"This Was My Utopia": Sexual Experimentation and Masculinity in the 1960s Bay Area Radical Left

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When Black Panther Party (BPP) cofounder Huey P. Newton argued in 1970 that in order to have a chance to be free, Black people would have to discard "all these romantic, fictional fin[a]lisms, such as they're married and they live happily ever after with a white picket fence," he expressed a sentiment that was shared across the movements of the day, including the sexual and gay liberation movements.[1] Amid the political ferment of the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Area in the second half of the 1960s, activists from various movements experimented with utopian alternatives to the nuclear family norm. This essay deepens our understanding of the late 1960s Bay Area Left by examining how these experiments with unconventional forms of belonging connected Newton with two lesser-known figures: Richard Thorne, who led the East Bay Sexual Freedom League (SFL) chapter in 1966, and Leo Laurence, who cofounded the Committee for Homosexual Freedom (CHF) in 1969. Newton and Thorne were Black activists with roots in Oakland's early Black Power movement, while Laurence was a white gay liberation activist with experience in Thorne's SFL. The personal and organizational links between these three leaders illuminate a shared sexual culture that bridged the Bay Area's gay liberation and Black Power movements.

The BPP, the SFL, and the CHF exemplify the range of organizations and movements that were seeking alternative ways to experience

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[1] Huey P. Newton, interview with J. Herman Blake, "Interviews & Other Recordings: 1970 September 13 Huey P Newton, transcript," 65–66, 13 September 1970, folder 5, box 2, series 1: Black Panther Party files, 1966–2010, J. Herman Blake and Emily L. Moore Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

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belonging while refusing to conform to the white normative nuclear family ideal in the mid- to late 1960s. Newton cofounded the BPP with Bobby Seale in an Oakland War on Poverty center in October 1966. By the late 1960s, it was one of the most well known and influential Black Power movement organizations in the United States, with local chapters in cities across the country. The party's wide-ranging ten-point program demanded "land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace," and the organization rose to national prominence for its commitment to the armed self-defense of Black communities.[2] The SFL became active in 1965, and with Thorne's significant contributions to its development in the first half of 1966, it grew into a leading organization in the Bay Area's sexual revolution, with chapters around the country by the end of the decade. Newton and Thorne's early friendship influenced the BPP and the SFL, both of which fundamentally shaped early gay liberation's political culture, including that of the CHF. Cofounded in San Francisco by Leo Laurence and Gale Whittington in April 1969, the CHF was one of the first homosexual organizations that embraced what became known as the politics of gay liberation. Laurence and other CHF members advanced a new militant vision of gay identity to align gay people with the Bay Area's Black Power, sexual liberation, countercultural, and antiwar movements, eschewing the homophile movement's comparative isolation and moderation.

Newton's and Thorne's experimentation with nontraditional forms of Black masculinity can illuminate threads connecting the Black Power movement's gendered imaginary to those of the Bay Area's countercultural, sexual liberation, and gay liberation movements.[3] This article draws on Tracye Matthews's groundbreaking analysis of gender and sexuality in the BPP to further contextualize the party's masculinism amid a broader sexual politics whose rejection of breadwinning masculine respectability was deeply patriarchal and held transformative possibilities.[4] This essay also builds on Robyn Spencer's and Ashley Farmer's recent work, which has expanded historians' understanding of both gender and power within the party and

[2] Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 71.

[3] Historian Ashley Farmer demonstrates that "the gendered imaginary—or activists' idealized, public projections of black manhood and womanhood—was a critical site of Black Power activism and theorizing." This article builds upon her insights to consider the ways in which Newton's early rejection of breadwinning masculine respectability and experimentation with nontraditional sexual practices informed his and, to an extent, the party's visions of revolutionary Black manhood. Ashley D. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 3.

[4] Tracye Ann Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks What a Man's Role in the Revolution Is': Gender and Sexual Politics in the Black Panther Party, 1966–1971" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1998).

of Newton's statements on sexual matters.[5] José Esteban Muñoz's writing about queer utopias provides a framework for understanding the transformational political potential of these shared sexual cultures, which, while patriarchal and often heterosexual, challenged many of the sexual norms that loomed large in the late 1960s.[6] Finally, this essay extends historian Nancy MacLean's insights about the uneven availability of the family wage in the post–World War II period by showing its impact on both the cross-fertilization of new utopian sexual cultures and the Black men who helped shape them.[7]

Newton's embrace of a political coalition between the Black Power and gay liberation movements in 1970 has been attributed to a shared critique of the carceral state sharpened by the federal government's violent repression against the Panthers.[8] In this article, I draw on newly available interviews between Newton and sociologist J. Herman Blake, the ghostwriter for Newton's 1973 memoir, to argue that this coalition also had roots in Newton's earlier period of countercultural sexual experimentation. Reframing the narrative of late 1960s Bay Area radicalism around Newton, Thorne, and Laurence recasts the political alliances that bridged myriad organizations across the Left by the end of the decade. The Left's culture of sexual experimentation grounds these coalitions in a broader arc of sexual utopianism that was both nonnormative and profoundly patriarchal. Understanding this culture and Newton's deep roots in it further illuminates his adoption of new language uniting the Black Power and gay liberation movements in his 1970 statement of solidarity. This statement was thus not born solely of the BPP's need for allies amid escalating state persecution and the influence of women's and gay liberation activists on Newton's thought; it was also shaped by the culture of sexual utopianism in which Newton had long participated.

Focusing on the impact of Newton and Thorne's friendship and shared experiences centers a dimension of Newton's early intellectual development

[5] Robyn C. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); and Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*, 3.

[6] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009). My use of "queer" in this essay is informed by Cathy Cohen's use of the term to advance coalitions between heterosexual and homosexual communities marginalized for deviating from racialized gender and sexual norms. Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?," in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Mae G. Henderson and E. Patrick Johnson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 21–51.

[7] Nancy MacLean, "Postwar Women's History: The 'Second Wave' or the End of the Family Wage?," in *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, ed. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 238.

[8] Jared Leighton, "'All of Us Are Unapprehended Felons': Gay Liberation, the Black Panther Party, and Intercommunal Efforts against Police Brutality in the Bay Area," *Journal of Social History* 52, no. 3 (2018): 860–85.

that has largely been overlooked.[9] This relationship has understandably been avoided both because Thorne had fallen out of Newton's orbit by the mid-1960s and because Thorne's legacy has been dominated by his leadership of an abusive sex cult later in the decade.[10] Despite this, Thorne's earlier friendship with Newton can illuminate the key role of Black bohemianism in the early 1960s as a factor that shaped Newton's political vision and connected it with those of other Bay Area radicals.[11]

After meeting one another through their participation in Oakland's early Black Power movement, in the early 1960s Huey Newton and Richard Thorne became key architects of the Bay Area Left's cultures of sexual experimentation. Thorne's influence was integral to Newton's embrace of alternative ideas about love, sex, and relationships and to the formation of the BPP, as he first introduced Newton to party cofounder Bobby Seale.[12] In the early 1960s, Newton and Thorne both attended Oakland City College, where they belonged to the Afro-American Association (AAA), one of Oakland's first campus-based Black Power organizations. Historian Donna Murch has demonstrated that the AAA nurtured the ideological roots of the Bay Area's Black Power movement.[13] The organization also provided a backdrop for Newton's and Thorne's experiments with nonnormative ideas about sexual relationships, thus helping to ignite the Bay Area's counterculture and sexual revolution.

At a young age, Newton gravitated toward Thorne's unconventional perspective about love and sex and refused to mirror his father's masculine breadwinning respectability. After an altercation with his father in 1960 over his refusal to shave his "bohemian" beard, Newton moved out of his

[9] Historian Tracye Matthews also analyzes Newton and Thorne's relationship and considers its relevance to Newton's subsequent role in the BPP. Matthews maintains that Newton's history with Thorne and early critiques of normative family structures facilitated his subsequent endorsement of other party leaders' misogyny. This essay attempts to keep Newton's and Thorne's exploitation of women and its consequences in view while also grappling with why their visions of sexual freedom appealed to so many across multiple Bay Area movements and eventually shaped the contours of early gay liberation. Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks,'" 228–32.

[10] As leader of the sex cult he founded in the late 1960s, Thorne sexually abused children in the 1970s and 1980s. Katy St. Clair, "Children of Om," *East Bay Express*, September 24, 2003, https://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/children-of-om/.

[11] My emphasis on continuities between Newton's oppositional masculinity in the early 1960s and his leadership of the Black Panther Party later that decade has also been informed by Robin D. G. Kelley's analysis of Malcolm X's political development. Robin D. G. Kelley, "The Riddle of the Zoot: Malcolm Little and Black Cultural Politics during World War II," in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 161–81.

[12] Bobby Seale, *A Lonely Rage: The Autobiography of Bobby Seale* (New York: Bantam Books, 1979), 125.

[13] Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), Kindle locations 1382–85.

parents' house at the age of seventeen and moved in with Thorne, who was five or six years older.[14] Newton's closeness with Thorne was thus directly tied to both his affiliation with the Bay Area's bohemian counterculture and his refusal to conform to his father's standards of masculine respectability. Newton acknowledged that Thorne's ideas about love and relationships profoundly influenced his own beliefs. In his interview with Blake, Newton said that he had adopted Thorne's philosophy

> of not accepting any kind of poss[essive]ness, where one person possess[es] the other as in the bourgeois kind of marriage relationship—where she's my woman and he's my man—that he's required to do this, this and this and the woman is required to do this and this because I say so. She can't have another relationship with another man, because she's my property. I can sort of naturally assume these principles because of the other troubles that I had with the family. In other words, the burden that I thought family was, because of my father's position. So it was easy for me to . . . accept Richard's definition of the situation.[15]

Newton saw Thorne's solution of rejecting possessive love as a way to enjoy romantic and sexual companionship while avoiding the obligations that assuming the normative masculine breadwinning role would entail. Furthermore, Newton connected his aversion to this role to having observed his father be crushed by debt despite always working two or three jobs at a time to support their family.[16] In this sense, Newton was receptive to Thorne's ideas about nonpossessive love as a result of the unavailability of the family wage for working-class Black men like his father. MacLean has argued that even as the family wage ideal was hegemonic during and after the New Deal era, it tended to be the exclusive purview of white middle-class two-parent families and was never attainable for low-wage workers of color.[17] For Newton, the unavailability of the family wage was a radicalizing feature of postwar racial capitalism, Cedric Robinson's term describing how "the organization, expansion, and ideology of capitalist society was expressed through race, racial subjection, and racial differences."[18] Despite his keen recognition of the shortcomings of the traditional family norm for Black people, Newton's early consciousness of its limitations did not reflect an awareness of its patriarchal power imbalances or their disparate impact on Black women.

[14] Newton, interview, 40–41.
[15] Newton, interview, 55.
[16] Newton, interview, 55.
[17] MacLean, "Postwar Women's History," 238.
[18] Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 149; Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 2; Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks,'" 229.

Newton and Thorne sought to spread their ideas about love, sex, and relationships to others in the Berkeley-Oakland area in the early 1960s. Newton noted that he, Thorne, and the racially diverse group of women they were with lived communally, developing and practicing a "philosophy that we were spreading around [Oakland] City College and Berkeley. This was before groups became popular, before [communes] became popular."[19] Newton's reflections on this experience indicate that the BPP's political culture did not develop exclusively as a response to middle-class Black activism or as a result of radicalization by urban poverty but was also an outgrowth of this working-class Black-led bohemian subculture.

Newton's early conceptions of what liberation could and should look like linked a fundamental refusal to participate in the aboveground capitalist economy with a commitment to sexual liberation. During the period in which he and Thorne were close, Newton declined to get a traditional job and instead sustained himself through petty crime, read books, and maintained open relationships.[20] Newton's subsequent descriptions of this period indicate that he experimented with these alternatives to traditional work and sexual norms in pursuit of freedom:

> I would say even though I starved my time was my own. . . . My purpose was to have as much leisure time as possible, cause I felt free then. . . . My main emphasis was just on the fact that I didn't have to go . . . reduce myself to a servant on a working thing. So my chief interest was on the leisure—so I could read and love. . . . This was my utopia at the time. I felt a God experience too, with the Jehovah complex—the way I view it now—then I just felt . . . free. I felt free that I could do anything I wanted. . . . I felt a tremendous amount of freedom and comfort and well being.[21]

Muñoz's work in *Cruising Utopia* offers a model for considering how Newton's and Thorne's sexual experimentations, at their most ambitious, rejected some of the limitations of what merely existed to instead envision new political possibilities of what could be. Muñoz considers how nonnormative sexual encounters have the potential to transport participants into a utopian future beyond the limitations of their flawed present moment and to reconfigure the social, reimagining actual conditions of possibility.[22] Newton's use of language describing his time in Thorne's orbit as one of spiritual euphoria suggests that he experienced the kind of world-making utopian transport that Muñoz describes. Newton also conceptualized his closeness with Thorne and the women in their circle as cementing a new

[19] Newton, interview, 57.

[20] Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Writers and Readers, 1973), Kindle location 1095, 1410–11.

[21] Newton, interview, 38–39.

[22] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 38.

kind of family, elsewhere referring to them collectively as "our little clan."[23] Newton's description of the freedom and bliss he experienced during his time with Thorne indicates that their "little clan" sought to reconfigure social institutions such as the capitalist nuclear family to achieve utopian transport beyond the limitations of their present moment.[24]

Despite these world-making ambitions, Newton simultaneously exploited the women he was involved with during these years. In September 1970, one month after he released his statement supporting the women's and gay liberation movements, Newton—with the benefit of hindsight—acknowledged this exploitation in an interview with Blake:

> I say that much of this was dealing with the philosophy and another part of it as far as I was concerned was somewhat exploit[at]ive. It was exploit[at]ive—not because I wasn't serious with the attempt to question the matters through practice—but I felt, to an extent, we were taking advantage. . . . I was taking advantage of the women for practical purposes. They would cook my food, do very practical things, pay my rent and so forth, and the money that I would get through the under-world activities—criminal activities. . . . Anyway, by indulging in those, I would keep this to do what I wanted to do. . . . I would buy clothes.[25]

Newton's acknowledgment that his utopian experience of personal freedom in the early 1960s depended on power imbalances between himself and the women he was close to illuminates the limitations of his and Thorne's defiance of sexual normativity. Even as he flouted some sexual and gender norms, Newton left key elements of hegemonic power relations intact: he upheld a gendered division of labor and prioritized his own agency and freedom over those of the women he was with.[26] Newton and Thorne would unfortunately leave these limitations intact as they each translated these ideas and practices into their own organizations in the mid- to late 1960s: the BPP and the SFL, respectively.

After he and Thorne went their separate ways in the mid-1960s, allegedly feuding out of rivalry for the affections of the women they were close with, Newton continued to struggle against the isolation he experienced due to the unavailability of the family wage for working-class Black men.[27] In the same 1970 interview, Newton reflected on this alienation:

> You see, I think what sums it up is that bourgeois values give you a definition . . . of what the family is suppose[d] to be like. We try to

[23] Newton, interview, 66.

[24] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 12.

[25] Newton, interview, 58–59.

[26] Newton even admitted that he went so far as attempting to pimp women on several occasions during these years. Newton, interview, 60.

[27] Newton, interview, 56.

> get that family and we can't have it. We don't get it, because [of] the conditions . . . the bourgeoise [*sic*] have established. So that's a frustrating thing. We need it, because every man deserves and needs that kind of spiritual unity. We try to get it [and] when . . . we try to get it, it fails. . . . And, on the other ha[n]d, there's nothing else left. Do we just stay outside of the whole thing, as I tried to do? I found that I couldn't stay outside the whole thing . . . that being outsiders is still to suffer.[28]

Newton's comments indicate that he had identified the white middle-class nuclear family model—in which bourgeois values defined "what the family is suppose[d] to be like"—as what was so restrictive. For Newton, this nuclear family norm was a suffocating trap because of its model of possessive relationships and because racial capitalism's foreclosure of a family wage made it financially unattainable for Black people. In the aftermath of his rift with Thorne, Newton keenly perceived that lacking a family of his own made him an outsider and that "being outsiders is still to suffer." Muñoz's work provides a model for understanding Newton's longing for unity as a utopian urge for collectivity and an escape from loneliness. Drawing on Muñoz, we can view Newton's efforts to get "out of oneself with and without others" as "an insistence on another mode in which one feels the collective."[29] For Muñoz, this longing is foundational to what is utopian about queerness. Newton's utopian longing and sense of "something missing" inspired him to reimagine social institutions by forming a heterosexual yet nonnormative family as he struggled to envision an "outsider's" revolutionary antifamily that would recapture the spiritual euphoria he felt in his "little clan" with Thorne. Nevertheless, Newton articulated that longing for collectivity in language that centered the entitlements of "every man," neglecting women's stakes in revolutionary alternatives to the nuclear family.

As cofounder of the BPP, Newton indicated that he ultimately realized the "spiritual unity" he had long sought by finding and building familial intimacy within the party:

> So, I take action and I form . . . we form the kind of family that's a fighting family . . . with realizing that we won't have all these romantic, fictional fin[a]lisms, such as they're married and they live happily ever after with a white picket fence. . . . Being together and accepting those values is the compromise or it's the imprisoning thing . . . the smothering thing. But you could be together for a whole different purpose and feel very free still—won't feel locked in so you can't fight, because you're together in order to fight.[30]

[28] Newton, interview, 65, final ellipses in original.
[29] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 45.
[30] Newton, interview, 65–66, first and final ellipses in original.

With Thorne, Newton felt he had freed himself from the trap of the nuclear family by embracing leisure, communal living, and polyamorous relationships. By September 1970 Newton maintained that he had since learned that to be most free was to be able to fight the power structure, which was ultimately "the imprisoning thing," suggesting that the nuclear family norm was an important constitutive part of this structure. To avoid feeling coerced into a family role that prevented him from fighting for his freedom, he did not need to avoid serious or intimate relationships. Instead, he wanted to form a fighting family—to form bonds with others around their shared commitment to fighting the racial capitalist power structure.

Newton's commitment to a patriarchal articulation of sexual liberation and a rejection of the white capitalist nuclear family influenced the BPP's guidelines, statements, and policies. The party encouraged Panthers to eschew monogamy and embrace polyamorous communal life in Panther communes, which its national leadership had begun recommending as living quarters for members by early 1969.[31] In an undated and unsigned document, "On the Party, the Family, the Society, and the Commune," the party established the terms of communal life in the organization and declared that establishing communes both "SEIZE[D] THE TIME" and "may be most favorable" to engendering the BPP's ultimate goal of revolution.[32] The guidelines stated that chasing the white nuclear family ideal would keep Black people so financially overcommitted that they would be prevented from resisting racial capitalism from any position of leverage. As a result, the party was developing "our own ways of relating to each other" that "more fully meet the needs of our struggle."[33]

Although the commune guidelines were neither signed nor dated, evidence suggests that Newton played a significant, if not the sole, role in authoring or revising them in early 1970 while he was incarcerated on a manslaughter conviction for the death of an Oakland police officer. The guidelines' critique of the unattainability of financial stability for nuclear families in impoverished Black communities resembles Newton's other statements on the matter. The guidelines also suggested that the author would serve as a father figure and take responsibility for supporting all Panther children, also noting, however, that "in view of my temporary absence from your presence," local party leaders should fill this role. A handwritten note in the margin of the typed guidelines expressed concern that using "I" in this section might make the author seem too egotistical.[34] There is another handwritten note at the top of the first page of the guidelines that reads:

[31] Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks,'" 210.

[32] "On the Party, the Family, the Society, and the Commune," 1, 4, undated, folder 6, box 58, subseries 9: Manuscripts, series 2: Black Panther Party Records, Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation Inc. Collection, M0864, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California.

[33] "On the Party," 1–2.

[34] "On the Party," 1, 4.

"Give back to Blake." While Newton was in prison, Blake became his close confidant and was the only person on Newton's approved visitors list who was not a member of his immediate family. Blake visited Newton in prison once weekly for long discussions of intellectual concepts and issues that Newton would continue to think about for the rest of the week while in solitary confinement.[35] Newton's incarceration, and thus temporary absence from other Panthers, and his closeness with Blake would explain this handwritten note confiding in Blake about the author's concern about his image. Finally, Blake's notes from his prison visits with Newton indicate that they talked through several of the ideas that appeared in the document in March 1970.[36]

Despite the utopian and revolutionary intentions with which the guidelines were likely crafted, they nevertheless demonstrated many of the same limitations that Newton and Thorne's "little clan" had evinced in the early 1960s. The first of these limitations was a gendered division of labor that mirrored that of the mainstream institutions the BPP opposed. While the scenario the author established for the division of childcare labor deviated from the middle-class nuclear family model of a single housewife performing this work full time, the guidelines nevertheless implied that only women would be responsible for childrearing. The guidelines stated that if "there are seven women in a commune with one child each, for example, they could share child-raising responsibilities in such a manner that each of them would be free six days each week for party work."[37] Male Panthers in the commune disappeared from this example, suggesting that only Panther women would be responsible for childcare.[38] The guidelines also explicitly endorsed a gendered division of labor by declaring that "all responsibilities of the commune shall be equally distributed, recognizing that there are some duties which may be more appropriate for men and others which may be more appropriate for women."[39] The guidelines thus established substantial tension between the requirement for the equal distribution of labor and the endorsement of gendered divisions of labor, a contradiction that would have to be resolved by rank-and-file members.[40] That these

[35] While not a Panther himself, Blake had been acquainted with Newton and other Oakland party leaders before he served as an expert witness in Newton's trial. During Newton's prison term, Blake was a significant influence on his intellectual development. J. Herman Blake, "The Caged Panther: The Prison Years of Huey P. Newton," *Journal of African American Studies* 16, no. 2 (June 2012): 241, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-011-9190-1.

[36] "HPN," 20 March 1970, 1, "HPN," 27 March 1970, 1, folder 6, box 1, series 1: Black Panther Party files, 1966–2010, Blake and Moore Papers.

[37] "On the Party," 2.

[38] At the end of this memo, party leaders recommended that "the ratio of females to males in any one commune should never exceed three to one," indicating that there would always be at least one male in every commune. "On the Party," 6.

[39] "On the Party," 7.

[40] For a comprehensive account of ongoing conflicts around gendered divisions of labor among rank-and-file Panthers, see Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks,'" 213–20.

guidelines were revised or written in early 1970 also introduces further discrepancies between their support of a gendered division of labor and party chairman Bobby Seale's assurance in his 1970 memoir that such divisions did not exist within the party.[41]

The guidelines' position on sexuality and on the sexual needs of commune members similarly conformed to patriarchal assumptions about gender and sexuality. Despite using gender-neutral language, the guidelines implicitly affirmed Panther women's obligation to satisfy male Panthers' sexual desires. For example, the guidelines emphasized commune members' requirement to meet Panthers' "biological needs," arguing that "all of the members of the commune must recognize that every other members has [*sic*] . . . [social, psychological, and biological] needs and these needs must be responded to fully in order to function smoothly. First of all, there is the biological need for sexual gratification[.] This is a normal and human need and should be seen as such."[42] This statement indicates that commune members were expected to meet one another's sexual needs, which raises concerns regarding consent. On one level, the guidelines took pains to emphasize the importance of consent when they specified that "participation in a commune should always be voluntary."[43] However, this statement, when read in combination with the statement about "biological needs," suggests that a Panther's willingness to live in a commune with other Panthers signaled not only consent but also an acceptance of the obligation to fulfill the sexual desires of fellow Panthers. The guidelines did not explicitly state that women were expected to satisfy the desires of men. However, when read in the context of the late 1960s popularity of BPP Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver's concept of "pussy power"—a term he coined in a 1968 speech to valorize women's duties to deny sex to male Panthers who were not in good standing with the party and to grant it to those who were—it does have that implication.[44]

Especially in and after the latter half of 1968, Panther women challenged these patriarchal assumptions and practices and inspired a revision of party

[41] Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party* (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1991), 401–3.

[42] "On the Party," 4. Blake discussed conceptual divisions between certain types of needs in Black communities—social and psychological—with Newton during his weekly prison visits between March and November 1969 and noted Newton's excitement about these ideas. This too indicates that Newton was the Panther who played the greatest role in shaping the guidelines. Untitled, March–November 1969, folder 5, box 1, Blake and Moore Papers.

[43] "On the Party," 6.

[44] Eldridge Cleaver introduced this concept in a speech at Stanford University in October 1968. This idea implied that Panther women were obligated to grant sex to any male Panther in good standing within the party, and it was never officially denounced by other high-level male party leaders. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*, 226n71; Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks,'" 240. A substantive analysis of this concept based on multiple accounts of its circulation within the party can be found in Matthews, 232–57. For Panther women's accounts of a climate of sexual coercion within the party, see Matthews, 252–56.

policies to address male chauvinism, although internal contradictions on this issue persisted.[45] This transformation included efforts to ensure that Panther women did the same kinds of party work that Panther men did, such as writing articles, speaking publicly, doing local outreach, and contributing to the party's political development.[46] These measures were also accompanied by ongoing internal discussions about male dominance in sexual relationships.[47] One unnamed Panther woman recalled in an interview that between 1968 and 1969, "the Party has undergone radical change in the direction of women leadership and emancipation of women . . . because we have come to realize that male chauvinism and all its manifestations are bourgeois and that's one of the things we're fighting against."[48] Increasingly leading and sustaining the party during a period in which state violence primarily targeted male party leaders, Panther women extended Newton's critiques of the white bourgeois nuclear family to the patriarchal power imbalances that structured it.[49] Panther women thus pushed the BPP as a "fighting family" closer to its goal of enacting alternatives to white bourgeois social values and structures. Nevertheless, as the 1970 version of the commune guidelines demonstrates, sexism continued to be an issue within the party, as these changes were often implemented unevenly and inconsistently.[50]

Like the BPP, other male-led organizations across the late 1960s Bay Area Left unevenly rejected some patriarchal norms while embracing others. Understanding the Left's masculinist culture of sexual experimentation both illuminates why similar limitations were shared across myriad organizations and helps explain the resurgence of Black and white feminisms during this period. Indeed, the patriarchal ideas and expectations that Panther women contested were not limited to the Panthers but were shared among male-led organizations across the Left and the counterculture in the latter half of the 1960s. For example, Cleaver's concept of "pussy power" has been well-documented, but similar ideas were prominent across the shared sexual cultures that spanned much of the Left during the late 1960s. A Berkeley-based underground press publication reported that a prominent protest sign at a white-led antiwar demonstration in October 1967 read: "Girls Say Yes to Men Who Say No."[51] White and Black radicals alike thus shared

[45] Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks,'" 277.

[46] "Panther Sisters on Women's Liberation," *Movement* (Berkeley, CA) 5, no. 8 (September 1969): 9.

[47] Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks,'" 232.

[48] "Panther Sisters." For an extensive consideration of both how Panther communes operated on the ground and the ways in which Panther women challenged patriarchal practices and assumptions within them, see Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks,'" 209–15.

[49] Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come*, 94.

[50] Spencer, Kindle locations 2142–50. See also Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks,'" 209–15.

[51] G. K., "Resistance Grows on Day of Terror," *Berkeley Barb* (Berkeley, CA), 4 February 1966.

the belief that women would "reward" men who held the correct political positions—in this case, refusing military conscription—with sex.

Just as Newton brought the ideas and practices he had developed with Thorne with him into the BPP, including their limitations, Thorne translated those ideas and practices to the East Bay chapter of the Sexual Freedom League, radically transforming it as its leader in early 1966. After becoming active in 1965, the majority-white SFL had primarily advocated political reforms such as legalizing abortion, making birth control more available, and legalizing same-sex sexual activity and interracial marriage. One recurring social event that was an exception to this political focus was a nude "wade-in" at a local beach.[52] The SFL's social functions began to take precedence over its pursuit of political reform in early 1966 when Thorne, as the new president of its East Bay chapter, introduced parties that featured communal sexual activity.[53] Additionally, Thorne did much to publicly promote the league by speaking with reporters from local news outlets like the *San Francisco Chronicle* and national magazines like *Time* and *Life* and by writing and circulating the chapter's position statement.[54] Thorne's position statement formally outlined the SFL's philosophy and defended it from potential critiques.[55] His publicity efforts and his statement worked together to raise public consciousness of what he called Berkeley's "sexual rebellion in the making" and its relationship to "all the other forms of rebellion" that he argued made Berkeley akin to an "experimental 'freedom lab' for the whole country and the world!"[56] Indeed, Thorne's SFL chapter, as well as BPP communes and other New Left sexual cultures, were key architects of this sexual revolution, which made the entire Bay Area akin to an experimental freedom lab.

Like the Panthers' rationale for their guidelines for communal life, the philosophy that Thorne outlined in his chapter's position statement critiqued the limitations of the nuclear family. In his statement's answer to allegations that the SFL threatened to loosen morality and undermine

[52] Valerie Alison [pseud.], foreword to *The Records of the San Francisco Sexual Freedom League*, ed. Jefferson F. Poland and Valerie Alison [pseud.] (London: Olympia Press, 1971), 17.

[53] For descriptions, see Jefferson Poland, "Picketing for Sex," *Sex Marchers* (San Rafael, CA: Ishi Press, 2006), 24; and Sam Sloan, "The Sexual Freedom Movement in the 1960s," Berkeley Sexual Freedom League, http://www.anusha.com/sfl.htm.

[54] Sam Sloan, "Making the League Sexual," *Sex Marchers* (San Rafael, CA: Ishi Press, 2006), 89, 97; "Students: The Free-Sex Movement," *Time*, 11 March 1966, http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,899098-2,00.html.

[55] The Sexual Freedom League's archival records indicate that Thorne wrote the vast majority of the East Bay chapter's formally anonymous position statement. Richard Thorne, "Sexual Freedom: Objections and Replies," 1, undated, folder 3, carton 3, subseries 1: National Office Files 1964–1972, series 1: Sexual Freedom League, 1964–1983, Sexual Freedom League Records, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[56] Richard Thorne, "A Step toward Sexual Freedom in Berkeley," *Berkeley Barb,* 4 February 1966.

the family, Thorne denounced the nuclear family for instilling guilt about sexuality. According to Thorne, this guilt not only divided people against "our own desires and the institutions we pretend to uphold" but even led to the atrophy of "our capacities to love."[57] He argued that sexual repression produced a form of hypocrisy that foreclosed the possibility of any moral consistency and frequently undermined monogamous marriages. Thorne's critique of moral hypocrisy undoubtedly built upon the general countercultural and New Left ethos, which held authenticity, honesty, and consistency to be paramount moral virtues.

While the language of his position statement was fairly abstract in its denunciations of repression and moral hypocrisy, a written statement Thorne published in the *Berkeley Barb*, a sympathetic underground press outlet, was less circumspect and openly touted the merits of orgies. Thorne described the specifics of Berkeley's "sexual rebellion in the making" as "the incidental rise of sheer, undiluted orgy-ism," which he heralded as "the first positive step in unrepressing our repressions." According to Thorne, embracing "orgy-ism" exposed "the utter hypocritical and unenforcible [*sic*] nature of certain social institutions which the society seeks desperately to preserve and impose on all," such as marriage and the nuclear family. He quoted a recent participant in a sex party who reflected that "sex, if entered into rightly, free and without guilt, is psychodelic [*sic*]." Finally, he suggested that "being more pleasurably involved" meant that protesters might "not need to cry 'Get out of Vietnam,' for potentially no such Vietnam situation would exist."[58] Thorne thus aligned SFL orgies with the counterculture's embrace of psychedelia and the antiwar movement's critique of US militarism. His reference to the psychedelic qualities of "orgy-ism" is consistent with Muñoz's emphasis on nonnormative sex's capacity to transport participants to a utopian future that defied the limitations of their present moment.

Thorne defended his innovation of incorporating orgies into the SFL's repertoire of activities, asserting league members' prerogative to enjoy the utopian future they sought to build immediately despite the challenges of the present moment. In statements to the *Barb*, Thorne praised the league's "audacity to believe the [sexual freedom] movement should be SEXY." According to Thorne, if the end goal of the sexual freedom movement was a "se[x]ually free society, it is also legitimate to insist on our prerogatives to enjoy that pleasure now."[59] Thorne thus portrayed the SFL's "orgy-ism" as a "utopia in the present," insisting on the right of SFL members to experience the pleasures of a utopian future in their current moment.[60] By claiming utopian pleasures amid a flawed present, Thorne and the SFL

[57] The Sexual Freedom League, *Statement of Position* (Berkeley, CA, 1966), 9.
[58] Thorne, "A Step."
[59] "Enjoy, Enjoy!," *Berkeley Barb* (Berkeley, CA), 22 April 1966, 3.
[60] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 12.

embraced and promoted the psychedelic potential of nonnormative sexual encounters to reconfigure social conditions beyond oppressive institutions such as the nuclear family.

Thorne's position statement for the East Bay chapter of the SFL, like the BPP's commune guidelines, critiqued the normative nuclear family and proposed an alternative form of belonging that would be both founded upon and conducive to greater freedom. Thorne wrote that sexual freedom should undermine the traditional family, which imparts "sexual shame and guilt and the forcing of human sexual behavior to conform to the views of certain well-intentioned, but overly-panicky individuals."[61] He continued:

> Now, if what is meant by the Family is the kind of family above denoted, then we believe we are safe in saying that the Family, by sexual freedom, will definitely—and hopefully—be undermined. But if what we mean by the Family is a stronger, more endurable institution, in which love rather than social coercion is the adhesive force, then our belief is that sexual freedom will strengthen common consent, desire and respect, will hold it together. . . . We further believe that in a climate of sexual freedom the human family will exist between persons who choose to abide outside the bounds of formal matrimony.[62]

Thorne thus imagined a new kind of family that would be formed on the basis of love, desire, and respect rather than guilt and coercion. He presented the league as a model for this alternative means of connecting and belonging that would expand "the family" beyond marriage bonds to include the entire human family. This argument signals the ways in which league members, like the Panthers and others across the Left, experimented with nonnormative forms of family, sexual connection, and belonging to enact the utopian community they struggled to bring into being.

While Thorne's arguments against the nuclear family shared some important similarities with those of the BPP's leadership, they also differed in key ways. Drawing on influential texts in popular psychology, Thorne was more concerned with moral inconsistencies and the psychological consequences of repression than the Panthers were.[63] Newton and the Panthers, on the other hand, developed an analysis that made critiques of racist and capitalist oppression central to their project. Unlike the BPP leadership, Thorne did not premise his alternative vision of family on fighting against the state or racial capitalism, and his critique of formal matrimony did not repudiate the state for only recognizing certain types of relationships. While Newton adapted Thorne's denunciation of possessive love and competitiveness to develop a more explicit critique of racial capitalism, Thorne himself focused

[61] The Sexual Freedom League, *Statement of Position*, 9.

[62] The Sexual Freedom League, 10.

[63] The popular psychology text Thorne most often quoted was Ellis Albert's *Sex without Guilt*. Thorne, "A Step."

more on the psychological impact of these behaviors. This decision likely not only reflected Thorne's personal outlook but also contributed to his success as a Black man at the helm of a majority-white and mostly middle-class organization. Nevertheless, like the Panthers, Thorne articulated an alternative definition of family that included more members, eschewed formal matrimony, and vowed to create stronger cohesion based on mutual love and respect. Both the Panthers and Thorne's SFL chapter thus critiqued the nuclear family as an institution, enacted alternatives that advanced their respective organizations, and "seized the time" by drawing upon the countercultural ethos and leftist political activity.[64] In doing so, both organizations strove to "build a world of peace and genuine brotherhood—a world . . . free from hate, suspicion, jealousy, and insane competitiveness."[65]

Like the BPP and other organizations across the Left, the East Bay Sexual Freedom League under Thorne and after his departure similarly struggled to practice the gender egalitarianism that its aspirations to embody an "experimental 'freedom lab' for the whole country and the world!" might seem to necessitate. In mid-1966, Thorne briefly required guests at parties to come in couples, all of whom at that point were heterosexual, to ensure an even gender ratio. As one woman who attended SFL parties later recalled, "Experience . . . showed that parties which allowed an overbalance of males created too much pressure on the women present" to engage in sexual activity.[66] In 1970 another SFL member recalled that by the mid- to late 1960s, she barely engaged with the organization because "almost the only activities available at the time were parties—which I found objectionable, as did many women, because of the double standard set up by continuing male dominance."[67] By leaving male dominance unaddressed, Thorne's SFL frequently failed to realize his vision of a sexual freedom that engendered relationships based on love rather than social coercion.

As they did in the BPP, in the late 1960s women challenged the masculinist assumptions and sexism underlying the SFL's patriarchal sexual culture. By 1969 "the SFL set in motion a multi-branched campaign against male prejudice which involved spotlighting female sexual freedom leaders, encouragement of bisexuality, discussions, orientation parties, encounter groups, etc."[68] In the late 1960s and early 1970s more women rose to positions of leadership within the organization, and they promoted understandings of sexual freedom that centered women's "command of [their]

[64] "On the Party," 1.

[65] Thorne, "A Step."

[66] Ramona [pseud.], chapter 3 of Poland and Alison, *The Records,* 58.

[67] Alison, foreword, 19.

[68] Alison, 19. For an analysis of women's participation in the SFL that is grounded in their perspectives on the sexual freedom movement's positive and negative effects on women's well-being, see Massimo Perinelli, "Sex Freedom Girls Speak Out: Women in Sexual Revolution," in *Sexual Revolutions*, ed. Gert Hekma and Alain Giami (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 219–92.

own desires and behavior."[69] By this time Thorne was no longer affiliated with the SFL; he had resigned from his leadership position to travel to Mexico in July 1966 and subsequently established an interracial sex cult called Om Lovers, in which he declared himself the deity Om.[70] Despite his short time in the organization, Thorne's official integration of sex parties into the league's sexual freedom advocacy both permanently transformed the SFL and influenced early gay liberation in the Bay Area.

As SFL women challenged sexism within the league, an SFL member named Leo Laurence initiated a push to encourage acceptance of male homosexuality at its parties, and he eventually resolved to form a new bisexual sexual freedom organization. Thus, while Newton integrated Thorne's philosophy about nonpossessive, nonmonogamous love into the Panthers' anticapitalist politics of Black liberation, Laurence sought to incorporate Thorne's innovation of sex parties into the Bay Area's homophile organizational landscape. Laurence was a long-term member of the SFL, and he used his position as a writer for underground press publications like the *Berkeley Barb* to publicly challenge the league and its members to support male same-sex sexual activity at its parties. In frustration with the league's slow response to his demands, he sought to bridge the gaps between the league and more conservative homophile organizations by forming a new "social-sexual group for bisexuals." In May 1968 he placed an ad in the *Barb* inviting "anyone not hung-up on artificial restrictions of either straight or gay world" to join his group.[71] Through these ads, Laurence sought to bypass the reluctance of established homophile and sexual freedom organizations to join together in adapting the Left's sexual culture for gay and bisexual communities. However, he was ultimately unable to find a landlord who would accommodate this ambition. The most Laurence was able to accomplish in 1968 was a clothed dance party cosponsored by the SFL and the more staid homophile organization known as the Society for Individual Rights.[72]

In April 1969 Laurence cofounded one of the first gay liberation organizations in the country, the Committee for Homosexual Freedom (CHF), in an effort to align gay activism with the rest of the Bay Area Left, including

[69] Alison, foreword, 18.

[70] "Circles in Sex," *Berkeley Barb*, 12 August 1966. By the time Om Lovers captured underground press headlines by marching naked through Berkeley thoroughfares in mid-1970, experimentations with alternative family forms and sex communes were ubiquitous across the Bay Area Left. For example, the Bay Area–based Peace and Freedom Party, a third party that sought to transform electoral politics, formally endorsed these experimentations in its political platform in 1970, and the *Berkeley Barb* reported that the Weather Underground's collectives "come together at night after struggling together by day." Phil Pukas, "Omigod," *Berkeley Barb*, 12 June 1970; "Commugamy," *Berkeley Barb*, 12 June 1970.

[71] Gary Patterson [pseud.], "BISEXUALS," *Berkeley Barb*, 24 May 1968.

[72] Gary Patterson [pseud.], "Straights a Bit Shy at Homo-Hetro Bash," *Berkeley Barb*, 19 July 1968.

its sexual culture. Laurence and other CHF members developed a new style of gay political militancy based on the model of and in solidarity with the Black Power movement. In a typical statement, Laurence explained the new militancy by highlighting this influence: "By understanding the black revolution, I saw the parallel and what could be done." He asserted that "'I'm a homosexual and want to be accepted as such' should be the gay slogan of liberation. It's the same as 'Black is Beautiful.' Only if we believe that deep down inside can the revolution proceed."[73] Laurence and other CHF members emphasized that gay people should declare their homosexuality with pride, leaving the hypocrisy, guilt, and shame of a double life behind. In doing so, they drew on the model of the Black Power movement and, in a broader sense, the countercultural emphasis, common across the Left, on authenticity and honesty as key moral virtues. Laurence and the CHF also adapted the SFL's priority of discarding the guilt and shame associated with sex to articulate this more confrontational vision of gay political and sexual identity. Laurence's skills as an announcer at a news radio station and his position as a writer for several underground press outlets gave him a strategic edge in his efforts to promote the new gay militancy.[74]

When CHF activists sought to further define the politics of gay liberation, they drew on critiques of marriage and the nuclear family that movement organizations like the SFL and BPP had developed and popularized. Just as Newton had encouraged the Panthers to eschew mainstream norms and develop "our own ways of relating to each other" that "more fully meet the needs of our struggle,"[75] in his widely circulated late 1969 "Gay Manifesto," white leftist and early CHF member Carl Wittman declared: "Traditional marriage is a rotten, oppressive institution. . . . Marriage is a contract which smothers both people, denies needs, and places impossible demands on both people. . . . Liberation for gay people is defining for ourselves how and with whom we live, instead of measuring our relationship in comparison to straight ones, with straight values." Like Newton and Thorne, Wittman too sought a way to achieve the "security, a flow of love, and a feeling of belonging and being needed" promised by marriage but outside of normative social institutions. Echoing BPP and SFL leaders' critiques of monogamy, Wittman also defined one of the "things we want to get away from" as "exclusiveness, propertied attitudes toward each other." However, he went further than Newton and Thorne did by also denouncing "inflexible roles . . . [that] are inherited through mimicry and inability to define equalitarian relationships." He instead prioritized sharing power in sexual relationships as key to realizing "liberation for gay

[73] Quoted in "Homo Revolt: 'Don't Hide It,'" *Berkeley Barb*, 28 March 1969.

[74] Gale C. Whittington, *Beyond Normal: The Birth of Gay Pride* (self-published, Booklink, 2010), Kindle location 2573.

[75] "On the Party," 3.

people."[76] Writing in late 1969, as women in leftist Bay Area organizations like the BPP and SFL were actively challenging male chauvinism within their ranks, Wittman denounced patriarchal power discrepancies in sexual relationships comparatively early in the gay liberation movement. Despite Wittman's direct critique of gender and sexual hierarchies, early gay liberation organizations like the CHF nevertheless tended to be male-dominated and often fell short of practicing these egalitarian ideals.

When Laurence cofounded the CHF, he achieved some success in his attempts to establish a gay or bisexual SFL analogue, and as a result his new organization shared some of the league's patriarchal limitations. In a highly critical account of the CHF in particular and of the militant turn toward gay liberation it represented in general, a homophile activist reported in horror to the homophile cofounders of the Daughters of Bilitis that CHF members had apparently voted to have an orgy: "This group also has heterosexual members, but there is at the moment quite a bit of . . . tension in this regard because the group had voted to have an orgy and one of the girl heterosexuals led a revolt against it under the banner, apparently, that militant civil rights groups shouldn't have orgies."[77] This report demonstrates that in the Bay Area's early gay liberation movement, as in the Black Power and sexual freedom movements, women across lines of race consistently challenged the patriarchal assumptions that undergirded the Left's male-dominated sexual culture. Indeed, the notion that sexual consent could be put to a popular vote is an example of precisely these kinds of assumptions.

Despite CHF women's interventions, the CHF in particular and Bay Area gay liberation activists in general did succeed in making communal sex a key feature of the movement's culture, using the appeal of sex and nudity to add critical mass to their organizations. The CHF newsletter promoted the organization's new East Bay chapter in July 1969 by reporting that its second meeting was "highlighted by an extemporaneous orgy!" and commenting, "See! CHF meetings can be fun!"[78] Additionally, within weeks of Newton's release of his statement of solidarity with the women's and gay liberation movements in August 1970, several gay liberation organizations collaborated with the SFL to host a "Pan-Sexual Celebration-Nude-Acid-Rock-Dance-and-Party" in San Francisco. Mother Boats, a white gay

[76] Carl Wittman, "A Gay Manifesto," in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, ed. Karla Jay and Allen Young (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 333–34.

[77] Perry Dickey, "Subject: Western Homophile Conference (San Francisco, 6/20, 21, 22/69)," folder 5, box 20, subseries C: Homophile—National, International and Regional, 1955–1988, series 4: National Homophile and Gay Liberation Organizations, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers, 93-13, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

[78] Reports of this CHF orgy did not specify how it was initiated or whether women were present or willing to participate. "East Bay Chapter Holds Weenie Roast and Orgy," *Committee for Homosexual Freedom Newsletter*, 8 July 1969, Archives of Sexuality & Gender, http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/BVmm51.

liberationist and early CHF member who had first met Laurence in the SFL,[79] organized the event and emphasized that its goal was "to bring everyone together and what is a better way than to 'come' together. Not everyone digs politics but most dig beauty and sex. In order to make our dance the huge success it was we had to borrow techniques we used successfully for years in the SFL."[80] The SFL's culture of sexual experimentation that Thorne had cultivated thus directly shaped the Bay Area's gay liberation movement and the methods its activists used to attract both gay and nongay participation. Gay liberationists harnessed this culture's nonnormative sexual practices and encounters for their potential both to facilitate "psychedelic" transport to a utopian future beyond their flawed present moment and to reconfigure society. Indeed, that Mother Boats described the four organizations that sponsored the event, which included the SFL and the Gay Liberation Front, as "sexual-political organizations" demonstrates his recognition of precisely this utopian political potentiality.[81]

Further demonstrating this fusion between sexual experimentation and leftist politics, Laurence both promoted gay participation in group sexual encounters and encouraged gay people to support other leftist political organizations. As he continued to advocate gay participation in the SFL, Laurence also argued that "alliances with the Black Panthers, the Resistance, and other antiwar groups will help when common causes arise." A full year before Newton released his statement of solidarity with the women's and gay liberation movements, Laurence reported a successful collaboration with the BPP on the local level. He announced that Panthers in Oakland allowed him to distribute leaflets about gay liberation, telling him that their leadership "hasn't endorsed this, but we're for anyone who wants freedom, so go ahead."[82]

Laurence also reported progress in his efforts to elicit support for gay liberation from national BPP leaders. Highlighting the need for the party to take a position, Laurence reported in the underground press that one rank-and-file Panther in LA had resigned from the party out of fear that his fellow Panthers might reject him should they find out about his homosexuality. Laurence also reported attending vigils at the BPP's San Francisco

[79] Mother Boats, personal email communication, 27 May 2018.

[80] Mother Boats, "300—Count 'Em—300 Nude Dancers!," *Berkeley Barb*, 28 August 1970.

[81] Mother Boats.

[82] Leo Laurence, "Gays Get Panther Ok," *Berkeley Tribe* (Berkeley, CA), 25 July 1969. While Laurence's account of local and national party leaders' responses to gay liberation in Oakland were positive, other local party leaders' and rank-and-file members' positions on homosexuality varied; see Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks,'" 282. For a thorough analysis of Laurence's and others' efforts to secure BPP support for gay liberation, see Jared Leighton, "'All of Us Are Unapprehended Felons': Gay Liberation, the Black Panther Party, and Intercommunal Efforts against Police Brutality in the Bay Area," *Journal of Social History* 52, no. 3 (2018): 860–85.

headquarters, where he asked Panthers their thoughts about gay liberation: "'Right on!' came back the answer every time. 'I'm for anybody who is after freedom and wants to rip off the fascists in this country,' was a typical Panther comment. Not once did I find hostility to the Gay Liberation movement from a Panther, even during discussions with Brothers David and June Hilliard, and Masai Hewitt, Minister of Education."[83] Within months of these exchanges, Newton led the BPP to form an official alliance with the women's and gay liberation movements by releasing his high-profile statement of solidarity in August 1970.

In July 1970, a month before he was released from prison, Newton developed an initial draft of his statement of solidarity, which he addressed primarily to Panthers, most likely other national leaders on the party's Central Committee. This early version of Newton's statement was typed and marked with the note "from HPN to DH." "DH" likely stood for David Hilliard, who was then the party's chief of staff. With sentences, phrases, and at times whole paragraphs crossed out and replaced with handwritten additions in the margins, the original draft reads as though it was first communicated verbally and then transcribed before it was further edited.[84] Newton first endeavored to acknowledge his own and other party members' insecurities about homosexuality, which he critiqued by rhetorically connecting racism and antigay prejudice: "We want to hit the homosexual in the mouth as soon as we see him because we're afraid that we might be homosexual." He then shifted to advise: "We must gain security in ourselves and therefore have respect and feelings for all oppressed people. We must not use the racist type of attitude like the white racists use against a man who is black."[85] Much like one of Laurence's statements that nongay New Left organizers had displayed "sexual racism" by not having gay activists speak at one of their events, Newton drew a direct comparison between antigay sentiment and racism.[86] These comparisons demonstrate that activists in the Black Power and gay liberation movements alike adapted the framework of antiracism to develop new language about and acknowledgment of homosexuals as an oppressed group. This new language cemented ties between the Black Power and gay liberation movements, affirming gay belonging within the Bay Area Left, which activists like Laurence had long sought.[87] Newton accomplished these rhetorical feats by drawing on the

[83] Leo Laurence, "Roland Raps Leo Listens," *Berkeley Tribe*, 26 December 1969.

[84] For example, the original draft included colloquial phrases that Newton often used in interviews such as "you see what I mean" that were later crossed out. Huey P. Newton, "A Letter from Huey to the Revolutionary Brothers and Sisters," 1, 8 July 1970, folder 14, box 47, subseries 5: Manuscripts, series 1: Huey P. Newton Papers, Newton Foundation Inc. Collection.

[85] Newton, "A Letter from Huey," 1.

[86] Leo Laurence, "The Last Rally," *Berkeley Barb*, 10 April 1970.

[87] As Ronald K. Porter has noted, however, Newton's endorsement of gay liberation did not address homosexuality within the party. Ronald K. Porter, "A Rainbow in Black: The Gay Politics of the Black Panther Party," *Counterpoints* 367 (2012): 370.

party's history of directly discussing sexual matters to encourage Panthers to acknowledge and address their own insecurities.

Newton modeled the emotional vulnerability and intimacy that he encouraged among Panthers to overcome these insecurities by speaking openly and honestly about his own sexual preferences: "I am willing to discuss the insecurities that members of the Party might have about having" gay liberation activists at events and rallies. He clarified that by "insecurities, I mean the insecurity . . . that they're some threat to our manhood. Because I can understand it. I'm not saying this . . . in any reprimanding way or any [facetious] way. I realize that homosexuality, because of a long conditioning process of insecurity on American males' part, might produce certain hangups." Newton proceeded to use himself as an example in order to demonstrate that he identified with and thus was not reprimanding Panthers with these "hangups." He described his own discomfort with male homosexuality, theorizing that it was distasteful to him because it was a threat, while in contrast, female homosexuality was attractive because it was "just another erotic kind of sexual thing."[88] Newton invited frank and intimate conversation about homosexuality within the party by sharing personal details about his own sexual preferences. He thus drew upon the party's culture of sexual openness in his initial statement in order to address an issue that some Panthers likely found difficult to discuss.

Newton invited discussion about homosexuality and other sensitive matters by highlighting his vision of the party as an alternative antifamily and by emphasizing its members' closeness: "We can carry on these kinds of discussions, and this is what our family, our Party as a family . . . should do. But as far as our official policy, we will not castigate or act unfriendly towards gay liberation or women's liberation movement, and we certainly won't call them counter-revolutionary."[89] Newton thus indicated that the party would hold discussions to process its members' own feelings about homosexuality even as it officially endorsed gay liberation groups. Moreover, by describing the party as a family, Newton both modeled and encouraged the emotional intimacy and vulnerability among its members that such discussions necessitated.

The original draft of Newton's statement indicates that the Bay Area gay liberation movement and its activists likely helped inspire him to publicly announce his support for the movement: "If we can have some kind of working coalition with [gay liberation activists], we can really get a thing going in the bay area. . . . In the bay area, there's supposed to be more homosexuals than anywhere in the United States. . . . [A]bout ten years ago, it was suppose[d] to have been 90,000. So I'm sure there's about 200,000 probably now. So it's really a significant part of the population that we have

[88] Newton, "A Letter from Huey," 3.
[89] Newton, 3–4.

to deal with."[90] The coalition Newton first envisioned between the BPP and gay liberation was geographically specific and built on popular ideas of the Bay Area as the epicenter of gay life. Newton's initial statement of solidarity thus indicates that it was intended for other Panthers, perhaps the upper echelons of the party's leadership, and was oriented toward forming coalitions with gay liberation organizations in the Bay Area specifically. Newton's focus on the Bay Area suggests that the visibility of local gay liberation activists like Laurence helped influence his decision to make the statement.[91] The BPP's culture of sexual openness fundamentally shaped Newton's initial delivery of his statement and helped foster new language connecting the gay liberation and Black Power movements.

While the unavailability of the family wage initially spurred Newton and others to reject the nuclear family, their yearning for something more than their present moment could offer led them to develop the Left's culture of sexual experimentation in pursuit of utopian alternatives that they hoped would fulfill their political, emotional, spiritual, and sexual desires. Not only did the BPP and the East Bay SFL chapter share important roots, but their continued development of a common sexual culture informed the broader cultural and political landscape into the late 1960s and early 1970s. The desire for belonging within this shared culture and for coalitions with the organizations it spanned shaped the emergence and defined the contours of early gay liberation in the Bay Area. This shared culture's openness about sexual matters also facilitated the formal coalition Newton established between the BPP and the gay liberation movement. Understanding this culture requires that historians consider leftist movements and groups typically considered separately in relation to one another. Doing so also illuminates the common ground between early gay liberation organizations and the BPP, because prominent figures across these organizations already shared commitments to sexual freedom and to experimenting with nonnormative sexual practices. Newton's initial statement of solidarity with women's and gay liberation indicates that he built upon this shared foundation—especially the party's commitments to sexual openness, emotional intimacy, and alternative forms of kinship among its members—to connect the struggles against racism and antigay prejudice. Centering this common

[90] Newton, 4.

[91] The original draft of Newton's statement suggests that the visibility of local Bay Area activists helped spur his decision to formalize this alliance, but it was not the only factor that informed this development. French homosexual writer and activist Jean Genet had also raised party leaders' consciousness about homosexual oppression earlier that year. Newton himself also subsequently credited his experiences speaking with homosexual prisoners while he was incarcerated with changing his thinking about homosexuality. For Jean Genet's influence on Panther leaders, see Porter, "A Rainbow in Black," 369; Edmund White, *Genet: A Biography* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 557–59. For Newton's claim about his prison experiences, see Emily K. Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 32.

culture and tracing its contestation require that historians also account for the fractures and struggles around gender and power within and across these organizations. Finally, considering the range of organizations that shared this culture necessitates that historians complicate easy distinctions between the counterculture and the political Left, or between culture and politics.

About the Author

Andrew Lester is a doctoral candidate at Rutgers University–Newark. He received his master of arts degree in American studies from the University of Massachusetts–Boston. His master's thesis examined connections between Vanguard, an organization of gay street youth, and the early Black Panther Party in the mid- to late 1960s. His dissertation expands upon that work to consider parallels, tensions, and intersections between the gay liberation and Black Power movements in the Bay Area in the 1960s and 1970s.