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**“THERE IS SOMETHING CHIC ABOUT WOMEN WEARING MEN’S CLOTHES” Lesbian activists as fashionable women in the fight for queer rights in the United States, 1955–1972**

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# “THERE IS SOMETHING CHIC ABOUT WOMEN WEARING MEN’S CLOTHES”

## Lesbian activists as fashionable women in the fight for queer rights in the United States, 1955–1972

*Malia McAndrew*

In March 1959 a women’s magazine called *The Ladder* published an illustration of a young, white woman with dark lipstick, finely plucked eye brows, and a sweeping French twist hairdo on its cover. The front page of the November 1960 edition of this publication struck a similar tone. Standing in a fashion model’s pose with her cat-eye sunglasses, the cover girl’s tailored button-up trouser set neatly accentuated her thin yet, busty frame. In August 1961, *The Ladder* again published images of the era’s predominate standard of female pulchritude, this time by showing the profiles of two make-up clad women carrying a sultry gaze on its front cover.<sup>1</sup> In many ways *The Ladder* was unremarkable in its depiction of the idealized American woman of the era. At times *The Ladder* printed glamourized photographs of its readers. On other occasions, it depicted idealized drawings of women. However, the only notable difference between the cover images found in this publication and those of other magazines that targeted women was the fact that the feminine figures depicted in *The Ladder* were those of lesbians.

Sexual minorities faced a precarious situation in the mid-twentieth-century United States. Because homosexuality was widely considered an immoral act perpetrated by weak and unstable persons, lesbian women and gay men were tagged as strange, sinful, and mentally ill persons. As a result of their perceived abnormality sexual minorities were socially ostracized and discriminated against by law, society, culture, and medicine. For example, *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* used by psychologists and psychiatrists of the era claimed gay men and lesbian women suffered from a “sociopathic personality disturbance.” Depictions of sexual minorities in the popular media were equally derisive. The cheap pulp fiction novels popular during the 1950s and 1960s routinely cast lesbians as either as misfit loners or as dirty, hypersexual predators whose stories routinely end in either suicide or some other calamity. As a result of their perceived abnormality, sexual minorities found their communities under constant attack at the hands of politicians, religious leaders, health professionals, and ordinary citizens, who believed queer lifestyles to be unhealthy and even un-American. In addition to the omnipresent threat of physical violence at the hands of outsiders, sexual minorities lived in fear that they could be fired by their employer, dismissed

from school, kicked out of their home, dishonorably discharged from the military, or even jailed for “vice.” In this homophobic atmosphere, the way one looked and dressed was an important marker of lesbians’ perceived deviance. Indeed, the simple act of wearing mannish clothing in public might land a woman in jail should she be swept up in one of the era’s many police raids of lesbian bars (D’Emilio and Freedman 1988; Penn 1994).

Sexual minorities thus faced almost unparalleled social rejection in mid-twentieth-century America. As *The Ladder* put it in 1961, the United States was filled with “those who are yet so uneducated that homosexuals strike fear in them as do child molesters, dope addicts, and the mentally ill.”<sup>2</sup> The pervasive homophobic atmosphere of the era drove many queer communities underground and relegated countless other individuals to lives of social isolation.

On June 29, 1969, the Gay Liberation Movement was launched when police forcibly raided the Stonewall Inn, a popular gathering spot for the queer community in Greenwich Village, New York. On that night patrons fought back against police brutality with physical resistance and, although such raids were routine for the era, law enforcement quickly lost control of the situation. On the next night crowds returned to the Stonewall Inn and a newly emboldened group of nascent activists started to publicly protest for access to spaces where openly gay men and lesbian women could enjoy their leisure time without fear of arrest, harassment, or bodily harm. Because of the boldness and bravery exhibited that night, and for years to come, as well as its impact on American society as a whole, much scholarly and popular attention has been directed at the Gay Liberation Movement’s role in queer history (see, for example, Carter 2010; Duberman 1994; Engel et al. 2001). Gay Liberation, however, was not born overnight. Indeed, its eventual emergence was built upon the existence of strong queer networks developed in earlier eras. Without the group cohesion, camaraderie, and sense of shared identity that was fostered by earlier queer communities, an organized movement for gay and lesbian rights could not have emerged in 1969 (Taylor 2002).

The first modern queer communities to be documented in the United States arose in America’s urban centers around the turn of the twentieth century (Chauncey 1994; Hartman 2019). Here, lesbian and gay communities openly thrived as a part of America’s new urban landscape. While sexual minorities may originally have congregated in working-class bars, private house parties, and other social spaces for the purpose of fraternization, it was from this base that a communal consciousness and political identity arose (Kennedy and Davis 1993). Stifled during the economic woes of the Great Depression, by mid-century World War II brought new opportunities for gay and lesbian communities to reformulate as long-term, same-sex military service commitments allowed same sex social networks to proliferate (Bérubé 1990; D’Emilio 1983). The years of virulent homophobia and McCarthyism that commenced after the end of World War II prompted some gay men and lesbian women to form what became the nation’s first organizations to advocate for the rights of sexual minorities in the United States. In the 1950s and 1960s gay and lesbian activists focused much of their attention on diminishing the severe social stigmas faced by those in their community. At the time, a sense of conformity and consensus dominated American culture, and as such queer activists attempted to use the politics of assimilation to carve out a place for lesbian women and gay men in the larger American story. Members of what came to be called the Homophile Movement focused their energies on carefully recasting gay men and lesbian women before the public eye. They directly confronted the widely held belief that sexual minorities were “perverts” who should be excluded from society by stressing the ways in which the members of their group conformed to popular social mores and cultural ideals. In this way, their assimilation was a form of early resistance (Meeker 2006; Rupp 1999).

The Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), a San Francisco-based lesbian organization, took the lead in forwarding the Homophile strategy among women. Started in 1955 by the pioneering lesbian couple Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, the DOB worked to “promote the integration of the homosexual into society.” The group provided a community for lesbian women to join, taught its members about their legal rights, published group-affirming research on same-sex couples, and attempted to educate the public at large about the lesbian community (Faderman 1992; Gallo 2006). With the publication of their monthly newsletter, *The Ladder*, the Daughters of Bilitis was able to provide its movement with a national voice. Published from October 1956 to September 1972, *The Ladder* was the first mass-circulation periodical for lesbian women in the United States (Streitmatter 1995). Its pages chronicle the strategy, tactics, and goals of the female Homophile activists who wrote and edited it, as well as the thoughts and reactions of ordinary readers who sent their comments and criticisms into the publication. It was within the pages of this magazine that fashion, beauty, and the politics of personal appearance became sites where the strategies of the Homophile Movement were embodied.

### **Fashion as a Homophile strategy**

Because sexual minorities were popularly viewed as people who failed to conform to society’s most basic standards and norms, *The Ladder* encouraged its readers to publicly demonstrate the similarities they shared with heterosexual Americans. Its creators believed that being perceived by others as feminine and fashionable was an important step in gaining popular social acceptance for lesbians. This strategy included actively crafting a physical appearance that was in line with mainstream perceptions of beauty, femininity, and heterosexual attractiveness. By the mid-twentieth century, the use of cosmetics and other commercial beauty preparations had become a standard part of the ordinary woman’s daily grooming routine. Likewise, in the 1950s, wearing clothing styles that were up-to-date with popular fashion trends, as well as selecting matching handbags, purses, and accessories, was seen by mainstream society as a must for all women who wished to succeed in marriage, motherhood, business, or social affairs. By mirroring popular aesthetic standards, the Daughters of Bilitis believed other Americans might begin to view the lesbian as less deviant and thereby start to accept her presence in workplaces, educational institutions, social settings, and other spheres of American life. The politics of assimilation and the politics of appearance were thus intimately tied to the DOB’s call for greater civil rights and social acceptance in mid-century America. Indeed, this chapter argues that during the 1950s and 1960s, lesbian activists attempted to fashion a new identity for their community by consciously stylizing their dress, hair, and general appearance in accordance with popular definitions of female attractiveness. It contends that lesbian activists consciously employed American ideals of beauty, fashion, and femininity as part of their purposeful effort to reshape public perceptions of their group. As a part of this process, lesbian leaders even attempted to gently push heterosexual understandings of suitable attire for the everyday woman in a more lesbian-friendly direction. In contrast to the frilly and girlish styles of the World War II pin-up era, lesbian activists in the late 1950s and 1960s promoted a more sophisticated and mature feminine look which, was trending among high-fashion clothing designers of the era.

In contrast to the derogatory depictions of lesbian women that proliferated in popular media, *The Ladder* presented images of lesbians that were visually akin to their normative, white, middle-class, heterosexual counterparts. While appearance was not the main focus of *The Ladder*, it regularly featured articles about femininity and fashion within its pages.

Fighting against public perceptions that judged lesbians as either whorish women unable to find respectable employment or unattractive manly outcasts not capable of living a “normal” lifestyle, *The Ladder* provided an alternative image of the “typical” lesbian. She was most often young, slender, and white – although on a few occasions women of color were also represented on its pages. She was fashionable and feminine. And, she was mostly indistinguishable from her heterosexual counterparts portrayed in the larger media landscape. In this way, *The Ladder* promoted a lesbian aesthetic that was unremarkably mainstream.

From this place of aesthetic conformity, the publication encouraged lesbian readers to confidently interact with the world around her. In addition to fashion advice, *The Ladder* gave readers practical tips for entering the workforce, highlighted the lives of lesbians who enjoyed monogamous, long-term partnerships, and promoted social spaces, such as at DOB’s national convention, where members of the lesbian community could publicly connect with one another in uncontroversial settings (as opposed to gathering at lesbian bars or other popular drinking establishments). Aesthetic conformity was sold by *The Ladder* as the lesbian woman’s ticket into a wider world that had for too long had shunned her.

When in early 1958 a male commentator writing for San Francisco’s *Pageant* magazine attempted to slander the Daughters of Bilitis by calling the editor of *The Ladder* “burly,” the publication did not hesitate to respond. Running an article entitled “WE DO HEARTILY DENY THAT PHYLLIS LYON IS BURLY” the publication quickly enumerated its editor’s petite and ladylike physique. “Those who have made the personal acquaintance of Phyllis Lyon would hardly call her large of body, bulky, or stout” DOB President Del Martin said in response to the depiction of her partner. She further specified that Lyon “has a trim figure – 34 bust, 24 waist (may be slightly larger after recent Holiday parties) and 36 hips – considered by many as very nice.” Asking the rhetorical question “Is our editor burly?” the DOB heartily responded, “We think not!”<sup>3</sup>

While imitation of heterosexual codes of appearance, dress, and conduct was an important tactic that the Daughters of Bilitis used to forward the integration of lesbian women into American society, such an approach was not without criticism from within lesbian ranks. “Perhaps some may feel we are advocating conformity,” *The Ladder* asserted in a 1961 editorial written by Jaye Bell, the second president of the Daughter of Bilitis. “We are,” she unapologetically declared, going on to argue “this is outward conformity, the same outward conformity demanded of numerous groups of people who are in positions foreign to the public at large.” Bell however made certain to differentiate the outward conformity she promoted from the societal pressure lesbians received at the hands of outsiders to change their sexual orientation. As Bell made clear to her readers, “conformity in one’s personal life is another matter.”<sup>4</sup> Thus while members of the DOB advocated a carefully crafted physical appearance meant to ease the bias readers might experience in their daily lives, they did not forward such ideals as a way for the queer woman to mask her identity as a lesbian. Rather, crafting a careful personal appearance was posited as one way for the woman who lived openly with another woman to secure the rights that all American citizens – including those who practiced same-sex love – were entitled to.

Reiterating this strategy for mainstream acceptance in her own words, a reader, simply identified as N.R. from California wrote into the publication to express her gratitude that

throughout the years, I have learned...chiefly through the Daughters of Bilitis, that a full-fledged, honest-to-God lesbian can hold down a responsible position, can wear skirts reasonably, comfortably, and gracefully, can wear her hair long, and can do a million and one other things any other female can do in society – with ease and poise too.

Further echoing the overall strategy of the Homophile Movement, N.R. went on to assert that “if we homosexuals want to feel integrated into society, we in turn must offer something useful and desirable to accept.”<sup>5</sup> Also forwarding this strategy for social acceptance, another reader who called herself Z.N. trumpeted her own success with engendering heterosexual approval of her lesbian lifestyle. “The first outward step is that of advocating a mode of behavior and dress acceptable to society” Z.N. instructed her fellow lesbians. She continued her line of argumentation by stating that “any minority group wishing to be accepted must conform to the majority group where first impressions are concerned.” In fact, she argued, the strategy of conscientious dress and deportment had changed a heterosexual’s opinion of her sexuality in “more than a dozen cases.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Masculine attire**

In its discussions of fashion, the subject of masculine clothing was a topic of frequent conversation in *The Ladder*. Because women who wore men’s attire threatened to contradict the feminine appeal that *The Ladder* wished to engender, it dealt with the subject head on. “Fem” (sic) partners were encouraged by *The Ladder* to check that their significant other not appear “too butchy” before the public eye and suggested the woman gently introduce “less butchy” looking clothing into her partner’s wardrobe. However, as a June 1957 article on masculine attire cautioned its readership, while “conformity has been recommended as a solution” for those women who preferred to wear masculine styles, “too often forced conformity is the mother of further neuroses” and, it posited, such action might easily lead to further pain. As such, *The Ladder* sought to map out a path forward which, could satisfy both the butch woman’s personal sense of style and help her to gain acceptance from a society quick to judge her every action. Again finding its answer in fashion, *The Ladder* gallantly proclaimed that “for those who must be mannish can do so, if they care, with style, class, and sophistication.” Womanly attention to detail and a purposeful effort to carefully craft ones look, it seemed, might help to draw attention away from the specific type of attire that the lesbian woman wore, even when those choices were more masculine than not.<sup>7</sup>

Furthering this message for lesbians and non-lesbians alike, *The Ladder* additionally argued that variations on male clothing were fast becoming popular components in the everyday American woman’s wardrobe. In 1964 *The Ladder* covered the Nina Ricci fashion show in Paris where, it reported, the audience applauded

as a model stepped out wearing a tailored tweed jacket, white shirt, grey flannel skirt with trouser pleats and a cuff, and a tiny beret worn down to the level of one eyebrow. Next came masculine coats, suits, dinner suits, and at-home outfits.

As the publication triumphantly related to its readers “fashion experts agree, a girl can hardly look too much like a boy these days.”<sup>8</sup>

Citing *Vogue*, *Harper’s*, *The New York Times*, and other mainstream publications, *The Ladder* reprinted articles on fashion from the mainstream press, which described an emerging masculine turn in women’s wear. These news items included a January 1962 article in *This Week*, a popular magazine supplement included in many American newspapers, entitled “Women Take Over the Pants” which, reported that the manufacture of women’s pants had become a multi-million-dollar industry. As early adopters of such garb, *The Ladder* used the growth of shorts, jeans, capris, and slacks among heterosexual women as evidence that lesbian women were ahead of the fashion curve. Enumerating such trends, *The Ladder*

reported that 78% of American women under the age of 25 now owned at least three pairs of trousers, and the majority of all women had at least two pairs of pants in their wardrobe.<sup>9</sup> “It’s such a definitive fashion statement,” the American designer Stan Herman stated in regard to women wearing pants in 1964. Printing this quote alongside others from prominent domestic and foreign fashion designers and couturiers, including Anne Klein, Eloise Curtis, and Pauline Trigère, *The Ladder* grew its arsenal of defense.<sup>10</sup> Far from “sickos” and social misfits, through *The Ladder* the DOB painted a picture of lesbian women as stylish and chic sophisticates at the cutting edge of international fashion trends.

Suggesting that the average American woman look to Europe, the historic birthplace of Western fashion, and New York City, America’s longtime fashion capital, for her sartorial inspiration, *The Ladder* sidestepped any criticism that a lesbian might receive for wearing pants in her own community. In April 1964, Esme Langley, creator of the Minorities Research Group, the first organization to openly advocate for the interests of lesbians in the United Kingdom, sent a special message to *The Ladder’s* predominantly American readership. Langley claimed that she had been “turning heads” for years through her adoption of pants, tall boots, leather jackets, and other garb years before they became a fashion craze in mainstream America. “I don’t follow fashions, I set them” Langley proudly asserted following that: “When Christian Dior runs out of notions, I daresay he’ll be cabling me to help him out!”<sup>11</sup>

Through its discussions of fashion, *The Ladder* thus encouraged its readers to conform to popular standards of feminine dress, while at the same time pushing the boundaries of how normative womanhood was being popularly defined. Its articles, commentaries, and fashion reviews consistently presented the bodies of lesbian women (even when they were stylized in masculine garb), not as evidence of social deviance, but rather, as representative of fashion-forward styling choices that any woman might subscribe to.

### Assimilation and resistance

Some contemporary readers who have lived their entire lives in the post-Stonewall era, might bristle at the politics of assimilation that the Daughters of Bilitis so proudly asserted in the 1950s and 1960s. In contrast to the Homophile Movement, the movement for Gay Liberation that took shape in summer of 1969 rejected the notion that homosexuals should have to conform to the mores and values of society at large. Promoting a new sense of solidarity, its members proclaimed that distinct gay subcultures should be seen as points of pride to be respected by society as a whole.

The purpose of this analysis is not to advocate for the DOB strategy but, to point out the important place that fashion and beauty (seemingly insignificant, and even frivolous topics) came to play in their consequential social and political project. At the height of queer persecution by mainstream American society, lesbian activists used beauty culture as a tool to win civil rights and achieve greater social acceptance. Instead of sitting by as the passive victims of a society that wanted nothing to do with them, members of the DOB fashioned themselves as agents of their own destiny. Through cosmetics, hairstyling, fashion choices, and the use of other seemingly superficial aspects of American beauty culture, they launched an avowedly political campaign that was an important part of the larger rights conscious ethos of mid-twentieth-century America. Indeed, the Daughters of Bilitis were not alone in their use of beauty culture as a tool for social and political change; their assimilationist strategy highlights a popular mode of resistance used by several groups of Americans who found themselves sidelined by mainstream culture.



When the Black Power, Gay Liberation, and Women's Rights movements almost simultaneously emerged in the third quarter of the twentieth century, their leaders directly questioned the inequitable power hierarchies that had long shaped American society. Among the most visible protests that feminist activists of this era launched was the 1968 rally that took place outside of the Miss America beauty pageant in Atlantic City. Here members of a second-wave feminist group known as the New York Radical Women tossed bras, girdles, hair curlers, copies of girlie magazines, and other "instruments of female torture" into their "freedom trash can." In protesting the Miss America Pageant, the longest-running and most prominent beauty contest in American history, these activists directly confronted the contours of a sexist American culture that expected the masses of American women to constantly compete for male attention by habitually consuming uncomfortable and unnecessary beauty goods that hypersexualized women's bodies. Since this time, a strand of feminist literature on beauty culture has continued to illuminate the powerful ways in which mainstream aesthetic norms are detrimental to women. Emblematic of this genre is the popular 1991 book *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, in which writer Naomi Wolf argues the fashion and beauty industries have unscrupulously profited by selling women a set of utterly unattainable, unhealthy, and continually changing beauty standards.

While such assessments still ring true for many today, they nonetheless downplay the full range of reasons why various groups of women have historically chosen to participate in America's robust beauty culture, despite its drawbacks. Indeed, a number of scholarly assessments have looked to the ways in which racial and ethnic minorities have used mainstream beauty culture as a tool to fight against discrimination. For centuries in the United States, people of color have been relegated to an outsider status by a power structure that privileges white Americans. Working within the constraints of this oppressive atmosphere, scholars have pointed to the ways in which some women in the Japanese American, Chinese American, Arab American, and African American communities have all used gendered notions of how a woman should look and act in order to bolster an elevated position for their group within America's social hierarchy.

Malia McAndrew's (2014) work, for example, shows how during World War II, some young Japanese American women held inside America's incarceration camps used beauty pageants as a means of asserting their patriotism and fundamentally American identity. As part of this avowedly political project, incarceration camp newspapers presented an image of second and third generation Japanese Americans who were stylistically indistinguishable from their white female counterparts. At times holding beauty pageants on significant patriotic holidays such as, the Fourth of July, camp newspapers described incarcerated contestants by highlighting their quintessentially all-American looks. For example, coverage of an incarceration camp beauty pageant in Arkansas described one contestant as having a "Coca-Cola smile" while another competitor was designated "a walking breakfast-cereal ad."

According to Judy Tzu-Chun Wu (1997), beauty pageants were an important tool of resistance in postwar America because they were able to promote a positive representation of American minority groups without threatening mainstream society. Her analysis of the Miss Chinatown USA pageant brings to light the many ways in which the greater Chinese American community promoted racial equality for their group by stylizing the bodies of beauty contestants as glamorous femme fatales. In contrast to the ways in which mainstream society stereotyped Chinese women as drab "slaves" with bound feet, pageant contestants represented the Chinese American body by wearing stiletto heels, dresses with high slits up their side, and tops that showed ample cleavage. With beauty pageants as the marquee event at large Chinatown festivals in West Coast cities such as Los Angeles, it was hoped that



beauty queens might both recast Chinese Americans before the public eye and draw outside business to Chinese American commercial districts, places popularly deemed as “dirty” by white American consumers.

Martina Koegeler-Abdi’s (2016) analysis of the Lebanese American beauty queen Mary Hakim illuminates a similar story. As Koegeler-Abdi shows, the 1954–1955 titlist in the first ever Miss Lebanon-America pageant used her beauty queen aesthetic as a way of both fashioning her identity as a patriotic American and consciously setting herself apart from the bodies of other Arab Americans whom some looked upon derisively. Contrasting herself with veiled Muslim American women in her autobiography, Hakim presented her idealized pageant aesthetic as evidence of the fundamentally American identity held by the members of her Christian Arab community in juxtaposition to those whose clothing choices she saw as evidence “backwardness.”

Reaching back centuries, African Americans have long used the “politics of respectability” to claim a more equal footing in the United States. By displaying “lady-like behavior” and perfectly executing the dictates of white middle-class culture, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1993) explains how Black church women used dress and public presentation to foster interracial cooperation for Black advancement during the Jim Crow Era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In post-World War II America, the works of Tiffany Gill (2010) and Malia McAndrew (2010) similarly detailed the ways in which Black beauty entrepreneurs – including the owners of hair salons, charm schools, and modeling agencies – all used an assimilationist beauty culture to forward Black economic empowerment and racial advancement during the civil rights era. Taking beauty pageant politics to the next level, Maxine Leeds Craig’s 2002 book highlights the efforts of Black women who integrated traditionally white beauty contests in the early 1960s. Often backed up by the NAACP or other leading Black community organizations, winning a beauty title in an integrated space, as opposed to an all-Black space, was seen by its promoters as mainstream validation of the race and therefore progress in the struggle for Black equality. Many female activists in the early Black freedom struggle styled their bodies in line with popular notions of respectability, including processing and straightening their hair and wearing a middle-class wardrobe. However, as Tanisha Ford (2015) chronicles, fashions changed as the movement intensified and younger and more progressive civil rights organizations emerged. Maintaining a traditionally respectable body proved difficult for protesters who met frequently with police and mob violence, or for those who were dedicated to the work of rural canvassing. Soon natural hair and unisex denim overalls overtook the politics of assimilation, and an emerging soul style was worn by a younger generation of activists who had a more progressive vision for American race relations.

As examples from the literature on Japanese American, Chinese American, Arab American, and African American communities in the 1950s and 1960s make clear, physical assimilation was a pervasive tactic used by some members of a diverse set of America’s racial and ethnic communities to fight against their exclusion from mainstream society. The evidence found in this chapter extends the conscious political use of aesthetic assimilation to the lesbian community. Through their choice of clothing styles, hairstyles, and other aspects of American beauty culture, minoritized groups contested their second-class status in the United States. A carefully constructed aesthetic was one way in which some members of these communities attempted to claim respect and acknowledgement from a society that had regularly dismissed and ridiculed them.

Aesthetics are a short hand for identity. They express on the physical form inner definitions of who we believe ourselves to be. Far from meaningless and superficial cultural artifacts,

bodies are what the theorist Susan Bordo (1993) has called a sort of “cultural plastic” from which the individual can mold her or his identity and set its basic form. Portraying more than an individual canvas, Maxine Leeds Craig (2010: 243) has further asserted that bodies are sites “where status inequalities and boundaries are formed, suffered, upheld, and transgressed.” The body is in this way a canvas for the political battles of the age in which it is produced. In America of the 1950s and 1960s, before the antiracist cry “Black is Beautiful” was uttered, or the queer mantra “We’re Here, We’re Queer –Get Used to It!” was popularized, groups like the DOB sought simply to be seen. Their strategy was one of assimilation, yet in their quest to organize and resist they helped to provide a foundation for group solidarity, self-definition, and hegemonic resistance that later generations of queer activists would build upon. In this way, the politics of appearance were a means for contesting the inequities of the American body politic.

### Related topics

Democratizing looks: the politics of gender, class, and beauty in early twentieth century United States

### Notes

- 1 *The Ladder* 3, no. 6 (March 1959); *The Ladder* 5, no. 4 (November 1960); *The Ladder* 5, no. 11 (August 1961).
- 2 Jaye Bell, “DOB Anniversary Message from the President” *The Ladder* 6, no. 1 (October 1961), 5.
- 3 Del Martin, “Is Our Editor Burly” *The Ladder* 2, no. 4 (January 1958), 16–17. Emphasis in original.
- 4 Bell, “DOB Anniversary Message,” 5–6.
- 5 N. R., “Readers Respond” *The Ladder* 5, no. 7 (April 1961), 24.
- 6 Z. N., “Readers Respond” *The Ladder* 3, no. 1 (October 1958), 30.
- 7 Barbara Stephens, “Transvestism: A Cross-Cultural Survey” *The Ladder* 1, no. 9 (June 1957), 10–14.
- 8 “Cross-currents” *The Ladder* 8, no. 8 (May 1964), 11.
- 9 “Here and There” *The Ladder* 6, no. 4 (January 1962), 26.
- 10 Melanie “Focus on Fashion” *The Ladder* 9, no. 2 (November 1964), 16.
- 11 Esme Langley. “Fashion Notes from London, England” *The Ladder* 8, no. 7 (April 1964), 20–21.

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