the part of new social movement writers is not entirely unlike that of western scholars, often feminist, in their analysis of "third world women", as described by Mohanty (1991) in her essay, "Under Western Eyes." Mohanty (1991, p.6) demonstrates that, by treating "third world women" as if they were a unitary group, and then stereotypically identifying this group with indicators that suggest underdevelopment, such as illiteracy, poverty and overpopulation, western scholars "freeze third world women in time, space and history." In this way, western scholars depict third world women without all the diversity, autonomy, agency and resistance that characterize the very distinct and contextually specific lives of women across the world. Mohanty thus shows that, while it is important to have information about the economic, political and cultural dimensions of the broad historical context within
which groups of women find themselves, to assume uniformity in how this context is engaged in particular settings has specific political consequences. Western construction of "third world women" in this way becomes yet another contemporary form of the colonization.

The political effects of such a discursive move directed at "new social movements" must be seen as quite different from the effects of such a move directed at "third world women" because the race, class, gender and nation-based elements of the political relationship between scholars and "subjects" in each case are so decisively different. Yet, a similar kind of "freezing" effect can be detected in the way that "new social movements" get constructed by theorists. By conceptualizing movements in terms of common responses to a shared historical experience, new social movement theorists lock movement conceptualization into homogeneous characterizations that correspond to theorists' perceptions of that shared experience. New movements are then implied to be logically consistent with the present context, or are explicitly stated to be the most rational responses to such a context (see Cohen 1985, p. 667). The fluidity and diversity within these movements becomes masked.

In other words, what is neglected is the actual process by which elements of the larger context take specific forms in particular settings, and the way that context is interpreted and acted upon by movement groups. The diversity in organizational forms taken in particular settings is also sacrificed to a macro-level, static description of commonly shared features of movement organizations. The epistemological question of how structure and consciousness are linked is addressed at the macro level
when new social movement theorists speak to the features of the societal-level structural context that set in place conditions for resistance. But the links between movement structure and consciousness are only addressed through the implication that movement structures are deliberately chosen to be part of the symbolic message of new social movements. What is needed is to bring into the foreground the ongoing interplay between specific forms of exchange and consciousness within movements.

Furthermore, there is also a blindness to the significance of other efforts for social change that are not easily recognized through the conceptual lenses of the theory. For example, new social movement theory proposes that, due to the relative economic security of contemporary Western European societies and the U.S., the economic and political realms are no longer the primary arenas of contest, and class issues no longer retain as much relevance. As Epstein (1990 p.48) cautions, this leads to the tendency of new social movement theorists to overlook working class activism among those who still have not experienced the "relative economic security" of postindustrial societies. Epstein also notes that there is the tendency in new social movement theory to respond to the failure within these movements to relate to the working class as a virtue.

Another central tenet of new social movement theory is the notion that state intervention in what were once considered to be private realms of social life (such as in areas having to do with identity, family, reproductive rights, etc.) is relatively recent and calls for "new" forms of response. Meanwhile, Hurtado (1989) makes the important point that the public/private distinction actually is only relevant to the
experiences of white middle and upper classes. She explains that the state has always intervened in the private lives of the working class and women of color in the U.S.

Again, this suggests that the generalizations of new social movement theory are not relevant to all groups, but are specific to white, middle and upper-class, European and U.S. (and I would argue predominantly male) experience. In essence, new social movement theory uses a white, privileged-class lens to detect predominantly white, privileged-class efforts for social change, setting up a limited number of recent movements as the prototypes of response to an historical context that is constructed through the same lens.

Meanwhile, a number of critical questions must be raised if both historical context and social activism are viewed from different vantage points. For example, given that state intervention has long been integral to the lives of the working class and people of color, what forms has resistance taken among these groups? Are the organizational forms described by white, middle-class movement theorists necessarily relevant to these groups? If not, what might be the implications for definitions of social movements? Do working class activists and people of color look upon their efforts for change as reformist? Do they see the primary target of change to be the arena of discourse? Is identity as central to these forms of activism, and how might identity issues be defined very differently by these groups? And perhaps most important, how do white, male, middle and upper-class, U.S. and European constructions of social movements undermine the efforts for social change of those acting from different positions in society? Recognition of the fact that such
constructions render these efforts for social change invisible is only the first step in addressing this last question.

While it is not within the scope of this project to investigate and answer all of these questions, it is my contention that these are some of the most crucial issues presently facing the study of social movements. And to demonstrate the relevance of these issues, some initial observations are in order. Sivanandan (1990) has been critical of new social movements precisely for their identity politics and their consequent definition of "discourse" as the primary sphere of contest for social change. His argument is that the needs of the poorest and most exploited people of the world should guide our definitions and efforts for social change, and these needs demand that we not forfeit our attention to class dynamics in the process of a preoccupation with identity. Mohanty (1991, p. 11) echoes this urgent point, emphasizing that any attention to discourse should also be "grounded in and informed by the material politics of everyday life, especially the daily life struggles for poor people - those written out of history." This argument not only becomes a critique of new social movements, but also of movement scholars who set up these movements as the prototype of contemporary efforts for social change.

Critique of identity politics has often come from those groups for whom identity and its community alignments could never be taken for granted, as it has been for those of us white, middle-class women of the U.S. whose identity politics too easily became solely defined by our own specific experiences of gender oppression. Those whose lived experiences and resulting political commitments could not simply be
defined only in accord with being a woman, or of color, or a lesbian, or working
class, but sometimes all of these at once, have become especially attuned to the
1984), Trinh (1988; 1989), Sandoval (1982) as well as Mohanty (1991) are but a few
of the third world feminists writing in the U.S. who expose the dangers inherent in
identity politics of creating exclusive categories that only serve to reinforce racist,
(hetero)sexist and classist avenues of oppression. These issues will be addressed in
more detail with regard to their methodological implications for this research and in
the concluding chapters as they become relevant to gay activism and the quilt.
However, for now, the significance of these issues in relationship to new social
movement theory revolves around the following questions: Why does activism on the
part of those who critique identity politics not get detected by new social movement
theorists as social movement activity? Why is this critique of identity politics not
incorporated into the theoretical perspective on “new social movements”?

All of this is not to say that new social movement theory does not have a great
deal to offer, especially with regard to its insights into historical
economic/political/cultural context, and its perceptions about specific types of
contemporary movements. However, as these points of critique suggest, there are
cautions to be taken about some of the assumptions underlying new social movement
theory. These assumptions have significant political implications for what does and

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8 See also Phelan 1989 for a provocative discussion of the problems with identity
politics from a lesbian feminist perspective.
does not get perceived as social activism and therefore whose activist voices get heard and taken seriously by those who study social movements.

**Summary**

I have argued that the resource mobilization perspective assumes that rational choice is what renders all movement behavior meaningful. The social process of meaning accomplishment in its myriad of potential directions is not considered. Further, "rationality" and "emotionality" are falsely dichotomized because of the failure to recognize that both these terms refer to differently labelled and evaluated facets of shared meaning. Because a sociological understanding of the AIDS Memorial Quilt requires attention to culture with its simultaneous "emotionality" and "rationality", resource mobilization theory offers little to my analysis.

I have also suggested that, while the concept of framing moves social movement research toward consideration of meaning accomplishment, it is only a beginning that offers a label and an initial description of the process. Meanwhile, all that has to do with the actual content of constructed meaning and the political influences on how this gets done is not addressed.

On the other hand, new social movement theorists do articulate some of the integral connections between economics, politics and culture in the overall historical context of contemporary movements. These writers suggest why many contemporary movements target the politics of cultural representation within the realm of civil society, and especially attempt to redirect discourse having to do with identity
construction. Some of these analysts also at least begin to address the link between structure and consciousness, noting how movement structures tend to be consistent with their intended messages. However, these messages and their corresponding structures are assumed to be common responses to what is seen as a consistent postmodern context. That is, one assumption of new social movement theorists is that the patterns they perceive in the broad, macro context get played out uniformly in local settings so as to elicit common interpretive and structural responses. This creates a blindness to the cultural and structural diversity in local efforts for social change and to the actual, ongoing processes through which culture and structure are linked. It is these neglected questions that my study of the AIDS Memorial Quilt explores. In other words, the theoretical perspective that guides this analysis allows us to understand the specific structuring of relationships that has accompanied the creation of the AIDS Memorial Quilt as a form of cultural expression and to analyze the intended and unintended effects of this linkage of structure and culture.

Ferree (1992) suggests that precisely this type of focus on structure and culture will take social movement research beyond the limits of resource mobilization perspective. She argues that it is time to recognize that different forms of social organization accompany different types of rationality, and that many contemporary movements are not instrumentally-rational, as resource mobilization theory suggests, but are value-rational, attempting to construct affective bonds that are valued for their own sake. Ferree draws on Weber's distinction between instrumental and value rationality to underscore her point that the more obvious affectivity or emotion within
value-rationality does not contradict its rationality. She recommends that social
movement research look to types of exchange other than commodity exchange, such
as gift exchange, as the structural forms likely to accompany value-rationality.

One of the terms most often used in reference to the AIDS Memorial Quilt by its
originators is "gift." Because the quilt is a gift that has such emotional connotations,
it provides a rare opportunity to utilize theories of gift exchange to understand the
structural and cultural facets of the movement actions and tactics.

THEORIES OF GIFT EXCHANGE

Because gift giving has been associated with preindustrial societies, most studies
of gift exchange have been anthropological. Mauss (1967), nephew and student of
Emile Durkheim, is attributed with the first comprehensive study of gift exchange
entitled The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies. In this
work Mauss (1967, p. 1) emphasizes that gift exchange is to be understood as a "total
social phenomena" through which "all kinds of institutions find simultaneous
expression: religious, legal, moral and economic."

Mauss (1967, p. 1) goes on to propose that, although gift giving in these societies
is assumed to be "voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous," the practice is actually
founded upon obligation and self interest. He suggests that there are three obligations
that generate circulation in gift economies, the obligations to give, to receive and to
reciprocate. He then poses what he sees to be the most central question about gift
giving: what force is there within the gift which compels its return? Because Mauss uses a phenomenological approach and focuses on ethnographic data, his answer comes directly from the Maori concept of the hau, which translates into "the spirit of the thing given." Mauss characterizes the hau as the spiritual essence of the giver, alive and sometimes personified within the gift, and always striving to bring an equivalent return to its place of origin. Further, the hau is connected to power since the latest recipient of a gift or of an equivalent or greater return is dominated by the most recent donor. Overall, Mauss sees gift exchange in early societies as a way of establishing political and economic order without the use of warfare.

In his book *Stone Age Economics*, Sahlians (1972) summarizes critiques of Mauss's theory of gift exchange and particularly his notion of the hau, as assessed by Levi-Strauss, Firth and Johansen. According to Sahlians, Levi-Strauss sees Mauss's otherwise cogent analysis to be marred by his mystical preoccupation with the hau resulting from his reliance upon ethnographic data that puts credence in the experiences and reports of "natives." Levi-Strauss (1966, p. 38) argues that this keeps Mauss from recognizing the full structuralist implications of exchange. Firth (1959, p. 421) also maintains that the obligation inherent to the hau should be interpreted in a less spiritual fashion, specifically as a result of social sanctions securing the continuation of "useful economic relations (and) the maintenance of prestige and power." Finally, Sahlians observes that Johansen (1954) also questions Mauss's interpretation of the hau but concludes that the actual meaning of the hau will probably never be known.
Beyond this, Sahlins (1972, p. 157) offers his own explanation of the *hau* in economic terms as the "return on," the "product of" or the "yield on" the original gift. He notes that the Maori use of the term *hau* is always in reference to an exchange among at least three parties. He proposes that if the *hau* referred to the spirit of the giver, then it would be just as applicable to a two-party exchange. But because there must be a third, the *hau* must have to do with an increase on the original gift that follows from a second exchange. Thus the obligation inherent to the *hau* is a moral obligation not to gain at someone else’s expense, that is, to give back to the original donor the increase on the gift. In this way, Sahlins offers what he calls a "secular" interpretation of the *hau*. He, like Firth and Levi-Strauss, dismisses as mystical and faulty Mauss’s view that the *hau* can be linked to the spiritual essence of the giver.

In a recent counter in this debate, Weiner (1985) explains that scholars such as Firth and Sahlins overlook Mauss’s important classification of "immeuble" objects, or what Weiner refers to as inalienable wealth. Such wealth is that which remains attached to its original owner. This is accomplished in a gift community either by keeping such wealth out of circulation altogether, or by circulating this wealth under specific circumstances. For example, the object might be given on loan, or circulated with it understood that another object of the same kind will be returned.

The importance of certain forms of wealth remaining attached to original owners has to do with the objects' socially constructed power to give material presence to the historical identity of the owners. Like an heirloom, inalienable wealth embodies the
ancestral and mythical history of a people. Therefore its continued circulation secures the ongoing identity of that people as such wealth becomes the concrete link between past, present and future. Paradoxically, however, while the ongoing construction of identity depends upon the circulation of the object, its power to signify identity is maintained and enhanced with simultaneous limitations on circulation. To keep the valuable out of circulation in some ways is to add value to it. Thus some resolution to the dilemma of how to "keep while giving" is key to the construction of the value of the object (Weiner 1985, p.223). The more restrictions there are on an object's circulation, the more sacredness is conferred upon it. Through the object, which is more than its materiality, the owner's self is enlarged and her/his mortality is transcended in the connection to the power of the past. Group immortality is attained. As a repository of history and identity, the object itself has power that cannot be explained solely as a function of its exchange. This power therefore goes beyond its economic value and its ability to affirm social relations. "Keeping while giving" becomes an essential technique of maintaining one’s social identity in the face of threat or loss.

Weiner emphasizes that, among the Maori, the hau, or the personal life force of a gift's donor, could not be found in all gifts, but existed specifically in those classified as taonga. Taonga were inalienable wealth which were considered to be carriers of the hau. Two main categories of taonga were Maori cloaks and stone taonga made of nephrite. In important rituals, especially those associated with birth and death, cloaks, cloths or threads were seen to actively manifest the hau of a person. In death,
sometimes weeping occurred over the cloak of a person as if it were the corpse. Because weaving and rituals surrounding cloaks and threads were especially the province of women, birth and death, the gods, ancestors, cloth and women all became connected within Maori cloaks as taonga. Weiner suggests that this may be the reason that male anthropologists overlooked the significance of cloaks as taonga, in particular, and Mauss’s notion of "immeuble" wealth, in general. She concludes that Mauss’s interpretation of the hau is not mystical, and that the force within the hau to return to its owner is not economic. It is a "force against loss, securing a group’s individual strengths and identities against the demands of others" (Weiner 1985, p.224). Overall, her emphasis is upon the importance of "keeping while giving" in the creation of wealth that embodies identity and gives it immortality.

In another recent effort to articulate a theory of gift giving, Hyde (1983, p.xv) draws upon the work of Mauss, Sahlins and other anthropologists, but also looks to folk tales about gift giving to provide more of an "interior language" about gift giving. Hyde seeks out this interior language because it is important to his primary purpose of drawing connections between art and gift. More precisely, Hyde’s intent is to demonstrate how the giftedness of art distinguishes it from commodity. His hope is to "write an economy of the creative spirit: to speak of the inner gift that we accept as the object of our labor, and the outer gift that has become a vehicle of culture" (Hyde 1983, p. xvii).

It is important to note that Hyde has no intention of empirically describing gift giving in all the various forms that it takes. His goal is to articulate the potential and
at times the actual social implications of a particular form of gift giving, one that involves the least control over the gift and its recipients once the gift is given. It is in this form of gift giving that Hyde finds a framework with which both to make sense of and encourage "an economy of the creative spirit." Meanwhile, Hyde’s focus is not upon gift giving as a potential form of dominance or social control, or as a mechanism by which political hierarchies are established and maintained. He notes the importance of recognizing this potential in gift exchange but leaves it to others to provide the complement to his more interior and "optimistic" approach. While Hyde’s tendency to speak of gift giving as if it could exist in a pure form separate from structures of domination must be questioned, still his insights into the creative potential of art-as-gift are particularly valuable to approaching the AIDS Memorial Quilt as social movement culture.

One of the essential characteristics of gift exchange, according to Hyde, is continual motion of the gift that involves the passing on of either the original gift or its fruits. If a gift’s movement is stopped somehow, if the worth of the gift is hoarded in one place, then the gift loses those properties which make it gift. Thus the ethics of gift giving commonly have it that one person’s gift must not be another’s profit. The social flow established in gift giving must not be stopped for individual gain. Often among tribal peoples this movement is circular, involving the passing of the gift from the donor to a first recipient and then on to at least one other, and usually more. One can speak of gift giving between two people, but this is only the simplest form of gift exchange, according to Hyde. Circular giving differs from reciprocal giving with
regard to the crucial element of control. If giving is circular, there is no direct return of the gift to the donor from the immediate recipient. This giving is a type of blind letting go to the whole with the trust that there will be a return but with little control over the return. As Hyde suggests, in circular giving there is no room for discussion. The gift's movement "is beyond the control of the personal ego, and so each bearer must be part of the group and each donation is an act of social faith" (Hyde 1983, p.16).

In this way, gift giving is a relational form in which there is the possibility of a constructed experience of connectedness or interdependence, and the social implications here contrast sharply with those of commodity exchange. In commodity exchange there is the tendency for the invested social subject to be constructed as individual, separate, atomized, independent and self-contained in competition with other such entities. This subject loses sight and experience of the larger social context. "Identity" is atomized, constructed in competition and conflict between "self" and "other." In contrast, the interdependence or connectedness potentially constructed within gift exchange relativizes the boundaries of the "self," and there is a structural basis for a sense of shared meaning, communal "spirit," collectivized identity and a more integrated experience/ consciousness of the whole.

Hyde emphasizes the emotive implications of gift giving, asserting that, as gift giving expands social boundaries, including boundaries of the "self," the connectedness established is very much at the level of feelings. The exchange is emotive; it moves or motivates people to respond. In Hyde's (1983, p.56) words, "It
is the cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange that gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people, while the sale of a commodity leaves no necessary connection." This "feeling-bond" not only happens between two people, but in a gift community it occurs in the larger social context, resulting in a moving experience of shared meaning and communal spirit. In this regard, Hyde refers to the synthetic, integrating and unifying effects of gift giving as "erotic" in contrast with the boundary-narrowing, atomizing and analytic "logos" effects of commodity exchange.

Part of the feeling response evoked in gift giving is gratitude. Hyde speaks of gratitude in terms of "labor" and "transformation." In this way he demonstrates that gratitude is much more than simply an inclination to repay or pass on a material object once it has been received. The social flow created in gift exchange is not only the flow of material things. It is also a communicative flow of symbolism and meaning relevant to various cultural definitions and experiences, including that of "self." Therefore acceptance of a gift involves being moved to recognize and come to terms with the expression within the gift, allowing for the personal transformation that is required, and responding in turn to that expression in accord with how one has been moved. According to Hyde the recipient thus feels compelled to pass on her or his own expression and labors creatively to do so. As this new gift is given away, the social flow is continued and the original gift is "consumed," but not without a return to the original donor of the material and/or symbolic acknowledgement of the original gift.
Here Hyde stresses that the movement of a gift is practically synonymous with its consumption. Yet he is clear that his use of the word consumption is not to be confused with the meaning of this term in the context of commodity exchange. In the latter case, there is the hoarding of goods by the individual, which leads not necessarily to their full use, but often to their waste. In gift exchange goods are consumed not by owners, but by their exchange. Ironically, gifts increase with their consumption, resulting in a commerce of abundance instead of scarcity. Food itself as a common gift within many societies provides the prototypical example of how gifts increase and nourish with their consumption. Hyde explains that gifts can increase in three ways.

First, gifts that are actually alive increase with their growth. For example, when resources of nature are treated as gifts, there is always a partial return of the gift to its source so that the source is never exhausted, as in the fertilization of land or the replanting of trees. Hyde suggests that to treat nature’s renewable wealth as gift involves recognizing our dependence and connectedness to nature and responding with the attitude of respect that comes with gratitude for the gift. Unfortunately, the U.S. provides examples at every turn of what happens to the increase of the gift when it is approached as commodity and its source is exhausted.

Further, (Hyde 1983, p. 37) speaks of the increase of gifts as "a natural-spiritual fact (when gifts are the agents of a spirit that survives the consumption of its individual embodiments).” Here part of the increase results from adding to the gift out of generosity, gratitude or goodwill. Hyde uses the potlatches (gift-giving
ceremonies) among the North Pacific tribes in illustration. A typical potlatch began with one tribe inviting another to a feast and offering them a gift of a copper decorated plaque. The second tribe then offered a return gift (blankets, for example) in the general worth of the copper as acknowledged by both tribes. Once the return gift was in place, the second tribe then added to their return gift (more blankets) out of generosity and the intent to establish their higher status, since generosity and status were always associated. In this way, there was an actual material increase in the gift. Yet there was also a spiritual and social increase because the material exchanged became the vehicle or medium of the social expression of goodwill.

Thus Hyde points out that the third way in which the gift increases is in the social bondedness that results from the individual expressions of goodwill. In Hyde’s (1983, p.37) words, "to speak of the increase of gifts is to speak of something simultaneously material, social and spiritual." Following Sahlins, Hyde further states that the increase on a gift is contingent upon its movement from a second to a third party, the increase or the fruits of the gift being gifts themselves. Like Sahlins, Hyde emphasizes a distinction between this increase and profit in capitalist commodity exchange. Whereas in gift exchange the increase stays in motion with the gift, in commodity exchange the "sector of increase" is not ahead but behind in the form of retained profit.

At the group level, the cohesion attained in gift exchange can be seen as a type of "anarchist stability," according to Hyde. The social ties established are not organized and enforced within a hierarchical, authoritarian structure, as in bureaucratic groups.
They are not founded upon the legal sanctions of contract, but upon the noncoercive momentum of the social experience of gratitude, which results in structuring that is decentralized. Hyde explains that because the exactitude, codification, calculation and reciprocality which characterize legal-rational interactions are not the basis for gift giving, in the less defined and controlled arena of gift exchange, gratitude becomes that which provides social cohesion. On the other hand, the more gift relationships are converted to legal-rational ones, the more affective meaning gets separated from the exchange process and the circle of the gift is narrowed.

Finally, Hyde focuses on what he refers to as "threshold gifts," gifts that are especially strategic in their purpose of symbolizing change, transformation, or movement from one state to another. Shower gifts, birthday presents, graduation, wedding and retirement gifts all exemplify threshold gifts that construct essential change. Gifts given in the event of a death illustrate particularly well the significance of threshold gifts since all change can be viewed as involving death in some fashion or to some degree. For this reason, Hyde (1983, p.44) highlights "death gifts," explaining that they "make visible the giving up we do invisibly." He adds that, because death gifts signify hope for gain to come from loss, they are the "promise of what lies ahead" and they "guide us toward new life, assuring our passage away from what is dying." Again, Hyde stresses here that such a gift acts as a catalyst or an agent of change and new life. The acceptance of this gift has an altering effect on the recipient because to receive the gift is to take on a new identity. Such a transformation takes time, and in this time one "suffers gratitude." It is only when
the transformation has taken place that the gift can then be passed on and the "labor of gratitude" is complete (Hyde 1983, p.44).

The power and social significance of gratitude central to Hyde's thesis is also earlier articulated in the important work of Simmel (1950). Simmel (1950, p.389) refers to gratitude as "one of the most powerful means of social cohesion" through which the bond of interaction is continued beyond the forces that initiated the relationship. Simmel explains that there is such power in gratitude because gift giving, unlike commodity exchange, involves not only the exchange of material things, but also the exchange of personal subjectivities, especially when the gift is not separated from the giver. Simmel points out that the subjectivity of the giver is especially manifest when a gift is first offered in a relationship, because the person who first gives is not acting out of any external necessity. Once an initial gift has been given, any following gifts can be seen as at least in part prompted by indebtedness for the original gift. Therefore, no matter how superior the content of a returned gift, the original gift cannot be matched because of its unique expression of subjectivity. Simmel suggests that this is part of the reason why gratitude is so "peculiarly irredeemable," and why some people avoid the acceptance of gifts.

In his social psychological perspective on gift giving, Schwartz (1967) gives strong emphasis to the idea that gifts generate identity, not only for the giver but also for the recipient. Schwartz proposes that gifts are objectifications of the identity of the giver, but they also disclose how the giver views the identity of the recipient. He illustrates here just how interrelated the identities of giver and receiver are. If the
gift is received and a return gift offered, then the norm of reciprocity is fulfilled, which signifies the recipient's recognition and acceptance of the relationship with the giver. This confirmation of the relationship also then has an impact on the identities of both giver and receiver. Ironically, there is also the implicit code that a gift will not be returned too immediately and that it will not be too close in value to the first, for this implies the unwillingness on the part of the recipient for there to be the emotional tie that gratitude suggests. Further, if a single gift is given to recipients in relationship to one another, as in the case of wedding presents, the gift sanctions the relationship as significant to the identities of the recipients, and accordingly impacts the identities of all involved, including the giver. Thus gift movement simultaneously constructs identities, social bondedness and group boundaries. Schwartz (1967, p.9) notes that "gratitude binds not only the living, but connects the living and the dead as well." However, because reciprocation cannot take place in this case, eternal indebtedness is generated.

Sometimes images constructed through gifts are projections of who the giver wants the recipient to be, as when a father gives his young son baseball equipment. Acceptance or rejection of the gift therefore signifies the willingness of the recipient to take on the projected identity. Whether accepted or rejected, in these circumstances the gift becomes an avenue through which the power to socially construct the other is potentially exercised. In Schwartz's (1972, p.2) words, "gift giving plays a role in status maintenance." Elaborate gift giving rituals of the wealthy illustrate this. In showering extravagant gifts upon dinner guests, hired
workers or "charities," the well-to-do socially confirm their own higher class status while also constructing the "inferior" identities of recipients, securing this relationship through indebtedness. According to Schwartz, it is for this reason that those who want to maintain superior status make sure that debts to them are never paid in full. Rejection of the role of grateful recipient in this case constitutes an affront to the status of the giver.

In her study of the relationships between domestics and their employers, Rollins (1985) describes the gift giving practices of domestic employers as a vivid illustration of Schwartz's point about status maintenance. Rollins writes that it is common practice among domestic employers to give gifts to workers, items that are often discards having little or no use to anyone. In the past such items were given in substitution for pay, and now they are given in addition to wages. Rollins proposes that the continuation of the practice beyond its practical purpose for the employer has to do with the social significance of defining domestics as inferior through attempting to create indebtedness for discards. Here Rollins qualifies Schwartz's notion that receiving the gift implies acceptance of the designated identity. She notes that while such gifts are almost always accepted, this is done for the sake of survival in the job and in conscious denial of the imposed identity. Thus Rollins' research not only illustrates how the politics of gift giving can simultaneously reinforce classism, racism and sexism, but it also points to some previously undocumented forms of resistance to these systems of oppression.
It is this attention to the politics of gift giving, so absent in the work of Hyde, that also becomes foregrounded in the work of Hochschild (1989a; 1989b). Of central concern for Hochschild is the question of what happens when interpretations vary with regard to what is perceived as gift and not gift. She suggests that in order for a gift to be defined as gift and therefore feel like one, it must be perceived as something extra or unexpected. Yet, whether something is defined as expected or unexpected depends upon the context of meaning from which such definitions arise. And as Hochschild demonstrates, patterns of meaning can vary markedly on the basis of gender. Hochschild focuses on how definitions vary specifically within marriage, questioning what happens when intended "gifts" in marriage are not received as such because of differences of interpretation between males and females. For example, Hochschild asks what happens in a marriage when a man intends his "help" around the house to be a gift that is received with gratitude, while the woman holds expectations for that work and more from the man. Hochschild proposes that these differences in interpretation have been intensified by recent, rapid economic and cultural changes that effect men and women differently. Emphasizing with other writers that gift giving is a commerce of emotions and that gratitude is fundamental to emotional ties, Hochschild shows that miscommunication between men and women in "gift" giving often results in the receding of emotional ties that bind the relationship.

Thus Hochschild, like Rollins, raises the question of the exercise of power within gift giving. She demonstrates how fundamental the constructions of "gift" and "expectation" are in the politics of signification, precisely because an economy of
gratitude is one of emotions. Hochschild (1989b, p.110) explains that power works through the feeling of gratitude, and that therefore an analysis of how gratitude is socially produced is an analysis of power and of "just how profound inequalities work emotionally." She also shows that there are moral, pragmatic and historical facets to the cultural context which gives "gift" meaning. That is, the unexpectedness of a gift is experienced in contrast to what can be expected in accord with these three facets of the cultural context: what cultural rules lead one to expect, what one perceives as pragmatically possible, and how one formulates expectations in comparison to what was expectable in the past. Thus this economy of emotion is intricately tied with the social construction of possibility in one's life, a realm in which, as Hochschild says, the workings of power are profound.

Although Hochschild's focus is on gender differences within the context of marriage, these questions about the politics of gift giving could be posed in relationship to gift interactions in any context in which differences in meaning systems are structurally constituted. Indeed, Hochschild's analysis would be greatly enhanced by a more careful consideration of how race, class, age and nationality, as well as gender, are related to gift interactions within marriage.

Another feminist writer who looks at gift giving and power quite differently is Vaughan (1991). She begins with the contention that there are two economic paradigms operating in the world, commodity exchange and gift giving. She attributes commodity exchange to men and gift exchange, the least valued of the two, to women. Vaughan’s plan for social change involves the promotion of the gift
paradigm as a way of moving toward needed other-oriented, altruistic (female) values. In other words, Vaughan does not question political dynamics going on within gift giving, itself, but analyzes the politics of a context that discredits gift giving and exalts commodity exchange. She re-emphasizes an important point that is basic to marxian and neomarxian tradition that commodity exchange becomes the archetypical form of interaction, the standard by which all interactions are measured as "normal" or "crazy." Vaughan also points out that one of the ways that gift giving is stigmatized is through its association with the feminine, the soft, the emotional, and so on. And if gift giving is not directly discredited in this way, then it is often simply rendered invisible as linguistic lenses centered on commodity exchange determine what is perceived as visible and valuable. As a result, much of the work that especially women do, work that is better characterized as gift-oriented rather than commodity-oriented such as childcare, goes unrecognized and unrewarded as work.

Yet, as Vaughan (along with many others) emphasizes, without the gift commerce that is founded upon the work that women do, commodity exchange in the U.S. could not function. In short, the very existence and meaning of contemporary capitalism is dependent upon gift exchange. Another significant observation that Vaughan makes is that the scarcity that is created in a capitalistic system is what often turns gift giving into self sacrifice.

Vaughan offers several key insights into the political context of gift giving and how this power is constituted through sexism. But again, Vaughan’s analysis fails to recognize that gender is not the only line of construction along which the politics of
gift giving are constituted. The simultaneous workings of race and class constructions are just as integral to the politics of exchange. Taking this seriously does not simply mean adding statements about how gift constructions work to maintain forms of oppression other than sexism. It requires doing away with dualisms set up to oppose gift exchange to commodity exchange, women to men, and other-orientation to self-orientation, dualisms which locate the "good" in some entities (especially women in this case) and the "bad" in others. More directly, it requires a fundamentally different perspective which does not pose power, oppression-status, identity or essence of any kind as inherent to individual entities, but instead locates these constructs within fluid relational (political) contexts.

Appadurai (1986) takes us closer to this type of perspective on gift giving and commodity exchange. He begins with what he sees to be an essential insight of Simmel's (1978), that the value of economic objects is neither inherent to the objects themselves, nor simply subjectively imposed. Both "subjective" and "objective" facets to the value of the object are conferred in the process of exchange. Simmel emphasizes that economic exchange does not follow from inherent values of particular objects; economic exchange creates value. Objects take on the appearance of having given, inherent, objective value because they become the embodiment of value conferred within the exchange process. But that process is also subjective and political.

According to Simmel, a situation that is ripe for economic exchange is one in which there is the desire for something but a distance between that desire and the
accessibility of the object for enjoyment or consumption. In order to overcome that
distance, something else that is the object of another's desire is sacrificed in
exchange. When there is this mutual exchange of sacrifices, value is generated
reciprocally. Meanwhile, desire, accessibility, the likelihood of exchange, and other
central features of exchange are all effected by cultural/political constructions such as
classificatory systems, rules and prescribed social practices that are themselves
generated within the exchange process. Thus the "objective" and "subjective"
features and consequences of the exchange process are thoroughly interrelated.

Building on Simmel's ideas, Appadurai offers the important insight that gifts and
commodities are not simply two different types of objects discernible by qualities
inherent to the objects. The same object can in one context display qualities and
consequences that are more commodity-like while in another, perhaps even
simultaneous, context display gift-like qualities, depending upon the
social/political/cultural dynamics of the contexts in which the object moves. And no
matter what types of exchange processes are taking place, they are political through
and through and interdependent. Therefore in contemporary U.S. society, for
example, gifts and commodities do not exist without one another. Thus Appadurai
returns us to the notion that nothing is inherently good/bad, female/male,
nonpolitical/political or gift/commodity. What becomes methodologically important to
Appadurai, then, is to understand that objects, like people, have social lives that are
to be traced in order to find out how the value and significance of the object changes
politically. This process is not solely dependent upon the political manipulation of
subjects, however, but also depends upon the impact of the object itself upon the subjects in the exchange process.

It is important to note that this perspective relativizes and qualifies any insights from theories of gift giving that approach gifts in more essential than relational terms. It is with this perspective in mind that the above theories of gift giving will be used to gain understanding of the AIDS Memorial Quilt as political culture and gift.
Chapter III

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONTINUITIES

The theoretical orientation guiding this study has essential implications for the methods to be used in researching the AIDS Memorial Quilt. The primary focus of this work is on the shared meaning of the quilt, especially as constructed by its originators, and its connections to gay activism. However, in order to get a larger view of the politics of the quilt’s discourse, my focus also extends to some examples of experiential perspectives that are incompatible with the quilt’s constructed meaning.

In addressing the question of how I was to come to know about any of the meaning systems relevant to this research, I turned to the postmodern epistemological perspectives of feminists such as Smith (1987; 1990), Hill Collins (1990) and Haraway (1988). A starting point for each of these writers is the redefinition of objectivity away from traditional associations with value-freedom, stoic rationality and transcendent vision. As an alternative, these scholars define knowledge to be objective when it is recognizably situated, embodied, partial, responsible and self-critical.
As Smith (1990, p. 22) points out, "the primary ground" of knowledge is "our direct embodied experience of our everyday world." Because this is knowledge of a socially constructed world, that world must be known "from within." Likewise, Hill Collins' (1990, p. 209) prescription for an Afrocentric feminist epistemology emphasizes, among other things, the importance of using "concrete experience" for the basis of knowledge. And Haraway (1988, p. 581) stresses that the only way knowledge can be objective is in its being "situated" and "embodied." According to each of these writers, however, such situated knowledge is always partial; any unmarked claim on the whole truth is a "god trick" (Haraway 1988, p. 584).

But for each of these writers, as well, feminist inquiry does not end with concrete experience. Such experience becomes the potential avenue to knowledge about the systemic workings of power, both organizational and conceptual. Smith (1987; 1990) poses direct, embodied experience as the starting point of knowledge, to be used as the place from which we launch inquiry into "relations of ruling" - or the organizational and conceptual practices - that shape our experiences. In Smith's (1987) terms, the everyday world is to be viewed as "problematic," or questionable, in its tie to these practices. For Hill Collins (1990, p. 222-230), concrete experiences are to be seen in relationship to the "matrix of domination," characterized by "interlocking systems of oppression," operating in the larger societal context. And Haraway (1988, p. 588) speaks of local knowledges having to be "in tension with the productive structurings that force unequal exchanges - material and semiotic - within the webs of knowledge and power."
How is the move to be made from embodied experience to this larger view of the workings of power? Hill Collins and Haraway are two among many who follow Aptheker (1989, chap.1) in recommending that an important step toward a larger perspective (although not a universalizing one) is "pivoting the center," that is, moving from one partial perspective to another. Hill Collins explains that pivoting the center involves different groups - for example, African-American women, Latina lesbians, Puerto Rican men, and any groups with particular standpoints - claiming the truths in their own situated knowledges, but also recognizing those truths as partial. In this way, "each group becomes better able to consider other groups' standpoints without relinquishing the uniqueness of its own standpoint or suppressing other groups' partial perspectives" (Hill Collins 1990, p. 236). Haraway (1988, p. 585) warns, however, that "...not just any partial perspective will do; we must be hostile to easy relativisms and holisms built out of summing and subsuming parts." She explains that this is why subjugated standpoints are preferred, not because they are exempt from critique, but because they are most likely to reveal oppressive consequences of the workings of power that take form through conceptual orderings such as universals, relativisms, and silences.

Haraway also warns that taking on different partial perspectives is not as simple as it might appear at first glance. Like others writing on identity politics discussed earlier, she notes that claiming partial perspective cannot be another justification for easy identification around one assumed commonality, such as gender. In other words, it is methodologically essential to realize that pivoting the center cannot be a matter of
imposing an assumed commonality on particular groups. Again, to do so is to assume that one dimension of the politics of identity takes precedence over all others.

Further, there is often the dangerous assumption here that the politics of gender, for example, are self-evident to all who are seen to share that commonality.

Alarcon (1990) develops this point much more fully in her critique of Anglo-American feminists for using standpoint epistemologies as an occasion to define subjectivity with the same "logic of identification" used by white, middle and upper-class men. This logic poses subjectivity as individual, autonomous and unified. Alarcon notes that, in defining subjectivity in this way, Anglo-American feminists have ignored one of the most fundamental messages of the writers of the momentous collection, This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981). As Alarcon explains, in contrast to the self-sufficient, unified subject of Anglo-American feminism, the contributors to this collection pose subjectivity as plural, multiple-voiced, collective, and sometimes contradictory. This is necessarily so, since these writers' specific experiences of how racism, colonialism, sexism, classism and homophobia operate in their lives result in knowledges that lead to divisions and contradictions not only among them, but within them as subjects.1

Thus pivoting the center has far-reaching epistemological implications for the redefinition of our subjectivities as researchers, and in our lives overall. It requires

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1 For a fuller treatment of this point with more of its complexities, see "Consciousness, Identity, Writing," pp. 32-39 in Chandra T. Mohanty’s introduction to Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism (Mohanty, Russo and Torres, eds., 1991). This passage contributed greatly toward the clarification of this point for me, for which I am grateful.
that subjectivities that appear to be unified and autonomous because they are defined on the basis of only one facet of self, such as gender, be seen as problematic. It requires nothing less than letting go of old notions of self, subjectivity, knowledge and activism, a process that is intensely personal. It involves losing our unified, autonomous selves, risking going to the specific social, geographic and historical locations where particular groups' experiences of the intersections of oppressions are revealed. Therein lies that expanded perspective on the workings of domination in the larger societal context, which necessarily includes knowledges of how our very notions of self, subjectivity, epistemology and activism have been complicit with the dynamics of oppression.

Stated differently, recentering silenced knowledges is about redefining structural and conceptual relationships with those who have been silenced, as well as with those diverse and contradictory dimensions of self that have also been denied. Thus pivoting the center is necessarily a matter of taking responsibility for how one lives in relationship at all levels, including levels of knowledge and discourse, recognizing that all concepts and categories are inherently relational.

It should be noted that many feminists have been working for years to develop methodologies in accord with this fundamental recognition that knowledge and research processes are relational, and therefore political, undertakings. Feminist methodologists have articulated numerous and broad implications of extending the analysis of oppression to the research process itself. Recent overviews of common trends in feminist epistemologies and methodologies document the many ways in
which feminists have grappled with the politics of research (see, e.g., Fonow and
Cook 1991; Reinharz 1992). But what is also suggested in these overviews, although
not explicitly, is that especially white, middle and upper-class feminists still tend to
see their statuses as women and as researchers as more fundamental and consequential
than their positionings with regard to race, class, and sexuality. That is, some of
these researchers see the politics of gender to be so basic as to have implications for
how knowledge and research are constituted. But considerations about race, class,
and sexuality are still often approached as little more than matters of inclusion. Such
approaches are not without value, but are at least as inadequate in their assumptions
as the "add women and stir" approaches that characterized many early attempts at
gender analysis. Taking race, class and sexuality seriously calls for just as
fundamental a shift as that represented by the movement "from the woman question in
science to the science question in feminism" (Harding 1986).

What this called for in my research was that I consciously make various aspects
of subjectivity continuously relevant to my inquiry. It required that I take
responsibility for my relationships with all the actual and potential subjects having
anything to do with the topic of my investigation. In relationship to the originators of
the quilt, it became important that I first of all be as open as possible to the quilt’s
meaning and its importance for some to regain subjectivity after being objectified by
the discourse of AIDS. In relationship to those who are also objectified by this
discourse but whose subjectivity is not forwarded by the quilt, it was essential that I
bring into my analysis the political implications of the quilt’s irrelevance to their experiences.

Therefore, my first goal was to enter as fully as possible into the constructed meaning of the quilt to experience it "from within." It was important that I approach the meaning of the quilt as a whole, open to its various facets, including its marked emotionality, because emotionality is so integral to the quilt’s meaning. This involved following the advice of feminists such as Jaggar (1989) and entering into the research setting with my feelings fully intact so as to be critically attentive to these feelings as an invaluable source of knowledge. Data collection techniques that specifically detect or allow for the expression of emotion became integral.

Further, the expression in the quilt is a form of "subjugated knowledge," or a challenge to some of the images, attitudes and beliefs within the dominant culture about AIDS and gays. It was essential, therefore, that this research give voice to this expression without violating its meaning. This required that the languages and mediums used by those involved with the quilt be left intact. For example, a common medium used to communicate the meaning of the quilt is storytelling. In order for the full impact of these stories to be preserved and passed on, I used interview techniques that allow and encourage storytelling. My data analysis also accommodated these stories without dissecting them to impose another logic or meaning. In this way, I followed the Richardson’s (1991, p.36) recommendations for a postmodern feminist method in which storytelling is "acknowledged and celebrated" as a morally responsible praxis.
Because the discourse represented by the quilt is a response to the objectifying discourse of the dominant culture, it was also important to consider the images of AIDS and of gays constructed in the larger culture, especially at the time of the quilt's inception.

After centering the perspective within the constructed meaning of the quilt, it was then important to pivot the center, placing that meaning in context with other partial perspectives on what it means to have AIDS. In so doing, my purpose was to provide a larger, contextualized view of the ongoing relationship between the quilt as social movement culture and the cultural and organizational workings of power in this society. This became a way of investigating why the quilt and its meaning sometimes cannot be accepted as intended, as gift. By looking at the quilt from inside different experiential perspectives on AIDS, insights could be gained about how power and oppression work differently for various groups around these issues.

RESEARCH METHODS

Researching the Constructed Meaning of the Quilt

To enter into the constructed meaning of the quilt, I used multiple data sources and collection techniques: interviews, observations, and secondary sources such as books, films, videos, letters, newspapers, music recordings, recorded speeches, plays and photographs (See Appendix). Following the advice of Reinhartz (1979; 1983), I approached the research setting as a unique, wholistic context. The determination of
focus and methods of study were therefore an ongoing process involving the collaboration of those in the setting. I began my research by immersing myself in all the secondary sources about the quilt that I could find. A book entitled The Quilt: Stories from the NAMES Project (Ruskin 1988), published for sale by the NAMES Project, became my stepping-off point. In my first reading of it, I immediately began to experience some of the emotional impact of the quilt as I allowed the stories and images in the book to put me in touch with my own grief over the loss of a friend to AIDS. And not only did I note specific references to the quilt as a gift in this and other sources, but I also noted my own feelings of gratitude as I experienced this book and later the quilt itself.

I approached several other media productions featuring the quilt in a similar manner, initially experiencing them as an involved participant, keeping in mind that repeated exposures to these productions (when possible) would later allow for different, more critical perceptions. These productions included videos, music recordings, a play, and a musical-theatrical production. I used several other secondary sources featuring the quilt, including different accounts of the historical context out of which the quilt originated, previously published or taped interviews with NAMES Project originators, recorded speeches of originators and supporters, newspaper articles about the quilt from mainstream as well as community-specific sources, such as The Gay Community News, and hundreds of photographs of the quilt, including many that I took myself.
Primary data collection began with my attendance and participation in a total of six quilt displays. Two took place on large university campuses, one on a small college campus, one in an Hispano-American Center in a large midwestern U.S. city, and two were displays of the entire quilt that took place in Washington, D.C. The size of the quilt at these displays ranged from 300 to 16,000 panels. I took part in these events in various ways. For example, at a university display I participated as a quilt monitor (one who volunteers to offer assistance and information to visitors) and therefore attended volunteer training events. At the full displays of the quilt in Washington, D.C., I also attended and took part in many of the events planned to coincide with the quilt's showing, including a candlelight march and rally, a "Concert to Celebrate the Quilt" performed by gay, lesbian and feminist choruses, and a town meeting sponsored by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force entitled "AIDS and Politics: Transformations of Our Movement." At each display of the quilt, I used every available opportunity to observe and experience the quilt itself, photographing some of its striking images and messages. I also allocated time specifically to observe people's reactions to the quilt as they viewed it.

In the context of these six displays, I conducted a total of twelve interviews with people who had been involved in different capacities. In the initial stages of my research, I conducted five interviews with students who had simply attended a university display. Two of these students were white, female and in their late teens, one was an African American female also in her late teens, one was a white male in his late twenties and one was a white, female graduate student in her mid-thirties.
These interviews averaged forty-five minutes in length. My goal was simply to get a better sense of the kinds of responses being evoked by the quilt. Student responses to questions about the quilt posed in classroom settings also provided some information along these lines. As it became clearer to me that, for my purposes, my efforts were better directed to the meaning of the quilt as constructed by those more closely involved with it, I discontinued this type of interviewing. However, these interviews did provide supplementary data.

Two of the twelve interviews conducted at display sites were with NAMES Project staff members from the national office in San Francisco who traveled to large displays to oversee the organization of the event and its follow-through. These staff members had been with the NAMES Project since the very first stages of its formation. These interviews, which I conducted at an early stage of the research, confirmed that the construction of the quilt as gift was indeed central to the quilt's meaning. Five interviews were with people who had helped organize displays at the local level. Interviews with local organizers provided further background information about the practical requirements for a display and about some of the different responses to the quilt in each setting.

Because early interviews confirmed the link between gift giving and the quilt’s meaning, I began to view what was going on around the quilt in gift giving terms, while at the same time continually checking for evidence that this perspective was appropriate. The more evidence there was to support this approach, the more I used theoretical implications of gift giving to organize my understanding of the quilt. In
this way, my analysis originated from within the constructed meaning of the quilt itself. But I also turned to the social science literature on gift giving as a way of incorporating sociological perspectives into my study. Gift perspectives therefore enhanced my understanding of the quilt's meaning, while also providing me with the some of the tools to situate that meaning within a larger social, political, and scholarly context. Categories for data analysis were derived from gift perspectives.

I looked to interviews with the originators of the quilt as my primary method for understanding the quilt's constructed meaning. Most central to this phase of my research was the data collection that took place during a week's visit to the NAMES Project workshop in San Francisco. My entre into this setting was deliberate, since I knew that NAMES Project staff members were dedicated to preserving the integrity of the quilt, and it was important that my support and respect for this be known. I made it clear to staff members that my purpose was to use my research as one means of documenting the immense significance of the quilt and that I would not be using a detached, analytical approach. I also emphasized that my work would focus on the connections between the quilt and gay activism, explaining that my investment in this focus was not just professional, but personal. My previously established connections to the two staff members I had already interviewed helped with this communication.

In the week that I spent in San Francisco, I conducted ten interviews. In addition to interviewing Cleve Jones and Mike Smith, who together had instigated the NAMES Project, I also interviewed six other people in key positions in the organization, most of whom had been involved with the Project since its early stages. Since I timed my
visit to San Francisco to coincide with the annual chapter meeting, a weekend meeting of representatives from NAMES Project chapters all across the country, I also conducted interviews with two of these local representatives.

Of the total of ten interviews that I did with those in key positions in the NAMES Project (including the two interviewed at display sites), three were with white gay men, three were with Hispanic gay men, two were with white lesbians, and two were with white heterosexual women. Most of the interviewees were middle-class and all were in their late 20s and 30s except for one who was in her 50s. These demographics were reflective of the overall make-up of the NAMES Project staff in that the people of color in staff positions were all Hispanic, there was a conspicuous absence of women of color in key decision-making positions, and there were no heterosexual men involved with the project at this level. They were not reflective in that there were more white gay men involved with the Project than Hispanic gay men, and more white lesbians than white heterosexual women. Of the total of seven interviewees who were active in local NAMES Project organizations, three were white gay men, two were Hispanic gay men, and two were white lesbians. One of these interviewees was in his early 20s, five were in their 30s and 40s, and one was in his 50s. All were of middle-class backgrounds.

I approached all interviewees as informants, using a very open interview format and tailoring each interview to the specialized roles and knowledges of the informant. Each interview involved two sets of questions. One included specific questions about such matters as the structure and operation of the NAMES Project. Another set asked
about the meaning of the quilt to the interviewee and any perceived links between that meaning and gay activism. These latter questions were open-ended, inviting storytelling or any other medium for conveying the meaning of the quilt. Interviewees often responded to this part of the interview by quoting poetry, sharing artwork about the quilt such as sketches, photographs, plays and music, and telling stories, often directing my attention to specific quilt panels. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Lengths of interviews varied from forty-five minutes to two and a half hours. I followed up one interview of a staff member of the NAMES Project with a second interview over a year later when a brief visit to the Bay Area afforded this opportunity. This contact provided some supplementary information about how the NAMES Project had changed during that time.

During the week of my first visit to the NAMES Project offices and workshop, I collected data through participant observation. I interacted informally with staff members and volunteers who came in and out of the workshop, attended a reception for chapter representatives, and was given access to the NAMES Project archives, which mostly consisted of news articles about the quilt from all over the country and letters that had been sent in to accompany individual panels.

Pivoting the Center

Pivoting the center of focus to the meaning systems of groups whose experiences of AIDS are quite different from white, gay men’s experiences could take many directions. An ideal method of pivoting the center would be to conduct extensive
interviews with members of these groups, asking them directly what their responses to
the quilt are and how these responses correspond to their own experiences of AIDS,
of quilting, of grief, and other elements relevant to the NAMES Project. However,
this method could require the time, energy and resources of an entire dissertation, in
itself.

Because of limitations in time and resources, and because my primary focus was
on the shared meaning of the quilt, I chose to pivot the center by specifically
considering experiences of African American women in the U.S. I chose this focus
because black women make up one of the populations that is most critically affected
by AIDS today, even though the intricacies of their experiences of AIDS are rendered
virtually invisible in the dominant culture and in the quilt. In order to pivot in this
direction, instead of direct interviewing, I interrogated the experiences of black
women through some of their own writings about their struggles with AIDS. These
writings are cited and discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

It is important to note that, in this dissertation, I give only one limited example of
how pivoting the center can be done, and therefore I simply begin to suggest what
perspectives are possible through this method. Still, what is revealed even through
this limited method has significant implications for our understanding of the politics of
the quilt.
SOME IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS IN RETROSPECT

Perhaps the most significant limitation to this research resulted from the fact that my theoretical and methodological views were in process, changing significantly over the course of this project. From a feminist perspective this is not surprising, since the experiential basis for my perceptions changed in that time. In particular, a year of teaching at Oberlin College brought me more directly face-to-face with the shortcomings of white, middle-class feminism than ever before, and fundamental shifts in perspective followed that are ongoing in my own life.2 Because most of my data collection took place before these shifts, I came to see my original methodology to be problematic in some ways. I especially realized that not enough research resources were directed toward investigating the quilt’s implications from vantage points that would decenter the views of the quilt’s originators and participants. Thus my method of pivoting the center was more limited than I would have liked, as suggested above.

In another way, my original hopes for this research had to be modified. As stated above, I approached my research with it in mind to cultivate the collaboration of those in the research setting, as recommended by Reinharz (1979; 1983) in her development of "experiential analysis." However, I encountered some of the same problems with this approach as reported by Reinharz (1983) herself and by other  

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2 I am deeply grateful to Chandra Talpade Mohanty and to all my former students at Oberlin who not only presented me with life-changing challenges but also with life-sustaining support throughout my time at Oberlin.
researchers such as Taylor and Rupp (1991). While those I interacted with in the research setting were quite affirming of my work and willing to facilitate it in many ways, their own time and energy were invested in the everyday demands of the ongoing operation of the NAMES Project. The expectation that they take on full collaboration in the research process was not consistent with their own priorities. Collaboration did take more limited forms within interviews when, for example, recommendations were offered about further data sources and responses were shared about approaching the quilt as gift.

I encountered another obstacle early in the research process that was tied to perceptions on the part of interviewees about conventional approaches to social research. Many of the informants were hesitant about my research at first because they expected me to take an objective or quantifying stance toward the quilt. They felt that this would, at best, miss the meaning of the quilt and, at worst, violate that meaning. Thus it became very important that I dispel this misconception from the outset. After my very first interview in which this concern was expressed, I designed my opening comments to interviewees to address this issue. But what was more convincing was my use of an open interview style, involving questions about the meaning of the quilt that invited storytelling. After the first few interviews in San Francisco, word got around to prospective interviewees that my approach was not what had been anticipated and that the interview was enjoyable. Some eventually confessed to me that, although there had been somewhat of a sense of dread among the staff before I arrived, as the week went on staff members were looking forward to
the experience. And after I had concluded the interviewing process, several informants communicated to me that they saw my research to be invaluable as a documentation of the history and significance of the quilt. Thus I overcame this obstacle, but not without deliberate effort. It is especially striking to me that my approach to studying the quilt was at least as important to my acceptance into the research setting as any other aspect of my identity. The implied resistance to definitions methodologically imposed by researchers underscored for me the importance of recognizing the politics of such choices and practices.

Finally, although my experiencing the emotionality of the quilt was essential to understanding its meaning, this also brought with it some limitations. Viewing the quilt, participating in NAMES Project events, and even reading materials written about the quilt were all very emotionally intense experiences. Furthermore, interviews were often so intense with disclosure about grief, joy, gratitude, anger and other feelings, that four to six hours of interviewing per day left me utterly exhausted. This not only limited the number of interviews I was able to conduct in the week I spent at the NAMES Project workshop in San Francisco, but it also restricted my ability to engage in other important research activities, such as participant observation and immediate field note recording. Taylor and Rupp (1991) report success in avoiding emotional exhaustion through turn-taking in conducting interviews, and this leads me to believe that collaboration with at least one other colleague would have enhanced this research. Further, I believe that such collaboration is an important consideration for any feminist approach that refuses to separate emotions from the
research process. This is another reason why the tendency within the discipline of sociology to deter collaborative research should be approached as a feminist issue (Fonow and Cook 1991).
Chapter IV

THE QUILT AS GIFT

Steve, a caretaker and close friend of a person with AIDS named Tom, told the following story about the night of Tom’s death:

(After visiting Tom and then going to work a night shift) I took a nap on my lunch break at work. I had to do relaxation exercises to get to sleep. And when I did get to sleep, I had a dream of his dying. I went directly into a dream of Tom, of hands cleaning him, of the chatter and the excitement of the individuals that were there. And it was just an impression that maintained the same intensity for a period of time. There was very little modulation to it. And out of that emerged a word suddenly. After he had gone off for some time, the word "adios" just leaped out at me. And I woke up to that, and I thought it was Tom, but I wasn’t really sure. And as soon as I let the thought in, "I think that is Tom. Tom has just died," I became overwhelmed with a sensation that I’ve never experienced in life. It was certainty. I knew that Tom had just died. I knew that he had just said goodbye, and there was also so much more that went with that. It was like a message from Tom. I really felt a very direct connection and message with Tom with that. It was a thank you. There was a very, very strong sense of "I made it." I had the strongest sensation that Tom had leapt. He died conscious. He died in his mother’s arms...and there was a sense that he leapt, he jumped. And with that, too, there was the most powerful sense of exhilaration and celebration for just that, that he made it, that he really made it. That he faced his greatest fears head-on and made it through them. And it is hard to explain the sense of pride that I had in him, the gratitude I felt for his opening himself up and letting me into that experience, to that very personal period of his life. There was so much that I felt he gave me that when the (NAMES) Project started, when I first heard of the Project, soon after that I immediately leapt to it as some means for giving back, some means of putting his name out there, not to be forgotten, and putting his name out there as just a clear statement that he mattered. That I would not forget him. And
everything I say sounds trite... The very strong emotional importance of that, of manifesting that sensibility, that feeling of gratitude, of indebtedness, of manifesting something of yourself that this person mattered.

Those who have been most directly involved with the AIDS Memorial Quilt have often spoken of the quilt as gift, and they have referred to their involvement in terms of gift giving and gratitude. In this chapter, I consider the different ways in which the quilt has been constructed to be gift, identifying givers and recipients. Then I use the theoretical perspectives on gift giving discussed in Chapter Two as a model with which to approach the quilt in a way that parallels the construction of the quilt as gift by its originators. My purpose is to cultivate sociological insights not necessarily pursued or recognized by the quilt’s creators. I use these theoretical perspectives to discuss how the quilt’s meaning can be seen to be integrally tied to its construction as gift. As I consider the gift attributes of the quilt and their implications, some of the consequences for social and cultural change having to do with gay issues begin to appear. A fuller and more explicit examination of these consequences follows in Chapter Five.

THE GIVERS AND RECEPIENTS OF THE GIFT

In a book entitled The Quilt: Stories from the Names Project, Cleve Jones, the originator of the NAMES Project, refers to the quilt as "a gift from the hands and hearts of thousands of Americans who have learned not to despair" (Ruskin 1988, p.
157). When asked why a quilt was chosen as the symbol of loss to AIDS, among the many reasons given, Jones emphasizes that quilts are "almost always given as a gift." In a song about the quilt written and performed by Brian Hurley and adopted by the NAMES Project, the lyrics portray the quilt as "something (that) is given to help balance the cost."¹ And all throughout the interviews with those who work most closely with the quilt, as well as in the letters written by panelmakers to accompany panels, expressions are steeped with the language of gift and gratitude. But precisely what is being given and received, and by whom? Those involved with the quilt speak of gift giving on many different levels.

As exemplified in the story relayed in the beginning of this chapter, panelmakers often speak of their panels as gifts given in gratitude to their loved ones who were lost. Letters that are written to accompany panels often convey a similar message. Some of these letters are reprinted in a book entitled A Promise to Remember: The NAMES Project Book of Letters (Brown 1992). Here are a few examples of letters that describe the lives of those commemorated in terms of giftedness.

She entered St. Vincent Hospital two days later and remained in I.C.U. for three months before the end. But even with that she continued to give to me and my family. She arranged to have her Christmas gifts given to us and other friends before Christmas, because as she said, "It is a day in the heart - not the calendar" (Brown 1992, p.33).

He had courage, integrity and commitment that should humble us all. And his final gift to us was the exemplary manner in which he died...selfless, loving and with a little sense of ironic humor (Brown 1992, p.98).

The life of a loved one represents the original gift, for which a return gift, a quilt panel, is offered. One NAMES Project staff member expresses his belief that those who have died continue to give through their panels:

There's such power in (the quilt) because these people are continuing to teach, you know? They taught their friends. They taught their family something. And now they're teaching everybody. You know, what more could we ask for?

While there are such indications that quilt panels are often created as gifts for those who have died, there is also evidence that the expression made possible through making panels and through involvement with the NAMES Project is needed and greatly valued by those surviving such loss. Many speak of their involvement as selfish, a privilege, and something for which they are deeply grateful. Thus the quilt can be seen as both a gift to others and to self, with the two being interrelated and not contradictory:
After my friend Patrick died, I made a quilt panel for the display in Boston. Although I've done a lot of different things around the AIDS epidemic, I felt like this was one time where I wasn't giving; I was getting.²

The first one (quilt display) was for us. Now it's taking it out. Now it's a gift. Now it's sharing in a way that it wasn't so much at first. It was a very selfish and personal thing for me the first time. It was all for me. I needed to make that statement for me. I needed to take Tom's name out to Washington for me...

Staffmembers of the NAMES Project also make it clear that they see each of the panels presented to them to be a gift that is entrusted to their care and guardianship, and thus a gift to the Project as a whole. One staffmember addresses this accordingly:

(I) consider each of the panels that people have made and given to the quilt as the gift. Um, God, it's really panelmakers who have an incredible attachment to the quilt, obviously. And they will do almost anything we ask.

As implied in this quote, panelmakers also see the opportunity to commemorate their loved ones to be a gift from the NAMES Project. Gratitude from panelmakers is evidenced in many of the letters that are sent in to accompany panels:

Thank you for the healing work that you are doing and for providing a vehicle through which I can express my grief (Brown 1992, p.189).

² This quote was taken from the comments of interviewer Paul-David Wadler in an interview with Cleve Jones entitled "Internal Strategies, Community Responses" published in Gay Community News, December 4-10, 1988, p.11.
I appreciated this project, as it helps give a physical and visual relationship to these feelings. I thank the NAMES Project for providing a way for me and others to express the feelings of loss and provide a means for our love to endure (Brown 1992, p.255).

The originators of the NAMES Project also speak of the quilt as a gift at another level. They often emphasize that it was first created within the gay and lesbian community in San Francisco, and can therefore be seen as a gift from this community to "the country" or "the world." In a flier circulated throughout San Francisco to announce a "bon voyage party for the quilt" prior to its first tour, the quilt is billed as "San Francisco's gift to America." Founders of the quilt speak to this point accordingly:

I think here in San Francisco a lot of us feel that it's a gift from the gay and lesbian people to the rest of the world.

I think everyone who has heard of the quilt is clearly aware it is a product of the gay community, that it is really a gift from us to the rest of the country, a community mechanism to show what is happening to us.³

Thus, initial considerations of some of the most obvious references to the quilt as gift indicate that it is constructed as such at various levels. The quilt is seen to be a gift both to and from those who are commemorated, panelmakers, NAMES Project

³ This is a quote from Michael Smith, co-founder and former General Manager of the NAMES Project, reported in an article by Jay Newquist entitled "NAMES Project Helps AIDS Awareness, Raises Funds for Local Services," printed in the Bay Area Reporter, January 5, 1989, p.17.
staffmembers and volunteers, and the gay and lesbian community of San Francisco. Further, the quilt is constructed as a gift to "the country" and "the world" - to all those who potentially experience it in any way.

THE QUILT AS "INALIENABLE WEALTH"

When Weiner (1985) characterizes "inalienable wealth" as evidenced among the Maori and in other societies, she describes objects that are uniquely perceived to remain inherently connected to their original owners, no matter how much they circulate through society. Weiner (1985, p.210) maintains that the "primary value" of such inalienability lies in "the power these objects have to define who one is in an historical sense." She explains that this is not accomplished in all gifts, but only in ones that symbolically consolidate a person's social heritage with their present identity. To accomplish this, the object must be capable of carrying the hau, or the personal lifeforce, of its owner. This capacity depends, in part, on the symbolic and practical value of the materials from which the object is made. And as Weiner emphasizes, cloth is particularly suited to this task. Because cloth has a long, rich history in many societies of being used in the most personal of ways, including the use of fabric or thread as a conduit for the transference of a person's life at such times as birth and death, cloth can uniquely and actively re-present a person's vitality. Weiner notes that naming practices are often used in conjunction with cloth to further invoke the lifeforce of a person in ceremonies that mark essential life events. Thus
inalienable objects become embedded with "the affective qualities constituting the giver’s social and political identity," and when these objects are given away, they "create an emotional lien upon the receivers" (Weiner 1985, p.212).

Key to the creation of value in the object, however, is that it be simultaneously kept while also being given, thus that its circulation be conditional in some ways that secure its value. Like the social significance of a secret between best friends depends upon the secret being told but also kept, the value of inalienable wealth is created in certain conditions of its circulation. The effect of "keeping while giving" is that inalienable wealth secures social identity in the face of loss, as "things themselves stand as the means through which individual mortality is transcended, ensuring some measure of the person’s or group’s immortality (Weiner 1985, p.112).

There are many facets of Weiner’s description of inalienable wealth that can be applied to an understanding of the quilt. The fact that the quilt is an expression in cloth is central to its construction as a specific type of gift that uniquely embodies the people it commemorates in the event of their death. In the U.S. as in other societies, threads and fabric are used at the most critical moments in a lifetime. They therefore evoke countless intimate images, such as the wrapping of an infant in a receiving blanket, the binding or sewing of a wound or incision, and the covering of a body upon death. As Weiner and Schneider (1989) also point out, the malleability and versatility of fabrics, as well as their diversity in patterns, colors and qualities, make cloth virtually limitless in its capacity to communicate about personal identities. This
versatility can convey variations in gender, class, status, age, ethnic heritage, group affiliation in general, and ideological and aesthetic values.

The many acres of cloth that make up the quilt become an expansive demonstration of such variability. Every imaginable fabric (denim, silk, leather, cheesecloth, burlap, velvet, etc.) appears on panels. These fabrics invoke the persons they represent in a particularly intimate way when articles of clothing are incorporated into panels, as is often the case. Obviously worn jeans and overalls, professional uniforms, t-shirts conveying musical tastes and political commitments, chiffon dresses and feather boas, priests’ collars, athletic jerseys, and hats of all kinds are only some of personal clothing appearing on the quilt. The person commemorated is further incarnated when other personal items are sown into the fabric, such as photographs, medals, political buttons, pink triangles, teddy bears, and even hair and crematory ashes. One panel that epitomizes this effort to re-present the person who has died displays an entire fabric reconstruction of the person made from stuffed clothing and nylon. Other panels depict actual silhouettes of persons, traced before their deaths. Some show handprints and footprints. And of course, almost all panels display names, some replicating the person’s signature. A solemn reading of these names enhances the symbolic power of the quilt at larger displays.

As Weiner’s observations in other societies would suggest, this use of cloth, especially combined with naming, socially recreates the personal presences of those who have died. The evidence of this among those who take part in the NAMES
Project is widespread and remarkable. Staff members at the NAMES Project tell the following:

The first time I walked into the workshop, the panels were, like, talking to me. It's just such a profound energy...I think I cried for a long time...It's a collection of souls. I mean, that's what I felt that day that I walked into the workshop.

Sometimes late at night you can almost feel it in the workshop, to go sit over there and to look at the panels on the walls and the panels on the shelves. I'm convinced Evelyn (who repairs panels) sits over there and talks to those panels, nonstop...I think for all of us they talk back in a certain way.

(After a conversation with parents who had lost their son to AIDS) I was getting ready to leave and they said, "Thank you for spending all this time." And the mother said, "You know, this is all we have." I said, "What do you mean?" and she said, "He died in San Francisco...he was cremated there, his ashes were sprinkled out in the bay, and we had a plaque put in at our cemetery. But he's not at the cemetery. This is where my son is. My son is where this quilt goes."

People who work with the quilt at the local level report similar experiences of the personal presences of the people who have died. When asked what was most striking about her involvement with the quilt, one volunteer reported, "unloading the quilt."

She explained:

We had to take the quilts off the racks in the truck and put them on the shelves. And the experience of holding the quilt, you had to hold it like this (holding arms straight out), 'cause they were heavy and kind of cumbersome. I felt like I was holding a person in my hands just like you would, you know, go up when somebody was in bed and you were picking them up to move them. I just had that sensation so strongly that I was holding somebody in my arms...
Panelmakers sometimes speak of the quilt as being the vehicle through which those who have died can continue to have life experiences. In a letter written to accompany a panel, one panelmaker addresses the following comments to his partner:

The panel will go to Washington, D.C., along with, I've been told, over 1,000 others. Remember how we both wanted to visit D.C. together? Well, it looks like, through the panel, you're getting the chance to see D.C. before me (Ruskin 1988, p.44).

Another letter addressed to the NAMES Project contains the following:

I know Tommy thanks you for letting him, the political activist that he was, be in Washington (Brown 1992, p.283).

And in a play written by David Lemos (executive director after Cleve Jones) about the creation of the NAMES Project, a personal presence in the first quilt panel is indicated as Lemos depicts Jones's experience of making this panel for Marvin Feldman:

His name was important. That had to come first. I painted the letters in his name and - this I hadn't planned on, wasn't ready for - - I began to remember. The silly names we had for each other. Our fights. His cat. Trying to make him laugh. Memories accelerating, making me laugh - the first in a long time - and then I felt him. His presence. I don't know how to
explain it. I brushed my face with the back of my hand and it was wet with tears. He was here. Welcome back, Marvin.⁴

In her discussion of the unique significance of cloth in evoking the presences of the dead, Weiner (1985, p.219) cites a report that a Maori family wept over the cloak of the deceased as if it were the corpse. It is clear that the quilt also elicits such a response as weeping over quilt panels is commonplace at all displays.

Consistent with Weiner’s notions that the value of inalienable wealth lies in its power to define one historically, quilt panels recreate personal lifeforges by situating the lives of individuals within their social histories. Panels become testimonies not just to personalities, but lifetimes, and lifetimes in relationship. In the words of one of the NAMES Project staffmembers:

Many of the panels show more than just a name, more than just the person who’s memorialized. And more than just their lives... The dearest panels to me show relationships.

Intimate relationships are depicted on panels through photographs showing a person with a partner, family or friends, through letters that directly address these relationships, and through many other forms of memorabilia. Items on panels such as political buttons, uniforms, and professional and club insignias further locate a person’s relationships to groups in the larger society. In these ways, panels tell life

⁴ Remember My Name, by David Lemos, copyright David Lemos, 1988, script Act I, p.2.
stories in which the threads of a larger social fabric can be traced through personal relationships. And because the quilt originated in the gay community of San Francisco, as a whole it especially documents gay relationships and their coming to terms with the physical, social and political devastation of the AIDS epidemic. Thus, strikingly appropriate to the quilt is Weiner's description of inalienable wealth as that which transcends mortality by giving material presence to the historical identity of those who first circulate the gift. Cleve Jones speaks of being compelled by this need to somehow manifest what was happening in his community as he describes the events that led to the idea of the NAMES Project:

I remember thinking (while walking through the Castro area of San Francisco remembering those who had died), if we could just level all of these pretty victorians and if, instead of this nice gentrified neighborhood, you saw a meadow with a thousand corpses lying in the sun, and people would look at that, and they would see it, and they would feel it, and they would be compelled as humans to respond. But there was no such evidence, and I was just really frustrated by our inability to communicate to the rest of the world what was happening to us. And not just the bad stuff, not just the horror of it and the pain, but also the courage and the love and the sense of community.

Those involved with the NAMES Project speak of the quilt serving this purpose of giving material presence to the historical identity of the gay community:

I think it's amazing that a community in the midst of the kind of tragedy and despair we have gone through has found something creative to sustain it and has found a way to ensure its memory, to capture its past, to not lose its identity.
I think that’s what the quilt is about. It’s chronicling lives, it’s remembering people, it’s establishing a history of this community.

Weiner emphasizes that the value of inalienable wealth is accomplished by "keeping while giving." There are a number of ways in which the NAMES Project has arranged to maintain control over the quilt while also treating it as gift. One important way is through the Project’s status as a non-profit organization claiming legal ownership of the quilt and copyrights on all materials submitted. Staffmembers decide where the quilt will be displayed and under what conditions, as secured through a contract with organizations sponsoring a display. Within this framework, the NAMES Project safeguards against any physical harm to the quilt and oversees its symbolic value.

More precisely, the symbolic value of the quilt is partially constructed in how the NAMES Project defines and enforces its physical safety. There are strict rules about food, drink or fire never being brought near the quilt, about how the quilt is to be displayed, handled and repaired, and about the need for continuous monitoring of the quilt while it is accessible to the public. Such rules contribute to the social construction of the quilt as sacred and inalienable as the power to define the quilt’s value is kept in the hands of the NAMES Project.

The quilt’s attachment to the original givers is further constructed through enforced codes about the ideological contexts in which the quilt is to be displayed. One of the most controversial and deliberate positions of the NAMES Project is that the quilt is not to be used to make political or religious statements. In an interview
with Mother Jones in 1989, Cleve Jones insists, "We're not a political organization."\(^5\) And the lyrics to a song adopted by the NAMES Project for one of its promotional videos contains the message, "There's no enemy here to blame. There's no politics in a name. No black or white, no wrong or right..."\(^6\) This position is implemented by the NAMES Project through agreements with sponsoring organizations that no political speeches, rallies or demonstrations will take place near the quilt during a display. Similar measures are also taken to keep the quilt from being identified with any specific religious organization. Cleve Jones and other staff members admit that this is a strategy. Jones explains:

> We're not lobbying or endorsing candidates. We want the grandmother from Iowa who hand-stitched her boy's flannel shirts together to be comfortable enough with us to come and see the panel. We don't use the rhetoric of the gay liberation movement or the Left or the "New Age." We don't allow ourselves to be defined in a way that will exclude anyone.\(^7\)

Although all staff members of the NAMES Project agree with this goal to reach as many people as possible with the message of the quilt, there is some disagreement about the desired content of the message and its value in different contexts. Therefore, according to several staff members, decisions involving politics and religion are the most controversial decisions faced by the staff. However, there is a

\(^5\) "And Sew It Goes," by Dan Bellm, Mother Jones, January 1989, p.35.


\(^7\) Also taken from Mother Jones, January 1989, p.35.
fundamental criteria used to guide difficult decisions. It is summed up by
staffmembers accordingly:

Every single one of us here feels the responsibility that comes (with)
accepting that panel. We’re responsible for the condition of that panel,
basically for eternity, which is really rough to do with fabric. And, you
know, the bottom line (is that) we are accountable to panelmakers. Only to
panelmakers, when it comes right down to it. And it often has been needed
to make a decision about whether we’re gonna go to the Democratic National
Convention or I mean, these sort of basic decisions. The bottom line always
is, the panelmakers are our only living constituency. We’re acting on their
behalf. We’re caretakers of something they made. And panelmakers are
everything from ACT UP activists to Republican grandmothers in Iowa. And
the last thing we will do with the quilt is put it into a situation where we’re
alienating the people who made it. And so it’s a constant job of finding the
middle road and walking a fine line.

Thus, when confronted with what are perceived to be the most critical decisions about
how the quilt will be circulated and used, the guiding principle of the NAMES Project
is to do whatever is necessary to keep the quilt inalienable from its original owners.
The actual specifics of how inalienability is maintained have to do with who are
perceived to be the original owners and how their identities are defined. This, in
itself, can be the crux of controversy, as will be discussed more in Chapter Six. But
because the quilt’s circulation and use are controlled in accord with attempts to keep
the quilt inalienable, the meaningfulness and value of the original relationships
embodied in the panels are continually reconstructed and reaffirmed, and the
sacredness of the quilt is enhanced. In this way, social identity is preserved in the
face of the enormous loss due to AIDS.
THE QUILT AS AN EROTIC GIFT

Weiner writes about inalienable wealth in response to a context in which theories of gift giving have been so focused on the effects of the exchange that the gift itself and its significance have been overlooked in some ways. Weiner therefore underscores the unique importance of inalienable wealth, its tie to certain socially significant materials, and its value in constructing historical identity. Arguing that inalienability is accomplished through "keeping while giving," her emphasis is more upon keeping than giving. But she writes with an understanding of "the constant need to give away what is most valued" (Weiner 1985, p. 211).

The writings of those who focus on giving make explicit some of the social implications of this form of exchange that Weiner addresses only implicitly. Many of these conclusions about gift giving are also strikingly relevant to the quilt, and they often coincide with and reinforce Weiner's observations. For example, one of Hyde's (1983) most emphatic points is that gift exchange constructs affective connections among people, in contrast to commodity exchange, which tends to construct social subjects as isolated and anonymous. Thus, in Hyde's terms, the quilt can be seen as an erotic gift, one that draws people into relationship with one another.

The quilt provides an ongoing demonstration of its relationship-building capacity. The relationship between the panelmaker(s) and the person commemorated is documented and affirmed in the creating and giving of a panel. Often family members and friends gather together to make a panel, forwarding further social ties.
Sometimes relationships are established between panelmakers and NAMES Project representatives as the cherished gift is more easily entrusted to someone who is not so anonymous. A NAMES Project staffmember explains this:

After you have a mother talk to you on the phone, talk about bringing in her panel, which is all she has left of her child, then O.K., she'll give it to the NAMES Project. But then she comes in and she'll talk to someone, to me or to whoever... for 20 minutes because she can't give her panel, her son, to the NAMES Project, but she could give it to Marcel.

Deep social ties are also created among those who work together for the NAMES Project to sustain and circulate the gift. One staffmember speaks about what it is like to work with a road crew at particular display sites:

All the work that we're doing, not just during the display but after and before, is all quilt stuff so these five people, they bond so incredibly.

Others discuss the bondedness that develops among staffmembers at the NAMES Project workshop in San Francisco:

It's an incredibly supportive place. You just walk down the hall and say, you know, "I need a hug," or whatever...I mean it's, it's very much a family of a sort.

I think that people come here for different reasons, but I think generally, I mean everyone's warm and caring and we certainly have a network here of volunteers and staff that, uh, we're almost like, almost like family.
Social connections are also created as groups form to support panelmaking within local chapters of the NAMES Project, to organize and sponsor quilt displays, and to provide all the voluntary labor needed during such events. When asked what was most striking about a display of the quilt in Houston, a volunteer who took part in the unfolding ceremony described this experience:

It was meeting the unfoldeders that were on my team. People that I had seen around but didn't actually know within the community. But that day brought us closer together because we all shared the same experience...It just so happened that (on) the block we were unfolding were a couple of panels that we knew...everybody knew that person.

Relationships are sometimes formed even among those who simply come to see the quilt, when family and friends of those commemorated use a display as an opportunity to meet or reconnect with one another. Notes have been placed on panels during displays instructing all who knew the person to meet at the panel at a specified time so that there could be a group remembrance of the individual. The NAMES Project has also scheduled such "quilt reunions" into the announced plan of events especially at larger quilt displays. As groups around the quilt have become more close-knit, fabric has been the ideal metaphor both to reflect and construct this process. And the quilt image has further enhanced this meaning construction. Founders of the NAMES Project describe the overall unifying effects of the quilt in these ways:

And when you go to visit the quilt, you, uh, the quilt has created a family, an extraordinary family of people who really love each other and care for each
other in a very personal way that has nothing to do with ideology or rhetoric or positions on the political details of the crisis. It has to do with their experience of losing a loved one to this horrible disease that is attended by so much social dysfunction, you know? So I think part of the spiritual-emotional impact is this connecting people, connecting strangers, and it’s just an amazing thing.

As we’ve travelled from city to city, it has always had that same impact, the same ability to focus people and bring them together. And that’s what I think is so wonderful about the Project at this point, that it seems that it works in any sized community.

As many writers on gift giving such as Simmel (1950), Hyde (1983) and Hochschild (1989a) suggest, the social bonds that gifts create are feeling-bonds; they are emotional. Quilt panels become embodiments of these feeling-bonds, as does the quilt as a whole. Many references to these bonds in the quilt are in terms of love and caring, as in this example:

It’s not just about loss to me, you know. It’s about love… I felt it the first time, that this enormous amount of love comes up to your feet as you walk along the walkways… You’re engulfed by love.

One NAMES Project staff member describes the emotional bondedness conveyed in quilt panels in the following way:

You know, it’s like their life’s essence. It’s like the essence of friendship. It’s the essence of a relationship between a mother and a son. It’s the essence of these relationships… we get to see the very essence of their emotions.
In his play about the NAMES Project, David Lemos captures the emotionality of the quilt in the comments of the character, Judy:

"We get a few (panels) each day, wrapped tight and snug like this, sometimes with a note or a letter inside. Love and loss sent right through the mail...I like to say that you feel the panels more than see them. You can just feel the emotion when you put your hands on them."  

The emotionality of gift commerce has to do with the fact that gifts allow for a relatively intimate expression of self-in-relationship, and the reception of such a gift signals the construction of a social bond between giver and receiver, resulting in both being moved. Part of the feeling response is gratitude, which is "one of the most powerful means of social cohesion," according to Simmel (1950, p.389). Hundreds of messages of gratitude can be found in all forms of expression around the quilt - on panels, in letters, in conversations about the quilt, and in the writings and artwork that have been inspired by the quilt. One panelmaker talks about his feeling response in these words:

"When I heard about (the quilt), I had a great need to manifest, give back, something of what I felt very dear people had given me..."

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8 Remember My Name, by David Lemos, copyright David Lemos, 1988, script Act I, p.17.

9 It should be noted that gifts do not always necessarily construct social bonds that are affective, but that gift exchange holds this potential in a context in which political and cultural definitions allow for a shared notion of "gift" and thus for its acceptance.
Because gift commerce is a form of exchange that is particularly suited to the more intimate expression of self-in-relationship, there is risk involved in gift giving. As Weiner (1985, p.224) reminds us, "The need to exchange with others is inherently dangerous because a person not only gives away material things, but a measure of her or his own identity." Thus Weiner cautions about the need for keeping while giving. But no matter what efforts are made to control a gift, there is always some element of letting go, of lack of control. It is this letting go to the larger social context that, in Hyde's (1979) view, allows for the possibility of a constructed experience of connectedness or interdependence. This letting go of the gift is an experience that is referred to at several different levels by those who are involved with the quilt. Staff members express the difficulty of parting with a panel once it is made:

Oh, it's hard. It's hard...I mean they all hold onto it like it's their kid, you know? Which it is, you know, in a way...Right before I went to Washington, I had a PWA give me his lover's panel. And he came out of his sick bed to bring me the panel. His nurse brought him over in pajamas. And it took me, well, he didn't let go of the panel for about 45 minutes before he finally, that was very, very hard. And it took everything I had to try to keep it together. You know, I mean, I cried with him and I tried to explain to him that I would take it to Washington and I would carry it for him. And he had to be assured that it wouldn't get messed up or lost.

I knew I needed to take the panel in and present it, but it was just, that would be my final goodbye. I kept putting it off and putting off and finally Sunday was the last day to present the panels. Well, I took it in, and I just walked around for hours on the quilt, and then finally when it came time to, thought O.K., you know, just get this over with. It's gotta be done. And when I turned it in it was just, oh, I didn't realize that I was still holding in so much grief for the partner that I lost...
As one staffmember explained to me the difficulty panelmakers have giving up panels, I asked whether there had ever been a time when the maker simply could not go through with letting go of the panel. He chuckled, said "yes," and after a long, tearful hesitation, continued:

I have a panel that I’ve had for about 14 months. Just can’t give it up yet. And I trust these people. I trust myself. And especially, the longer it gets, the harder it is. You know, it’s all I have left.

It is clear from these statements that letting go of a panel is equivalent to letting go of the person commemorated. This is so poignantly expressed in a letter published in the book of letters published by the NAMES Project (Brown 1992). The letter was written by Danny Sauro, a staffmember at the NAMES Project, to his lover:

I love you, Garth Wall. You are the love of my life. You are, even now. I cannot put that love into the past tense. And you know, I’m so sick of hearing people talk about AIDS as a gift. It’s not a gift, it’s a damn nightmare. You were the gift - a gift I’ll treasure and hold in my heart and soul forever. And I will make a panel for you, I promise. But not yet. I just can’t let go yet (Brown 1992, p.19).

Another level of letting go has been required as the NAMES Project as a whole has grown and moved out of the hands and control of its originators. The difficulty, but necessity, of this letting go process is apparent in the comments of the quilt’s founders:
We've always said that the experience of working as closely with the quilt is really a gift and should be shared. And I've been saying that for years, and I finally felt like it was time to really let go and let other people come in and, uh, let it sort of grow without me.

(After it had been discovered that a local committee had broken some of the rules for display set up by the NAMES Project) I wanted to take my quilt and go home...And then I left and I got to the airport. I was so angry, just so angry. And I got on the plane and the plane was taking off, and just had some physical sensation, you know, and I just thought, "It's in good hands." So for me, that was the big, where I had to realize that it was not a one man show, and that I was going to have to give up control of it.

Yet another level of letting go has taken place on the part of the gay community of San Francisco. A staffmember of the NAMES Project sums this up accordingly:

For a long time San Francisco, particularly this neighborhood, took special ownership of the quilt and it's been really hard for them to let go. It doesn't really belong to us anymore. It belongs to other people now, you know. Panels come from all over the world, and how can we say it's ours, you know? The epidemic doesn't belong to the community.

To emphasize again that letting go is simultaneous with keeping, and that this is key to the quilt's inalienability from its originators, it should be noted that deliberate efforts are made continually to link the quilt symbolically to its original context. For example, the opening paragraph of a brochure distributed to the public at the 1989 display of the quilt in Washington, D.C. reads:

Established in June of 1987, in the heart of San Francisco's Castro district, the Quilt began as a response by lesbians and gay men and their friends to the
devastation of their community by AIDS. From this beginning, the NAMES Project has sought to reach out to everyone affected by the epidemic.

Those at the NAMES Project in San Francisco keep the quilt linked to its origins by reminding volunteers who work with the quilt of its history. One staffmember speaks in the following way of the importance of keeping the quilt connected to its gay and lesbian roots:

The fundamental is what we're doing for our own community. And that was what we started, and we started in this community and we went out. And we always have to remember what we started here, and our success in the beginning was very much that sense of building a community, of uniting people who were in the midst of isolation. And the fact that we've reached out and we're doing all this other stuff is good. You have to find your center, and I think we're the center.

As Hyde (1983) points out, if the risk is taken and the gift is entrusted to a larger social context, the movement of the gift from one person to another acts to erase social barriers between giver and receiver. There are many forms of evidence that divisions between people and groups are changed as a result of the quilt. One staffmember explains how he sees the division, especially between gays and heterosexuals, to be overcome as a result of simply seeing the quilt:

And when people come on the quilt and see individuals who they might have been able to conceptually categorize in easy ways that could distance themselves from the individual, whether they could relate to the individual or not, there is always something in the relationship... something in the panel is often very familiar to people in their experience and in their own lives. And
suddenly categories, or the ways that they were simply able to classify groups of people break down. And suddenly a lot of these people are a lot like themselves...And that transcends the narrow definitions that they may have never even questioned before, and even very supposedly openminded people, even very supposedly sophisticated people in the world often times see people, see the relationships differently when they look at the quilt.

Others also point to the effects that the quilt has in breaking down barriers between gays and heterosexuals:

I think that gay and lesbian people, because of our history, have every reason to be suspicious and doubtful of the sincerity of heterosexual people, but we can’t stop trying. And so I really want the quilt to be part of breaking down those walls, and I think it’s one of the things that we’ve been most effective at, is involving heterosexual people in the struggle.

There’s the bridging...learning on the part of...heterosexual people who, in their own loss, having an opportunity to express it, found themselves in conjunction with lesbians and gay men, particularly gay men.

Those who work closely with the NAMES Project also report that the quilt has some effects in breaking down barriers within the gay community itself, especially between gay men and lesbians, the evidence of which will be presented in the following chapter. And there is some evidence, as well, that racial barriers are overcome through the quilt. For example, at a display that was sponsored by an Hispanic community and that took place at a metropolitan Hispanic community center, one of the organizers told me that several members of the mostly white, gay community of that city had volunteered to help with the event. He said that this was the first time that the gay and Hispanic communities had worked together, and that
hopes and intentions had been communicated about working together more in the future.\textsuperscript{10}

As social boundaries are altered in the circulation of a gift, identities are also constructed and reconstructed. As Schwartz (1967) implies, identities are relational, and gifts redefine identities as they reconstruct relationships with their movement form one person or group to another. Schwartz explains that a gift is not only an objectification of the identity of the giver, and therefore a prop in the process of defining that identity, but also a statement of the intended identity of the recipient. Further, when gifts are given to people in relationship with one another, or are received from them, that relationship is socially recognized and confirmed. Thus, a common occurrence is for parents to make a quilt panel that not only documents their love for their gay son, but also for his lover. In such an act, there is significant social affirmation of gay identity. But the identities of all those involved are affected. What it means to be a parent is also redefined.

According to Hyde (1983), the reconstruction of social boundaries that accompanies the movement of a gift results in enlarged notions of "self". The limits of the "self" are expanded with the experience of connectedness to others through feeling-bonds, especially gratitude. And as Schwartz (1967, p.9) attests, "gratitude binds not only the living, but connects the living and dead as well." Because in the event of death there is no possibility of final reciprocation, eternal indebtedness is constructed, which melds present to past. In Weiner's (1985, p.212) words, "the self

\textsuperscript{10} Further discussion of racial barriers and the quilt takes place in Chapter Six.
is enlarged and enhanced by the power of the past" because of the inalienability of the gift. Hyde (1983, p.40) refers to gifts given in death as threshold gifts, which "mark the passage from one place or state into another." In this way the limits of the self are expanded beyond originally constructed limits, even the limits of mortality. And with this expansion, identity is changed. "Self" is transformed. Because gifts are the vehicles through which isolated, atomized definitions of self give way to experiences of self-in-relationship, gifts become agents of transformation. In Hyde's (1983, p.45) words, "It is as if such a gift passes through the body and leaves us altered."

The evidences of such transformation in connection with the quilt are many. One staffmember captures very directly the change in confidence that comes with social connectedness and self-enlargement:

I can think of two ways it (the quilt) has changed me, quite a bit. One is sort of the sense of connectedness to a larger group... um, the sense of a network out there that I never would have thought was there... and I think that there's sort of a confidence or a surety that comes with that network that has made me stronger.

Several staffmembers report some of their fundamental values as transformed through their work with the quilt. Interestingly, the old values that are often forfeited are the traditional capitalistic aspirations for material possession and success, values associated with the isolating, atomizing effects of commodity exchange driven by self-interest. New values that are adopted emphasize relationships and meaning, values
that tend to be affirmed in gift exchange. These value changes coincide with rather
dramatic career changes for some of those on staff at the NAMES Project:

I was on a real traditional career path working for Dean Witter here in San
Francisco...I had no plan of leaving, but when I saw the quilt, I became more
involved and (spent) a few months as a volunteer. It felt like a calling. It
was really clear this is what I should do for a while. And so it very much
changed my life that way, but I came out of this suit and tie environment
(working) for Dean Witter. I used to own part of a theatre. I made a good
deal of money, and I quit after I went to (the) Washington (display) in
'87...because I didn't want to go back, I couldn't go back to anything, any
job that didn't feel exactly the same way I did about people dying. So I
didn't go back to my jobs and somehow luck had it, they did put me on staff
after a while but I didn't know that I would be. I just figured, you know, I
knew it made me so happy.

You know, it's so reaffirmed my faith in people to be working with the quilt.
It's made my life so very simple, because I know what's important and
what's bullshit...My priorities were all wrong, you know? I thought making
money and having a car and da-da-da-da-da-da-da. And, you know, it just
doesn't matter to me anymore...Things aren't important to me anymore.
People are.

Such transformations in values and perspectives are also common among those
who are not involved with the NAMES Project on a daily basis, and even for some
who simply come to see the quilt. At each display of the quilt, the NAMES Project
puts out a "signature panel," an area of blank cloth on which visitors are invited to
write any responses, messages or comments. The following are just a few of
countless messages written on signature panels indicating transformations in
perspective - changes of heart:
I came here not knowing anything. I walk away understanding.

I have always been almost repulsed by AIDS and the people who carry it. I now embrace these people, and the disease. I see now that these people are the same as you and me! I have been deeply moved by this experience! Keep the faith!

From their death comes beauty.
From their memory comes hope.
You have opened my eyes and broken my heart.

The editor of *The NAMES Project Book of Letters* (Brown 1992, p.315) reports that a student at San Luis Obispo, who saw a quilt display in her school gymnasium, responded by leaving a note that simply stated, "My life is changed."

Those who travel with the quilt often talk about seeing such transformation in people who see the quilt:

Even people who don’t know what the quilt’s about, and they walk onto the quilt, and they come off of the quilt. You can see the change, the difference in their face and how more loving they seem to be...

When they walk around this thing happens in their face. You can see that they get it. You know, and when you see they get it, you realize how important it is to do it.

Many of the evidences of transformation that are reported have to do with people’s perspectives and relationships changing with respect to gays, from fearful and judgmental postures to more accepting and loving ones. These evidences and their implications for social change having to do with gay issues will be explored in more detail in the following chapter. Meanwhile, it is important to note that those
closest to the quilt often speak about the power of the quilt in the form of storytelling, and because transformative events can be quite moving, these events are often conveyed in the form of stories. A discussion such as this on transformation and the quilt would not be complete without at least a couple of samples of the stories told. Issues of identity and the removing of relational barriers are central to each of the following stories:

We just came out of Salt Lake City. There was a woman there whose brother had died of AIDS and they had not really talked about it. They had maintained that he had died of cancer and...it had been some time and she was carrying this inside all that time. As she started becoming aware of the quilt, and as Salt Lake City was organizing to bring the quilt to Salt Lake City, I don't know if she had seen a display or what, but she started becoming involved with people who were involved with the Project, and she made a panel for her brother. And for her it was such an experience to open up and to decide that she was not going to lie about either her brother's homosexuality or about his dying of AIDS. And it was a transformation in her life. It was a real healthy transformation in her life in dealing with the truth about her brother, and I think, in many ways, standing up for her brother with pride, investing, choosing to express and manifest pride in her brother.

We were in St. Louis, and there was a panel for a young man. And the father had gotten wind of it, called at the house community, and said, "I'm gonna come down with a shotgun and I'm gonna blow it away," and said, you know, "Take down that panel." We kind of said, you know, nothing's ever happened before; it's not gonna happen now. But technically, there are local host committees in control of the new panels. They took it down. But the father and the mother showed up. We didn't know that they were there, but they had walked through the display. (The father) came up to the host committee and said, "I'm really sorry. I didn't know what this was all about. My wife and I spent an hour here going through all the panels, and now we're gonna go home and make a panel for our son."
THE QUILT: A LIFE OF ITS OWN

In her conclusions about inalienable wealth, Weiner (1985, p.223) asserts, "Mauss was correct: 'the thing given is not inert. It is alive and often personified'" (1954:10). Because inalienable wealth is constructed to embody the lifeforces of its original owners, and because its significance in this sense is enhanced in its circulation as a gift, such wealth can be seen to take on a life of its own. Those who work most closely with the quilt often speak about it as if it were alive. One staffmember sums this up accordingly:

Those of us who have sort of given ourselves to this organization for the last couple of years really have the sense of the quilt as a personality or as a group of personalities. This is a very nonreligious group of people. It's a lot of fallen Catholics, a lot of fallen Jews, but it's a very spiritual group of people. And the quilt reinforces a lot of that, that feeling and spirituality. There are a lot of odd little coincidences which I am sure you've heard stories about.

Indeed, in the interviews I conducted, many stories were told about such "odd little coincidences." They suggest that the lives of those commemorated in the quilt are still present in some fashion, influencing events around the quilt in such a way as either to confirm a continued relationship to those who have been left behind in death or to draw others into a relationship with those commemorated. These stories are so commonplace that, as striking as some of them are, staffmembers have come to the point of simply taking them in stride, laughingly referring to them as "woo-woo"
stories, but also showing great respect and for their implied power. Taken in stride or not, these stories become an important part of the gift construction of relationship across barriers, even the barrier of death. Thus these apparently mysterious events can be partially understood as another facet of the social construction of bondedness, expanded self, history and immortality. In this sense, they become integral to constructing the quilt as inalienable wealth as well as erotic gift. The fact that these stories do construct or reconstruct a link between those who have died and their survivors has everything to do with why they are so moving, since again, to redefine relational boundaries is to be moved. The implications of the social construction going on in the telling of "woo-woo" stories will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Meanwhile, here are a few samples of these stories:

Anybody who’s worked around the quilt at all will tell you all of these, there are just so many weird things that happen. There are so many coincidences, and I know I try to be fairly pragmatic about these kinds of things, but when they just keep happening, you know... like a woman sends in a panel and then decides to come out here to do sewing (repairing). And she walks into a room, there’s a pyramid of unsewn panels there, and she’s handed a bundle. And the first one that comes out is the one she made. And then she sews it and cries, and puts it in there. And then she, a year later, meets us in Washington, D.C. to be an unfolder, and unfolds it and there it is. You know, that kind of shit happens over and over and over and over and over.

(At) the very first display in D.C., a straight woman came down from somewhere in the northeast, I think in New Jersey or something, to Washington...to see the quilt because she understood that there was a panel in it for her brother. Unless you were in the gay community, you didn’t understand what the quilt was...And she came down expecting a bed-sized quilt with little embroidered names or something. And as she walked up to it on the ellipse, she became absolutely overwhelmed by the size of it and was terrified that she wasn’t gonna be able to find her brother’s panel. (She) was completely freaked out, didn’t know that there was a directory or that
somebody probably could have helped her and was sobbing uncontrollably with someone who sort of came up to her. She explained that it wasn’t that she was overwhelmed with sadness, but she was terrified with the thought that she had come all this way, and the frustration was just overwhelming. And it was just as the unfolding was winding up, and she’s standing there by the edge of the quilt shaking uncontrollably and trying to pull herself together. And the last set of teams finished, and they laid out the panels, and her brother’s panel was at her feet.

One of the staff members died this year... He’s the one who got us to (organize) the volunteers for D.C.... and he was really a wonderful person. Anyway, my lover and I were in the volunteer tent this year and we were kind of doing something and we moved something and there was this plaid shirt. And he was quite renowned for a particular plaid shirt, and there it was... and actually, the reality was that the colors were not only the same, but it was exactly the shirt that he wore... (My lover) and I just looked at each other and screamed, "Jack!" We felt like he was there. I mean it was just so much that he was there. It was in the volunteer tent where he pawned us, the little devil, into doing that damn thing the prior year. And it was sort of like the two of us were alone and we’d been through the whole display and it was as if he was there. We felt it so strongly... And (we) looked at each other and we started to laugh and cry. I mean it was just this amazing thing to us. It felt really like Jack was right there with us and we like screamed "Ghosts!" and we laughed and cried... So for Christmas (my lover) bought us all slime from "Ghost Busters" and said "The next time you see Jack, slime him!"

In this chapter, I have looked at the quilt in accord with major themes in writings on gift giving, since the gift image is central to its constructed meaning. By considering the quilt as inalienable wealth, I have shown how it gives historical continuity to gay identity, even in the face of AIDS. By approaching the quilt as an erotic gift in Hyde’s use of the term, it has been possible to address the many ways that the quilt creates social bonds among those who give and receive it. And by focusing on a theme in many writings on gift exchange proposing that gifts take on a life of their own, I have been able to suggest sociological insights into why stories are
told about the quilt that imply a mysterious, continued presence of those who have
died. All these gift-related dimensions of the quilt have important implications for
gay activism and social change. The analysis of these implications is the focus of the
following chapter.
Chapter V

THE QUILT AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE

The quilt is a cultural expression in which notions about what it means to have AIDS, to be gay, to face death and to respond to those with AIDS are constructed in ways that contradict the meanings given these occurrences in the dominant culture of the U.S. As the quilt’s messages are communicated and the gift is received, both cultural and social change accompany the quilt in its path of circulation. This chapter highlights ways in which the quilt reconstructs what it means to be gay, and is therefore a significant contemporary facet of the ongoing construction of gay identity in the U.S. Further, this chapter looks at the quilt’s consequences for gay activism and its implications for cultural and social change having to do with gay issues.

THE QUILT AS A RESPONSE TO A CULTURAL CONTEXT

The meaning construction taking place in and around the quilt can be seen as a response to a cultural context in the U.S. in which discourse about AIDS, including biomedical discourse, is used in subtle but unequivocal ways to define gays as outcasts. This discourse is recognized by some to be as central to the epidemic’s devastation as the "virus," itself. Two writers who address the politics of
signification taking shape in the mid-1980s around AIDS, when the quilt was conceived, are Susan Sontag (1988) and Paula Treichler (1988).

Sontag maintains that, similar to other forms of illness, AIDS is conceptualized as an invasion from the outside. It is therefore to be resisted as one would resist "foreign" or "exotic" agents in times of war. Military metaphors abound in the epidemic. To fall prey to the invasion carries connotations of guilt and lack of loyalty or patriotism. As one's body is overtaken, it becomes an agent of infiltration itself. AIDS "victims" are especially blameworthy because their contamination is constructed to be not just a matter of weakness, but a matter of complicity resulting from willful indulgence in sexual and/or moral perversion. Those with AIDS take on the status of traitors who threaten the "general population" with the prospect of violent, disfiguring and humiliating death.

Referring to AIDS as an "epidemic of signification," Treichler (1988, p.31) also points to the prevalence of references to the exotic and to combat images in the social construction of AIDS. She demonstrates, as does Sontag, that any groups who are readily stigmatized as "other" in the dominant culture of the U.S. such as gays, prostitutes and drug users then become the scapegoats of the epidemic. Treichler especially focuses on the many references in biomedical discourse that accomplish this type of construction. Among many examples, she underscores textual references to "multiple and violent gay sexual encounters," to "killer sperm," to gay men as "sexually driven," to the "strong projectile capacity of a penis or syringe" and to
prostitutes’ bodies as harboring "massive quantities of killer microbes" (Treichler 1988, p. 65).

In these ways, the language of AIDS is used to construct multiple stigmatizations all at once. In reference to gay men, it constructs them as hard, aggressive, driven, crazed, exotic menaces of physical, sexual and moral contamination. Assumed to pursue multiple and anonymous sexual quests, gay men are identified as in violation of all relational patterns valued by the dominant culture. They are perceived as foreign to values of family, society and country and, therefore, as threats on many levels.

The symbolism of the quilt stands in sharp contrast to these constructions. As fabric and as a quilt, it evokes images that are soft, warm, consoling, and life-cradling. This is especially accomplished with the choice of an art form that is traditionally feminine. The quilt counters images of threat, violence and contamination with something that is not only approachable, but inviting, personal and beautiful. Because quilts have often been handed down through familial lines over generations, the quilt elicits images of connectedness to family, of belonging over time. And because quilts are seen to be central artifacts in American folklore, they carry connotations of patriotism and rootedness in U.S. history. This link to American patriotic imagery is strengthened through constructions of the quilt as an eminently democratic art form. Anyone can make a panel as long as they have known someone who has died of AIDS, and the only requirements are that panels be a standard size. This form allows for diversity within a common structure, placing
celebrities and the anonymous, old and young, gay and heterosexual, the privileged and those abandoned in death all side-by-side. The effect is a constructed sense of democratic inclusivity and encouragement of unity in diversity. The fact that quilts are also associated with gift giving further suggests a sense of invitation, warmth and caring. All these images together counter each of the impugning constructions of the dominant culture.

The association of quilt images with gay men and gay relationships is a very deliberate choice on the part of those who founded the quilt. Cleve Jones recounts his thoughts on the night that he conceived the idea:

And as I was there in U.N. Plaza, I thought, "This is it. This is this nice, warm, cozy, middle-class, nonthreatening, American image. And it's about different people and different kinds of fabric being sown together to make something whole. And it's something that we offer to people. It's not a shroud. It's something we give to people when they're tired, when they're sick, when they're cold. It's a promise of comfort."¹

The strategy of taking positive images and identifying them with a predominantly gay population to resist the denigrating constructions of the dominant culture is used in various ways in connection with the quilt. For example, in an address given to sixty thousand participants in a candlelight vigil taking place after one day of the 1989 display of the quilt in Washington, D.C., again Cleve Jones reverses the images of the dominant culture. He addresses his remarks to President Bush, rebuking him for

¹ This quote was taken from a "Gay Freedom Day" speech delivered by Cleve Jones to the Metropolitan Community Church in San Francisco on June 25, 1989.
proposing a "kinder and gentler nation" while allowing scandalous inattention to AIDS. And to the precarious applause of a mostly gay audience, he concludes his speech with these words:

Mr. President, you could have visited us today upon the quilt. You would not have been harmed, Mr. President, though many would doubtless clamor to gain your attention. You and your family could stand among us on the quilt and fear no harm at all. For in all truth, Mr. President, it is we who are kind. It is we who are gentle. And it is our light that will lead the way to victory and to life.

With these few sentences, Cleve Jones again resists associating gays with threat, aggression, dishonor, darkness and death. The images in this speech, as well as those evoked by the quilt itself, suggest that creators of the NAMES Project consider it to be especially important to dismantle the construction of gays as a threat. Because the construction of a group as a threat is integral to their being cast to the margin as "other" and rendered expendable, efforts to dissociate gays from threat can be seen as strategic. Although some members of the NAMES Project have been political activists throughout much of their lives, they choose to portray the quilt as non-political. At work here is the assumption that being nonpolitical is less threatening. Thus the brochure distributed to the public during the 1989 display of the quilt in Washington, D.C. refers to "the non-threatening nature" of the quilt. This reversal of the association of threat with gays is seen by members of the NAMES Project to be important for drawing close to the quilt those who would otherwise readily accept the stigmatizations of the dominant culture.
There are further ways in which the quilt challenges commonly held notions about people with AIDS. The immensity of the quilt jars one away from the irrelevance and anonymity of statistics into the realization that deaths to AIDS are intensely personal and alarmingly widespread. This is in keeping with one of the foremost goals of the NAMES Project, to "reveal the names and lives behind the global statistics."\(^2\) The many panels on the quilt that indicate various routes of HIV infection undermine notions commonly held especially early in the epidemic that AIDS is solely linked with gay sexual practices. And those panels that do depict the lives and deaths of gay men contribute to the visibility of gays in the larger society, countering denials of gay presence, and undercutting homophobic myths that pose gay lives as most essentially defined by sex-crazed, death-inviting activity. These panels portray gay men's involvement in and commitment to every conceivable familial, professional and social role. They show the tremendous grief experienced at the loss of all aspects of life, making it clear that gay men are not necessarily different from other populations in their priorities, values and diversity. Further, the quilt provides evidences of compassion in response to persons with AIDS, evidences that challenge attitudes within the dominant culture of indifference and disgust.

The quilt is therefore a prop through which positive images of gays and of people with AIDS are constructed in resistance to, and in reversal of, many of the stigmas cultivated in the dominant culture, especially in biomedical discourse about AIDS.

\(^2\) This quoted goal of the NAMES Project appears on the brochures distributed at displays.
The strategy here is not only to change concepts of gays and people with AIDS, but to bridge both conceptual and social distance that makes stigmatization possible. This is done by removing conceptual obstacles ("threat") and using the bonding potential of gift giving to draw those who see the quilt into a place where they are able to relate to those whose lives are represented on the panels. Even the preference at the NAMES Project for the quilt to be displayed on the floor or ground is, according to those interviewed, intended to promote a more intimate and immediate relationship between the viewer and the panels.

THE QUILT’S IMPACT OUTSIDE GAY COMMUNITIES

As suggested in the previous chapter, many who have subscribed to the anti-gay and lesbian attitudes of the dominant culture and then have experienced the quilt have undergone a change of heart. One of the originators of the quilt expresses in the following way what he sees to be the changes in perception of gays and lesbians prompted by the quilt:

I have never, ever seen anyone walk through the quilt and not have their impression of gay and lesbian people changed. And that is a very important thing, that, in walking through the quilt, you can’t help but acknowledge the importance of male-male relationships. You can’t help but notice that the love between those two men is as strong as any heterosexual marriage. You can’t help but realize the creativity of our community. And often you can’t help but realize the important role lesbians have played as caregivers. And coupled with the fact that host committees are almost always mostly gay people, it puts them in a very positive light in terms of how the rest of the
community views them as contributing to the community and not just as a fragment of it that is different and separate.

The change indicated has not only been at a conceptual level, but has involved feelings of being moved as the gift has lessened distances between giver and receiver. The following message directed to the NAMES Project provides an illustration:

I must admit that prior to seeing the quilt, my experience of the gay community was limited to childish gawking while passing through the gay areas of our major cities. My view of "them" was negative simply because "they" were so "different"...The grief, the love, the loss and the hope of those present was palpable and powerful. We felt the emotion, as if those remembered were our own (Brown 1992, pp. 306-307).

In some instances, those who have expressed a change of heart have also indicated being moved to actively respond to the epidemic in one way or another. Here are some examples of such responses, as indicated in letters sent to the NAMES Project:

After seeing the AIDS Quilt at the University of Montana, we were wondering what we can do to help educate people, and help them see and feel the things we felt (Brown 1992, p. 305).

Even though it has been over five months since I visited the Quilt, I think about that experience often. It is these thoughts that have prompted me to write to you. I have also taken some time today to write to the President, to express my outrage due to the lack of funds being provided for AIDS research and treatment (Brown 1992, p. 291).
It is therefore clear that the meaning construction surrounding the quilt results in changes for some who first approach the quilt from the perspective of the dominant culture. It appears that the quilt’s primary effect is symbolic, constructing gay presence in the larger society and contributing to changes in perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about gays and about people with AIDS. But the link between symbolic and interactional changes is also clear in this data, since there is evidence that some who experience a change of heart do relate differently to groups or individuals represented on the quilt. There is also evidence that some choose to take action as a result of having seen the quilt. Yet the quilt’s most significant implications for change are to be found by looking at its impact within gay communities, where for some the quilt’s reconstructions become a matter of life and death.

THE QUILT’S IMPACT FOR GAY COMMUNITIES

Collectivizing Effects

During an interview in which one of the founders of the quilt enumerated several ways that he saw perceptions of gays and lesbians to be changed by the quilt, I asked if he felt that this was the most important impact of the quilt for the gay community. His response was a somewhat surprising and emphatic "no." He explained:

I think the most important role the NAMES Project has played in the gay and lesbian community is giving it a rallying point. That workshop was the closest thing San Francisco has ever had to a gay and lesbian community center. This neighborhood in '85 and '86 was a walking graveyard. The
streets were nearly empty. Bars were closing. You could feel AIDS in the air. And that workshop opened, and over the course of that summer this neighborhood was reborn. So many people felt isolated, even though they lived next door to other people who were going through the same thing. And nobody was talking about it. And no one understood how deep those feelings were. And that workshop opened, and it just opened the floodgates. And you really had a sense of community here for the first time in a long time. A sense of creativity, a sense of positive energy, a sense of emotional release. And especially with the March on Washington, a sense that, for people who couldn’t go to the March on Washington, they could still be there because they sewed part of the quilt.

This staffmember went on to point out how the quilt had similar effects in Boston, Topeka, and other communities, especially those who were at a point in their response to the epidemic of "shut down because you can’t deal with anymore." This explanation is reproduced here at length because it captures several elements of the significance of the quilt for certain gay communities, as repeatedly confirmed in other interviews. A key element of the quilt’s impact is its power to draw individuals out of isolation into a collectivized experience. One NAMES Project staffmember suggests that this need became obvious on the night that inspired the idea of the quilt, when placards bearing names of those who had died of AIDS were taped to the walls of the Old Federal Building in San Francisco:

For the most part up to that point, a lot of people held their grief in the loss of friends as a personal experience, and they had not collectivized the experience. We were only in the very beginning stages of collectivizing those experiences. And to have a symbol, to have a memorial, a monument, even if it was made of scratch, even if it was just names on paper taped to a wall, became a very, very potent experience.
Another staffmember expresses that simply seeing the quilt has the potential for this collectivizing effect:

Whenever anybody goes through this (dealing with AIDS), it’s such an intensely personal experience, and then when you go to see the quilt, you realize how many other people share that experience. So one of the things that I hear from people over and over and over and over about this needed quilt is how they were just sort of sunk down in their own grief, the day-to-day crap of coping with this disaster...and had very little opportunity to be comforted, to be connected, to be supported.

The quilt therefore offers the opportunity for some of those whose lives have been affected by AIDS to recognize their commonality with others who have had similar experiences. Further, the quilt provides a context for a collective interpretation of those experiences that defies the condemning constructions of the dominant culture. Thus the quilt not only draws individuals out of the physical isolation that comes with the devastation of life-threatening illnesses, but also invites individuals out of the social isolation that can result from being marginalized and stigmatized. Overcoming this social isolation depends upon having opportunity to participate in a compassionate and affirming construction of what it means to be gay and to have AIDS.

The Positive Reconstruction of Gay Identity

It is especially important to recognize that to reconstruct gay identity in the face of social condemnation is necessarily a very emotional process. Hochschild (1975),
Jagger (1989) and others suggest that the social construction of "reality" at any level always involves emotionality. Such is all the more the case when a group’s survival depends upon how its identity is constructed. To suffer the stigmatization of the dominant culture involves experiencing the shame and guilt that are built into that construction. And to confront and denounce established meaning is to reconstruct identity emotionally, as well as conceptually. The quilt becomes one important means of constructing gay identity as a source of pride instead of shame. It portrays gay relationships to be legitimate, loving, sensitive and fulfilling. It becomes a tangible, lasting manifestation of this construction, which not only impacts the image of gays generated within society generally, but also continually influences how gays see themselves very personally and as a collectivity. And in a society in which the message is that those dying of AIDS are expendable, the quilt involves the passionate expression that these people matter. It therefore provides a needed avenue of expression of various emotions, including profound grief. And in that shared expression, the debilitating despair of isolation is transformed into a collective celebration of identity. In the words of two of the NAMES Project staff members:

Collectivizing it too I think has become a very important means of transcending the grief and allowing people to come back to a real joy for the lives that they’ve shared, even though they’re gone. And so the quilt has allowed for I think as much a real celebration of those lives that have passed.

We (the NAMES Project) have a positive effect that way. As a community we can collectively grieve and also celebrate the lives of the people we have lost.
Rituals are used to enhance the emotional reconstructions of meaning that occur through the quilt. Using Wuthnow’s (1987) definition of rituals as symbolic occurrences that dramatize and express social relations, Taylor and Whittier (1992b) propose that ritual is key to the management of feelings in social movements, transforming feelings such as shame and defeat into ones that oppose the dominant order. Clearly this is the case in rituals that take place around the quilt. The vigil mentioned above in which Cleve Jones characterizes gay responses to AIDS in ways that evoke gay pride is but one example. Other quilt rituals involve gatherings to make panels and precisely planned and organized behaviors to carry out quilt displays.

For example, displays often begin with an opening ceremony in which groups of volunteers, all dressed in white, silently and methodically unfold sections of the quilt while names of those who appear on the quilt are solemnly read. The unfolding of the sections is choreographed to resemble the opening of a lotus blossom. When the section is fully open, the volunteers together lift and turn the fabric, allowing it to gracefultly billow as the section is placed within a grid of walkways. Names continue to be read throughout the display as the volunteers in white quietly monitor sections of the quilt, comforting grieving viewers and protecting the quilt from potential violations (e.g., people walking on panels). Displays are often ended with closing rituals in which creators of new panels ceremoniously present these panels to NAMES
Project representatives. Throughout, feelings of respect, pride, awe and intense grief are expressed and constructed.

The first and perhaps the most opportune time to ritualize the meaning of the quilt happened with its first full display, which took place on the Capitol Mall in Washington, D.C. in October of 1987. Many of the originators of the NAMES Project speak of this first display as one of the most overwhelmingly moving experiences of their lives. Volunteers and staff members worked through the night to be ready to begin the opening ceremony precisely at sunrise. Sections of the quilt were unfolded very slowly and deliberately as the names that appeared within that section were read with great emotion. And the immensity of those first two thousand panels gradually, strikingly presented itself for the first time. In later full displays, sheer numbers of panels would preclude this type of ritualization, since the quilt would cover several acres. But for many of those who took part in this first event, the impact was momentous. One staff member describes the experience:

That first push to go to Washington I think was probably one of the most magical times in my life. We did see manifest what was just a dream, and what was just an intention, and what was just a very, very incredibly sincere drive to make a statement...to make the most respectful and honoring statement of pride in the lives that we have lost. And as we saw it unfold, we saw it manifest in a way that I think exceeded all of our hopes, all of our expectations. The beauty of that moment exceeded anything we anticipated.

Ritual is therefore integral to the constructed meaning of the quilt, to the expression of emotions inherent to that meaning, and to the power of such
constructions to defy contrary images of the dominant culture. Quilt rituals also create solidarity among those who take part, a consequence that is consistent with the writings on ritual by many sociologists, including Durkheim (1961), Kemper (1981) and Wuthnow (1987). When I asked one of the founders of the quilt in what way he felt the quilt was most significant for the gay movement, he hesitated, cautioning that his response might sound "off the wall." But he proceeded by saying, "It’s ritual." He then described what it was like for him to go from one display to another, taking part in the rituals that take place around the quilt. He emphasized the importance of quilt rituals for gay and lesbian collective identity with the following:

It’s the first ritual that we've had to join us together that worked for men and women, that worked for political and non-political, radical and non-radical. It doesn't matter who you are, doesn't matter what you believe in. If you believe in the gay and lesbian community, you can be part of this, and it’s a ritual that includes others. It’s not an exclusive thing; it’s a drawing-in experience. I've always believed...that the single most important thing that we could be doing was reinforcing the concept of gay and lesbian people - a gay and lesbian tribe, and that’s what this does.

In sum, the quilt and its rituals draw individuals out of their isolated experiences of AIDS and into a context in which gay identity can be emotionally, positively and collectively proclaimed.

A significant aspect of this identity construction is that there are times when no apparent distinction is made between self and other in the construction of what it means to be gay. To express pride in being gay with regard to another or with regard to the community is to express pride in self and vice versa. Personal needs for self
definition are met through expression about others and about the community as a whole. Consistent with the social psychology of interactionists such as Mead (1934) and Cooley (1964), my observations indicate that the construction of identity is a social, collective undertaking that cannot be accomplished in isolation. What is to be gained through the reconstruction of what it means to be gay is gained by the individual and the collective simultaneously. In this case, the interests of the individual and the collective are not contradictory, but are interdependent.

Further, another aspect of the identity construction that the quilt manifests has to do with what might be called the time-dimensional qualities of identity. This data indicates that when identity is defined, its referent is not only the present, but also the past and the future. In other words, to make declarations about who I am/we are is to also make claims on our past and future. Again, these claims not only redefine what was, is and will be, but also redefine emotional responses to these constructions. To reclaim the past as valuable (in spite of the denunciation of the dominant culture) is to find the context of meaning in which to grieve its loss, hold onto it in pride, yet also let go of it in order to move on. To reclaim the present is also to discover collective pride and identity, and the possibilities of joy, in spite of tragedy. And to reclaim the future is to find hope and the will to go on. The time-dimensional elements of the quilt's constructions of gay identity are clear in many of the comments made about the quilt, such as these:

I think it's amazing that a community in the midst of the kind of tragedy and despair we have gone through has found something creative to sustain it and
has found a way to insure its memory, to capture its past and not lose its identity.

I think the community can look at the quilt and see their future.

Most important, what is being accomplished in these conceptual and emotional reconstructions of gay identity is the rewriting of gays back into time, and back into society. At a time when AIDS and its signification pose serious threats to both the physical and social existence of gays, this rewriting of gays back into social history becomes a matter of survival. And that survival depends upon a simultaneous rewriting of past, present and future. The link between survival and the ability to project a future from claims on the present and past is especially obvious in these comments from a NAMES Project staff member:

When I see the quilt, I see (that) we have survived it (the epidemic), and everything we believed in, everything we fought for and everything we hoped for is still there. And we will survive. So it is very much a promise to people, to the people that have died, to all the people that have lost people they have loved the most, this quilt. It’s (something) real, something they can wrap around themselves and know that we’re gonna survive it.

In using Weiner’s (1985) notions of inalienable wealth to understand the quilt, it can be seen that this power to construct gay identity in a way that links past, present and future has to do with two things: how the quilt is circulated and the significance of it being cloth and quilt. Although there are increasing numbers of panels for people who are not gay, the quilt remains a testimony to gay identity because it is
circulated in such a way that it remains attached to its original owners. Further, the materials of cloth/quilt uniquely capture the personal presences and heritages of those they represent, while also providing the perfect metaphor for the reintegration of gays back into the social fabric of life. These images construct inclusion, unity, and the mending and tying together of otherwise discarded pieces. That the quilt's imagery is intended to act in this capacity to reconnect gays to social sources of life is reflected in the lyrics to a song adopted by the NAMES Project entitled "Thread of Life":

Keep the love alive. Keep the will alive  
Keep the hope that time will heal the wounds  
Hold on through the night.  
You are a part of the thread of life,  
Running through, the thread of life.  

One staffmember of the NAMES Project articulates how the use of a quilt is integral to this effort to rewrite gays back into social history:

(The quilt) claims for us (that) we are a part of (U.S.) tradition, too. We are a part of this country. We are a part of your history. I think that has a lot to do with the power of it. Everybody’s got a quilt...

It is important to recognize that the quilt rewrites gays back into the social fabric not only culturally, but also structurally. In gay communities in which networks of relationships have been ravaged by the loss of lives to AIDS, the relationship-

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building capacity of the quilt-as-gift reweaves social connections necessary for a community to survive such loss and to regain a sense of collective identity. As described in the previous chapter, this happens with the cultivation of new relationships within gay communities, and with the mending or reaffirming of relationships with other members of society, including families of origin. In these ways, the quilt epitomizes Weiner's (1985, p.212) characterization of inalienable wealth as that which secures identity in the face of loss and "ensures some measure of the person's or group's immortality."

It is in this context that "woo-woo" stories become understandable sociologically. These commonly told stories that suggest the mysterious continued presence of those who are commemorated on the quilt are consistent with the quilt's power to construct immortality. These stories become the evidence that even physical death cannot disrupt the unity and identity of gay communities and their loved ones. They indicate that the quilt does indeed take on its own life that cannot be defeated even by an epidemic such as AIDS. In this way, they become central to the overall construction through the quilt of ongoing identity, in spite of death. Because the dominant culture poses death as a punishment that gays inflict on themselves as a result of the violation of social and moral codes, the defiance of death indicated in "woo-woo" stories is also a defiance of such social recrimination. Thus these stories make sociological sense as important elements of a collective effort to create and recognize a social continuity that spans even death and social condemnation, and therefore constructs a future of hope and possibility.
Consequences for Mobilization

As evidenced in the opening of this discussion on the effects of the quilt within gay communities, the construction of gay identity that takes place in the quilt and its rituals provides some gay communities with a "rallying point." The quilt facilitates movement beyond what many refer to as a "paralysis" that threatens physical and social survival. One NAMES Project staffmember describes the experience in this way:

At a certain point of this epidemic, you just shut down because you can't deal with anymore. And you can't function. And you lose the anger to write to your congressman, and you lose the ability to keep writing checks you don't think are helping. But there's something about sitting down with a needle and thread, where you finally feel like you're doing something. And it might be all you can do, but you're doing something. And there are other people around you who are in the same boat. And I think it has really been the kind of adrenaline that the community needed.

In The Quilt: Stories from the NAMES Project (Ruskin 1988, p.18), Cleve Jones describes what paralysis was like for him personally after most of those closest to him had become ill or died of AIDS and after he eventually was diagnosed as HIV positive himself:

I began to believe that there was no hope and that everyone I cared about was going to die from this disease. I lost my sense of humor, and I lost my ability to fight back.
He goes on to explain why, in his view, the quilt literally saved his life:

There’s promise in a quilt...It’s so important for people whose greatest enemy is despair. I really believe that the worst thing that could happen to us is to despair and to stop living and loving and fighting.

As noted above, many others speak of the quilt in terms of survival, as well. Therefore first and foremost, the quilt mobilizes gays who are HIV positive or who have AIDS fight to stay healthy and alive. In this context, such a struggle to survive becomes its own distinctive form of resistance.

By providing an avenue for the collective expression of emotions and the reconstruction of identity and hope, the quilt also further mobilizes toward various types of responses to the AIDS epidemic and the anti-gay beliefs and practices that promote it. This supports Taylor and Whittier’s (1992b) view that rituals are important for social movement mobilization. In fact, this study suggests that mobilization is a fundamental purpose served by the quilt for gay activism. One member of the NAMES Project summarizes the mobilizing effects of the quilt:

People who are burned out are reenergized. People who have not been involved before (in) the AIDS epidemic, AIDS Movement, gay and lesbian movement are motivated to volunteer.
Describing the response of a crowd of NAMES Project volunteers when President
Bush was in flight out of the city as a full display began in Washington, D.C.,
another staffmember pinpoints a moment of mobilization:

They save their money for Washington so they could work, and then your
president flies over...They were so, they just stood there and yelled,
"Shame!" And it so empowered, they became so focused right there and they
became even more passionate. And that’s what it’s about.

Further, interviewees point to the ways in which the mobilizing effects of the
quilt extend beyond the community in San Francisco to other gay communities across
the country. One of the founders of the quilt addresses this in some detail:

It’s a real confidence builder for that community. It’s sometimes the first
time that group of gay and lesbian people have come together and succeeded
at what they were doing, especially on the media level. A lot of the media
work that Danny did for those first couple of tours (was) trying to convince
the host committees that they should go to the major media with the story
because it will get covered - trying to convince them that what they were
doing was important because their sense was that it wasn’t, and that it was a
losing battle, and that, you know, they were gay activists and they were
never going to be heard by the local paper. And by the time the quilt got
there, there were cover stories and there were editorial pages. And for a lot
of these communities it was the beginning of a major sense that things can
change and that a community united works.

From the other side of the picture, a volunteer who is active in the Oklahoma
City Chapter of the NAMES Project enumerates many forms of gay activism that
came about as a result of a quilt display in that city. He explains:
A large number of people who were moved by the quilt knew that there had to be something else that they (could do)...It was just right after the quilt had left, the same night, that they started an organization in Oklahoma City called "STAT," which is a gay and lesbian activist group. And it's just been incredible the things that we've gotten accomplished, the things that we wouldn't let our state and government offices do that would discriminate against gays or lesbians...

Some of the successes of this organization reported by this volunteer include having kept a Department of Human Services list of AZT recipients out of the hands of other organizations, blocking public responses to a government-sponsored survey about AIDS until its structure and wording were altered to be less discriminatory, and using various media to stop a campaign to smear gays by a local legislator.

It is therefore clear that the confidence needed to continue to press for change is fostered as a result of the positive identity construction happening in the quilt. This mobilizing posture is often passed on from the national level to the local chapters of the NAMES Project and other gay activist groups, especially those whose members have been involved with the quilt in some capacity. In this way, the quilt has direct and indirect impact on the movement.

Other Related Consequences for Gay Activism

As the above discussion of mobilization suggests, one of the consequences that has come about with the growth of the NAMES Project is the structuring of organizational relationships between the national office and the forty local NAMES Project chapters across the country. The NAMES Project promotes the development
of organizational structures that can accomplish a display and then links these organizations, passing on to them not only the medium for expression and mobilization, but also a structure that makes this possible. This structure then becomes the avenue through which resources are shared. As indicated above, staff members from the national office share media skills and information with local volunteers. All money donated at quilt displays is directed to local AIDS service organizations. Further, the national office organizes an annual chapter conference at which ideas, resources and skills can be shared among representatives of all levels of the NAMES Project. The national organization therefore links local groups to a larger structural network of information and organizations - elements which the resource mobilization perspective recognizes to be essential for social movement gains. While the purpose of this national and international structure is to educate and mobilize response to the AIDS epidemic, its existence represents the potential to mobilize for other aspects of gay activism, as well. One of the staff members explains:

We have a chapter network throughout the country, throughout the world, actually. We’ve shown that we can organize on a national level, that people are interested. We have a good mailing list. It’s the biggest mailing list in the United States for a gay and lesbian rights/AIDS organization. It’s bigger than the Human Rights Campaign and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force together...So we’ve shown that we can organize now on issues...but we need a national agenda. We need leadership.
What is especially important and interesting about the organizational structure that the NAMES Project has put into place is that it is the result of a group’s need for a type of social expression that involved gift giving. This suggests that the tendency in the resource mobilization perspective to see structure as preceding and facilitating expression should be complemented with more study of the ways that cultural expression and structure mutually effect one another.

Many of those involved with the NAMES Project also point out that the quilt provides an avenue of response for those who want to work against gay/lesbian discrimination but who, for one reason or another, choose not to be "out." There is cover in the NAMES Project for these people since the quilt is a response to AIDS, rather than to gay issues per se, a response that attempts to be broadly inclusive of all populations effected by the epidemic. In interviews and other data gathered for this study, I found that the involvement of closeted gays and lesbians in the NAMES Project is indeed common. This suggests that the quilt may evoke or facilitate pro-gay efforts and/or expression from people who would not otherwise become involved.

Similarly, there is evidence that some gays and lesbians use the shared experience of the quilt as an opportunity to come out to family and friends. Because the quilt represents a relatively safe space in which there are positive images of what it means to be gay, viewing the quilt with family or friends allows for an assessment of responses to gay-related issues and sets the stage for the telling of personal stories. In this way also, the quilt fosters the visibility of gays and lesbians in the larger society.
Finally, the quilt is a site where coalition between various groups, and especially unity between lesbians and gays, is cultivated and reinforced. Lesbian presence at all levels of involvement with the NAMES Project is marked and pervasive, as in other facets of response to the AIDS epidemic (Adam 1987, ACT UP/ New York Women and AIDS Book Group 1990). At the time that the quilt originated, it was believed that lesbians were the least likely population to be HIV infected. The reasons for such a high level of lesbian involvement are not, therefore, immediately obvious. Some of the women interviewed explain that the epidemic itself has led gays and lesbians to find more commonalities and opportunities for coalition than before AIDS. For example, they point to fact that the financial costs of the epidemic to the gay community have lessened the differences between gays and lesbians with regard to economic resources. They also observe that the experience of AIDS has caused gay men to become more politicized and therefore more closely aligned with lesbian groups working against multiple forms of oppression. These commentaries from interviewees shed light on why lesbian coalition with gays in the fight against AIDS is more pronounced than it has been in the past.

Further, like others who become involved with the quilt as panel-makers, volunteers or even staffmembers, lesbians often are involved at least partly because they are grieving the loss of someone close to them, and the quilt meets their personal needs for expression. There is some evidence that, once they do become involved with the quilt in some way, lesbians find more commonality with gay men because of the grief shared with them. Again, the quilt becomes a context in which shared
meaning breaks down barriers. For example, one lesbian involved with the NAMES Project tells about a lesbian friend of hers who had always been somewhat condemning of gay men who were into sadomasochism and all its markers, including leather, whips, chains, etc. The friend had expressed anger and disgust over such practices, concluding that the behavior could only be about pain and violence. But after attending a quilt display in Washington, D.C. at which she saw gay men in leather "blubbering like babies and holding each other," she was deeply moved and convinced that she needed to reconsider her perspective.

Thus the quilt is a place where the shared experience of grief and other emotions creates links within and among the many diverse groups that interact through the quilt. In this way the quilt cultivates coalitions - among groups who define their sexualities in various ways, among groups who respond to AIDS in various ways, and across many other lines of difference that fade somewhat in the shared expression of grief and loss.

In conclusion, there are several direct and indirect consequences of the quilt for gay activism. The NAMES Project brings about the placement and linking of a national organizational structure that is conducive to further activism. The quilt provides a context in which closeted gays and lesbians can engage in pro-gay activity. It also promotes gay and lesbian visibility by providing a relatively safe space for coming out. Further, it cultivates coalitions between gays and lesbians, and various other groups. And especially significant is the mobilization that takes place as the
quilt reconstructs gay identity, reconstitutes gay communities, and reintegrates gays into the larger fabric of social life.
Chapter VI

CONCLUSION: THE CAPACITIES AND LIMITS OF THE QUILT AS SOCIAL MOVEMENT CULTURE

In researching the AIDS Memorial Quilt, my focus has been especially directed to those who have been most involved with the quilt and its meaning. This is because my purpose has been to investigate how the constructed meaning in a shared cultural expression impacts efforts for social change, in this case gay activism. Consistent with the postmodern feminism that guides this research, I have demonstrated that the quilt is a text in which what it means to be gay and to have AIDS has been constructed in ways that challenge the discourses of the dominant culture about these issues.

However, a postmodern feminist approach would also point out that any discourse, including that promoted in the quilt, presupposes the political leverage to construct "reality" in a specific way. Therefore, the ways in which being gay and having AIDS are given meaning in the quilt can be understood to result from some political privileges that make it possible for especially gay, white, middle-class men to construct their experiences. A potential implication that finds evidence in this research is that the quilt’s constructed meanings at the most deny, and at the least are not relevant to, the experiences of some groups who are gay, who have AIDS, or
both. In spite of the fact that the founders of the NAMES Project intend for the quilt to be accessible to and inclusive of all who experience AIDS, the way that meaning gets constructed through the quilt precludes its relevance and benefits to certain groups. In other words, the quilt as gift cannot be received by specific groups since, for various reasons, the quilt has relevance for some groups and not for others.

This chapter begins with an overview of how the shared meaning of the quilt has been conducive to social change and to gay activism, especially for those who can relate to the quilt and receive it as gift. Then I discuss some of the most important implications of these findings. Finally, I consider some of the limiting effects of the quilt's discourse to give a fuller view of both the capacities and the limits of the quilt as social movement culture.

CHANGE IN THE PATH OF THE QUILT: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This research has shown that the quilt's meaning and its consequences are integrally related to the fact that the quilt has been constructed and exchanged as a gift. Because gift exchange, more than any other type of exchange, constructs and affirms strong emotional bonds between people, the quilt as gift creates and strengthens social ties that have been threatened by social condemnation, disease and death. Through the quilt, relationships between those who have died and their loved ones are reaffirmed, and the accompanying emotions of grief and love are given expression. Reconciliations sometimes take place between those who are facing death
or have died and those who have been estranged from them because of social stigmatization. And social bonds are created among those who share in common their grief and similar experiences of AIDS.

This bonding takes place not only because the quilt is a gift, but because it counters the dominant culture’s condemning images of gays and of people with AIDS. Characterizations constructed especially through biomedical discourse posing gays as aggressive, sexually driven, crazed and exotic threats of physical, social and moral contamination are reversed in the quilt. Images evoked by cloth, quilt and gift associate gays with something soft, consoling, life-supporting, familial, patriotic, responsible and loving. The effect is that the quilt acts to remove the obstacles to social bonding created by stigmatizations that are meant to set up social divisions. Further, the cloth/quilt medium is uniquely conducive to capturing and conveying very personal, intimate and emotional dimensions of the individual lives represented on the quilt. Therefore the quilt becomes a compelling invitation to sympathize with the lives and the relationships that are revealed on the panels. In a word, the quilt moves people across previously constructed boundaries. And to the degree that someone is moved to define their relationships to others differently, and possibly define themselves differently, they experience a "change of heart." My research indicates that this has happened to many who previously accepted anti-gay stigmatizations of the dominant culture. In this way the quilt, like other gifts, creates social bonds by redefining social boundaries and by securing those ties with gratitude.
Further, because the quilt is exchanged as a particular type of gift, as inalienable wealth (Weiner 1985), its exchange continually bears witness to the identity of its original owners, the gay community. That identity is maintained in part because the cloth/quilt medium so effectively represents personal presences in the panels. The link to the gay community is secured through conditions placed on the exchange of the quilt by the original owners or their representatives. These conditions enhance the value of the quilt, yet still allow for its exchange. So the continual movement of the quilt sets up ongoing social recognition of gay identity. In this way, both physical and social threats to gay existence are defied in a symbol that continually proclaims gay presence in a positive manner. Social identity is sustained in the face of the tremendous loss of the AIDS epidemic.

This study shows that, in this capacity, the quilt impacts gay activism and social and cultural change having to do with gay issues in various ways. For those outside gay communities who experience a change of heart as they are drawn into the quilt’s meaning, there are changes in concepts about gays and people with AIDS. And sometimes such changes result in pro-gay or anti-AIDS actions.

Furthermore, some of the most important changes prompted by the quilt take place within gay communities. I have demonstrated that one of the most vital effects of the quilt is its tendency to draw individuals out of physical and social isolation into a collectivized experience. There the collective interpretation of what it means to be gay and to have AIDS is compassionate and affirming, resulting in both conceptual and emotional reconstructions of gay identity. Pride replaces shame, and grief is
given expression with the collective proclamation of the value of those lives lost. The many different forms of ritual used in and around the quilt are integral to this emotional expression. The identity construction that results is time-dimensional, not only involving claims on the present, but also the past and future. The past is proudly valued and grieved, the present proudly celebrated, in spite of tragedy, and the future is deemed to be a place of hope. Continuity between past, present and future is reestablished, so the debilitating despair of isolation is collectively transformed into the will to go on.

Through the quilt as text, then, gays threatened with physical and social annihilation are rewritten back into time and into society with a metaphor of reintegration. And this has structural as well as cultural implications. Relationships are built and affirmed in the quilt’s path, helping to secure gay identity in the face of loss and to construct group immortality. Stories about the continued presence of those who have died become the evidence of this immortality.

The quilt is therefore, most of all, a mobilizing agent. It mobilizes gays who are HIV positive or who have AIDS beyond paralysis to survival and hope. And it mobilizes gays toward anti-AIDS and pro-gay activism at national and local levels. In the process, the NAMES Project encourages the development of organizational structures at local levels, linking them to one another and providing them with information, skills, and opportunities to share resources with one another. Within these local contexts, closeted gays and lesbians have the occasion to engage in pro-gay activity and still remain closeted, and those who want to come out are provided with a
supportive and positive context in which to do so. Consequently, gay and lesbian involvement and visibility are cultivated through the NAMES Project. Because of the relationship-building capacity of the quilt, coalitions are also fostered between groups who find a unique occasion to share common ground in the quilt. Thus coalitions are strengthened between gays and lesbians, and between groups who approach activism and response to AIDS in various ways.

These findings suggest several important sociological insights that warrant further consideration and research. One of the most significant implications of my findings is that sociological understandings of emotions, in social movements or in any social realm, can benefit from a more concentrated focus on how emotions coincide with the placement or movement of relational boundaries between people. Based on this data, bonding emotions such as love and gratitude have to do with the reconstructing of relational boundaries. In this case, that reconstruction is accomplished with the exchange of a gift. It is the gift and its meaning that crosses and transforms previously existing relational boundaries, and therefore moves both giver and recipient. Thus this research provides strong support for the trend in the sociology of emotions away from seeing emotions as individual and physiologically or psychologically based. It strengthens the social constructionist arguments exemplified in the writings of Jagger (1989) and Hochschild (1989a; 1989b) that emotions, like concepts, are integrally linked to constructed meaning, and that dichotomies separating concepts and emotions from one another and from meaning are artificial. Moreover, this research not only supports this argument, but also points to ways in
which the actual construction process takes place, demonstrating how material culture and its exchange can be central to this process.

Related to this point is the important insight that, as gift giving redefines relationships with the movement of relational boundaries, concepts and attitudes change as relationships do. I have shown that, as the exchange of the quilt has moved people and redefined their relationships to one another, notions about what it means to be gay and to have AIDS have also changed. This illustrates how intrinsically relational all facets of culture are, including concepts, suggesting that the study of the role of culture in social movements and social change has a great deal to gain from linking conceptual changes to relational ones.

My findings support the work of others who imply that identity is effected by changes in relational boundaries (Taylor and Whittier 1992a; Melucci 1989). As the quilt creates social ties between people, boundaries of "self" become expanded, resulting in collective redefinitions of what it means to be gay. Therefore, in this case it is clear that the social construction of identity has to do with how boundaries between "self" and "others" are meaningfully defined through the symbolic exchange of a gift. This is also consistent with the writings of third world feminists such as Anzaldúa (1987; 1990) and Mohanty (1991) who emphasize that identity too is relational, suggesting that more can be learned about identity construction by looking at how various forms of discourse, or symbolic exchange, continually situate or move self/other boundaries. Again, this research begins to reveal the importance of the exchange of material culture in establishing such boundaries.
Like other research that emphasizes the reincorporation of culture and constructed meaning back into the study of social movements, this study moves beyond the resource mobilization perspective in some ways. It demonstrates that the quilt as a cultural expression has structural consequences, while it is also true that the quilt’s continued existence depends upon structural/organizational resources. There is the beginning of a reintegration of the false dualism of culture/structure in this approach. Actually, several of the false dualisms left intact by resource mobilization writers are reconsidered in this research. For another example, my findings dispute the necessary separation of individual and collective incentive for movement participation suggested by Olsen (1968), demonstrating that the two can be interdependent. The posing of emotions and reason as opposites is also challenged with the finding that the quilt simultaneously accomplishes emotional expression and strategy for social change. Thus this research underscores the importance of focusing on both facets of such apparent opposites in order to find their relatedness to one another in social movements and in other social realms (Ferree and Miller 1985; Taylor 1992). Because resource mobilization researchers do offer significant findings about part of this picture, their work and a focus on culture of this type become potentially complementary.

This research is consistent with the views on culture and social movements proposed by such writers as Wuthnow (1987; 1989), Gamson and Modigliani (1989) and Taylor and Whittier (1992b) who affirm the value of approaching social movement culture as discourse and therefore focusing on its observable attributes.
There is strong support in my findings for the conclusions of these authors that ritual as a form of discourse is central to emotional expression within social movements. My explorations of the quilt and all its rituals also confirm Taylor and Whittier's (1992a, p.22) further conclusions that ritual is used by challenging groups to "redefine dominant feeling and expression rules to reflect more desirable identities or self conceptions, and express group solidarity."

There are several ways in which these findings are consistent with the writings of new social movement theorists. As these writers would anticipate, the quilt as social movement culture is a resistance to the encroachment of political regulation and control on private realms through the cultural representation of sexuality in medicine, science, media, law and other institutions. It is resistance to the ever more intimate manipulation of not only the thoughts, but also the desires and motivations of individuals. The quilt is therefore an effort to reconstruct cultural representation about the identities of gays and of people with AIDS through a relational form that itself challenges the status quo, through gift giving. Also consistent with Offe's (1985) characterizations of new social movements, originators of the NAMES Project defy former dualisms by deliberately using the quilt to accomplish both expressive and instrumental goals simultaneously. This is especially reflected in the many comments about the quilt that reveal it to be a carefully chosen strategy, as well as an urgently needed form of expression. The fact that the quilt originated within a predominantly white, middle-class and male population is congruous with descriptions of new social movement actors as not the most deprived groups in society and not
class-identified, but issue-identified. Further, it can and will be argued in more detail below that, consistent with new social movement characterizations, the quilt as social movement culture is more focused on the renewal of democracy and its political culture than on revolutionary change. In all these respects, my findings are compatible with new social movement theory, confirming the value of this perspective for the historical and political contexting of some forms of cultural resistance.

This research also moves beyond new social movement theory by providing more of a micro-level, processual perspective on how cultural resistance actually gets done in a particular setting (Klandermans 1986; Morris and Mueller 1992). Especially with the discussion of differing constructed meanings below, this study begins to document the variability and contextuality of political interpretations and resulting efforts for social change. Accordingly, the potential structuralist trap within new social movement theory of seeing one macro-level socio-political context to evoke uniform responses is avoided.

THE LIMITS OF THE QUILT: THOSE OUTSIDE THE GIFT CIRCLE

Because the quilt is a form of cultural resistance, its primary consequences for social change have to do with how it constructs meaning about having AIDS and being gay. But what happens when the way that the quilt makes sense of these events does not coincide with the experiences or the priorities of all groups who are gay, who grapple with AIDS, or both? The implication is that the discourse promoted
through the quilt is not relevant to or potentially even denies other discourses about
tese experiences, illustrating again that all discourse is political. Because a central
element of the quilt's meaning is its construction and exchange as a gift, the politics
of gift giving are also demonstrated here since some groups do not have access to this
gift, find it irrelevant to their lives, or must refuse to receive it because of its
meaning.

Thus, although the primary focus in this research has been on the quilt's
consequences for social change among those who share it's meaning, a larger view of
it's impact can be gained by looking at how and why some groups are not within the
gift circle. One way to identify the parameters of the quilt and its discourse is to note
direct criticisms of the quilt. Another discussed in more detail in the methodology
chapter is to "pivot the center" of our focus to accounts of what it means to be
grappling with AIDS for groups whose experiences are only minimally or not at all
represented on the quilt. What follows is a discussion of criticisms of the quilt, as
well as indirect perspectives on the quilt gained through writings that document
experiences of AIDS that are different from those of gay, white, middle-class men.
These perspectives are then used to expand these conclusions about the politics and
limits of the quilt's discourse and its implications for social change.

Criticisms of the Quilt

Interestingly, virtually all direct criticisms of the quilt or the NAMES Project
encountered in my research have been instigated by gays or lesbians. One line of
critique argues that in some ways the quilt has not remained true to the political needs of gays. For example, from the very beginning of the epidemic, and especially as it has involved more and more heterosexuals, many gays have been cautious about the implications of posing AIDS as a gay disease. There have been concerted efforts to dissociate AIDS from gays in some ways. But many have also warned that it is a disservice to gays to fail to recognize that the percentage of deaths to AIDS that are gay has continued to be very high, and that the percentage of those fighting against AIDS who are gay has also remained very high. So the "de-gaying" of AIDS has also been seen to be problematic. Meanwhile, the NAMES Project has been accused of dissociating AIDS from gays in inappropriate ways.

For example, in 1988 Michael Standman of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation argued that the candlelight vigil taking place in conjunction with that year's capitol display of the quilt gave virtually no acknowledgement of the gays and lesbians who made up the vast majority of the crowd. He charged that the NAMES Project focused on children, families and heterosexuals in order to appeal to, and attract resources from, middle America.¹

Others have also made similar accusations, noting for example that parents and heterosexual families are more prominently featured than gays in vigil ceremonies, on some NAMES Project brochures, and in NAMES Project videos about the quilt. Meanwhile, NAMES Project representatives have contended that these have been

¹ See articles entitled "Bi-coastal Controversy" in the issues of Equal Times published on December 7 and December 23, 1988, New York City.
efforts to be inclusive while also maintaining a continual acknowledgement of their gay roots. Yet some gays have perceived this as an abandonment of the gay community. Some of these feelings of betrayal have come in the event that the quilt has been perceived to be used too closely in alliance with specific religious or political groups, alienating particular segments of the gay community. Such concerns were raised, for example, when a quilt display was allowed to take place in conjunction with a Catholic Mass celebrated by the pope in San Francisco.² Other related criticisms charge that the hesitance from NAMES Project staff members to alienate members of the mainstream in the U.S. has resulted in the NAMES Project having continually missed a perfect opportunity in its displays to educate people about why there are so many panels and so many deaths to AIDS. Thus the concern is that the NAMES Project fails to link AIDS to homophobia and to the larger systemic workings of power and oppression.³

This sense of urgency about seeing AIDS in context with larger systems of oppression is also at the heart of several other criticisms of the quilt. Members of ACT UP have issued written warnings at quilt displays that the grieving that the quilt promotes is not enough of a response, and that people should not assume that, by

² It should be noted that differences of perspective about the points of criticism discussed in this section exist within the NAMES Project as an organization, as well as in the larger gay community. As mentioned earlier in this document, these are indeed the issues around which most controversy takes place within the organization.

³ These concerns are raised, for example, in the comments of Jeff Levi, Washington lobbyist for the Gay Men’s Health Crisis, at the October 6, 1989 Town Meeting of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.
visiting quilt displays, they have done something about AIDS. Similarly, some have
argued that the quilt's constructed image of being nonpolitical is counter-productive,
betraying the activist stance that is necessary if social change is truly to take place
concerning AIDS. Others have maintained that the financial, material and human
resources being monopolized in maintaining, shipping, storing and displaying the
quilt, as well as staffing the NAMES Project, should be directed to more urgent
ends.⁴ And especially lesbians have pointed to the injustice of so much gay and
lesbian energy being directed to AIDS while little attention has been given to the high
incidences of women's, especially lesbians', deaths to breast cancer. Many lesbians
contend that this is not just another example of sexism, but that it is a result of a
failure to recognize that efforts against AIDS must be approached in terms of a
radical revamping of the entire health care system in the U.S., with all its
heterosexual, sexist, racist and classist consequences.⁵

All these direct and indirect criticisms of the NAMES Project suggest that, at the
least, the response to AIDS represented within the quilt and its rituals must be
understood as only one among many. At the most, these appraisals suggest that the
perspective that has guided the construction of the quilt has not recognized how

⁴ For a recent version of this and other criticisms of the quilt, see "Has AIDS
outgrown the quilt?" by Rick Rose in the "Vox Populi" section (p. 6) of The Advocate,

⁵ This view on the part of lesbians is reflected in the interviews for this research, and
is also exemplified in the comments of Veneita Porter, director of the New York State
Office of AIDS Discrimination Issues, at the Town Meeting of the National Gay and
Lesbian Task Force on October 6, 1989, in Washington, D.C.
fundamentally AIDS is grounded in the systemic workings of power in this country, and is therefore related to all forms of oppression. The implications of these perspectives for the politics of the quilt will be further discussed in conjunction with the views revealed through pivoting the center to some of those whose political interests are not represented by the quilt.

Perspectives Gained through Pivoting the Center

In one relatively recent follow-up contact with one of the staff members of the NAMES Project, a middle-class, gay Latino admitted his disappointment that quilt displays continued to be attended and voluntarily staffed by predominantly white, middle-class people, most of whom were gays and lesbians. Several staff members interviewed pointed to the fact that some of the money that had been donated to the NAMES Project had been earmarked for "outreach" to minority populations, and therefore had been used to promote and support displays in the neighborhoods of these populations. But they also conceded that their own time and energy was so consumed in the daily maintenance of the quilt that "outreach" never seemed to get the energy that they intended. In my own observations at displays, this appearance of overwhelmingly white and middle-class attendance, participation and location sites was confirmed. And although the constitution of the quilt itself could not be ascertained because of the lack of race and class identification on panels, these panels also appeared to be overwhelmingly representative of white, gay males.
The AIDS epidemic is spreading more rapidly among women than in any other population, and 73% of women with AIDS in this country are women of color. Further, 52% of women with AIDS are black, while black women constitute only 12% of the female population in the U.S (ACT UP/NY Women and AIDS Book Group 1990, p. 32). In view of this, it becomes especially strategic and instructive to pivot the center to the experiences of AIDS among these women, and to note what light is shed on the politics of the quilt from this perspective.

In an article entitled "Race, Sex and AIDS: The Construction of 'Other'," Evelynn Hammonds (1986) discusses the hesitance in the black community to be identified with AIDS or with gay sexuality. She links this hesitance to the history of racism in the U.S., pointing out that disease and sexual immorality have always been used by the dominant culture to justify racist oppression. Hammonds notes that, from the time of the arrival of the first slave ships from Africa, white southern doctors portrayed black response to disease as different from whites, legitimating the use of black slave labor in hot, swampy lowlands, since it was argued that blacks were less susceptible to "fevers." She also emphasizes that blacks have been constructed to be inherently morally depraved through the belief that their sexuality is uncontrollable by nature, and therefore to blame for the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Hammonds demonstrates that this mindset led to the justification of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, an experiment that lasted from 1932 to 1972 in which 400 black males who had syphilis were left untreated even when penicillin became widely available for treatment, resulting in perhaps over one hundred unnecessary deaths. She points out
that there are parallels between this incident and the refusal of the white, dominant culture to recognize how racialized AIDS has become. Thomas and Crouse Quinn (1991) echo and elaborate on Hammonds' point in this regard. They emphasize that, with this and other racist atrocities marking the very recent history of medicine in this country, there is widespread belief among blacks that AIDS is another attempt by the dominant culture to promote racist genocide. These beliefs are only enhanced with the dominant culture's promotion of the ideas that AIDS originated in Africa and Haiti. Hammonds explains that, because of this history of the social construction of race and sex, the black community shuns any association with gay sexuality, disease, and other "deviant" behavior such as drug use, even though resulting denial among blacks has disastrous effects.

In another article entitled "AIDS: In Living Color," Beth Richie (1990) emphasizes that, even though the incidence of AIDS among black women is so high, for the black community AIDS is simply one of many urgent problems. Joblessness, poverty, inadequate housing, lack of health care, incarceration, drug use, and illiteracy are just some of the problems that daily pose a threat to life for blacks, and also increase susceptibility to AIDS. Richie points out that meanwhile, ironically, black women make up a large percentage of the nurses' aides and other poorly paid and overworked health care workers who provide services to some people with AIDS. The irony here is especially poignant when health agencies hire undocumented black women and do not provide them with basic health insurance. So while gender roles require that black women be the caretakers of partners and children in the event of
illness, gender, race and class intersect in the larger economic and political context to exploit their caretaking in that realm as well, even when these women are themselves ill.

Richie adds that safe sex campaigns usually do not reflect a cultural sensitivity to a hesitance in the black community to discuss sexuality (for reasons suggested above), and they sometimes reinforce sexist and racist stereotypes of black women as the ones who should be in control of sexuality. Because priority is often given to male partners and children, black women are often approached as vectors of the disease, resulting not only in little or no attention to their own illness, but in pressures upon HIV positive women to abort and to undergo sterilization. This again invokes the issue of racial genocide, since it was only approximately two decades ago that the systematic forced sterilization of women of color in this country was exposed, coinciding in time with the investigations into the Tuskegee Syphilis Study (Thomas and Crouse Quinn 1991). Further, black women who are HIV positive, like other women in the same situation, face threats of being criminally charged upon giving birth and of losing their children.

Gloria Lockett (1990) adds to this picture the perspective that black prostitutes, like other sex workers, have been subjected to further particular forms of stigmatization in connection with AIDS. She asserts that the scapegoating of prostitutes for the spread of AIDS is commonplace, in spite of the fact that female sex workers are far more likely to be infected with HIV by their clients than vice versa, and sex workers are more likely to practice safe sex than other sexually active
women. Further, she points out that the rate of infection among sex workers varies markedly, corresponding with the coincidence of I.V. drug use. Meanwhile, condemning assumptions about sex workers as irresponsible deviants are widespread, with little or no recognition of the two most common reasons for prostitution - financial need and a history of childhood sexual abuse. As Leonard (1990) adds to this discussion, such attitudes result in discriminatory practices against sex workers, such as mandatory testing, quarantining, and felony charges if a prostitute works after a positive test result, even if she uses only safe or no risk sexual practices. Again, the welfare of the sex worker in the event of AIDS is of no concern to the dominant culture. She is simply regarded as a vector or a threat to the "general population."

Racist economic and political discrimination against black women results in their overrepresentation in prostitution and in the female prison population in this country. As Reynolds (1990, p.193) documents, black women make up 43% of the in federal prisons in the U.S., and most of these women are incarcerated for relatively minor, poverty-related crimes such as petty theft and check forgery. Further, it is more likely that black women will be prosecuted and severely sentenced for such crimes than white women. As Christensen (1990, p.139) also notes, the incidence of HIV positivity and AIDS is very high in prisons. For example, AIDS is the leading cause of death among prisoners in New York state, where a woman with AIDS lives an average of only five to six months after diagnosis, half the survival time of her male counterpart. Proper health care in these settings is lacking, yet prisoners are
subjected to mandatory testing and quarantining, which precludes taking part in programs that earn good time credit toward release.

The ACT UP/New York Women and AIDS Book Group (1990) point to many other factors that are relevant to black women's experiences of AIDS. They suggest that racist stereotypes lead to false assumptions that incidences of AIDS within the black community are primarily related to I.V. drug use. Then with regard to the incidence of drug use that does exist in the black community and its relationship to AIDS, efforts toward drug detoxification or treatment of drug users with AIDS are minimal while criminal sanctions abound. There are attitudes of blame toward drug users, even though there is evidence that the U.S. government has had a hand in making drugs available to people of color in this country in the event of political unrest (Cockburn 1988).

African American women, like all women, suffer from the consequences of sexism with regard to the research, diagnosis, and treatment of women with AIDS (ACT UP/New York Women and AIDS Book Group 1990). A hierarchy of risk categories developed in the study of gay men is used by the Center for Disease Control to draw conclusions about how HIV contraction occurs. Therefore routes of contraction for women are not studied. Women's symptoms of AIDS differ from men's, often involving gynecological manifestations such as chronic vaginitis, vaginal and cervical lesions and pelvic infections. However, until December 1992, no such symptoms were used by the CDC in their criteria for the diagnosis of AIDS. Therefore many possible deaths to AIDS among women have not been diagnosed at
all, or have been diagnosed after the fact. This underrepresentation of women in the classification and counting of people with AIDS has made it all the less likely that research funding would be directed to study women and AIDS. And because they often have not been diagnosed, women with AIDS have not received benefits hard-won by AIDS activists, including disability payments, Medicare, child care and rent subsidies. Meanwhile, economic realities for women, especially black women, make these benefits all the more urgent. Since drugs used to treat AIDS such as AZT are quite expensive, drug trials are the only avenue of access for most women. However, drug trials often systematically exclude women and people of color, as well as I.V. drug users, the poor, hemophiliacs and children. With all this, AIDS is the leading cause of death for black women, ages 24 to 36, and 59 to 80 per cent of all children who are HIV positive are black (Richie 1990, p.182).

Of course, these discussions about experiences of AIDS among black women only begin to address the topic. But they provide enough perspective to look back at the quilt and recognize many ways in which the political, economic, cultural and activist needs of black women are simply not met by the NAMES Project. Obviously, quilt panels are not relevant to women who have not even been diagnosed or who would never have the time, money or health to make a panel or attend a display, even if it did take place in a relatively accessible location. It is unlikely that many black women benefit from donations to AIDS service organizations prompted by quilt displays. Further, anyone who is not English speaking or who is illiterate does not find ready access to the quilt. But the irrelevance of the quilt for some groups, and
particularly for black women in this case, is more than a matter of access. There are many ways in which the quilt's constructed meaning is not consistent with the experiences of some black women. Given the hesitance in the black community to be associated with disease and "deviant" sexuality, the placement and reading of names in the NAMES Project potentially has a very different meaning for black women and men, even if they are gay, than it does for gay, white men. Involvement with the quilt does signify to one degree or another alliance with gay, white men. Meanwhile, it is possible for some black women to look upon these men as those who gain privileged access to health care and drug trials at the expense of black women. The fact that gay, white men are more likely to have the time and resources to ritualize grief can also be viewed as a privilege that comes with economic advantage that is also gained at the expense of other groups, including black women.

Perhaps even more problematic, however, are the notions that get reflected in the quilt about the workings of power in society and how social change is to occur. Originators of the NAMES Project make it very clear that their strategy is to appeal to white, middle-class America with images that are patriotic and nonthreatening. Indeed, the quilt's reversal of many of the stigmas imposed against gay men is meant to lessen the social distance between gays and those who subscribe to the dominant culture. The message is one of "we're like you in that we are patriotic, wholesome, warm, loving and nonthreatening." It is believed that, if individuals and government officials can only be moved by the quilt into the recognition of the humanity of those
who are dying of AIDS, then they will respond to end the epidemic. But this strategy is hardly appropriate for those whose long history of multiple forms of oppression lead them to perceive the dominant culture as deliberately threatening genocide on several fronts at once. An appeal for sympathy and compassion makes little sense in this context. Further, gay, white men sometimes can be perceived as part of the white power structure that poses such racist threats.

Thus there is an implied critique of the NAMES Project inherent to the perspective that comes from pivoting the center to some of the experiences of African American women in the U.S. What this critique shares in common with some of the criticisms posed by gays and lesbians above is that, as valuable as the quilt is to the expression of a specific group of people, its underlying strategy for social change lacks an understanding of how firmly AIDS is rooted in fundamental systemic workings of power in this society. The perspective gained from writings about African American women and AIDS is consistent with that of third world feminists who see all systems of oppression to be simultaneous and interdependent (Mohanty 1991). In the experiences of these women, it can be seen that racism, classism and sexism are just as integral to the politics of AIDS as is homophobia. In other words, not just homophobia, but all forms of AIDS-related oppression are constructed through cultural and institutional practices, including biomedical discourse about AIDS, immigration and citizenship laws, the structure of the health care system, the

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6 Evidence of this approach can be found in the goals of the NAMES Project, as stated on brochures, and in speeches by Cleve Jones delivered at the Candlelight Vigils during the quilt displays in Washington, D.C. on October 7, 1989 and October 10, 1992.
practices of pharmaceutical companies, institutional funding of science and research, law enforcement and incarceration policies, and many other political practices. Thus forms of oppression of all kinds must be seen as intricately connected to one another and reinforced by one another. And responses to a particular issue such as AIDS must address these interconnections.

What this means for cultural activism, and thus for the quilt, is that cultural change must involve strategies that are much more radical than an appeal to the sympathies of those most centrally located in the power structure. As third world feminists demonstrate (Sandoval 1990; Alarcon 1990) the setting up of a white, male, middle-class, heterosexual norm is integral to the construction of oppression in the dominant culture. But in most ways, the quilt does not challenge this norm. By taking a "we're like you" approach to those in central power positions in this country, the constructed meaning of the quilt reinforces the norm. This "we're like you" message inherently contradicts the lives of some of those who have most directly experienced the oppressive consequences of the dominant culture. To the extent that these groups are not represented on the quilt, contrary to the intentions of its originators, the NAMES Project contributes to a national image of AIDS that disguises some of the most destructive politics of the epidemic.

Pivoting the center therefore allows us to see the workings of power in the larger society as they impact on, in this case, the AIDS epidemic. This method achieves this perspective without resorting to the "god trick" of an unsituated, all-knowing, objective stance. And through this method, it can be seen that those who have
constructed the meaning of the quilt have done so in such a manner that, in many ways, they have reinforced the very mechanisms of oppression that they have sought to eradicate.

Nevertheless, the distinctive value of pivoting the center is that one "truth" revealed by this method does not negate another. The limits of the quilt notwithstanding, for those who make up the gift circle, the effects of the quilt can be literally life-saving. The quilt is a powerful, mobilizing and transformative gift that binds the wounds and restores hope for entire communities in this country.
APPENDIX

SECONDARY SOURCES

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