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## Intersectionality in Queer Activism: A Case Study

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**Intersectionality in Queer Activism:**

**A Case Study**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the relationships between intersectionality and queer activism through a case study of the Louisville, Kentucky LGBTQ+ organization The Fairness Campaign. Intersectionality has been increasingly explored by academia, but rarely ventures beyond the “big three” categorical divisions of race, gender, and class; even rarer are studies of the practical application of intersectionality in activism, particularly queer activism. Through analysis of secondary data, I examine the ways in which intersectionality has, consciously or not, played a part in the history of the Fairness Campaign, as well as its role in the future of the organization.

**A note on terminology:** I use the term “queer” in this paper as an interchangeable reference to the LGBTQ+ community; this usage is intentional as a method of reclaiming “queer” for the self-use of LGBTQ+ people. Varying opinions on the acceptability of using “queer” exist, but as a self-identified queer, genderqueer woman, I believe it is an appropriate term especially in this context. I also use the acronym “LGBTQ+” (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, etc.) to encompass the entirety of the non-straight and/or non-cisgender community. As these identity terms vary vastly depending on context, it is my hope that “LGBTQ+” will suffice as a reminder of the many identities involved in the queer community.

## Literature Review

Intersectionality has conceptually been discussed in social science for several decades, but the coining of the term by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 sparked an interdisciplinary development of theory that has been, at times, both confusing and encompassing. Within research, there is a tendency to isolate elements of identity such as race, gender, and class, and attempt to use these categories as inclusive of all people with that particular category. In her germinal papers, Crenshaw calls for a look at the “intersections” of these identities, where factors of race, gender, or class alone do not account for the overall lived experiences of those who face oppression from multiple sources. Crenshaw uses violence against women of color as an example of the scope of intersectionality, highlighting the various ways in which race, gender, immigration status, socioeconomic status, and other elements of identity all shape one’s reality; examining one of these factors alone would not sufficiently include the effects of the rest of these factors on the individual, and would thus be an inaccurate representation of their experiences. Socially constructed categories are the focus of intersectionality, which leads some critics to charges of divisiveness, as the theory relies on the categories it seems to be intent on destroying. However, although these categories are socially constructed, it is “not to say that that category has no significance in our world” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1296). Intersectionality acknowledges that social categorization is often justification for inequality, but never places a value judgment on this; instead, intersectional approaches to research seek to understand how these intersections come to be and how they can be used as a resource.

Crenshaw’s experiences in the legal realm led to her coining the term ‘intersectionality,’ but the concept is not particularly new among those interested in social justice and transformation. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, women of color have called upon

society as a whole to understand their struggles as based on neither race or gender alone, but as the result of both race and gender intertwined. Many different groups began the journey towards what would be called “intersectionality” in the 1960s and 1970s, when radical social examination and change seemed necessary. Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana feminist and queer scholar, advanced understanding of the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and immigration status through *Borderlands/La Frontera*, a collection of accounts of the borders that divide society into distinct groups, such as men or women, LGBTQ+ or straight, etc. (Chun, Lipsitz, & Shin 2013). Because of the relatively recent introduction of the term “intersectionality” into scholarship, many intersectional studies have occurred without explicitly stating their intersectional nature, leaving the true amount of conducted intersectional research unknown (Collins 2015). Intersectionality has undeniably been most developed through black feminist theoretical and practical efforts, both in academia and activism. African American community organizers developed the rough concepts of practical intersectionality in the 1970s and 1980s, noting that “mono-categorical” approaches to social progress were insufficient in addressing multiple oppressions (Collins 2015). Before its naming, intersectionality was generally incorporated into academia under the umbrella phrase “race, class, and gender,” and quickly spread from its roots in women’s studies to many other disciplines that recognized the power of social categories by the 1980s. Moving to other disciplines was the beginning of confusion for intersectionality as a theory, as a rudimentary understanding of the theory of intersections gained some popularity and achieved “buzzword” status (Davis 2008). Unfortunately, this has shaped much of public perception of intersectionality and diluted its roots in black feminism, particularly with the common practice across disciplines of attributing intersectionality as beginning with Crenshaw. Patricia Hill Collins argues that briefly mentioning Crenshaw “as intersectionality’s foremother fosters a

collective ritual that legitimizes this particular origin story,” implying that intersectionality was not of value before its “discovery” and academic outline by Crenshaw, who “herself has taken issue with this rendition of her own work, claiming that it is returned to her in forms that are often unrecognizable” (2015, p. 10). It is of utmost importance to understand the history of intersectionality in order not to fall into the trap of erasure that is prominent in much interdisciplinary intersectional research.

In the past, intersectionality as theory has suffered from criticisms of being too vague, too flexible, too reliant on the categories it should transcend, and too focused on particulars to be of use within wider research. Some feminist scholars have argued that intersectionality is outdated, suggesting that the academy has moved *beyond* the theory, while other scholars criticize the theory for not being yet developed enough, suggesting that academia is moving *towards* it. Jennifer Nash calls these stances “feminism-past and feminism-future,” arguing that these critiques of intersectionality require a movement beyond the “devalued” black women central to intersectionality and women’s studies, implying that black women are the beginning and yet the problem of intersectionality (2008, p. 61).

Because intersectionality as a theory has transcended a variety of disciplines, its scope in the whole of academia is far beyond the capacity of this paper; I will focus on social science research in general, rather than fields in which intersectionality is more underdeveloped. Within the last ten years, intersectional scholars have deliberately focused on the development of a more standardized theory of intersectionality, with the intention of eventually developing a field of intersectionality studies (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall 2013). Leslie McCall (2005) identified three approaches to intersectionality – anticategorical, intercategorical, and intracategorical – that all produce different kinds of knowledge, which she argues is one of the great benefits of

intersectional theory. McCall also advocates a postpositivist stance that challenges the idea of unbiased, empirical research is the only way to truly construct knowledge (2005). McCall considers methodologies to be the main restriction of intersectionality, and calls for a collective embrace of a variety of methodologies and fields in order to create a larger body of knowledge; without this move, intersectionality will be limited in its scope (2005, p. 1795). Collins (2015) outlines the provisions of intersectionality, which intersectional projects must accept in some combination: social categories like race, gender, class, and sexuality are understood best in relational terms to one another rather than in isolation; these categories work within intersecting systems of power, which form complex social inequalities that shape realities across history; and these inequalities are fundamentally unjust (p. 14).

Some critics of intersectionality have advocated for a move towards “solidarity politics,” because intersectionality supposedly does not instigate enough actual action in social change and is descriptive rather than deconstructive (Nash 2008; Carastathis 2013). Though the strength of intersectionality’s calls for social change are debatable, intersectionality has always been intertwined with social movements, as mentioned previously (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall 2015). Anna Carastathis argues that much of the dominant intersectional research fails to consider the structural context of inequalities, and advocates for a return to Crenshaw’s original classification of categories as “potential coalitions,” which helps foster all types of activism (2013). Carastathis envisions all identity-based groups (such as LGBTQ+ organizations or racial justice groups) as coalitions in themselves, because of the complex identity of each person involved in them, as well as a means to form “coalitions of one” of internal acceptance (2013, p. 960). Arguments about the validity of categorical identity are common in intersectional research, but there has been little proposed to adequately replace these categories in language as of yet.

Coalitions between different social groups are also a frequent discussion in intersectional research, as these are definitive actions that at least attempt an intersectional understanding of social structure. Mieke Verloo (2013) warns that many organizations that tout their intersectional approaches are merely parroting a buzzword, but that those who truly do pursue intersectionality have “affirmative advocacy” (Strolovitch 2007) policies, which “recognize that equitable representation requires proactive efforts to overcome entrenched biases persisting against marginalized groups and to create decision-making rules that elevate issues affecting disadvantaged minorities on organizational agendas” (p. 907). Verloo also illuminates the tendency of movements and policy makers to lose cross-movement political power due to intragroup opportunity-hoarding, which prioritizes one group over the other (2013).

Intersectionality has become a popular approach to political and social activism, particularly with groups that may have multiple oppressions working against them.

Much of intersectional research has been focused on the relationships between race, gender, and class, with much less attention being paid to sexuality, gender identity, disability, age, immigration status, ethnicity, or the endless other categories we use to define ourselves. In cases where research does consider these categories, it is often intersecting with either race, gender, or class, making intersections with other, less-studied categories nearly invisible. According to Nash, “nowhere has the call for more intersectionality – and an attention to more intersections – been more profoundly developed than in the field of queer intersectionality” (2008, p. 50). Queer intersectionality recognizes that “most queers face multiple aspects of discrimination, as women, as people of color, as poor people, as cross-gendered people, and as sexual subversives” (Rosenblum, 1994, p. 89). Unfortunately, little research appears to have been conducted on the links between queer intersectionality and activism. Queer research also

suffers from a reliance on “lesbians” and “gays” as its main informants, despite the wide array of sexualities and gender identities in the LGBTQ+ community.

LGBTQ+ activism itself involves a variety of identities and concerns, which unsurprisingly leads to more intersectionality in theory than in practice. A 2013 study confirmed that white people are disproportionately represented in gay and lesbian activism, and many critiques of the LGBTQ+ movement as a whole argue that it focuses mainly on the experiences of white gay cisgender men (Swank & Fahs 2013) or that it too heavily relies on the “state-centered approach” (Swank & Fahs, 2011, p. 126) to social change. There is much conflicting research on the relationships between affluence and activism in the queer community, but studies have shown that socioeconomic standing affects one’s ability to be involved in activism (Swank & Fahs 2011; Barrett & Pollack 2005). Much of the available research on queer intersectional activism compares queer struggles to the struggles of people of color, as these groups commonly experience discrimination based on employment, housing, education, and human services (Whitfield et al. 2014). LGBTQ+ activism has its own cultural elements, such as using “outsider tactics” and protests more often than other realms of activism (Swank & Fahs 2011). Much more research on queer intersectionality and queer activism should be conducted to adequately understand the forms that these entities take.

### **Methodologies**

To examine the role of intersectionality in queer activism, I put forth a case study of the Fairness Campaign, an LGBTQ+ organization based in Louisville, Kentucky with the main purpose of advocating for statewide and national protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. This case study includes an analysis of secondary data, consisting of 22 interview transcripts with LGBTQ+ activists who have, in some way, been

involved in the formation and work of the Fairness Campaign. These interviews were conducted by Dr. Catherine Fosl of the University of Louisville, between 2005 and 2012, and focus primarily on the Campaign's history until the late 2000s. Using this collection of interviews (see Appendix A), I argue that the Fairness Campaign should serve as a model for the practical application of intersectionality in social justice-related organizations. I identify two major themes that have underscored the Campaign since its inception in 1991: intersectionality and coalition-building. Furthermore, I argue that an understanding of these two key components led to mutual symbiosis between them, and allowed the Campaign's staff and volunteers to actively pursue inclusivity into the present through grassroots efforts, education, and outreach.

## **Results**

### **Background**

The LGBTQ+ movement in Louisville is as unique as the city itself, due in part to location, demographics, and history. Louisville is known as “the gateway to the South,” but is heavily influenced by the North and Midwest regions of the United States, likely because of its location on the Ohio River and its rapid industrialization in the nineteenth century. With around 760,000 citizens, Louisville's population is nonetheless majority white, at 74 percent; black/African American residents make up another 21 percent (Metropolitan Housing Commission, 2015). Louisville is also heavily segregated, with the majority of its black/African American population concentrated in the “West End,” due to urban renewal efforts and white flight in the 1950s and '60s. Despite Kentucky's status as a neutral border state at the beginning of the Civil War, Louisville itself has its borderline: the infamous “Ninth Street Divide” separates the majority white, more affluent neighborhoods from the West End, resulting in vastly different racial dynamics and income levels. Louisville citizens pride themselves on their

progressivism compared to the rest of the state and the South as a whole, but unfortunately, inequality continues to be the norm. All these factors collide to create a regional LGBTQ+ movement that has seen a surprising amount of political and cultural success, despite (or perhaps because of) a history of racial and income inequality. In this way, Louisville serves as not only the physical middle ground between North and South, but as an ideological middle where identities and norms collide.

As with most organizations, the road to the birth of the Fairness Campaign was long and twisted, involving a number of different queer organizations before the Campaign took hold. According to Kathie D. Williams, many of these organizations grew out of influences from the prominent lesbian feminist community in Louisville during the 1970s. Formed in 1971, the city's first queer organization, the Gay Alliance, predominantly consisted of and focused on gay men, leaving lesbian issues unexamined and unchallenged. Similarly, straight members of the city's first feminist group, Feminist Cell, were uncomfortable examining queer issues. In 1974, a group of lesbians formed the Lesbian Feminist Union to build a matriarchal, lesbian community that would address issues of both sexism and homophobia. Although the LFU would disband by 1979, many of its members went on to play key roles in the queer organizations that followed: Gays and Lesbians United for Equality (formed in 1981 and focused on education), the Greater Louisville Human Rights Coalition (formed in 1984 as a response to GLUE's apolitical focus), and ultimately, the Fairness Campaign.

The Fairness Campaign was first announced at the city's fifth annual March for Justice in 1991, an event sponsored by the GLHRC. From its inception, the Fairness Campaign was intended to be coalitional: its goal was to unite the local politically active LGBTQ+ community and other minority communities in favor of a citywide fairness ordinance, which would protect

from discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. In 1990, the Louisville Board of Aldermen had passed an ordinance prohibiting hate crimes on the basis of sexual orientation, “marking the first time in Kentucky’s history that the words *sexual orientation* were used in a piece of legislation” (Williams 1997). The momentum from this victory inspired GLHRC and March for Justice activists to form the Campaign, which ultimately succeeded in its goal. After failed attempts at passing ordinances in 1991, 1992, 1995, and 1997, the Louisville Board of Aldermen finally approved an ordinance covering employment discrimination in January 1999. By October 1999, Jefferson County (which includes Louisville) commissioners approved a comprehensive ordinance. The Louisville and Jefferson County governments merged in 2003; by the end of 2004, the new government’s Metro Council also approved a comprehensive fairness ordinance for the entirety of Louisville Metro. After this victory, the Fairness Campaign’s purpose became lobbying for a statewide fairness ordinance, as well as working to pass local ordinances around the commonwealth. The Campaign was also heavily involved in lobbying against the successful 2004 state constitutional amendment that limited marriage to unions between cisgender men and women.

Since the organization’s inception, racial justice and other social issues were prioritized as an equally important focus to the LGBTQ+ struggle; this was in spite of the Campaign’s majority white racial makeup for its first several years. Leaders of the Campaign consciously worked to make the organization more inclusive of racial and queer minorities, sometimes struggling to find the balance between representation and tokenism. The success of this effort, and of the Campaign’s as a whole, is due to the strategic prioritization of intersectionality and coalitional work.

## **Intersectionality**

The case study reveals that the most important organizational aspect of the Fairness Campaign was a purposeful and unwavering intersectional approach to the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights. The core values of the organization, compiled in the 1990s and unwavering today, read as follows:

We believe gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people have the right to respect, dignity, and full equality. We believe that dismantling racism is central to our work. We believe that all issues of oppression are linked and can only be addressed by working in coalition. We believe in non-violent, grassroots organizing that empowers individuals and builds a social justice movement that creates lasting change. (Fairness.org)

Every interview within the case study discusses at least one of these values in some capacity; many discuss most or all of these values and how they have been implemented in the Campaign's 25 year history.

Several subjects pinpointed involvement in the Campaign as the beginning of their understanding of the intersections of oppression, particularly white subjects. Jeff Rodgers, a white gay man and one of the Campaign's co-founders, was a part of the queer Louisville Sports Alliance prior to the Campaign. In reflecting on the racial diversity of this group, as well as in the queer clubs and bars, Rodgers said, "...it was largely white... in retrospect it seems like I'm not sure I was that aware of it. I mean, I think a part of my journey is my own awakening around how race and class are a part of the overall struggle for equality and how oppressions are linked" (Rodgers 2006). These "awakenings," or "political-consciousness origin stories" (Fosl & Kelland

2016), led several of Fairness' activists to become involved in other progressive causes. Throughout the interview pool, interviewees mentioned involvement in over thirty other movements or organizations, many of which were taken on after Fairness' conception. Carol Kraemer, a white lesbian and the Campaign's first paid staffer, recounted coming to LGBTQ+ work to fight "the personal oppression" of her queer identity. Throughout her tenure on staff, Kraemer attended events and rallies on issues not directly related to the queer movement as a coalitional ally, and saw these as "just as much my issues as the LGBT work." Kraemer likened this adoption of additional causes to a practice familiar to the queer community: "...in some ways, my coming out with my family was on so many levels all the time. I felt like I was needing to... not only come out as a lesbian, but come out as anti-war and coming out as an anti-racist (sic)" (Kraemer 2011).

Intersectionality was also clearly understood by each of the non-white interview subjects, an unsurprising result since they all are situated within multiple intersections of oppression. Several discussed feeling they had to divide out parts of their identities prior to the Campaign, including Dawn Wilson, a black transgender woman and early Kentucky trans-rights activist: "the black community sees me as white, and the white trans community sees me as black... the African-American gay people thought I was a sellout and then the Caucasians thought 'this is our token'" (2011). Personal intersections of oppression began to be understood, even if the specific language of intersectionality was not known (Rodgers 2006). Interview subjects discussed racial divides within the transgender community; sexism, transphobia, and income disparity within the queer community; and urban and rural conflicts on queer issues. Yana Baker, a black transgender woman, discussed the Campaign's struggle (indicative of a larger problem within activism) with becoming more racially diverse as a product of poverty: "for a person of color on the West End

that's trying to make ends meet, like, doing volunteer work or activism or doing something that's going to remove you from paying your bills, it's not feasible. So activism has, I feel that it's been very white" (2010).

The Campaign purposely attempted to not only be inclusive of all people with infinite intersections, but to have as many different kinds of people as possible "at the table" during board meetings, community building meetings, and other events outside the administration of the organization. David Lott, a white bisexual man and leader of GLHRC, articulated this intentional effort:

...space was created for people of color... and that was directly related to the politics.

You're not going to make progress as a movement or an organization where people have to divide who they are. You can't ask a queer person of color to come into a gay rights organization and deny their color for the sake of unity. It just doesn't work that way.

(2006)

For example, Kraemer mentioned the actions to get allies as well as queer people to come out in support of the fairness ordinance in 1999. Baker discussed hiring processes that emphasized, and frequently hired, "people of color... in key leadership positions" (2010). Darnell Johnson, a black gay man and eventual Campaign staffer, praised this effort for representation, but also criticized "trying to speculate how people identify in order to... invite them to the table" (2006).

Fairness has certainly faced criticism for its intersectional approach, much from within the organization. Several interview subjects discussed backlash against the organization for its involvement in "other people's work," most of which they determined came from white cisgender gay men; Rodgers stated, "you see that resistance in pockets where privilege is most evident" (2006). However, many of those who did not initially support these cross-issue efforts

came to understanding through continued involvement in Fairness activities. Kraemer discussed the process through which some of these critics became antiracists themselves through the Campaign's 'dismantling racism' trainings. Diane Moten, possibly the first publically out black lesbian in Louisville, shared the story of her gradual support for reproductive rights after being invited to escort at the downtown abortion clinic by another Fairness volunteer (2006).

One of the unique aspects of the Campaign's efforts to pass fairness ordinances is its commitment to including gender identity within protected classes, beginning in the early 1990s with its first attempts at passing legislation. Although many cities around the country enacted nondiscrimination legislation that protected sexual orientation during this time frame, very few, if any, included protections for transgender or gender nonconforming individuals. This commitment to including gender identity protections inspired criticism from outside and within the organization. Carla Wallace, a white lesbian, one of the Campaign's co-founders, and a steadfast antiracist activist, discussed meetings with the Courier-Journal (Louisville's newspaper), council members, and other queer activists in which they suggested removing gender identity would facilitate the passing of legislation:

I remember, sometimes I said to the folks who were resisting, I said, 'Look, we can either include this and the battle might take longer, or we can have a picket line outside, and I'll be with it, with the trans folks saying Fairness doesn't include everybody.' ...there were a couple people in the leadership who were like, 'Yeah, but I don't understand, like, the gender piece' ... And I would say, 'It isn't about that. You can figure that out on your own time. There's discrimination here, and... if discrimination is our starting point, then the only question is, how do we educate the rest of the community to understand why this is included?' (2011)

Wallace and the Campaign remained committed to including gender identity protections in the legislation, which eventually passed and became one of the first ordinances of its kind in the American South.

Ultimately, this focus on practical applications of intersectionality created a mutual symbiosis with the Campaign's other key effort: coalition-building with other social justice organizations. Through an emphasis on intersectionality, Campaign supporters began to understand their own privileges and oppressions, which in turn inspired many to become involved in other organizations or activist efforts. This built coalitions, both formal and informal, that bridged divides and introduced the Campaign to those in other communities. Some of those introductions led to new supporters of the Fairness Campaign, including closeted people of color and straight, cisgender allies, further increasing the diversity of the Campaign. With this diversity, individuals with a variety of intersections became more involved in the Campaign, and the cycle continues.

### **Coalitions**

A focus on coalition-building is not unique to the Fairness Campaign; in fact, coalitions are utilized by many organizations and activists to broaden their scopes. Coalitions are often formed particularly in social justice work between minority groups, where "different organizations [are] able to embrace an analysis exposing shared marginalization in relation to power" (Cole, 2008, p. 447). Many scholars have examined the links between social justice activism and coalition-building, with some arguing that the "language of coalition" is necessary for discussion of social justice (Reagon 1998). Because of the Campaign's emphasis on intersectionality, these coalitions were easier to establish and uphold, and led to a diversification of the Campaign's members. Many interview subjects cited coalitions with racial justice

organizations as being beneficial not only to their own understandings of oppression, but to the Louisville community as a whole. Coalitions allowed the Campaign to lend support to groups that may not have necessarily expected it, and, in turn, received support in times of need.

Coalition-building was accomplished through grassroots organizing: door-to-door campaigning, community building events, and an emphasis on local people and values.

Coalitions helped ease anxieties of some Campaign supporters and their family members. For example, Eleanor Self, a white lesbian, remembered door-to-door surveying “in neighborhoods that people thought it was crazy for us to go door-to-door” (2005). She discussed her own stereotypes about the people living in these districts, and how these grassroots efforts helped tackle her assumptions and fears as well as those of the people she met. Johnson discusses how his African American parents were initially unsupportive of his coming out and being a public representative for Fairness, but eventually came to see that “it was really about social justice and civil rights” (2006).

The Campaign is also unique in its relationships with nearby religious institutions. This is, in part, due to Campaign leaders’ understanding of the importance of religion within the South, particularly for African Americans. Many of Fairness’ key supporters came from religious backgrounds, and sought new spiritual homes after anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments were expressed from the pulpit. Moten recalled a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy at one of the city’s largest black churches that paralleled the intersectional struggle at Fairness: “if I can’t bring my whole self to worship and to God, then that’s not fair to me, that’s not fair to God” (2006). Several interview subjects recalled “whisper campaigns” conducted by Southeast Christian, a mega-church in Louisville with opposition to queer causes. Self, a graduate of Southern Baptist Seminary, made it her personal goal to learn about the religious right in Louisville and deconstruct their

information. The importance of the church in Kentucky, even among queer people, cannot be underestimated. Wilson remembered a non-local Human Rights Campaign consultant coming in to advise the Campaign on the marriage amendment in 2004, ultimately arguing that the churches were the Campaign's enemy; Wilson protested, saying, "This is the South. Gay people go to church just as much as anybody, especially black gay people" (2011).

Although there was certainly religious backlash towards the Fairness Campaign, there was also significant support from some religious communities, particularly from black churches after coalitions had been formed with racial justice organizations. Rodgers recalled holding a "Black Gay Speak-Out" at a Presbyterian church in the early years of Fairness. Wallace remembered the religious right, particularly during the 2004 marriage amendment debate, arguing that the queer community was hijacking the civil rights movement and framing queer issues as white-only; when a black pastor was asked for his opinion on the issue, he called the Campaign office to let them know he was supportive of their cause (2011). Since 2004, religious support for the Fairness Campaign continues to grow within the Louisville community.

Coalitions also allowed the Campaign to remain focused on a long term vision, something with which most organizations struggle. The emphasis on community building and grassroots organizing allowed Campaign members to build relationships with not only their fellow supporters, but with the city. Self told a story about being invited in by an anti-Fairness homeowner during door-to-door campaigning; as they talked, she became a "counselor" to the woman, who was disenfranchised from and distraught about her gay son. Rodgers recalls celebrating after the first vote in 1991, which the Campaign lost, because they had been able to at least bring the issue to light, had a clearer image of what the next steps would be, and had a greater sense of community than they would have solely by passing legislation (2006).

As with its focus on intersectionality, the Campaign received criticism from some on the emphasis of building coalitions with other groups. Lott discussed “real tension in the early stages” among people in the organization “who thought that you were diluting the gay movement by including the struggle against racism and sexism and other things” (2006). Lott, who was involved in leftist movements before narrowing in on LGBTQ+ causes, elaborated on the struggle that most coalitional organizations face:

You see this in every single political movement... How do you bring about the greatest sense of unity – do you just focus on one kind of single broad issue under the understanding that that’s going to give people from different backgrounds the opportunity to come together, or do you place your particular struggle in the context of other oppressions? But then, of course, the broader realization is that you can’t build a movement without being inclusive of others, or otherwise it’s just going to reflect on the existing social relations and oppressive relations that exist in society. So, in order to build a movement you have to challenge all those things. (2006)

Coalition-building may have been a natural product of the Campaign’s focus on intersectionality, but it was also a strategic and crucial move in passing fairness legislation. According to the Movement Advancement Project, a think tank focused on documenting LGBTQ+ demographics, policies, and activism, there are an estimated 131,000 adult LGBTQ+ individuals in the state of Kentucky, or about 3.9 percent of the population (2016). As many of the subjects rightly point out, the Campaign could never have succeeded in its efforts if it focused solely on garnering support from queer individuals. Fairness’ intersectional approach and commitment to coalition-building were critical to the passing of Louisville’s historic legislation.

## **Conclusion**

This case study has shown that the Fairness Campaign's longevity and successes are due to an emphasis on intersectionality and coalition-building, two tenets that accompanied the birth of the Campaign in 1991 and continue on today. The Campaign's focus on implementing intersectionality is unique, particularly within the historical context of queer activism in Kentucky. This intersectional approach naturally led to coalition-building, which in turn affirmed the importance of intersectionality.

The Fairness Campaign's continued survival and success is dependent on reaffirming these values of intersectionality and coalition-building, as well as determining the next step in the American fight for queer rights. Since the Supreme Court decision on same-sex marriages in 2015, the general public easily assumes that the LGBTQ+ community has achieved full equality; sadly, this is not the case, as issues of discrimination, disparity, homelessness, and healthcare still disproportionately affect queer individuals, especially those who fall within multiple intersections of oppression. When the Campaign achieves its ultimate goal of statewide or federal protections on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, its leaders will need to either establish new efforts and priorities or make way for new social justice organizations.

In the late 2000s, the Fairness Campaign's priorities shifted from localized, specifically grassroots efforts to statewide legal lobbying for nondiscrimination laws. Due to the timing of the interviews in this case study, most interviews focused on the work of the Campaign until this shift in strategies; because of this, the study may not accurately reflect the current role of intersectionality in the Fairness Campaign's work. The shift from local to legal is an entirely

valid strategical change; however, this unfortunately leaves minority queer communities behind in many issues, and begins reprioritizing white gay issues over those of other racial and queer backgrounds. Legal protections are important, but they do nothing to change the day-to-day realities of those living within multiple oppressions tasked with mere survival. When the Campaign began work on the Louisville ordinance in the early 1990s, its leaders rallied support and changed minds through personal, community-focused actions; the shift to a statewide focus necessitates a certain loss of the Campaign's grassroots ideals. It remains to be seen whether those the Campaign sought to include will continue to have their voices heard. Hopefully, the Campaign will be able to not only pursue these statewide legislative actions, but will also return to its roots in an intentionally intersectional and coalitional manner.

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## Appendix A

### Interviews done by Cate Fosl as part of Louisville LGBTQ Activism Oral History Project 2005-2012; donated to UofL Oral History Center Fall 2013

#### Phase 1: 2005-7 interviews (transcribed):

**Pat Hossein**, Atlanta-based African American lesbian, early leader of SONG (Southerners on New Ground) and outspoken organizer against homophobia in 1970s-90s; consultant to what became Fairness Campaign and based in Louisville for fall 2004 no-on-the-amendment campaign

**Lynn Pfuhl**, out lesbian and prostitute, co-founder of Louisville Gay Liberation Front in 1970, had also been one of 2 whites involved in youth sit-ins downtown Louisville protesting racial segregation in 1961 and active in anti-Vietnam movement, later had breakdown, was in accident and confined to wheelchair, still resides in Louisville and rescues feral cats. Interviewed September 27, 2005.

**Micki Schickel Nelson**, early out lesbian in 1970s Louisville GLF as teenager, resided in Gay Lib House in Highlands, 1971, arrested when house was “busted,” later became nurse and married partner, remained peripherally active. Interviewed January 24, 2006.

**Carla Wallace**, [NOTE: interviewed several times, including both Phases 1 & 2] Fairness Campaign co-founder and “idea person”: native Louisvillian, educated at Tufts University, returned to Louisville a few years after college, and became active in the Kentucky Alliance against Racist and Political Repression, and in the Greater Louisville Human Rights Coalition, a 1980s organization dedicated to ending discrimination against gays and lesbians; instrumental in early March for Justice that led to Fairness Campaign and in joining LGBT and racism campaigns and leaders

**Melinda Paras**, Filipino-American organizer, former executive director National Gay and lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) and a consultant throughout founding of what became Fairness, former partner of Carla, currently resides in San Francisco [interview took place during 2005 Creating Change conference]. Interviewed November 10, 2005.

**David Lott**, bisexual white man active in gay/lesbian rights causes since early 1970s, leader in early gay-politics organization, Greater Louisville Human Rights Coalition, and leader of March for Justice, Inc., originator of annual march out of which idea for Fairness was born. More recently a co-chair of Kentucky Alliance against Racist and Political Repression

**Jeff Rodgers**, coordinator of Pride Committee, organizer of Pride Week events, strategist and co-founder of Fairness, co-chair of Fairness board at time of interview. Interviewed September 16, 2006.

**Diane Moten**, minister to the homeless at Jefferson Street Baptist Community, leader in people-of-color-organizing in early years of Fairness, possibly first “out” African American lesbian in Louisville. Interviewed February 24, 2006.

**Eleanor Self**, white lesbian who attended Southern Baptist Seminary and got active in early Fairness efforts, special interest was investigating religious right in Louisville. Interviewed December 29, 2005.

**Jack Kersey**, white gay man active in Louisville gay life 1950s-90s in context of longtime committed relationship (partner now deceased); became first gay to “come out” on local TV in 1978; active in Old Louisville politics and real estate; retired in Fort Lauderdale (site of interview); active in early anti-AIDS campaigns. Interviewed January 15, 2006.

**David Williams**, activist-archivist active in Louisville gay life since early seventies, longtime editor of The Letter newspaper, collector of LGBT local history and creator of gay rights archival collection at University of Louisville library. Interviewed September 19, 2005.

**Darnell Johnson**, black gay man who first became active in 90s in Louisville Youth Group, “came out” while a student at UofL, later worked for Fairness Campaign staff organizer 2005-07. Interviewed July 13, 2006.

**Mandy Carter**, North Carolina activist, long among leading southern LGBT rights leaders of color; consultant to development of Fairness; co-founder of SONG; spent fall 2004 in Kentucky working on No-on-the-Amendment drive. Interviewed April 5, 2006.

**Phase 2: 2010-12 interviews (transcribed)**

**Pam McMichael**, [NOTE: THIS INTERVIEW CANNOT BE MADE PUBLIC AS SHE HAS NEVER BEEN WILLING TO SIGN A RELEASE] Fairness Campaign co-founder: born 1952, native of rural Kentucky, first active in 1970s lesbian separatism (Louisville Lesbian Feminist Union), antiracist, anti-nuclear, and international activism; later, co-founder of Southerners on New Ground (SONG), currently resides in Knoxville, TN, and is director of Highlander Center, one of co-founders of SURJ (Speaking Up for Racial Justice) network of white antiracists

**Suzanne Pharr**, longtime (white) southern lesbian activist and former director of Arkansas Women's Project and of Highlander Center; now Tennessee-based; writer on intersections of homophobia, racism, sexism; Tennessee-based consultant to early Fairness work and Kentucky-based during Fall 2004 No-on-the-Amendment drive. Interviewed January 6, 2011.

**Natalie Reteneller**, founder of the (LGBT) Louisville Youth Group (LYG) and early youth leader in Fairness work. Interviewed December 22, 2010.

**Dawn Wilson**, early Kentucky trans-rights activist, African American, student at Transylvania University in Lexington and came out as trans-woman. Interviewed March 4, 2011.

**Carol Kraemer**, active in women's music scene who came out as lesbian in college at WKU and got active politically back in Louisville, becoming committed antiracist and serving as Fairness first paid staffer. Interviewed March 4, 2011.

**Ed Segal**, UofL anthropology professor, faculty adviser to early gay-rights non-credit class at UofL and testified on behalf of lesbian marriage plaintiffs in 1970 courtroom

**Margie Jones** [pseudonym], plaintiff in 1970 lesbian marriage case in Louisville, which spawned formation of Louisville GLF and which appears to have been second such legal trial (first with female plaintiffs) in US history, proprietor of a massage parlor, homeowner and single mother who was harassed into retreat for fear of losing children, still lives in Louisville, keeps low profile, now in 80s. Interviewed January 16, 2012.

**J. Bruce Miller**, well-known local attorney who prosecuted 1970 lesbian marriage trial as young assistant commonwealth's attorney. Interviewed December 27, 2011.

**Yana Baker**, active in Fairness Campaign in early 2000s, outspoken African American trans(woman) activist. Interviewed November 19, 2010.