

**COMPOSING HISTORICAL ACTIVISM:  
ANECDOTES, ARCHIVES, AND MULTIMODALITY IN RHETORICS OF LESBIAN HISTORY**

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This dissertation examines the unique rhetorics and technologies lesbian collectives have employed to compose and wield their histories. Focusing on the Daughters of Bilitis (1955-70), the Lesbian Herstory Archives (1974-), and filmic historiographers such as Barbara Hammer and Cheryl Dunye (1994-), I investigate how these historical activists have deconstructed dominant accounts that underpin conceptions of lesbian deviance and replaced them with collective histories of their own making. I argue that these collective rhetors composed radical versions of a queer past that challenged present oppressions, cohered provisional communities, and disrupted static consolidations of lesbian identity.

Examining a diverse collection of primary sources from newsletters to documentary films, I assay alphabetic, material, and multimodal rhetorical strategies for composing lesbian history, including “anecdotal clustering” of experience in print pamphlets and books; radical classification schemas in material archives; and the use of multimodal technologies to reframe and even fabricate archival evidence in experimental documentary films. The study’s three core chapters rely upon archival and primary research, complimented by rhetorical, multimodal, and queer theory, as I analyze the cultural contexts, rhetorics, and technologies employed by the collectives to compose their histories. Because I attend to the effects of these histories on each collective rhetor’s

imagined constituency, my dissertation makes clear the rhetorical significance of historical production and the consequences of composing history on gendered and sexual identifications.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1.0</b>	<b>COMPOSING HISTORICAL ACTIVISM: COLLECTIVE RHETORIC AND IDENTIFICATION IN THE ARCHIVES OF LESBIAN HISTORY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1</b>	<b>DEFINING KEY TERMS: RHETORIC AND IDENTIFICATION IN HISTORICAL ACTIVISM .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.2</b>	<b>HISTORICAL ACTIVISM IN RHETORICAL AND QUEER STUDIES.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>1.2.1</b>	<b>Queer Rhetorical Studies.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>1.2.2</b>	<b>Feminist Historiography in Rhetorical Studies .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>1.2.3</b>	<b>Queer Historiographic Theory Outside Rhetorical Studies .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>1.2.4</b>	<b>The Media of History: Technologies and Rhetoric .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>1.3</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>THE DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS ARCHIVE: CLEARING HISTORICAL SPACE FOR CLUSTERED ANECDOTES .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<b>THE DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS IN CONTEXT: FROM MOBILIZATION TO ARCHIVIZATION .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>2.2</b>	<b>ARCHIVAL LESSONS: LEARNING FROM ANN ALDRICH AND THE LADDER .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>2.3</b>	<b>CLEARING HISTORICAL SPACE: REVISING HISTORIES OF PATHOLOGY AND CRIMINALITY .....</b>	<b>44</b>

2.4	RAISING CONSCIOUSNESS FROM A QUEER ARCHIVE OF ANECDOTES...	49
2.5	FORGING COMMUNITY FROM ANECDOTES OF FAILED RESEARCH AND UNREQUITED LOVE .....	54
2.5.1	Failed Research as an Inventional and Communal Resource .....	55
2.5.2	Isolation, Rejection, and Unrequited Love as a Collective Problem	58
2.5.3	Forging Self-acceptance and Middle-class Collectivity across Racial, National, and Regional Lines.....	63
2.6	THE LIMITS OF THE LESBIAN/WOMAN ARCHIVE.....	68
2.7	CONCLUSION .....	72
3.0	THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES: ARCHIVING DIFFERENTLY THROUGH SUBVERSIVE CLASSIFICATION .....	76
3.1	THE ARCHIVE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF POWER.....	81
3.1.1	Searching for Queer History in the Archive.....	84
3.1.2	The Epistemology of LHA’s Closets: Radical Openness and Fierce Guardedness.....	88
3.2	SUBVERSIVE CLASSIFICATION: ARCHIVISTS, ACCORDANCE, ACCESS, ACQUISITIONS, AND ARRANGEMENT .....	91
3.2.1	Archivettes and Accordance of Funding: the Ethos of Separatism..	91
3.2.2	Access: Demarcating Audience Through Material Space and Donor Proviso.....	95
3.2.3	Acquisitions: the Rhetorical Composition of Lesbian History .....	102
3.2.4	Arrangement: “Associative Discovery,” Materiality, and Repetition .. ..	111

3.2.4.1	Metaphor and Materiality .....	113
3.2.4.2	Metonymy and Repetition.....	121
3.3	CONCLUSION .....	126
4.0	MULTI-MEDIATING LESBIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY: DOCUMENTARY COMPOSITIONS OF LESBIAN PASTS.....	130
4.1	CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND: QUEER RESISTANCE TO NEOLIBERAL HISTORICISM .....	136
4.1.1	Filmmakers and Festivals .....	137
4.2	“GAINSAYING” CLASSIFICATION: WHEN HISTORICAL FIGURES RESIST IDENTITY CATEGORIES.....	140
4.3	SHIFTING ALLEGIANCES AND RECONFIGURED MEMORY .....	150
4.4	“IMAGING” TABOOS: EXPOSING EXCLUSIONS WITHIN LESBIAN COMMUNITIES.....	157
4.5	FICTITIOUS ARCHIVES: MANIPULATING AND INVENTING THE QUEER ARCHIVE.....	162
4.5.1	Manipulating History Lessons: Speaking over Historical Subjects.....	163
4.5.2	Honest Deceptions in The Watermelon Woman: Inventing the Archive .....	167
4.6	CAMP HISTORIOGRAPHY, OR PERFORMING ARCHIVAL AMBIVALENCE .. ..	172
4.7	CONCLUSION .....	178
5.0	PARTING THOUGHTS ON THE PAST AND FUTURE OF HISTORICAL ACTIVISM .....	179



5.1	FILMIC REMEDIATION OF THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES.....	183
5.2	EARLIER FORMS OF REMEDIATION.....	186
5.3	DIGITAL ARCHIVIZATION AND THE FUTURE OF HISTORICAL ACTIVISM .....	190
5.3.1	The “It Gets Better” Archive: Collecting Videos of the Recent Past... . .....	191
5.3.2	The Rainbow Family Tree: Networking Communication from Video Archives.....	195
5.3.3	Coming Out on YouTube: Shaping, and Commodifying, Identification.....	196
5.4	CONCLUSION .....	198
	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	201
	NOTES .....	211

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 .....	118
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## PREFACE

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## 1.0 COMPOSING HISTORICAL ACTIVISM: COLLECTIVE RHETORIC AND IDENTIFICATION IN THE ARCHIVES OF LESBIAN HISTORY

I want to suggest [...] that we begin thinking about “the making of the modern homosexual” not as a “fact” but as an *argument*, fundamentally as a narrative with serious implications for addressing issues historically. Rather than simply describing an historical process, these accounts of the past themselves help “make” or “construct” a fiction of the modern homosexual.

--Scott Bravmann, Queer Fictions of the Past

In 1894, Pierre Louÿs unveiled his life’s discovery: a collection of erotic prose poems written by Bilitis, a lesbian poetess from Greek antiquity, made available for the first time to the French public through his translation. Hellenist scholars were transfixed by Louÿs’s illumination of the poetess, whom he claimed lived with Sappho on the isle of Lesbos as a fatherless orphan.<sup>1</sup> While Sappho was infamous in Louÿs’s Victorian age for her legacy as a teacher and her love poems for other women, her own extant lyrics stopped short of actually describing same-sex intimacy. Bilitis’s poems, on the other hand, were explicit in their descriptions, “implicating Sappho in a homosexual scenario far more graphic than anything contained in her poetry” (Dejean 278). Her poetry seemed to confirm and even invent a “sexualized sapphic pedagogy,” infusing Sappho’s memory as a teacher of women

with myths of her seduction of innocent students like Bilitis (Dejean 277). It soon transpired, however, that the poetess was a hoax. Louÿs had invented Bilitis's name and poetry whole cloth, hoping to find notoriety and legitimation in her ancient Greek "origins."

Bilitis, a fictional lesbian invented by a French man, would thus seem to be an odd namesake for the 1950s American lesbian collective, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB). Why would a 20<sup>th</sup> century women's activist organization position themselves as the progeny of a 19<sup>th</sup> century man's lie? Rather than reveal the DOB's ignorance, this anecdote introduces instead the collective's active and strategic appropriations of history for mobilization, identification, and political leverage. Because Bilitis was not in the realm of popular knowledge in midcentury American culture, the organization could, if pressed to explain her, claim they were merely a poetry club, helping them negotiate censorship and repression. That is, her enigma was *useful* in the era of McCarthy, when even the suspicion of homosexuality could be grounds for arrest and harassment. Bilitis' mystery made her malleable; she could be fashioned differently for different audiences. The organization's choice of a name further deflected attention with its nominal connotations of socially accepted institutions, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution. The acronym "DOB" could be seen to resonate with and even echo the much revered DAR.

Thus, while Bilitis meant fame and respect for Louÿs (before his fraud was revealed), she meant secrecy for the DOB, a secrecy that worked simultaneously to bring the collective together in their shared confidence and to divert outsiders from the nature of the organization. The collective could share their secret with one another—that Bilitis was a constructed lesbian "foremother"—and bond over their clandestine knowledge when, in their own midcentury historical moment, there was little visible or unified lesbian identity

to bring them together as a group. The DOB's strategic uses of Bilitis, a figure with no factual, actual place in history, *made* her a part of history in her subsequent uses and reuses for present needs. Any discussion of Bilitis could not be about "what was" because she never "was"; it could only be about how and why she was rhetorically employed in a lineage of constructed history.

I begin with this anecdote as a way to demonstrate this dissertation's focus on the composition and uses of history by lesbian collectives to cohere in identification; the strategies these collective rhetors have employed to compose the past; and the effects of these strategies on the lesbian identities they helped to shape. It is significant, for instance, that the name, "Daughters of Bilitis," provoked associations with both Greek antiquity and longstanding, patriotic women's service organizations like the DAR, for both lent legitimacy and *legacy* to an organization whose very purpose was considered illegitimate, pathological, and even criminal. The collective's choice of a name begins to suggest the kind of lesbian identity they wished to shape with their composition of history, characterized by middle-class values of femininity, respectability, and other bastions of social conformance.

In this dissertation, I investigate how three lesbian collectives have strategically composed history to shape identification and to leverage their organizations politically. Focusing on the Daughters of Bilitis (1954-1970), the Lesbian Herstory Archives (1974-), and a contingent of lesbian documentary filmmakers (c. 1990s), I ask: What are the mechanisms by which sexually identified groups come to create a sense of communal history? Expanding what counts as history beyond traditional print historiography, I ask: How do these collectives appropriate and invent discursive, visual, audio, and material

rhetorics to compose lesbian history? Enquiring into the means of distribution and adoption of certain versions of the past, I ask: How are versions of the past generated, shared, and embraced by members of the collective? Ultimately, to what identity-shaping and political ends is such history put in the fight to define the present?

Unlike traditional historical projects, this dissertation does not attempt to more accurately determine what happened in the past. I do not, that is, audit the historical facts cited by the collective rhetors I study. While the past “happened,” of course, I contend that any *representation* of the past is necessarily rhetorical; it serves a purpose for the rhetors who compose it. As Michel de Certeau explains, the “locus” that historical representation “carves out of the past is equally a fashion of *making a place for the future*” (85). This project, then, is interested in the collective rhetorical work that goes into composing and leveraging history for the present and future, regardless of the factuality of that history.

But, as the introductory anecdote also suggests, the rhetorical composition of history does not take place in a void. The Daughters of Bilitis and the other lesbian collectives I examine in this dissertation were faced with accounts of lesbianism that were not of their own making: sexological studies that claimed physical pathology, psychological studies that diagnosed mental illness, fictional accounts that punished immorality. In the very selection of a name, the Daughters of Bilitis yoked themselves to existing, venerated historical constructs (ancient Greece, the Daughters of the American Revolution) in an effort to *displace* the historical narratives of deviance found in legal, medical, and literary records. I contend that this displacement—and replacing—of pejorative accounts of lesbian history is an *activist* strategy to effect change in the present. I define **historical activism** as the move to alter the present by impugning, deconstructing, and scavenging



existing historical accounts, and composing history in their place in an effort to shape identification and assert political leverage. Each of the lesbian collectives I examine have recognized that one way to rhetorically combat political harassment, shame, and isolation is to revisit historical narratives that naturalize present characterizations of lesbians as mentally, physically, and morally aberrant. They then challenge these versions of the past and *replace* them with complex, experiential, and queer compositions of history. Ultimately, I maintain that historical activism is motivated by a desire to cohere communities, to change public opinions of those communities, and even to change the meaning of community itself.

My focus on the rhetorical composition and use of lesbian history as an activist move is supported by scholarship touting the centrality of historiography in queer cultures and studies. Scott Bravmann, for instance, asserts the “abiding presence of the past and its significance” in queer popular memory practices, which engage in historiography as a way to “foster community, expand public and private discourses on sexuality, construct queer subjectivity, and insist on the differences, specificities, and particularities of (queer) historical relations” (45). The insistent engagement with history in queer cultures and studies is a product of the pervasive sense that the enduring traumas of the past can be redressed historically, through a rescue of and return to the scenes of historical injury.<sup>2</sup>

As I demonstrate in each case study, a primary rhetorical approach to historical activism for lesbian collectives has been to *archive*: to nourish and complicate a voided past with plentiful evidence with which to identify. That is, the mechanisms by which the individuals and collectives compose and wield history are frequently archival in nature,

depending on the construction, reconfiguration, or repurposing of archives and their contents. As Judith Halberstam maintains:

[For queer cultures], the archive is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity. In order for the archive to function, it requires users, interpreters, and cultural historians to wade through the material and piece together the jigsaw puzzle of queer history in the making. (In a Queer Time 169-70)

My project is a study of these “users, interpreters, and cultural historians” as they construct and make use of records of queer activity towards specific ends. This understanding of archives makes them distinctly rhetorical. As queer rhetorician Charles Morris III maintains, “archives are indeed rhetorical sites and resources, part of a diverse domain of the usable past that...functions ideologically and politically” (“Archival” 146). In each of chapters I outline below, I examine how lesbian collectives have composed and used archives in different ways to shape identification and assert political leverage:

In Chapter 2, “The Daughters of Bilitis Archive: Clearing Historical Space for Clustered Anecdotes,” I focus on the Daughters of Bilitis—the collective featured in this chapter’s anecdotal introduction and the first lesbian organization in the United States (1955-1970). In this case study of the DOB’s enactment of historical activism, I investigate how the San Francisco-based collective strategically deconstructed histories of lesbian pathology in sexology and pulp fiction and then replaced them with the experiences of organization members composed in print magazines (The Ladder) and books (Lesbian/Woman). I argue that these experiences are rhetorically rendered in the form of

“anecdotes,” which are then assembled in middle-class categories in order to simultaneously challenge associations of lesbianism with pathology and to coalesce a particular lesbian identity characterized by monogamy, femininity, and respectable employment. I identify the inventional effects of this anecdotal rhetorical strategy by assaying the many autobiographical letters the DOB received in response from readers of their print newsletters and books. This chapter addresses the driving questions I pose above by investigating the mechanisms—the rhetorical strategies and media—this midcentury collective employed to cohere in identification.

Chapter 3, “The Lesbian Herstory Archives: Archiving Differently through Subversive Classification,” focuses on how a New York-based archive (founded in 1974) composed history through their classificatory procedures for archiving lesbian materials. Posing archivization as a technology (akin to the DOB’s use of alphabetic writing), I frame classification as a fundamental rhetorical *topos* and examine its effects on archiving queer materials. I argue that the mechanisms by which this collective cohered in identification and asserted historical activism were in the very selection and arrangement of material artifacts: by archiving differently than official archives and libraries. First, I illuminate how these official archives and libraries have historically closeted queer materials through their procedures of selection and arrangement. I then contend that the Lesbian Herstory Archives combats archival closeting through their rhetorical strategies of nontraditional classification, including a radically open approach to selecting materials and defining “lesbian,” and the queer design of an intentionally exploratory and material research experience for both lay and academic visitors. Ultimately, I pose radical classification as a historical activist rhetorical strategy in the medium of archiving material artifacts.

In Chapter 4, “Multimodal Lesbian Historiographers: Documentary Compositions of Lesbian Pasts,” I examine experimental documentary films by Barbara Hammer, Cheryl Dunye, and others as collective compositions of historiography. These films employ multimodal rhetorics to represent not just lesbian history but a queer *historiography*. To evince this queer historiography, the filmmakers trouble the relationship between the archive, the lives it is meant to preserve, and the historian. I argue that these filmic historiographers’ activist exigency is in part the “rescue” or recovery approaches taken by previous generations of historical activists. I contend that the filmic composers seek to nuance the recovery of a glorified lineage of lesbians, because they see the celebration of “heroes” as necessarily exclusive, with the effect of cementing static or narrow identifications in the present. In this chapter, I outline five conceptual innovations filmic composers make in lesbian historiography, each facilitated by a different multimodal rhetorical strategy. In one example of this work, I identify in Dunye and Hammer’s films the fabrication or obvious manipulation of archival evidence; I then theorize how this historiographic innovation is facilitated by the multimodal rhetorical strategy of “appropriation,” which impacts viewers both affectively and intellectually.

In each of these chapters, archives are figured in different ways. The Daughters of Bilitis constructed an archive of anecdotes in the founders’ published book, Lesbian/Woman; the Lesbian Herstory Archives collective assembled a material archive of artifacts and records; and the contingent of documentary filmmakers reframed and remediated archival materials to tell radically queer versions of a lesbian past. In my concluding Chapter 5, I reflect upon the relationship between these three core chapters. I assess how each lesbian collective I examine in this dissertation strategically frames the



Burke argues that the motives for rhetorical activity are primarily towards identification, to establish shared investments (or the perception of them). This definition has clear relevance for a project interested in the role of the collective composition of lesbian pasts in the coherence of sexual identification across time and place. But, for Burke, identification between individuals is more complex than simple similarity:

Here are the ambiguities of substance. In being identified with [Person] B, [Person] A is 'substantially one' with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another. (Grammar 21)

In other words, collectives may nominally cohere in identification by composing a shared sense of the past, but this "consubstantiality" does not eliminate individual difference or "substance" between members of a group.<sup>3</sup>

Following Burke, I attend to the tension between collectivity and difference throughout the dissertation. For example, in Chapter 2, I examine the dissonance between the Daughters of Bilitis' efforts to shape a middle-class, socially acquiescent lesbian identity and the alternative identifications forming in the queer bar scene. In particular, I focus on a letter sent to the organization by a gender-transgressive woman who identified with the middle-class aspirations of Lesbian/Woman but felt excluded and confused by the authors' emphasis on femininity and critique of butch-femme relationship models. This example illuminates my concern for the "edges" of identification: the individuals who both do and do not recognize themselves in the sexual identities the collectives seek to rhetorically shape through historiography.<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, when Burke first explains his now-canonical theory of identification in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, he invokes the present-motivated historiography I have described. Detailing the example of a poet who identifies with a fallen hero in his historical retelling, Burke describes the “uses” of the

poet’s identification with a blind giant who slew himself in slaying enemies of the Lord; and [the] identification between Puritans and Israelites, Royalists and Philistines, identification allowing for *a ritualistic kind of historiography* in which the poet could, by allusion to a Biblical story, “substantially” foretell the triumph of his vanquished faction. (Rhetoric 19, emphasis mine)

Here Burke is explaining how the poet’s identification with a historical figure was, in a sense, a rhetorical move, a way of defining and elevating the poet through association with a slain hero.

Despite Burke’s now canonical association of rhetoric and identification, rhetorical critics rarely attend to discursive construction of identity or the complexity of individual difference within identification. As Ralph Smith and Russell Windes recently argued in their chapter in Queering Public Address, “many rhetorical critics...take for granted that collective actors speak automatically from a transparent identity and therefore the only rhetorical decisions are those that concern how a given identity is to be presented to a particular audience” (54). They suggest that, instead of looking only at how a fully-formed identity is *wielded* to an outside audience, rhetorical scholars should be looking at contests over the definition of identities, the historical forces that shape those contests, and “the agonistic genealogies of specific identities” (54). Smith and Windes contend, in other words, that scholars should look more fully into the complexities of identity accounts and

narrations by attending to the discursive creation—and disruption—of sexual identities. Responding to Smith and Windes’ provocation, this dissertation not only examines how historical activism works rhetorically to cohere lesbian identifications but also how it challenges static or narrow identifications. In this project, I am interested in the deeply rhetorical, *historiographic* processes that change, and are intended to change, present gender and sexual identifications and politics.

In taking this complex identificatory approach to rhetoric, I extend Bravmann’s contention that “lesbian and gay historical self-representations—queer fictions of the past—help construct, maintain, and contest identities—queer fictions of the present” (4). Bravmann argues that images of the gay and lesbian past “animate the present” in an ongoing “hermeneutic and political struggle in the formation of new social subjects and new cultural possibilities” (4). However, while Bravmann understands that queer fictions of the past are “dynamic rhetorical performances” (4), he does not attend to the specifically rhetorical *strategies* employed by queer communities as they cohere and contest identification. Instead, Bravmann surveys the broader claims and discourses that professional historians of sexuality engage in their scholarship.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, in addition to the role of rhetoric in identification, a second facet to my understanding of rhetoric in this dissertation is an attention to the granular rhetorical strategies lesbian collectives have employed to construct and wield certain versions of the past. As I will demonstrate in this introduction, unlike other feminist and queer historiographers, I focus on inventive textual, visual, audio, and material moves and their specific rhetorical effects on the collective and more general publics. That is, rather than posing History grandly as “discourse” and making broad claims for its impact, I investigate



in depth the process and product of the literate, rhetorical activity of historical representation. I ask, for example: how precisely did the Daughters of Bilitis compose history in print newsletters and books? What textual strategies did they employ, appropriate, or invent to forge a convincing and effective account of lesbian history? How did they persuade women with same-sex desire to adopt and contribute to this collective rhetorical project? When possible, I investigate the effects of rhetorical choices in composing history, seeking out evidence in reader and audience response. It is in this attention to the granular rhetorical strategies and responses to these strategies that my dissertation gains distinction and significance.

Because I am attending to the textual strategies lesbian collectives have employed to compose and leverage history, this project also engages the term *literacy*. My emphasis on the production and learning of collective history by lesbian collectives evokes the “extracurricular” sense of literacy studied by Ann Ruggles Gere and subsequent composition scholars. These scholars call attention to the existence and value of literate activity outside of formal schooling, and its role in the real lives of ordinary or marginalized groups. Jacqueline Jones Royster defines literacy in these real communities as individuals’ capacity to access and use information “to articulate lives and experiences and also to identify, think through, refine, and solve problems...over time” (*Traces of a Stream* 45). Rhetoric and composition scholars like Royster thus implicitly link literacy to the articulation of (past) experience, identity, and activism. This project clearly reflects Royster’s definition of literacy, as I focus on lesbian collectives’ composition of a shared past as the articulation of “lives and experiences” and I focus on the uses of composing the

past to “identify, think through, refine, and solve problems” of identificatory dispersion and political marginalization (Royster 45).

Thus the choice between emphasizing “literacy” or “rhetoric” as a key term is a difficult one. As Brenda Glasgott recently argued, emphasizing rhetoric over literacy has deep implications for the kind of history we write—what we focus on and value in our research. Glasgott commends Royster for focusing on literacy because she contends that it “allows [Royster] to pay attention to women as essayists and the process of self-creation particularly supported by the essay.” For Glasgott, the key distinction between literacy and rhetoric as key terms in writing history is that literacy encourages a “self-directed” focus. She writes, “in practice, rhetoric allows us to see language acts as other-directed while literacy encourages us to consider how they are self-directed as well. [Royster’s] essayist uncovers herself to herself as she writes.”

However, I ultimately focus on rhetoric in this dissertation because this term most explicitly allows me to attend to the uses and effects of *strategies* and to engage with Burke’s definition of rhetoric as fundamentally motivated toward identification with others. As I will show in the next section, focusing on rhetoric also helps me speak more directly with the subfields of feminist historiography and queer rhetoric. Scholars in these fields (as well as other scholars interested in the rhetoric of marginalized people) have expanded “rhetoric” far beyond the classical definition Glasgott has in mind. As Patricia Bizzell writes in response to Glasgott, “Rhetoricians, like literacy scholars, may well be interested in texts that are not deemed to have great aesthetic merit, because studying them produces valuable insights about how people in various times and places tried to express themselves (‘self-directed’) and sometimes, to influence others (‘other-directed’).”

This dissertation is interested in both of these “directions,” as I seek to uncover the mechanisms by which sexually-identified groups have composed and used their history both for identificatory cohesion *and* external political leverage. Indeed, as I hope to make clear, these “directions” are not independent of one another. The Daughters of Bilitis shaped a middle-class, socially conformist lesbian identification in part *as* a political move—to challenge dominant stereotypes of lesbians as criminal and deviant. Posing rhetoric as my key term allows me to focus consistently on the complex relationship between identity-shaping and political work.

## **1.2 HISTORICAL ACTIVISM IN RHETORICAL AND QUEER STUDIES**

My project’s emphasis on the rhetorical activity of historical-activist, lesbian collectives most directly engages in four scholarly conversations: 1) Queer rhetorical studies; 2) Feminist historiography in rhetorical studies; 3) Queer historiography outside of rhetorical studies; and 4) Studies in rhetoric and technology. Rhetorical conversations in queer, feminist, and technology are rarely treated in relation to one another. Below, I demonstrate how my project engages and intervenes in each by bringing these scholarly conversations together.

### **1.2.1 Queer Rhetorical Studies**

Queer rhetorical studies is a relatively new subfield, led by scholars such as Charles Morris III, K.J. Rawson, Dana Cloud, Lester C. Olson, Jonathan Alexander, and Jacqueline Rhodes.

Queer rhetorical studies seeks to uncover the symbolic and performative strategies that have constructed and continue to construct queer subjects in different times and places. Queer rhetoric is radical by definition; Alexander and Rhodes define it as the “self-conscious and critical engagement with normative discourses of sexuality in the public sphere that exposes their naturalization and torques them to create different or counter-discourses, giving voice and agency to multiple and complex sexual experiences.” Queer rhetoric, in other words, is defined more by its radical opposition to normativity than by the contemporary sexual identity categories of “gay” and “lesbian.” Emerging historiographies of queer rhetoric are equally radical in their attempts to locate rhetorical practices in both queer and “straight” archives. Morris, for example, encourages scholars to be “archival queers”: to “utilize the tools of rhetorical criticism and theory to enhance navigation of archives and produce rhetorical histories of archives that will warrant and arm our queer scholarship, pedagogy, and activism” (“Archival” 147). Morris is advocating a queer orientation toward archives: a critical, rhetorical analysis that examines how archives produce and encourage normativity or queerness.

This dissertation clearly participates in this line of scholarship, as I investigate the rhetorical strategies sexually identified collectives have employed to compose and leverage their histories as an activist move against normalizing discourses. However, the collectives I study are “queer” by Alexander and Rhodes’s definition only to varying degrees. For Alexander and Rhodes, “queer rhetoric is certainly concerned with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues, identities, and politics, but it is not exclusively linked to them and may in fact resist certain kinds of gay and lesbian normalization.” If I set out to study queer rhetoric within these specifications, I might not be able to include the

Daughters of Bilitis in this project, for this lesbian collective would likely be considered conservative and assimilationist by contemporary queer critics: too normative to be queer. Lisa Duggan, for example, might describe the collective as “homonormative,” as they enact a politics that “does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them” (50). For Duggan and other queer critics, the danger of homonormativity is a “demobilized gay constituency” that is “depoliticized” and “anchored in domesticity and consumption”(50). However, as I demonstrate in Chapter 2, the Daughters of Bilitis’s proto-homonormative agenda was quite radical in the 1950s given the severity of the political climate for any lesbian public action and, as my analysis of the rhetorical effects of their collections of anecdotes suggest, the DOB mobilized collective activism rather than deflated it.

Thus, one intervention I make in the field of queer rhetoric is the recuperation of lesbian rhetorical activity that fails to meet contemporary standards for queer resistance. By drawing “homonormative” collective activity into conversation with more radically queer historical activism (i.e. the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Chapter 3 and, to a greater degree, the filmic historiographers in Chapter 4), I put pressure on the terms of queer rhetoric and the presentist impulse of queer critics to define resistance by contemporary, non-historically-specific standards.

Even as I mean to make this intervention in the subfield, I also draw on queer rhetorical theory to help articulate the rhetorical strategies that *do* challenge normalization, within and outside lesbian communities. In Chapter 4, for example, I use Charles Morris’ “archival queer” methodology to think through Barbara Hammer’s multimodal rhetorical strategy of manipulating archival film footage to invent lesbian

history where it was not and to expose exclusions within lesbian communities based on age and sexual politics. Consequently, a second intervention is my focus on the *rhetorical* practices of composing history to figure these rhetors as queer historiographers. That is, while Morris is encouraging professional historians to become “archival queers,” I consider how his rhetorical theory helps illuminate the non-normative, activist practices of the lesbian rhetors I study. In the next sub-section, I explain how queer rhetorical theory, primarily from K.J. Rawson, aids my intervention in the second primary conversation I enter: feminist historiography.

### **1.2.2 Feminist Historiography in Rhetorical Studies**

I see this project as a contribution to feminist historiography in rhetorical studies. Like scholars such as Cheryl Glenn, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Susan Jarratt, and many others, I understand that gender bias in our disciplinary history matters because, as Glenn asserts, histories “do something” in the present; they “subtly shap[e] our perceptions of a rhetoric englobed” (“Remapping” 291). Feminist historiographic scholarship has primarily been directed at the male-dominated “rhetorical tradition”—the disciplinary canon of rhetorical history that defines what rhetoric and its best practices are.<sup>6</sup> The consequence of the absence of women rhetors in this canon is a legitimation of the continuing exclusion of women rhetors. Like historical activists in my study, feminist historiographers have been motivated by the understanding that the way we write history has present and future implications for gender politics. Clearly, there are connections between this dissertation and the motivations of feminist historiography: like feminist historiographers, I

understand that it matters in the *present* how history is written, and that history is always gendered, whether it is “traditional” or explicitly feminist.

But, in order to work through the nuances of my extension and intervention in feminist historiography, it is important to outline in more detail the primary approaches taken by feminist scholars as they challenge traditional rhetorical historiography. Thus far, feminist scholars have carved out two primary methodological tracks in pursuit of their collective challenge to the rhetorical tradition: recovery and gender-analytic “rereading.” Recovery projects endeavor to unearth rhetorical women from the dustbins of history, reclaiming them for the disciplinary tradition. This approach has resulted in a spate of projects “rescuing” individual women rhetors and demonstrating their rhetorical significance (Campbell; Lunsford; Glenn). However, the recovery approach has been critiqued by some feminist historiographers, such as Michelle Ballif and Barbara Biesecker, for reinforcing the ideological system—exclusive canonization; patriarchal criteria for value and credibility—that produced the need for recovery of women into history in the first place. These scholars thus advance projects that “reread” the rhetorical tradition as their text and interrogate the ways historical knowledge is produced and made meaningful through gender. Jarratt defines rereading as the analysis of “the ways social categories are constituted around or in absence of each other,” which means looking at how gender is operative even in prominent male-authored texts in the dominant tradition (2).

This dissertation engages both recovery and rereading in an effort to move the conversation in feminist historiography beyond these two longstanding methodologies. Like a recovery project, my case studies of the Daughters of Bilitis, the Lesbian Herstory Archives collective, and experimental documentary filmmakers provide proof that women

have successfully invented and leveraged strategies for writing and speaking, despite, or *because*, of their gendered and sexualized positions.<sup>7</sup> I have also been inspired by feminist historiographers like Wendy Sharer, whose 2007 book, Vote and Voice: Women's Organizations and Political Literacy, 1915-1930 expands the object of recovery from individual women rhetors to *groups* of women, in her case the consistent and persistent appeals of women's non-governmental political organizations in the forms of letters, articles, books, speeches, and media navigation. Following Sharer, I focus on collective rhetorical activity, with particular interest in how individual women cohere in collective identification through rhetoric.

Like proponents of rereading, I also stake out my intervention by questioning the *terms* of recovery projects. However, I do so in a way that also has the potential to destabilize rereading approaches.<sup>8</sup> This dissertation provides a new challenge to feminist historiography that threatens to dispute (that is, to *reread*) the field's primary focus on heterosexual women. As I have set out, this project examines women's own compositions and applications of history for present gender and sexual identifications and politics. My focus on how collectives have leveraged rhetoric to cohere in gender and sexual identification unsettles what most feminist historiographers take as given: the universal category of "woman," which is almost always implicitly heterosexual. As K.J. Rawson recently argued, recovery projects in feminist historiography have proceeded with an unquestioned reliance on "fixed-identity categories, typically 'woman' or 'female,'" and have most frequently recovered "a gender-normative body of texts—those produced by biologically born, self-identified or historically identified women" (40). Similarly, rereading projects "engage with oppressive gender roles and stereotypes" but do not



challenge static “gender binaries and logics” (Rawson 40). Rawson points out that he has not encountered a definition of “woman” in these histories and wonders if such omissions reveal the assumption that women “simply are,” and thereby risk excluding the diversity of gender and sexual identifications that might exist within, and put pressure on, such categories.

Instead of viewing gender and sexuality as certitudes, Rawson invites scholars to take on historical and political projects that understand these identifications as a “complex identity production and performance” (41). This dissertation is in part a response to Rawson’s critique of both recovery and rereading as I accept his invitation to pursue a historiographic project that does *not* take gender and sexuality as given, universal identity categories. Instead, as I have set out, I examine how rhetors have composed history together *in order* to identify as women and as lesbians, often positioning themselves against other definitions of women and lesbians. And, as I demonstrate most clearly in Chapter 4, I also examine how rhetors compose history in order to disrupt the seemingly universal categories of gender and sexuality, even and especially exclusive codifications of lesbian identity that go unquestioned. In this fourth chapter, I investigate how documentary filmmakers like Hammer employ multimodal rhetorical strategies to compose lesbian *historiography* as a way to call out exclusions within lesbian communities, such as those based on ageism or sexual politics.

My focus on lesbian historical activist collectives as rhetors is in part an attempt to complicate feminist historiography’s tacit assumption of a normatively gendered and sexually-identified rhetor. But I also focus on lesbian collectives, rather than, for example, lesbian *and* gay male collectives as a feminist rereading of the tendency for Gay and Lesbian

Studies and queer theory alike to equate homosexuality with gay men. As Diana Fuss explains, gay male writers, like Foucault, either “effect a complete and total silence on the subject of lesbianism while implicitly coding homosexuality as male” or, like historian John D’Emilio, “situate lesbianism as a footnote to gay male history—the subordinated other in a newly constructed gay/lesbian binarism” (Fuss 110). Prominent queer theorists such as Lee Edelman, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Leo Bersani almost always take literary representations of gay men as their primary texts, which has been acknowledged and critiqued by scholars such as Judith Halberstam (“Shame”). By recovering three lesbian collectives, my dissertation, then, is a feminist rhetorical intervention in the tendency to “code homosexuality as male” (Fuss 110).

### **1.2.3 Queer Historiographic Theory Outside Rhetorical Studies**

Because of this challenge to the terms of gender and sexuality, this project engages with queer theory. As I have explained, “queer” is not as a synonym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender individuals but rather an orientation against normativity. Thus, by this definition, this project engages in a *queer* critique of feminist historiography’s tendency to focus on normatively gendered and implicitly heterosexual women. However, some queer theorists might resist my focus on the consolidations of sexual identity. I am interested, after all, in how lesbian collectives have come to cohere in identification through the strategic composition of history. Yet, as many scholars have pointed out, queer theory is decidedly *anti-identitarian*. Duggan’s coining of “homonormativity” represents a pervasive fear in queer studies that celebratory and normalizing identity projects will blunt queer

studies' ever-resistant edge. This dissertation might, on face value, be received by queer critics as just such a project.

However, one intervention I see this dissertation making is a *return* to identitarian projects. Following Heather Love, I argue that critiques of identity scholarship may have “short-circuited important critical work in the history of identity” (45). Yes, Love explains, gender and sexual identity has proven to be deeply problematic, but it “nonetheless remains a *powerful organizing concept in contemporary experience*” (45, emphasis mine). Rather than dismissing outright the concept of identity in our historical treatment of sexuality, Love argues that “we need an account of identity that allows us to think through its contradictions and to trace its effects. Such a history can offer a critique of identity without dispensing with it as a category of historical experience” (45). This dissertation endeavors to treat identity with the complexity Love advocates by attending to its “contradictions” and “effects,” making an effort to critique identity while honoring it as a tenacious concept in both history and individual subjectivity.

What Love’s queer historiographic approach contributes to my project is the insight that rhetorical constructions and contests over gender and sexual identity are not merely a *result* of historical activism—they are also a “cause,” as it were. Love asserts that “identity not only accounts for the shape of the past but also for the feelings [queer subjects] *continue to have about the past*” (45, emphasis mine). Here, Love explains that the composition of the past not only shapes identification. Identification also shapes the composition of the past, through “recognition”; composers of queer history “are condemned to search for roots and resemblances” (45).

In my three case studies, “recognition” returns frequently as a motivation for the collective production of history. As I argue in Chapter 2, Lesbian/Woman, a book written by DOB founders Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, served as an inventional and communal resource for lesbian readers because these readers recognized themselves in the archive of anecdotes curated by the authors, responding in letters with anecdotes of their own to contribute to the archive. Likewise in Chapter 3, the Lesbian Herstory Archives collective works tirelessly to diversify their holdings so that any woman with same-sex desire, regardless of her class, race, gender-performance, or nationality might “see herself there” (Nestle interview). Finally, in Chapter 4, I demonstrate how filmic historiographers interrogate and embrace recognition as the motivation for lesbian history: Cheryl Dunye, for instance, goes so far as to *fabricate* an archive to produce a black lesbian film artist from the past in whose image she can recognize herself. Each of these examples illustrates how recognition motivates and shapes the rhetors’ historiography.

Even as I take Love’s queer historiographic theory as a foundation for my thinking about these collectives’ composition of history, I mean to stake out an intervention. Love, like Bravmann, is speaking to and about professional historians in the history of sexuality and queer literary studies. She is speaking to *academics’* recognition of themselves in the subjects they study. Yet, as Burke suggests, recognition of figures and experiences from the past is a fundamental rhetorical function of identification, and so it makes sense to think about the concept of recognition as a part of the rhetorical practices of the “everyday” rhetors we study. That is, part of my intervention in this project is my attention to the role of recognition in how amateur historians compose their own histories, shape identification, and assert political leverage.

Love suggests that recognition is unavoidable because it is emotional. She asserts that “it is in large part because [queer subjects] recognize figures, emotions, and images from the past as like [themselves] that [they] feel their effects so powerfully” (45). That is, despite intellectual and theoretical challenges to identity as a concept in queer theory, the emotional pull of recognition continues to hold sway. This affective dimension of recognition makes emotion an integral part of queer rhetorical, historical practice. As Ann Cvetkovich argues, “lesbian and gay history demands a radical archive of emotion in order to document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism — all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive” (“In the Archive” 110). In the next sub-section, I examine how these “areas of experience” manage to be chronicled by the collective rhetors I study. I demonstrate how this dissertation draws queer historiography into conversation with scholarship in technology and rhetoric to rethink what forms and media the composition of history might take. If the experiences that characterize the queer past escape capture in traditional archives, how do emotions become archived in the historical productions of lesbian activist collectives? Cvetkovich explains that emotions and sexuality can only be archived indirectly, through the mediation of cultural artifacts and art. The “drive to recognition,” as we might call it, propels the rhetors’ identification with a past that often takes less traditional forms than official records or history textbooks.

#### 1.2.4 The Media of History: Technologies and Rhetoric

In thinking through the composition and uses of history by activist collectives in the formations and disruptions of gender and sexual identifications, I have found it increasingly difficult to ignore the material form and media of this rhetorical activity. Queer challenges to evidence and archives disrupt conventional ways of thinking about what history “looks like.” José Estaban Muñoz advocates a concept of evidence of queer history as “ephemera”: a “modality of anti-rigor and anti-evidence that, far from filtering materiality out of cultural studies, reformulates and expands our understandings of materiality” (10). Ephemera and the “radical archive of emotions” (Cvetkovich) that serve as evidence in queer rhetorical practices make it impossible to limit what counts as history to traditional print volumes organized in narratives and punctuated by major events. History will be found with “whatever heuristic is at hand,” as Freeman asserts (62), necessitating attention to the *technologies* of historical production that make composing queer history possible.

Inspired by these queer challenges to conventional forms of history and historical evidence, I look creatively in each of my three case studies for evidence of composition of the past. In Chapter 2, for example, I look in the printed newsletters and books written by DOB leaders and members and housed in San Francisco’s GLBT Historical Society Archive. I also look at how the written correspondence from readers of these texts contributed to the collective historical project of recording, arranging, and sharing DOB women’s experience. In Chapter 3, I expand what counts as a “historical text” beyond print to consider how the Lesbian Herstory Archives collective composes the past through the

material selection and arrangement of physical artifacts in the archive. In this case study, I argue that the archive encourages an experiential and associative research experience through the juxtaposition and repetition of certain artifacts. Finally, in Chapter 4, I examine how documentary historiographers have remediated existing archival materials in film and video, reframing, modifying, and rearranging archival evidence to represent a complex and dynamic lesbian identity. Each chapter, then, focuses on a different technology of historical production, ranging from print to material arrangement to film and video. In my concluding chapter, I consider the digital archives in contemporary forms of historical activism.

In thinking expansively about the media of historical production, I engage in conversation with rhetoric and technology scholars.<sup>9</sup> As Stuart Selber argues, “in both theoretical and practical terms, technology does not really function as a separate category or subcategory of consequence,” distinct from our larger concerns in rhetorical studies (2). Rather, it “tends to infuse each and every area of the discipline,” including and beyond the thriving areas of study that take technology as their explicit focus (namely, computers and composition and technical communication<sup>10</sup>) (Selber 2). But as Selber contends, the role of technology in rhetoric and composition cannot solely be the purview of these disciplinary domains because changes in technologies of communication have encouraged scholars across the discipline to “reinterpret (yet again) the traditional canons of rhetoric,” from invention to delivery to memory (2). Thus, part of my intervention here is to attend to the technologies of rhetorical practice that the collectives in my study leverage. In so doing, I examine lesbian collectives’ rhetorical activities for how they “technologize the queer

archive,” because I understand that a “variety of media are needed to (re)construct queer experiences” (Alexander and Rhodes).

Considering the technologies that are intimately involved in the rhetorical activity of lesbian activist collectives does not mean that I must focus solely on *digital* technologies. While the focus on technology in recent years has overwhelmingly been on “digital, screen-mediated texts” in rhetoric and composition, scholars such as Jody Shipka have challenged the conflation of multimodality with digitality (8). Selber too explains that “rhetorical activities have *always* taken place in technological contexts of one sort or another, whether a scriptorium, a traditional classroom, a state-of-the-art cybertorium, or other work place, private as well as public” (1). With this expansive understanding of technologies of rhetoric in mind, I understand “technology” beyond (and including) the digital to consider print, material collections, and film.

These technological differences matter because each affords the rhetors I examine different strategies for composing and reaching their audiences. Technology is “directional,” Carolyn R. Miller argues: “it appeals to us, by making some form of communicative interaction possible or easy or others difficult or impossible, by leading us to engage in or to attempt certain kinds of rhetorical actions rather than others” (x). Susan Wells, like Miller, defines “affordance” as a “mobilizing concept that orients us to action and interpretation as they play out in the materials of production” (151). Like rhetoric then, or more precisely *with* rhetoric, technologies help shape the histories that are and can be composed and delivered. For example, though the Lesbian Herstory Archives’ technology of archivization encouraged the selection and arrangement of an eclectic mix of artifacts and identifications, the medium of archiving does not encourage the *manipulation* of these



materials. Instead, it encourages the *preservation* of individual materials, and the rhetorical work happens in the juxtaposition of existing artifacts, with care taken to preserve their individual provenance. In contrast, the technologies of film and video in Chapter 4 encourage the *remediation* (Bolter and Grusin) of archival materials: Hammer's experimental film techniques, for instance, allow her to dub over the voices of "straight" archival film clips, to manipulate and even invent archival evidence to tell accounts of a lesbian past that might have existed had the evidence been preserved in an official archive.

The relationship between the technology of production and the rhetorical strategies employed may exhibit what Susan Wells calls a "link between gender and genre" (152). Wells argues that the democratization of publishing technologies such as offset printing in the 1960s—to this I would add, handheld video cameras in the 1970s and personal computers and editing software in the 1990s—afforded new publication practices for marginalized groups. Wells lists new practices, such as collaboration, quick and easy document reproduction, and work by amateurs as some of the affordances of newly democratized technologies of rhetoric. While the emergence of these accessible technologies did not determine the "vernacular style" of countercultural activist movements, activists fashioned the features into affordances that supported their "colloquial style, informal layout, and extravagant uses of images" (156). Though these particular literacy practices Wells lists do not map neatly onto the historical activists I study in this dissertation, the three core chapters reveal a separate set of rhetorical strategies for composing history, such as "anecdotal clustering" in print newsletters and books (Chapter 2); "analogical association" in material archives (Chapter 3), and "archival mashup" in experimental documentary film and video (Chapter 4). Nonetheless Wells'

point is important: the democratization of publication technologies helped shape the kinds of rhetorical address and delivery the historical activists employed, even as the rhetors exploited the technologies inventively for their purposes. Each technology of historical production afforded its rhetors different ways to reach and impact their constituency.

### 1.3 CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages, I have demonstrated the exigency for this dissertation, its driving research questions, and its key terms. I have mapped out my theoretical grounding and charted the disciplinary interventions I intend to make. Each of the following chapters examines a different collective of individuals in a different historical moment. Likewise, each chapter takes different media as its primary materials. The chapters correspondingly evince different rhetorical strategies and motivations for composing the past, shaping identification, and asserting political leverage.

I've explained above my motivation for this diverse approach to my subjects and media, but my methodology bears a bit more explanation here. I understand my methodology to be what Halberstam calls a "scavenger methodology": one that

uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior. The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence. (Female Masculinity 13)

I employ a scavenger methodology in order to include a diversity of sources in this dissertation, ranging from print to archives to film to digital media. Halberstam's description of a scavenger methodology supports the move to study primary sources such as archival materials (despite my situation outside of the discipline of history); film (despite my situation outside of traditional film studies), and material artifacts (despite my situation outside of material culture studies). Rather than design my methodology disciplinarily, then, I am motivated by my driving research questions into the mechanisms of historical activism and by my understanding that queer rhetoric will be found through "whatever heuristic is at hand" (Freeman 62).

Despite the diversity of sources, the case studies that constitute this dissertation together demonstrate how these different groups, media, and strategies coalesce in the project of historical activism. By bringing the conservative aims of the mid-century Daughters of Bilitis (Chapter 2) into conversation with the increasingly radical historical activism of the experimental documentary filmmakers (Chapter 4), I set out to demonstrate that there is a legacy of historical activism that has produced unique forms of sexually identified communities; inventive rhetorical strategies; and creative uses of technology in the production of queer history and identity. I hope that my project issues a challenge to feminist and queer historiographers to attend to how rhetoric functions in contests over identities and the historical forces that shape them.

## 2.0 THE DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS ARCHIVE: CLEARING HISTORICAL SPACE FOR CLUSTERED ANECDOTES

We do feel that the experience of Lesbians, expressed in their own terms and in the context of their own self-awareness, has merit in and of itself...This isn't just "our" book. It is the story of the many Lesbians we have met over the years.

—Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, Lesbian/Woman, 1972

Your book is anecdotal, so it leads me in that vein too.

—K. Elizabeth Jackson, Letter to Martin and Lyon, 1972

Fifteen years after Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon founded the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), the first lesbian activist organization in the United States, they composed Lesbian/Woman (1972). This influential 283-page book is essentially a collection of lesbian experience from hundreds of women the couple had corresponded with in their work with the Daughters of Bilitis during the 1950s and 60s. Though the publication punctuates the dissolution of the organization, the book continued the DOB's agenda to educate women with same-sex desire about themselves, to promote self-acceptance, and to encourage broader social acceptance through conforming to conventional middle-class values. By strategically

collecting and curating the experiences of the many women with whom they communicated throughout the history of the DOB, Martin and Lyon hoped to extend the organization's particular sense of collectivity to women with same-sex desire without access to lesbian community or information about what it "meant" to be lesbian.

In this chapter, I argue that Lesbian/Woman constitutes an archive of lesbian experience, the first lesbian archive widely available to women across the United States, and contend that it functioned rhetorically as a communal and identificatory resource. In making this argument, the chapter responds to recent calls in rhetorical studies to attend to the archive as a site of rhetorical invention—a claim I make in Chapter 1. Calls for attention to the rhetoricity of archives extend naturally from the field's enduring interest in historiography: the relationship between how a history is composed and its rhetorical effect on the politics of the discipline or the social world writ large (Jarratt; Ballif; Enoch and Jack). Indeed, in 2006, Charles Morris III expressed surprise that "the archive itself, chief among the inventional sites of rhetorical pasts, has not been subjected to sustained critical-rhetorical reflection" ("Archival Turn" 113).<sup>11</sup> In the same Rhetoric and Public Affairs forum to which Morris contributed, Barbara Biesecker encouraged scholars to acknowledge the "situated and strategic uses to which archives have been put" (130). But, while scholars have begun to accept these invitations (Kirsch and Rohan; Glenn and Enoch), few in rhetorical studies have turned to the rhetoricity of *queer* archives. With the exceptions of Morris, K.J. Rawson, and Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes' recent work, the unique nature of queer archives has more often been elaborated by scholars outside the field, such as Ann Cvetkovich, Carolyn Dinshaw, Elizabeth Freeman, and José Esteban Muñoz.

Drawing this work into conversation with rhetorical studies, I attend critically to the queer archive as an “inventional site of rhetorical pasts” (Morris) through three intimately related investigations. First, I examine the DOB’s history of literate activity in their monthly magazine, The Ladder, and its influences on Martin and Lyon’s later rhetorical design of Lesbian/Woman. Second, I investigate how the queer archive of Lesbian/Woman is composed of clusters of DOB members’ experience. Extending scholarship on the ephemeral nature of queer archival materials, I consider the rhetorical construction of Lesbian/Woman as an archive of *anecdotes*: numerous, brief articulations of experience retold second-hand and curated in strategic categories. As in a more traditional archive with shelves, boxes, and folders, the anecdotes in Lesbian/Woman are set side by side with only the rare transition provided by Martin and Lyon. Lesbian/Woman is not a typical archive, either in its contents—clustered anecdotes—or its form—a published book. Yet, as I will demonstrate, it evinces many of the characteristics of a queer archive as theorists such as Freeman and Muñoz have defined it. Anecdotes, as Randolph Starn asserts, have their “uses precisely in disrupting the detached pose and forced coherence of history-as-usual” (140). Consequently, *collections* of anecdotes such as Lesbian/Woman can amplify the single anecdote’s unruly potential to disrupt cohesive accounts of lesbian stigma.

In tandem with this investigation of the rhetorical construction of the Lesbian/Woman archive, I consider how readers responded to and made use of its collections of anecdotes. The book inspired invention in its readers, who wrote dozens of autobiographical letters and sent them to Martin and Lyon from all around the country.<sup>12</sup> The second epigraph to this chapter suggests the significance of the anecdotal archive for its readers. As K. Elizabeth explains in her letter to Martin and Lyon, “your book is

anecdotal so it leads me in that vein too” before articulating her experience coming out in her “fire and brimstone background” and her struggle to accept her sexuality. The many letters like K. Elizabeth’s evince the heuristic potential of queer archives to prompt a process of *archival consciousness raising*. Drawing on Tasha Dubriwny’s theory of consciousness raising and repurposing it in application to queer archives, I argue that the anecdotes in Lesbian/Woman validated readers’ experiences and encouraged them to contribute to the archive begun by Martin and Lyon, effecting transformations of self-acceptance and attempts to forge community despite the frequently rural locales of the readers. However, as I will show, these transformative effects were only possible for women who saw themselves reflected in the archive’s anecdotes of middle class women. I thus this section with a reader’s letter exposing the limits of Lesbian/Woman’s ability to inspire consciousness raising for more diverse lesbian readers.

## **2.1 THE DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS IN CONTEXT: FROM MOBILIZATION TO ARCHIVIZATION**

In order to understand the rhetorical design and impact of Lesbian/Woman as a queer archive, it is important to comprehend the political and cultural context in which the Daughters of Bilitis mobilized. In 1955, eight women—four working class, four middle class—came together to begin a secret social club as an alternative to the San Francisco bar scene, desiring the privacy to openly dance with other lesbians without police interference. While gay and lesbian bars were the primary means of meeting and socializing with other

women, public meeting places carried considerable risk in the era of McCarthy.<sup>13</sup> The bar scene was fraught with the risk of police harassment and arrest, the effects of which extended beyond punitive damage to the potential for a lesbian's sexuality to be exposed to her family or place of employment, often resulting in alienation or job loss. As Nan Alamilla Boyd explains, bars were targeted because they were sites where cruising, gender transgression, sex tourism, and prostitution coalesced; bars were, in other words, sites where lesbian difference was *visible*—visibly gender subversive and working class—and where queer people fought to protect their right to visible difference in public spaces.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, the social club sought more private, less perilous opportunities for community.

Within a year of the social club's founding, it divided over its purpose and across class and race lines.<sup>15</sup> While the majority of members opted to retain the club's social purpose, Martin and Lyon wanted to combat what they understood to be a pervasive problem for lesbians: the pathologization and criminalization of same-sex desire, the resultant sense of isolation, and the lack of representation for lesbians in the burgeoning homophile movement.<sup>16</sup> Martin and Lyon, both white (and white collar), left the social club to found the first activist organization for lesbians. Retaining the original club's name of the Daughters of Bilitis, the organization grew slowly as leaders mitigated potential members' fears of exposure. However, through coffee meetings, conventions, epistolary correspondence, and The Ladder, the DOB eventually expanded as chapters opened in cities around the country. A staff of volunteer DOB members edited and wrote the magazine, hand-typing and, often, secretly mimeographing and mailing copies from their places of employment.



Tracing the terminology in The Ladder shows a gradual transition from self-identifying as “variants” to naming themselves “Lesbians,” always with a capital L to indicate their identity as a collective, a people. This tracing indicates a gradual coherence of a particular identity, one that the DOB chose for themselves against the dispersing discourses of pathology and criminality.<sup>17</sup> The DOB’s mobilization in the 1950s homophile movement marks a historical moment before lesbian identity had become visible and exclusively named, except by deprecatory medical discourse. At the time of the DOB’s origin, women with same sex desire were still pejoratively dubbed “variants” or “inverts” by psychological discourses, which contributed to a pervasive sense of isolation and individual pathology and consequently obstructed their collectivization into shared identification. As David Halperin explains, “Lesbian” did not become a “dominant or exclusive” name for a “particular kind of erotic practice or sexual orientation” until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (53).<sup>18</sup>

From 1956-1970, the DOB corresponded and conversed with women across the country to “communicate that same-sex attraction meant something, that it had social ramifications, and that it had a name” (Meeker 2), and it proffered the DOB’s primary message of self-acceptance as a foundation for lesbian community. The DOB’s emphasis on self-acceptance led to later accusations of assimilationism and a passive activism compared to more radical, post-1969 gay liberation protests. But in response to these accusations, Martin replied that “people need to have a sense of self-worth to fight for. What we were trying to do at that time is survive...to build a sense of community among those of us who could, that gave us self-esteem and...a sense of our own individual power—and then our power as a group” (qtd. in Boyd 153). Once a sense of community was assembled against

the isolating forces of McCarthyism, the final objective of the DOB was to encourage the mainstream to understand that, as Lyon explained, “there is really nothing to fear from us (for that is the true reason behind the prejudice—fear)” (qtd. in Meeker 83). To achieve this aim, the DOB called for collective conformance to mainstream expectations for feminine dress and middle-class sensibilities of respectable daytime occupations, moderation or abstinence from alcohol, and romantic monogamy, in the hopes that doing so might grant them relief from social and official harassment. For the DOB, these middle class sensibilities were a strategic intervention in the common association of lesbians with pathology, crime, immorality, and mental aberrance and were expressly set against the gender and class transgressions of the bar scene.

By 1970, the organization slowly dissolved as members became increasingly involved in more radical feminist and gay liberation efforts.<sup>19</sup> The DOB, however, did not end in silence. That same year, Martin and Lyon began to compose Lesbian/Woman, archiving the experiences of women they had known through the organization. To compose this 283-page book, the authors drew from the experiences women had written in to The Ladder and from their memories of conversations and correspondence with hundreds of women through the DOB. Continuing the DOB’s agenda, the Lesbian/Woman archive contains virtually no mention of bar experience, collecting instead anecdotes that shape a distinctly middle-class lesbian identity, characterized by traditional values of monogamy, hard (respectable) work, femininity, and motherhood. Archives are not all-encompassing catchalls; they are constituted by decisions about what to include and how inclusions are arranged and categorized. The experiences collected in Lesbian/Woman are organized under categories—chapters—defined by these values. Within the ten chapters

that make up the book, there is a chapter on motherhood (“Lesbians are Mothers Too”), a chapter on monogamy (“Lifestyles”), a chapter on positive “Self Image”, and a chapter on upbringing (“Growing Up Gay”). While the last two chapters focus on politics (the role of lesbians in the homophile movement and the burgeoning liberation movement), the majority of the book clusters the experiences of women who exemplified the middle-class values the DOB upheld.

## 2.2 ARCHIVAL LESSONS: LEARNING FROM ANN ALDRICH AND THE LADDER

Martin and Lyon were motivated to archive experience in Lesbian/Woman because they sensed a pervasive historical void for lesbians who identified against the queer bar scene and its class and gender diversity. At the time of their writing, the only representations of lesbians available—primarily in sexological studies, sensationalizing pulp fiction, and, as I will demonstrate, the historical non-fiction of Ann Aldrich—emphasized the *queerness* of lesbianism: the anti-normative difference the DOB tried so hard to normalize. In this brief section, I outline some of the differences between Aldrich’s and Martin and Lyon’s versions of lesbian experience, and find exigency for Lesbian/Woman in the DOB’s response to Aldrich in The Ladder.

Prior to Martin and Lyon’s publication of Lesbian/Woman in 1972, Aldrich released the widely read, nonfiction books, We Walk Alone (1955) and We Too Must Love (1958), which interwove the stories of a few “cliques” of lesbians in New York City.<sup>20</sup> Unlike Lesbian/Woman’s anecdotes of monogamy, motherhood, and other conservative values,

Aldrich's books told tales of cold, loveless relationships born in bars, rife with descriptions of women as jealous and capricious. Aldrich even tells the story of a cruel woman who "preyed" upon a scared, underage girl, "luring" her away from her friends at the bar to her apartment and then abandoning her after returning to the bar when the young girl's friends left without her.<sup>21</sup>

Aldrich's publication became a topic of heated debate in the DOB. The collective held meetings and devoted sections of The Ladder to analyzing and discussing Aldrich's work. The magazine's ultimate conclusion was that Aldrich "failed to balance her more bizarre examples of Lesbianism with those who have attained adjustment and are useful, productive citizens" (1957, 16): a "failure" that revealed the need for a book like Lesbian/Woman. Helen Sanders, a DOB leader, "felt that Ann Aldrich quoted heavily from medical and psychological authorities who are very biased" instead of including the experiences of "real" lesbians (1957, 17). In critiquing Aldrich's characterization of lesbian history and identity, the DOB circumscribed their *alternative* understanding of history and identity. In an open letter to Aldrich published in The Ladder, Martin concludes that Aldrich had let the "extreme" examples represent the majority of lesbians, whom Martin argued were likely "capable of carrying on an intelligent conversation" and are "hardworking" without "bravado" (1958, 2.7, 4). In tracing the DOB's debate with Aldrich, it is possible to see a collective identification emerge: the middle-class lesbian, characterized by romantic monogamy, education, socially acceptable employment, and modesty.

The debate with Aldrich also encouraged readers to collectively share the intimate experience that would come to characterize the strategy of anecdotal clustering in

Lesbian/Woman. Readers wrote into The Ladder to share anecdotes of personal experience that contradicted Aldrich's representation of lesbians in the bar scene as pathologically non-committal. M.L. from Warwick, RI, for example, wrote that she was "hurt" to find no lesbian couple in Aldrich's writing with which she and her partner could compare themselves: "my friend and I have lived together for less than five years but as far as we are concerned, it's for life. We own our furniture and car jointly and just signed a mortgage for a home of our own...I wish Aldrich would write about someone like us" (1958, 2.8, 22). Like this reader, F.L. from Peacedale, RI wrote that readers need to be provided with complex accounts that include both sadness and hopefulness because, facing "this life *without* the benefit of viewing what goodness there is as unrealistic as she who knows only the beautiful" (1958, 2.11).

From readers' letters like these, we can begin to see the influence of The Ladder on Martin and Lyon's strategy of clustering anecdotes. Like Lesbian/Woman, the grassroots periodical incorporated and published the thoughts and experiences of its readers. As the second issue pleaded:

A few people cannot educate the public and themselves but many can. Give us those thoughts which have been lolling in your brain. Your name needn't be signed in your letter, nor printed. Your innermost desire is to be 'recognized.' Well, you won't do it by thinking but by doing" (1956, 1.2, 7).

Later issues continued to beg for reader-generated content: "We need...contributions. We need manuscripts, both fiction and non-fiction, by and about women to correct erroneous conceptions—to depict Lesbianism as it is, not as it is supposed" (Dec. 1956, 1.3). Women recipients complied, submitting their responses to previous issues in Letters to the Editor,

as well as their interpretations of organization discussions and events, and their fiction and poetry. By compiling the contributions of DOB members in the magazine, The Ladder thusly functioned as a record of the experiences and opinions of DOB members who wrote to share their acclaim or disdain for articles and issues, and contributed their views on what lesbians were and how they should best navigate the social world. Martin and Lyon would later draw from this record of experience, as well as their memories of correspondence and conversation with women in their time as leaders of the DOB.

The “lesson” of clustering experience that Martin and Lyon learned from The Ladder is particularly apparent in the checks and balances readers’ provided the newsletter as the DOB grew and changed through the 1960s. While earlier issues included at least two pages of many readers’ comments, later issues would skip the “Readers’ Response” section altogether or would print one, longer letter, reducing the sense of collectivity effected by clustering many women’s voices in an issue. The DOB’s increased political activism through the late 1960s (as opposed to their longtime program of self-acceptance and education) filled the pages with descriptions of legal battles and injustices, leaving less room for readers’ letters. When readers’ letters were printed, they strongly resisted this change. J.C. from New York commented on the paranoia-inducing repetition of “grossly exaggerated Injustices and Sights on the part of the Hostile Public” and begged for more reader interaction. She wrote that she preferred the entire newsletter be filled with readers’ voices because it would be “more constructive and helpful if we could get *each others’* slant on things” (1966, 11.3, 27). Readers resisted what they saw as an editorial/DOB leadership takeover of what was once a collective project. Even members of The Ladder staff agreed: Gene Damon<sup>22</sup> wrote to the editor “we need to hear less and less

about meetings and more and more about people. What they do and say and feel and fear and love and want” (1967, 11.5).

Readers’ resistance to The Ladder’s increasingly mono-vocal approach provided Martin and Lyon with an important rhetorical lesson: readers wanted to see themselves and each other, clustered together to evince the sense of community they deeply desired. DOB members wanted to feel like they were part of a collective, to have channels through which to converse with other lesbians because it was so difficult to find them, especially for women in small towns and women who avoided bars. As Meredith Grey, a frequent contributor of short stories to the magazine, wrote in a letter to the editor: “it is immodest and unwise to suggest that the DOB can, now or ever, dispense with dialogue” (1967, 11.4, 2).

This reflection on the role of Ann Aldrich and The Ladder in the exigency and design of Lesbian/Woman suggests that *reading and writing experience* served a vital function in the DOB’s collectivization of lesbian identity. Women sought out and joined the DOB because they wanted information about themselves and each other as lesbians. In so doing, they revealed the damage inflicted by available research (such as Aldrich’s books) on these individuals’ understanding of themselves. In the next section, I turn to Lesbian/Woman itself and examine how Martin and Lyon represented and addressed the damage of existing accounts of lesbianism in sexology, accounts of Sappho, and popular fiction as they endeavored to clear historical space for the more mainstream experiences of DOB women.

### 2.3 CLEARING HISTORICAL SPACE: REVISING HISTORIES OF PATHOLOGY AND CRIMINALITY

Before Martin and Lyon could compose history with clusters of lesbian experience, I suggest that they had to clear historical space of the damaging clutter of existing historical accounts. In this section, I focus on the first chapter of Lesbian/Woman, entitled “The Lesbian—Myth and Reality,” and the second, “Self-Image.” These chapters demonstrate Martin and Lyon’s initial ignorance about lesbianism and its provocation of a drive to research. The authors sought information about themselves by visiting gay bars (“always a twitchy experience,” they admitted) and spending hours in the library, where they found little except a “few books about the male homosexual” (11, 29). Instead of love, Martin read that her feelings for Lyon were a “perversion, a sign of psychopathology, a crime against nature and a sin against God” (30). The authors described the emotional impact of available research:

All this is what Del [Martin] learned about herself after hours of agonized reading at the library. They were talking about her, a Lesbian. And they were right. Lesbians do suffer from feelings of rejection, loneliness, isolation, fear, insecurity, hurt pride, lack of self confidence, loss of self esteem. Del felt all these things and more. She was indeed sick. She displayed all the symptoms of melancholia...[but] how could it be otherwise? The realization that she is considered sinful, criminal, and mentally ill can be overwhelming and devastating to a young mother of twenty-five [years old], particularly when she sees what she experiences as simply a state of being and



expression of love (49).

As Martin and Lyon suggest in this passage, the library sources were *persuasive*, convincing Martin that perhaps her feelings of love might not be love at all, but deviance. Martin's reflection on the affect of available research indicates an ambivalence—the understanding that the sources might *cause* melancholy, rather than merely empirically observe it, in lesbian women.

Martin's ambivalent identification with sources in the library exemplifies the queer rhetorical practice of "disidentification." Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes define disidentification as "the ways in which one situates oneself both within and against the various discourses through which we are called to identify." Judith Butler calls disidentification an "experience of misrecognition," an "uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong" (qtd. in Alexander and Rhodes). This complex sense of disidentification as a misrecognition is important in understanding the persuasive effect of available research on women with same-sex desire in the 1950s and 60s. Women seeking information about themselves *saw* themselves in the library, even as they felt they didn't or shouldn't, because there was no other archive from which to learn and it was difficult to locate other women with same-sex desire, especially for those who lived in small towns or rural areas. Thus, before Martin and Lyon could archive the anecdotes of DOB members' experience, they had to clear historical space of misrecognized identities and neutralize the persuasive impact of available sources. Their primary targets for attack were the discourses of Sappho, sexology, and pulp fiction. Martin and Lyon used the first chapter of Lesbian/Woman to encourage disidentification by "scrambling" and "reconstructing" (Muñoz) available research to reduce its power as an identificatory

resource for DOB members.

A primary source for researchers was found in accounts of Sappho, the poet from Greek antiquity who lived on the isle of Lesbos. As Martin and Lyon explain in the first chapter of Lesbian/Woman, Sappho has been reconstructed in historical accounts in multiple, contradictory ways. She was celebrated in some accounts as a founder of a school for young girls, while in others she was remembered as the leader of an island cult for female homosexuals. Martin and Lyon attempted to provoke disidentification with Sappho by arguing that these historical constructions produced “two Sapphos”: “one the great poetess and the other the courtesan of undisciplined habits” (20). For Martin and Lyon, the contradictions between Sappho’s accounts called into question the historical accuracy of either. The authors demonstrate the consequences of Sappho’s multiple configurations, arguing that these contradictory “origins” led to conceptions of lesbians that were similarly divergent, ranging from childish romantic to prostitute to child molester (21).

Even more than classical history, Martin and Lyon blamed sexological discourse for perpetuating damaging stereotypes.<sup>23</sup> In the same section of Lesbian/Woman in which Martin and Lyon “disidentify” with Sappho,<sup>24</sup> the authors dismantle the pseudo-scientific studies found in the library by women with same-sex desire. These “studies” were published in nationally syndicated publications purporting to illuminate the public about lesbians with claims about their physical and mental deviance. Martin and Lyon cite Dr. Hugh Barnes article, “What Makes a Homosexual?” published in the 1957 issue of Actual Medical Cases. Barnes claimed that lesbians have “firm muscles” and “excess hair,” with “over-developed” stature and “underdeveloped” femininity. In order to call sexology into question, Martin and Lyon juxtaposed Barnes’ claims of physical deviance with the

opposite claims of Dr. Edward Dengrove. In a contemporaneous issue of the journal, Sexuality, Dengrove characterized lesbians as “essentially feminine” with no marked difference in appearance. But where he didn’t see physical difference, he saw psychological deviance: “for most Lesbians are not women who are pretending to be men, but rather women who cannot express their normal sexual drive in relationship to men but must direct it towards other females instead” (qtd. in Lesbian/Woman 19). For Dengrove, lesbians had abnormal sex drives and gender confusion, but were physically and essentially “women.” Such contradictory evidence proved for Martin and Lyon, and their readers, that, like classical historians, medical perspectives on female homosexuality were fractured and contradictory, undermining the ethos of certainty provided by the institution of medicine.

Martin and Lyon then suggest that these histories of sexology and Sappho proliferated in the form of “pulp” fiction: inexpensive paperbacks sold in newsstands.<sup>25</sup> Many 1930s-50s pulps perpetuated stereotypes of lesbians as child molesters, a mischaracterization Martin and Lyon found origins of in Sappho’s mutated history. In such novels, young, innocent girls were often initiated into sexual experience by older, more experienced women. Pulps followed other common plots as well: prostitutes who find diversion with other women; rich housewives who mitigate boredom with their maids; imprisoned women who find solace in their cellmates from their isolation from men. Martin and Lyon connected examples from the pulps with their prior deconstruction of classical and sexological history. They argued that stories about lesbian prostitutes perpetuated Sapphic myths, while stories of intimacy between inmates perpetuated claims about gender transgression found in sexology.

For example, Martin and Lyon maintained that Radcliffe Hall’s now classic novel,

The Well of Loneliness (1928) reflected sexological claims that lesbians were “pseudo-males” who desired to be men and were debilitated by their failure to become men. Martin and Lyon contended that “many women, like Del, emulated” female protagonist Stephen Gordon’s performance of masculinity—her brusqueness, her fierce need to protect women—“only to find that their lovers, like Phyllis [Lyon], were not looking for a male substitute, for lesbians are attracted to women” (12). Here, Martin and Lyon disidentify with gender transgression expressed in the pulps and sexology by refuting it with their experience. By clearing historical space of the pulps and sexology, Martin and Lyon’s disidentification with gender transgression in these accounts is another move toward mainstream values of femininity and social conformance.

The disidentification Martin and Lyon prompt in readers, through their deconstructive treatment of pathologizing discourses, clears historical space for clustered anecdotes that constitute the remainder of the book. In fact, DOB members’ experience with the negative affect of available research actually becomes the content of the queer archive that follows. In other words, the historical material the archive contains is no longer pieced together from sexology and Sappho; instead, the affective *experience* of failed research becomes the content of a new lesbian history, encapsulated in anecdotes and curated in strategic categories.

## 2.4 RAISING CONSCIOUSNESS FROM A QUEER ARCHIVE OF ANECDOTES

Martin and Lyon made it possible to fill their archive with anecdotes by calling existing historical discourses of lesbianism into question: by denaturalizing Sappho, sexology, and the pulps as reliable and authentic representations of lesbian history. In so doing, they anticipate the work of more recent queer archivists, who understand that they cannot clear historical space solely with published research. As Elizabeth Freeman explains, “sexual dissidents have had to understand what is prior to our own lives” through archives of “gossip,” “conjecture,” a “seemingly myopic focus on ephemera” (62). Queer archives, in other words, must be composed with contents and in forms that do not look like the official paper records we expect archives to contain, because these archives document pasts that have been forgotten, elided, or corrupted in official histories, libraries, and archives. Indeed, these pasts are by nature difficult to preserve, for as Cvetkovich explains, queer pasts are characterized by “intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism, all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive” (“In the Archive” 110). Echoing Freeman and Cvetkovich, José Muñoz writes that:

Queerness is rarely complemented by evidence, or at least by traditional understandings of the term. The key to queering evidence, and by that I mean the ways in which we prove queerness and read queerness, is by suturing it to the concept of ephemera. Think of ephemera as the trace, the remains, the things that are left hanging in the air like a rumor. (Cruising Utopia 65)

Muñoz emphasizes the necessity of ephemera in documenting the queer past and its complicated relationship to traditional standards of proof, suggesting that we need a more expansive understanding of historical evidence.

In approaching Lesbian/Woman as an archive of lesbian experience, I extend the concept of queer archival ephemera to consider *anecdotes* as a form of historical evidence. Anecdotes are ephemeral because they are experiences articulated second-hand and retold in absentia of the subject whose experience is divulged, with no material record to authenticate it. Each anecdote in Lesbian/Woman is a moment in another woman's life without bildungsroman, plucked from a past organized by linear time, origin, and telos and inserted into categories elsewhere. Anecdotes in Lesbian/Woman are experiences temporally delayed and retroactively transformed: the experiences were endured and felt by DOB members and The Ladder readers at the time they were shared with Martin, Lyon and other DOB constituents in the 1950s and 60s; later, in 1970 as Martin and Lyon composed the archive that would become Lesbian/Woman, they collected these experiences and reorganized them second-hand.<sup>26</sup> Because of the distance between the retelling and the experience, anecdotal ephemera is “a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself” (Muñoz).

An anecdote is a brief form, and particularly so in Lesbian/Woman where anecdotes are often comprised of a short paragraph or a few sentences. They are typically light on details: in the book, for instance, the anecdotes refer to the women Martin and Lyon describe only by their first names, revealed as pseudonyms to protect the women's privacy. In contrast to similar forms like the “example,” the anecdote does not evidentially support an assertion in Lesbian/Woman. Instead, the anecdote itself shows, rather than

supporting a statement that tells; each anecdote exists for its own sake, next to others' anecdotes, rather than in service of an explicit claim. Here is an example of an anecdote in the chapter focusing on motherhood:

One couple, who had a definite butch-femme relationship in their youth, had wanted a child so badly that they made various attempts at artificial insemination without success. Many years later, when they were in their forties, they eagerly greeted us with the news that they had had a baby. They had adopted the baby of an unwed mother in Lillian's family. By that time, Bo, the butch, was less obvious as a Lesbian and more obvious as a successful businesswoman. They couple had a spacious home with a swimming pool outside the city. (Lesbian/Woman 156)

This anecdote reinforced several middle-class values for Martin and Lyon: it celebrates the couple's wish for motherhood and their love for their child; it suggests a long-term, monogamous relationship between women; it seems to favor the "butch" partner's conformance to more feminine gender performance; and it implies that happiness is found in economic success and suburban life. Yet there is no definitive interpretation of the anecdote provided by Martin and Lyon. Instead, "Lillian and Bo's" anecdote is preceded by "Delia's" and followed by "Judy's" related experiences becoming mothers in the face of legal and cultural obstacles. Together, these anecdotes suggest a conservative conformism to mainstream values.

This conservative conformism was strategic, as the anecdotes were meant to intervene in the existing accounts of lesbian deviance. In historiography, anecdotes have the effect of disrupting a single grand narrative. In historiographer Leonard Gossman's

words, “like an ideal human form when it is inspected close up through a microscope, the heroic and orderly public narrative of the history is undercut by a ragbag of anecdotes of depravity and abuse of power” (152). Because of their unruly potential, anecdotes are distrusted in “mainstream history,” whose “default position is that anecdotes are a guilty indulgence unless severely disciplined. Contrariwise the jarring anecdote has its uses precisely in disrupting the detached pose and forced coherence of history-as-usual” (Starn 140). The collection of experiences in Lesbian/Woman from so many unofficial or hearsay perspectives had the potential to disrupt the dominant narrative of lesbian pathology, criminality, and moral deviance.

It is in this sense that the Lesbian/Woman archive of anecdotes is distinctly rhetorical: the strategic collection and curatorship of lesbian experience had specific, *interventionist* effects on its readers’ understanding of themselves as lesbians by undermining the pejorative official narratives in which they had sought information about themselves and providing a collection of experience in its place. The evidence of the anecdotal archive’s effects can be found in the dozens of letters sent to Martin and Lyon in response to Lesbian/Woman. Most of the women who sent letters to Martin and Lyon were located in rural towns and small cities in the American Midwest and south, far from the hubs of liberation activism flourishing in San Francisco, LA, and New York City.<sup>27</sup> These readers found little in the way of research or lesbian bars, but the archive of anecdotes offered them an alternative account of lesbian experience in which they could see themselves or to which they could aspire.

The Lesbian/Woman archive inspired a process of archival consciousness raising in these readers. “Consciousnesses” are “raised” when the composition of a multiplicity of



experiences connects what was previously felt individually into the foundations for collective identification and action. The famous feminist dictum, “the personal is political,” means that personal experience, when shared and linked with others’ experiences, reveals that individual suffering is a product of systemic problems. As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell explains, the goal of consciousness raising is “to create awareness (through shared experience) that what were thought to be personal deficiencies and individual problems are common and shared, a result of [women’s and here, lesbians’] position” (128). Lesbian/Woman’s archive of anecdotes did “not simply alter opinions” but created a “situation in which the telling of individual experiences makes possible a reframing of one’s understanding of the world” (Dubriwny 396)—a reframing of individually-felt guilt, fear, and visible difference into self-acceptance and adherence to middle-class conventions of dress, behavior, education, and occupation. Because this reframing encouraged conformance to social mores rather than critique, it does diverge from feminist liberation consciousness raising in this sense. However, by comparing their experiences to the linkages of DOB women’s experience in the archive, readers came to view their personal trauma not as a result of individual pathology but rather the result of a world hostile to same-sex relations. They then leveraged their resulting self-acceptance to seek community with other lesbians.

As Dubriwny explains, consciousness raising requires both the “validation of experience by others” but also the “necessity of the telling of their own experiences by individuals” (401). The Lesbian/Woman archive drew together the experiences of many women to collectivize a lesbian identity in which these isolated readers could see themselves, validating their experiences and compelling them to contribute accounts of

those experiences to Martin and Lyon's archival categories. As one reader, Pamela from Albion, WA, explained, "I'm reading your book for the second time and, *as a result, I have to write*" (emphasis mine). The archive encouraged the sharing of private disclosures across the miles and the years, which many readers saw as less dangerous than sharing with unsympathetic friends and family. This was especially true for readers in small towns or cities without flourishing feminist and gay liberation activism, lesbian bars, or the ability or desire to locate them—readers who frequently lament in their letters that they have "no one else to talk to" and no other way to find information about themselves as lesbians. Martin and Lyon collected experience from a host of women with same-sex desire until a collective identity was palpable enough to dispel the common sense of isolation and individual pathology, thereby inviting readers to contribute their own anecdotes to the archive.

## **2.5 FORGING COMMUNITY FROM ANECDOTES OF FAILED RESEARCH AND UNREQUITED LOVE**

When juxtaposed with readers' autobiographical responses, Lesbian/Woman's collections of anecdotes illustrate the archive's heuristic potential to inspire invention and transformation in its readers. Though Lesbian/Woman contains a breadth of categories and hundreds of anecdotes, most readers responded directly in their letters to two particular collections of anecdotes on which I focus here: the failure to find information

about lesbians in conventional places and experiences of unrequited love and romantic monogamy.

### **2.5.1 Failed Research as an Inventional and Communal Resource**

In Lesbian/Woman, the experience of searching for information and failing to find it actually became a *resource* for identification with other lesbians, supporting Cvetkovich's contention that "trauma can be a foundation for creating counterpublic spheres rather than evacuating them" (Archive of Feeling 15). Through compilations of anecdotes, Martin and Lyon attempted to transform the negative affect of failed research by suggesting that the experience can actually build community. The authors curated the anecdotes of "Joyce and Marty" who "walked into the DOB national office looking for information about Lesbianism" after being expelled from the military for rumored lesbianism (202). The women sought out the DOB because they did not know what lesbianism was, could not find information in conventional places, and wanted to know if they were indeed what the military accused. The brief anecdote about Joyce and Marty is then followed by an equally brief anecdote of another woman's experience: "Maggie's," who was grateful for the Navy for edifying her about her sexuality. The short paragraph devoted to Maggie describes her appearance—she was a "tall, lanky, and masculine appearing woman"—and uses reconstructed dialogue to recreate the experience. Previously unaware of her sexual preferences, Maggie was questioned by navy officials and called a "butch." She remembered to Martin and Lyon: "I couldn't figure out what he was talking about, and he didn't believe me, so he wouldn't tell me.' She grinned. 'After I got out, I found out though.'" (202). The

brief account of Maggie's military experience comprises an anecdote because it represents an encapsulated moment, incorporates reconstructed dialogue to emphasize the oral transmission of such "historical" evidence, and exists in a moment in time, later recollected and shared with Martin and Lyon, who still later relay the experience second-hand.

The anecdotes make collective what might have been an individual trauma. An anecdote like Maggie's expresses one woman's simple, humorous memory of her failure to find information about lesbianism but, because her story is archived with Joyce and Marty's, who also needed the DOB to explain what lesbianism was to better understand their expulsion, Maggie's experience is collectivized, shown to be experienced by *women* accused and expelled from employment without explanation. Maggie's anecdote contradicted dominant accounts that would call her maladapted (she "grins," after all, in memory of military pressure) and her anecdote, with Joyce and Marty's, illustrated to readers that the military's strict prohibition on homosexuality—and their refusal to share information about the meaning of their accusations—could backfire by informing women with same-sex desire that there were others like them to whom categories such as "butch" applied.

Maggie's anecdote is immediately followed, with minimal transition, by "Tillie," "Georgie," and "Jackie's" similar but slightly different experiences of sexual self-understanding and the discovery of lesbian community as a result of the military's denigration and expulsion. For example, Georgie and Tillie were discharged from the military for "association," even though they did not actually have a relationship. After Tillie was discharged, her family sent her away out of shame. The 20-year-old went to the city where Georgie lived and they turned to each other for support and love (203). Martin and

Lyon imply that, rather than merely exposing it, the military's expulsion actually *drove* her to a same-sex relationship.

Like Starn and Gossman's characterization of anecdotes as unruly and subversive bits of history, these anecdotes functioned in the Lesbian/Woman archive as a counter to perceptions of lesbians as necessarily melancholic and isolated. The women's anecdotes showed them to collectivize in response to accusations—to seek information from others who may be like them (the DOB) and, in so doing, to learn that their desire had a name and potentially an identity. Because Martin and Lyon rarely intervened with transitions or explanations between the anecdotes, lesbian readers addressed by the book were prompted more through induction than deduction, assembling the mass of anecdotes as they read. Often without direct instruction on how to make use of these anecdotes, readers drew their own connections between anecdotes and perhaps mentally added their own to the category.

Several dozen readers wrote letters echoing the failure to find information and adding their anecdotes to the category containing Del, Joyce, Marty, Maggie, Tillie, and Georgie's experiences. One woman wrote, "just as you all...searched the literature for information, I too searched articles and books on psychology, fiction, etc. for more knowledge about myself. What I read I partly accepted as gospel because of the aura surrounding psychology, but I knew most of us didn't fit its descriptions and analyses." Carol from Plentywood, MT wrote requesting "any material, books, [and] newsletters" because "there isn't too much material on lesbians in this town!" Still another writer, Mary from Cleveland, TN, wrote that she, "like Del, trundled off to the library. Would you believe that in my county of 51,000 persons, we have one small library...and that in that library

there is *one* reference to lesbianism and it consists of one chapter in a heavy tome on Freud.” As the military women did in their archived anecdotes, the letter writers came to Martin and Lyon to share their confusion about lesbianism and to seek information.

Because Martin and Lyon clustered anecdotes of similar experiences of failed research, each one functioned as a “kernel story” begun by Martin and Lyon, effecting the connections between experiences necessary for consciousness raising. Each anecdote “supports” the other experiences in the archival category, helping to “achieve the tone of harmony in the group”; in response, readers added their anecdotes to “fit the topic under discussion” (Kalcik 8). By archiving multiple women’s experiences of failed research, including Martin’s own, Lesbian/Woman inspired readers to contribute their own experience to the category, “reshaping the meaning of that individual experience” (Dubriwny 398) from a lonely ignorance to a *shared* indignation.

### **2.5.2 Isolation, Rejection, and Unrequited Love as a Collective Problem**

This shared indignation at the dearth of information about lesbianism provided Lesbian/Woman with an ethos for the other categories of experience archived in the book. Positioned as a response to silences and biases in traditional archives and libraries, the experiences collected in the book were meant to fill the void of information and community in the library and, for women without access or interest in lesbian bars. The categories under which Martin and Lyon assembled anecdotes reflect the archive’s function as counter-evidence to pathological accounts in psychological texts. For instance, in the

chapter entitled “Lifestyles,” Martin and Lyon assembled anecdotes from more than 90 women who “live quietly unassuming lives and expect fidelity from their partners” (112). This chapter collected the experiences of lesbians that contradicted psychiatric accounts of excessive sexuality. Introducing the collection of anecdotes, Martin and Lyon described the irony, and isolating force, of this accusation:

This stereotype [of excessive sexuality] often turns a quiet life into one of quiet desperation and brings about a turning away from sex and/or involvement with other Lesbians simply because such noninvolvement seems the only “safe” way to survive in a hostile society. It is ironic (but consistent with America’s confused view of sex) that a large number of people whom society would castigate for sexual variation, i.e. Lesbians, actually don’t engage in sex at all, or do so very rarely. We have known a number of women who fit this category: women who have identified themselves as Lesbian, who suffer through all the fears that they may be found out, that they may lose their job, that they may face rejection from friends and family, and yet have never found either the woman or the nerve to change their status from one of being to one of doing. (94)

Citing the experiences of the many women they have “known,” Martin and Lyon simultaneously refuted accusations of excessive sexuality as a product of “America’s confused view of sex” and circumscribed lesbianism within mainstream expectations for feminine chastity and modesty. They attributed the pervasive sense of isolation and individual pathology felt by women with same-sex desire to the dispersing effects of accusations of promiscuity.

To combat this dispersion, Martin and Lyon archived the anecdotes a dozen middle-class women who dreamed of monogamous love with another woman but instead isolated themselves out of fear. “Ann” was a schoolteacher who lived a “self sufficient but lonely life, untouched by human hands” because she “built a shield around herself” (95). “Elsie,” a highly ranked social worker, feared losing her job and maintained a “nonsexual involvement with a circle of friends,” while “Charlotte” could never share her feelings with her unrequited love, “Gert,” out of fear of rejection. In Dubriwny’s terms, each experience was “unique,” but the “similarities in their stories became visible because each story emerged” after earlier anecdotes (406). The similar but subtly divergent anecdotes of “Beulah,” “Zelda,” “Marnay,” “Wanda,” “Sally,” “Merle,” “Jean,” and many others underscore Martin and Lyon’s intention with the archival category: to express that “by and large, most Lesbians opt for one-to-one, long-term relationships as an ideal” (97). Even when Martin and Lyon included an anecdote suggesting promiscuity, they condemned it in their retelling of the experience. “Kate,” for instance, was “much too bold and flirts with danger constantly,” almost losing her office job after being reported to her supervisor for making passes at her colleagues (96). For Martin and Lyon, Kate was another example of a “loner,” denied lasting love because of fear.

In return, letter writers almost universally responded to the middle-class values of long-term romance and fidelity, adding to the archive of experience their own anecdotes of self-isolation, fear of rejection, and dreams of love. Bonnie from Columbia, MO, for instance, described her satisfaction with her “good job as a producer-director of instructional media, television, and film” but feared she will never meet a life partner. She offered an anecdote of her recent rejection by a woman who had “developed a very cold hard view of human



relationships. She had been rejected by someone else she had loved and had been in other bizarre relationships.” Bonnie shared her own fears of becoming like her lost love, turned to “stone for the sake of self-preservation.” She compared Lesbian/Woman to Sappho was a Right On Woman, which was published in the same year of 1972, finding Martin and Lyon’s book superior because it didn’t “try to tell me *how* to be gay” by requiring her to flout monogamy. She did not want “anyone telling me a monogamous relationship is inherently bad anymore than I want anyone to tell me I’m sick because I’m a Lesbian.” Bonnie found Martin and Lyon’s book “less judgmental and dogmatic” because first, her own aspirations for lasting love were already mirrored in experiences of the women in its archive and second, because the clustering of anecdotes did not tell her how to be a lesbian as much as it shared the experiences of a number of lesbian women in whom she could see herself.

Like Bonnie, Deborah from St. Catherine, ON described how her relationship was troubled by fear and isolation. She fell in love with her roommate, Wanda, but the “guilt and fear of discovery instilled by society” overtook her. She did not “fit in” with the gay men and lesbians she met in a rare bar experience and was not sure she had the “strength of character necessary to live my life as these people [in the bar] seemed to be doing.” As a result of feelings of guilt and fear, her relationship with Wanda began to strain and they “stopped going out socially for fear that people might think we were ‘those type’ of women,” likely referring to bar-going women of lower class and masculine dress. Nearly every letter Martin and Lyon received shared an experience with unrequited love or rejection and the desire for long-term monogamy.

The isolating effects of these painful experiences frequently resulted in intense depression and self-loathing. After a breakup, Kathy from Duquesne, PA tried to deny “the

existence of my lesbianism and also the existence of myself,” resulting in “bouts with bottles and with pills” to put herself in “another world.” Each woman, like Sherron from Ashland, KY, described “frustration and confusion,” “self-hatred and despair.” Sometimes, these painful experiences led to alcohol and drugs. Carol from Plentywood, MT thought they would

meet my every need of feeling good about myself but then [drugs and alcohol] too destroyed the very little self-worth I managed to have left after living a life continually surrounded by the armed guards of guilt, shame, fear, resentment, isolation and loneliness. Not only did I think of myself as a piece of trash, a social outcast, because I was a lesbian, but I was also drinking way too much and doing any kind of drug I could get my hands on.

These women were compelled to share intimate anecdotes of pain with Martin and Lyon because the letter writers could already see themselves in Martin and Lyon’s archive. Mary from Cleveland, TN had struggled with accepting her sexuality for eight years until, “there in the pages of your book, in black and white, I saw myself.” Mary’s experiences of unrequited love and longing were “validated,” in Dubriwny’s terms, as *lesbian* experience by Lesbian/Woman and by her own articulation in response. The painful individual experiences took on new meaning as a collective problem faced by lesbians as a result of dispersing discourses of guilt, fear, and isolation; rather than an individual pathology, readers began to see their now collective isolation as a result of erroneous but pervasive social perceptions of lesbianism.

### **2.5.3 Forging Self-acceptance and Middle-class Collectivity across Racial, National, and Regional Lines**

Lesbian/Woman did not only archive experiences of pain, isolation, and fear in the aspirations for monogamous love. Following the assemblage of anecdotes that suggest a collectivity of isolated women, Martin and Lyon countered with even more anecdotes of women who had managed to find lasting love and only wish to sanctify it with marriage, providing evidence that relationships were possible for lesbians who accepted themselves and reached out to others like them. “Joyce” and “Madeline” were joined in a “celebration of commitment” at an Episcopal church. Martin and Lyon recalled that “Joyce was jubilant when she broke the news to us. This tall, pensive, sensitive young brunette had been through years of struggle with her parents, her church, and her psychiatrist. Finally she had received the blessings of all three to be herself” (99). Martin and Lyon’s retelling of Joyce and Madeline’s story is replete with the language of experience: it represents the emotions of Joyce and Madeline (their eyes “brimming with joyful tears”) and the solemn sanctity of their voices (“I give you this ring as a token of our covenant, vowing to live in close friendship...to love you even as I love myself. May God be between me and thee forever.”) Though Joyce emerges as a unique individual, she is also representative of conventional marriage more generally, the kind of marriage with vows that pledge love, faithfulness, and support under God. This identification with mainstream heterosexual women—who were not accused of excessive sexuality—was meant to emphasize the injustice committed against lesbian women and to diminish negative associations with promiscuity, prostitution, alcoholism, and other social transgressions attached to female homosexuality.

Joyce and Madeline's anecdote is followed by a string of other couples—"Neva" and "Judith," "Marjorie" and "Tracy"—who had found enduring love, failing only to celebrate it with state-sanctioned marriage.

The archived experiences suggest that middle-class values reigned supreme as the cohering factor, allowing for the inclusion of women of color and international women's experience as long as their anecdotes reflected the DOB's core values, like monogamous love. Interspersed among the many anecdotes of apparently white, monogamous lesbian couples, Martin and Lyon curated the anecdote of "Manonia" and "Donna," a black lesbian couple whose love and courage drove them to attempt to obtain a marriage license, and an anecdote of "Monty" and "Darlene," a black couple who struggled to stay together after Monty was "forced...by her married brothers and sisters" to move home and care for her ill mother because her own relationship was not as valid to her siblings as their own (101-05). While the DOB sometimes dissuaded gender transgressive or bar-going lesbians from joining the organization in an effort to shape feminine identification—which historian Martin Meeker notes is "almost surely evidence of brewing class antagonism in the lesbian world"—women of color were more readily accepted as long as they adhered to the collective aspiration for middle-class status and gender conventions (101). Indeed, black lesbians occasionally held leadership positions in the DOB—Cleo Glenn Bonner, for example, was a circulation manager for The Ladder and elected national president in 1964 (Meeker 102). However, the acceptance of black lesbians as members and leaders and the inclusion of their anecdotes in the Lesbian/Woman archive did not entail, as Meeker asserts, an "active explor[ation] of the intersections of race and sexuality" nor a "clear

understanding of how lesbianism might be experienced differently by women of color even if class status was shared" (102).<sup>28</sup>

The inclusion of anecdotes from international women also focused more on similarity than difference, emphasizing the shared desire for monogamous love. But, more than with respect to race, anecdotes of international women's experience did acknowledge the unique conditions for female homosexuality in different national contexts. "Ger," for example, a lesbian from Indonesia, "wanted love" with another woman but felt "coerced" into heterosexual marriage due to customarily strict expectations and the comparatively more pointed humiliation and banishment resulting from transgression. She married a man for three short months before "revolting against captivity and breaking free" (128). Ger, like in so many anecdotes of American women in the archive, remembered feeling isolated, as if she were the only woman with feelings for other women. But ultimately, Martin and Lyon concluded that, "though customs and language may differ from country to country, Lesbians are pretty much the same around the world"; Ger wanted love and found it in "Hetty," a woman with "sharp features and cat-green eyes" (129). Ger's anecdote reinforced the archive's implication that lesbians across the world share the same desires for commitment and suffer similar stigma, secrecy, and isolation despite differences in race or nationality, contributing to the sense that lesbian experience is *collective* across (some) differences.

The juxtaposition of failures to achieve monogamous love with examples of the many women of various races and nationalities who had overcome these failures had an apparent transformative effect for the reader-writers. The letters frequently followed a rough pattern, beginning with the articulation of experiences of isolation, depression, and

unrequited, lost, or struggling love that the letter writers saw mirrored in the archive, and closing with claims to “self-acceptance” based on the evidence provided in the archive of middle-class aspiring women who have managed to find and keep life partners. As Dubriwny explains, “collective rhetoric takes place through the validation of experiences,” and, here, the validation of the experiences to which these relatively diverse women aspired—lasting love. This validation is “one way oppressed groups rename—and hence create new meaning from—their experiences” (Dubriwny 396). The letter writers’ experiences of loss and their dreams of love were validated in the archive’s anecdotes, helping them to rename their experiences from an individual pathology to a collective struggle and to generate new meaning—“self acceptance”—from them.

The generation of self-acceptance from this renaming allowed even the drug and alcohol addicted letter writers to see themselves in the archive. Carol from Plentywood, for instance, wrote that she was recovering from her addictions and that “just admitting and accepting my disease of alcoholism and chemical dependency gave me the same sense of relief and freedom that I felt when I admitted to myself and others that I was a lesbian.” She proclaimed that she was a “grateful alcoholic, drug addict, woman, and lesbian” and that “through these painful experiences, I have found and continue to find the greatest blessing...me...Carol, a human being.” Kathy from Duquesne, PA admitted that she had known for many years what her “sexual preferences” were but could “never fully accept them even though I have had several lesbian relationships”; after reading Lesbian/Woman, she realized she was living in denial: “I don’t know what title I had for loving women[...]but I can now say “lesbian” and like the word, how it sounds and what it means.”

These letter writers effected this transformation in the composition of experience, and then leveraged their transformed sense of self-acceptance and lesbian identity to forge new contacts with other lesbians. In each case, after sharing their experiences of depression and isolation and their transformation to self-acceptance, the letter writers made moves toward creating community, toward replicating in person the sense of collectivity they saw in the archive. The archive of anecdotes in Lesbian/Woman inspired the letter writers to share their experiences with Martin and Lyon and, when possible, more local community. Bonnie, for example, believed that it was “reading...about all the woman who have contacted” Martin and Lyon that encouraged her to “try as well to somehow reach across the void to my sisters. I want to know if I am unique in discovering the growing fear of women in relationships to get involved and risk part of themselves.” The letters suggest that the archive helped create community by demonstrating the affirmation of lesbian experience between participants, a community readers now wanted to extend to physically and temporally local lesbians. Readers closed their letters with promises to change introverted behavior and often sought help from Martin and Lyon in locating lesbians “like them” in their region, that is, lesbians with little interest in or access to the bar scene. Eileen from Ashland, KY wanted “desperately to get in touch with some organization near enough for me to talk to people, to meet people. I don’t think I’m the kind of person who’d feel comfortable going to bars.” Marcy pleaded for “any contacts you can give me. I’m living in a small town in Minnesota and, believe me, there isn’t much to do. There is a small gay bar in Sioux Falls, SD, but the chance of meeting other women is small.” Several letter writers expressed a willingness to travel more than 100 miles to meet other lesbians if Martin and Lyon could only provide them with references.

## 2.6 THE LIMITS OF THE LESBIAN/WOMAN ARCHIVE

The anecdotal archive of Lesbian/Woman resonated with middle-class women letter writers, who frequently mention in passing undergraduate and graduate degrees, and careers such as nursing, teaching, television production, and higher education. Their articulated experiences reveal women who disidentified with the visible gender, sexual, and class transgressions of the bar scene and felt the consequent isolation of their *invisible* same-sex desire. While this audience is clearly self-selecting—seeking out Lesbian/Woman and voluntarily composing letters—it is also clear that the archivists crafted their archive to reach this contingent of women with same-sex desire, invoking their audience through the curation of anecdotes and categories. Though anecdotes, as I have argued, have the potential to disrupt dominant historical narratives, the archivization of Lesbian/Woman suggests that collections of the form might *also* create a new grand narrative, one that challenges heteronormative narratives but, in doing so, instantiates a homonormative history in its place. Just as Martin and Lyon illustrate the damage caused by heteronormative historical narratives of pathology and stigma, one reader's letter suggests the damage caused by homonormative narratives of social conformance. This reader's difference stands out and exposes the limits of Lesbian/Woman's ability to inspire archival consciousness raising in a more diverse group of lesbian readers.

Virginia, a prison counselor from Jonesboro, AR, initially praised the book as the “most honest book on gay women” she had read but immediately transitioned into the intense confusion the archive of lesbian experience had caused, not calmed, in her. Unlike the experiences of isolation and unrequited or lost love felt by the other letter writers,



Virginia's lesbian experience was from the beginning social and, in her mind, socialized: "since I came out in the bars [in the bigger city where she went to university], my gay orientation is in that realm of flaunting homosexuality with the devil may care attitude [*sic*]." She was a self-described "butch—in the fullest sense of the word" and recounted in her letter her experience transitioning into masculine dress and manner in emulation of the "only models" she "had in the bars." Virginia shared in detail the permanence of this socialization: her self-identification as a man, her discomfort in women's clothes and mannerisms, her hatred of her female body. Her experience, in other words, did not add to the archive Martin and Lyon had composed but directly challenged it; she was aware that her anecdotes would have no place among those she read. As she astutely explained to Martin and Lyon, "you said in your book that the real purpose of the DOB is to help lesbians adjust to life as *women*—well, I do not even think of myself as a woman anymore." But rather than dismissing the archive as containing the experiences of lesbians who identify differently than her, Virginia struggled to find ways to fit in its categories.

Virginia *wanted* to see herself in Lesbian/Woman's archive because she did identify with some of its middle-class aspirations for employment and romance. She believed that if she wanted to "live in this straight society and have a good life" and "to work at the profession I was trained for...without the hell I'd have to face if the world knew I was a lesbian," then "I have to *act* the part of a single, feminine woman." Her "wife," Terry, also objected to her butch dress and behavior because Virginia internalized the roles and projected them on their marriage: "I've always played the role of the man and the husband...to the full degree and I've expected her to fulfill my needs as a wife to the full degree." Terry, like the women in the archive, did not have preconceptions about gendered

roles in lesbian marriage, but Virginia laments several times that she knows no other way to relate to her partner:

I just don't understand how two lesbians can live together in a marriage without butch/femme roles. Isn't one of you more aggressive or dominant than the other? Is this not butch? Doesn't one of you do things wives do and one of you do things husbands do?...I know my butch behavior is learned, but I don't know how to unlearn it and learn to think of myself as a woman.

Rather than decide that Terry and the archive were incompatible with her sense of self and relationships, Virginia became deeply depressed and confused by the incongruity between what she was and what she wanted. She and Martin and Lyon exchanged a few more letters, but Virginia seemed little consoled in the end.

Ultimately, for Virginia and perhaps others like her, Lesbian/Woman did not effect the rhetorical process of consciousness raising because her experience was not validated by the archive. Her own experiences were in fact *invalidated* by the archive even as it cohered with her aspirations for employment and monogamy, and so she could not transform the experiences into a collective struggle and, finally, self-acceptance. She was left even more isolated than when she began because, like the women in the archive, she (no longer) related to “bar people” and felt they had “very little in common” despite her previous patronage of bars. And, after reading the archive of experience in Lesbian/Woman, she now felt that her butch identity—previously a social orientation in bars—was the individual pathology, not her same-sex desire. The archive (and Terry) had succeeded in dissuading her from bars and gender transgression but had left her without the resources to embody femininity nor find new community.

Virginia's location in Arkansas might have limited the range of options she could imagine or realize and may have made it more difficult for her to resist her sense that the archive contained the experiences she should have and the woman she should be. Women in cities like San Francisco, where gender transgression and sex roles were more accepted, may have found it easier to find queer community. For example, in contrast to Virginia, San Francisco bar owner Rikki Streicher was able to maintain a stronger resistance to the DOB:

I remember Phyllis [Lyon] and Del [Martin] marching up...and Del said... 'Why don't you join this organization, Rikki? You know there's no reason for you not to—' and I said, 'because we have nothing in common.' And she said, 'What do you mean we have nothing in common?' I said, 'I have nothing in common with those women. You know I'm over here [in the bars]...my whole attitude and approach to life is different from theirs. I'm not beating the same drum. (qtd. in Boyd 161)

Unlike Virginia, Streicher was securely situated in an urban community of visible class and gender difference; unlike Virginia, her employment—the success of her bar—depended on this community and her obvious membership in it.

Somewhat paradoxically, Streicher's anecdote reveals and reinforces the *rhetorical* construction of Lesbian/Woman's archive of anecdotes. Despite Streicher's assessment of difference and distance from Martin, Lyon, and the DOB, the dialogue she recalls actually reveals a familiarity between her and Martin and Lyon that exposes their social interaction in reality. Indeed, in their own oral history interview with Boyd, Lyon admits that they frequented lesbian bars regularly—far more than their published accounts like Lesbian/Woman would indicate. According to Boyd, the DOB “depended upon bar life—the

central artery for queer life—for their activities” and met many of their friends there (160). Martin and Lyon’s silence about this aspect of DOB life in the Lesbian/Woman archive was a strategic omission, an attempt to distance their identity textually from their actual participation in the bar scene. They wanted to be remembered as private, middle-class, socially acquiescent citizens and they wanted this activism to continue to reach new lesbian audiences through the rhetorical effects of the published archive. Martin and Lyon’s choice not to include anecdotes from bars in the archive was a rhetorical strategy against the public conceptions of lesbians that emerged in part from the bar culture’s predilections to gender transgression, late hours, alcohol, and casual affairs. Inadvertently, however, this strategy worked against lesbians like Virginia, who identified with some aspects of bar culture and some aspects of the DOB.

## 2.7 CONCLUSION

Martin and Lyon were so confident that their strategy of clustering anecdotes in Lesbian/Woman might have the collectivizing effects of consciousness raising that they stalwartly defended their rhetorical choices to their first press, McCalls. Their editor, Susan Stanwood, criticized the authors’ “superficial” approach to representing experience, calling the anecdotes “much-too-brief thumbnail examples of what happened to so-and-so.” These “sketches,” Stanwood contended, were “too slight to give the reader a sense of the individual under discussion,” and so she recommended that the authors limit their examples to the lives of ten or so individuals with more detail about each instead of

glossing several hundred individuals—a “dollop of Jane here and Susie there is meaningless,” she quipped.

But Martin and Lyon refused to comply, to the point that their McCalls contract was terminated and they sought another press in San Francisco’s Glide Publications.<sup>29</sup> They may have refused McCall’s demands because the task of expanding some anecdotes and omitting others would turn the anecdotes into case studies of individuals, ceasing to be anecdotes at all and reducing the number of “participants” in the collective rhetorical project of the archive. In contrast to Stanwood’s prediction that brief anecdotes would lack meaning for readers, the letter writers suggest that it was as much the sheer volume of experience packed into the Lesbian/Woman archive as the content of the experiences that evinced the sense of community across time and place: filling the historical void, helping readers transform their feelings of guilt, fear, and isolation into self-acceptance, and encouraging them to find more local community with other lesbians. Indeed, transforming anecdotes into case studies, a genre with more detail and a more traditional form of proof, might have attenuated the queer archival investment in the ephemeral, and so Martin and Lyon sought another publisher.<sup>30</sup>

But, despite the volume of experiences it contains, Lesbian/Woman still risked exclusion and confusion for gender transgressive or otherwise nonconformist women. Martin and Lyon’s strategic categories provided little room for lesbians like Virginia, the prison counselor from Jonesboro, Arkansas, whose experiences were not validated but instead contradicted by those in the archive. Yet in spite of the conservative categories and experiences housed in Lesbian/Woman, or more precisely because of them, the archive managed to reach a large number of women geographically distant from the lesbian, gay,

and feminist activism flourishing at the time of its publication in 1972.

The different rhetorical effects of Lesbian/Woman for Virginia versus the other letter writers illustrate how even queer archives with expansive and ephemeral notions of evidence risk exclusivity because of the very rhetoricity of archives. All archives are rhetorical, as I have maintained, because archivists must make decisions about what to include and how inclusions are classified. Queer archives too must make decisions about what counts as historical evidence and even who counts as lesbian: is same-sex desire enough? Or must sexual contact be proved? What constitutes such historical proof? Where does homonormativity belong in queer history?<sup>31</sup> Indeed, archives' reliance on classification to select and organize materials may challenge the very notion of queerness, which orients against the circumscription of individuals into categories, even consolidations of non-heterosexual identity. As Mathias Danbolt maintains, "a queer archive may...almost seem like a contradiction in terms, because if we understand identity to be essential for an archival order, the strength of queer theory is the continual pushing and troubling of such categories and definitions" (34). A queer archive is always at risk of collapsing under the force of one of its terms.

These cautions do not diminish the transformative effects for the readers of Lesbian/Woman showcased in this essay. These women's understanding of themselves and their community was deeply changed by the archive's curation of experiences. But the questions I pose do point to the ways queer archives in particular require more "sustained critical-rhetorical reflection," as Morris charges of archives more generally ("Archival Turn" 113). We must attend more closely to how the rhetoricity of archives constrains or constructs queerness as these archives endeavor to fill the historical void for queer

subjects because, as I have shown, queer archives can provide significant inventional resources both for self-understanding and community building *and* identificatory confusion and solitude. In the next chapter, I take up this project in a case study of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, a material archive in New York City.

### **3.0 THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES: ARCHIVING DIFFERENTLY THROUGH SUBVERSIVE CLASSIFICATION**

If we ask decorous questions of history, we will get a genteel history. If we assume that because sex was a secret it did not exist, we will get a sexless history. If we assume that in periods of oppression, lesbians lost their autonomy and acted as victims only, we destroy not only history but lives....They told us that we should hate ourselves and sometimes we did but we were also angry, resilient, and creative. We were part of a community that took care of itself. And most of all we were lesbian women, revolutionizing each of these terms. We create history as much as we discover it. What we call history becomes history and since this is a naming time, we must be on guard against our own class prejudices and discomforts.

–Joan Nestle, LHA founder

Founded in 1974, the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) set out to “create history” on their own terms: to produce and preserve accounts of collective lesbian pasts that were being forgotten, elided, or actively repressed in public discourse, official histories, libraries, and archives. LHA, located in Brooklyn, NY, is the focus of this chapter because it is an explicitly lesbian, historical-activist organization—recognized as the largest and most well-known



lesbian archive in the world. LHA's work is expressly historical activist because what they set out to change was the historical narratives that erased, criminalized, moralized, or pathologized lesbians in the past to justify present misconceptions about lesbians. The Archive's primary historical activist method is to challenge and augment the available sources—the archives and libraries—from which these histories are written by *archiving differently* than official archives: through different procedures for access, acquisition, and arrangement of materials.

As several scholars have recently contended, the construction of an archive is a distinctly rhetorical project. In 2006, Barbara Biesecker issued a call to feminist historiographers to rhetorically examine the "*historicity* of the archive" (emphasis in original, 130). For Biesecker, the implications of feminist historiography's "deconstruction of the material presence of the past" is that we can no longer view the archive as an unmediated conduit to the past. Following the work of Jacques Derrida and Dominick LaCapra, she concludes that archives "anchor nothing absolutely": history is not "in the archive, not in any archive, not even in all the archives added together"; yet, while we may not find unmediated history in the archives, we will find rhetoric (127). The archive is a site that *works* to authorize itself as the objective stuff of history and, to do so, conceals its rhetorical construction, making it especially exigent for rhetorical analysis: "what the archive cannot authenticate absolutely but can (be made to authorize nonetheless)" is an "invitation to write rhetorical histories of archives" (130).

Here, I accept Biesecker's invitation but, more precisely, I examine the Lesbian Herstory Archives' praxis as a rhetoric of history by attending to how the organization has "composed," broadly speaking, a version of lesbian history through its archival practices. I

argue that the primary rhetorical device employed to “compose” the archive is classification. As Wendy Sharer asserts,

We cannot afford to ignore the various material processes—acquisition, appraisal, collection management, description, indexing, preservation, oxidation, and deaccession—that affect the corpus of historical records on which we may be able to construct diverse and subversive narratives to challenge previous exclusionary accounts of rhetoric. (“Disintegrating Bodies” 124)

Each of these material processes that Sharer lists can be considered a level of classification, requiring decisions about the appraisal of materials worthy of selection and preservation in the archive; the category of individuals allowed to access the materials; and the schema of classification employed to organize the materials inside the archive. To these levels of classification, we might add the level of the archivist—which individuals may make decisions about how the materials are selected, accessed, and organized—and accordance—who may financially support the archive and thereby maintain some sense of ownership of its contents. These levels of classification—archivist, accordance of funding, acquisitions, access, and arrangement—circumscribe the archive’s decision makers, its visitors, and these visitors’ experience “reading” the mass of materials. Consequently, they will become the categories through which I analyze the rhetoricity of the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

Outside the archive, classification has been a fundamental rhetorical *topos* from rhetoric’s beginnings, a strategy to break down and discern the parts of a claim. As far back as Plato, Socrates makes the ability to divide and classify central in Phaedrus, asserting that

“he who is to develop an art of rhetoric must first make a methodical division and acquire a clear impression of each class” (263b). Much more than Plato, Aristotle relies on the practice of classification, or *divisio*, to divide and name the parts of his topics from rhetoric to poetics to science. This classical concern for the deep importance of classification continues through contemporary rhetorical theory—through Kenneth Burke, for instance, who brought *divisio* into conversation with identification, which were for him “clearly apparent in any system of classification” (Grammar 417). For Burke, “Identification is armed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division” (Rhetoric 22). To classify, in other words, is to simultaneously compare and distinguish elements in a whole.

While classification might traditionally have been understood as a strategy employed to discern and understand a complex issue or as the motivation for identification, I set out to demonstrate how classification is itself persuasive. The nature of classification as an argument becomes clear in queer history. In contrast to the celebration of *divisio* by Plato’s Socrates, who described himself as “a lover of these processes of division and bringing together,” classification has a more insidious history for queer people. In The History of Sexuality Vol. 1, Foucault contends that the late nineteenth century marked a pivotal moment in the production of homosexuality as a category constituted by a distinct group of people in Western society. The category of homosexuality was produced through scientific classification (“*scientia sexualis*”) in order to regulate and “treat” as illness what had previously been considered discrete acts of transgression. The classification of homosexuality as an enduring disease made an argument for the nature and treatment of queer people. As Foucault suggests, the creation

of a category of homosexuality made possible the notions of sexual identity we have today but also made possible the strategic targeting of practitioners of non-normative sexuality. Because of the new classification as a medically deviant category of individuals, it became possible to create medical and legal apparatuses that functioned to discipline, sequester, and punish non-normative sexuality. Queer studies emerged to combat the danger of classifications of sexual identity: to undermine the seeming stability of identity categories because even non-heterosexual sexuality can become normed through classification with more dominant heterosexual assumptions and institutions.

This understanding of classification as a persuasive strategy with serious consequences for lesbian and gay people is apparent in traditional archival classification schemas. As I'll demonstrate, official or traditional archives and libraries have historically closeted or pathologized queer materials by either omitting them from the collections or classifying them within categories such as disease or sex crimes. LHA emerged to refigure these traditional archival classification schemas. I argue that the collective set out to approach classification differently: to classify the mass of artifacts and records they collected through methods that *refused* to definitively classify what counts as "lesbian," as evidence, as worthy of preservation. In *An Archive of Feeling* in 2005, Ann Cvetkovich asked how lesbian archives, broadly conceived, can defy "institutionalized or stable forms of identity" (15). Anticipating this question fifteen years prior, Joan Nestle answered that the Lesbian Herstory Archives set out to "continually reconstruct the words 'woman,' 'lesbian,' and 'gender' so that they reflect the complex creations which we call our lives"—to perpetually make and un-make lesbian identity through their archival practices ("Will to Remember" 233).

In this chapter, I examine the procedures of classification in the Lesbian Herstory Archives in contrast to classification in traditional archives to determine how LHA keeps the definition of “lesbian” radically open while simultaneously maintaining a fierce lesbian separatism in their archival practices. First, to distinguish LHA’s alternative grassroots archival practices, I briefly explain how scholars characterize traditional archives as a source of power and rule for state and official institutions, and I examine precisely how official archives and libraries have wielded this power against queer subjects through systems of classification. I then closely analyze the Lesbian Herstory Archives’ quite different procedures for classification as rhetorical praxis, arguing that their approach to classifying 1) archivists, 2) accordance, 3) access, 4) acquisitions, and 5) arrangement of materials subverts the silences and biases in the classification of queer materials in traditional archives.

### **3.1 THE ARCHIVE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF POWER**

Before I delve into the rhetorical particularities of LHA’s queer archival practices, I want to briefly elaborate on how archives have become an object of scholarly concern—how the archive has shifted from a “site of knowledge retrieval”—an authorized source of information about an external object of inquiry—to a site of “knowledge production”—the archive itself becoming the object of inquiry (Stoler 84). I do so to make clear the stakes of the rhetoricity of the archive, the power that is wielded and suffered through its practices, and to contextualize the contrast of the unconventional practices of LHA.

The shift from the archive as a source for the study of something else to an object of study in itself raises new questions and concerns about the production of history: which material fragments of the past are authorized and preserved? What procedures are necessary to make the fragments that are preserved, and the silences or biases that are not, appear to reflect the past as it was? How do the selection and arrangement of materials dictate how and what researchers find? What procedures dictate *who* may access the materials?<sup>32</sup>

As Ann Stoler maintains, the shift in focus to the archive as an object of analysis means a shift in treating the archive as an “epistemological experiment rather than a source”: that is, an examination of the archive for *how* we know what we know about the past, rather than simply *what* we know (83). Archives, in other words, are not merely places where documents naturally assemble due to their inherently preservable worth; they are, as Foucault contends, the “law of what can be said,” that system that “establishes statements as events and things,” that “system of their enunciabilities” (*Archaeology* 145-46). These theorists are describing the power of the archive to produce what it is possible to know, and to authorize a happening as a bounded “event” worthy of remembrance that could otherwise be forgotten. Events and individuals, in other words, can *achieve* the status of a momentous event or important person by virtue of their preservation in an official archive.

Seeing the archive as a rhetorically constructed source of power and knowledge has led to many reconsiderations of official archives, particularly in postcolonial nations.<sup>33</sup> For Achilles Mbembe, a Camaroonian scholar in South Africa, the archive is

fundamentally a matter of discrimination and selection, which, in the end, results in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents and the refusal of that same status to others, thereby judged ‘unarchivable.’

The archive is, therefore, not a piece of data, but a status. (20)

The consequences of the difference between documents with “status” versus the “unarchivable” are immense. As Jacques Derrida boldly contends, “there is no political power without control of the archive. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation” (3). A foundation of authorization, the archive stands behind scholarly research and even democracy and, for Irving Velody, their claims to “ultimate truth, adequacy, and plausibility” (3).<sup>34</sup>

Derrida further contends that the structure of the archive and the technological methods by which documents and objects are archived—what he calls “archivization”—determine what is, and can be, archived, and therefore how history and memory are shaped (Manoff 12).<sup>35</sup> He claims that “archivization produces as much as it records the event” and, because the “event” as it is produced and preserved in official archives serves as a foundation for authority and political power, the manner of its production and preservation by the system of archivization is imperative for any scholar concerned with the historiography of marginalized groups to consider (Derrida 17). However, these scholars’ largely abstract descriptions of power of archivization do not reference the archiving of queer materials and subjects nor how precisely queer subjects are rhetorically affected by the official archive’s power. The next section will demonstrate the rhetorical nature of classification by examining in detail how procedures for classification help

archives grant status and make *arguments* for the character and value of certain (heteronormative) materials over other (queer) materials.

### 3.1.1 Searching for Queer History in the Archive

For researchers from professional historians to queer individuals seeking evidence of their history, the archival process has wielded its power through erasure, rendering invisible—or pathological—documents that would make queer lives and activity “known” and enunciable in Foucault’s sense. The epistemological power of the archive makes it a worthy opponent for lesbian activists who see in their own lives the consequences of official or mainstream histories. As Joan Nestle writes in the epigraphed quotation, “what we call history becomes history,” and before the concerted efforts of queer historical activists, lesbian history was experienced in negative ways, both in the sense of absence and derogation.

In an essay in the 1972 volume Revolting Librarians, Steve Wolf explains precisely how systems of classification shaped the way queer materials were received by users of libraries and archives. While archives are typically not classified using the Library of Congress or Dewey systems with which Wolf was concerned (since archival documents are not, or not always, published books with call numbers), Wolf’s examples illustrate how the classificatory arrangement of materials can make an *argument*. I linger on his interpretation of systems of classification in libraries because archives are essentially libraries: collections of materials selected and organized in ways that circumscribe how each material is found and used.



In his essay, Wolf condemned the classification systems of the Library of Congress (LC) and the Dewey Decimal System for their treatment of gay and lesbian subjects, arguing that these classification systems linked homosexuality with crime, pornography, prostitution, sexual perversion, and psychological disorders. The classification systems achieve these value-laden linkages—in which homosexuality is framed as a deviation or aberration from the norms of heterosexual relations, marriage, and nuclear families—through cross-references. For Wolf, cross-references are inherently evaluative and rhetorical; the linkages make an argument about the nature of non-normative subjects. For example, libraries referred readers from “homosexuality” or “lesbianism” to a general heading, “sexual perversion.” Polly Thistlewaite, an LHA collective member and university librarian, noted that this general heading was eventually changed from “sexual perversion” to “sexual life” in 1972 when the cataloguing committee of the Task Force on Gay Liberation put pressure on the LC (“Lesbian and Gay Past” 10).

But, as Wolf demonstrates, what remained after the Task Force’s reform were the “cf” referral notes under other categories that link back to homosexual subjects. For example, under “RA 1141: Sexual Offenses and Diseases,” was the note “Cf. HQ 71-471, Sex Crimes.” “Homosexuality” (under its new general heading, “Sexual Life”) is classed in HQ 76, falling within the range of the “Sex Crimes” classification numbers. So, the Cf. note implicitly categorizes gayness as a crime *and* a disease, alongside the “related” subjects of Prostitution (HQ 101-440) and Pornography (HQ 450-471). These Cf. notes linking pathologized and criminal subjects back to “Homosexuality (HQ 76)” were present in a variety of categories. Wolf demonstrates similar associations made through cross-references in classifications of Medicine: under “Sexual Deviation” is “Homosexuality,”

under which is the obligatory note, “Cf. HQ 71-79, Sex Crimes.” The Dewey system contained comparable biases, using a “see...” cross-reference procedure. Under “Homosexuality” were the entries “Crime, see Offenses; Sex, see Sexual Disorders” (Wolf 40-41).

For Wolf, the system’s biases expose the LC as an “unthinking prop for an official Sexual Orthodoxy which does not depict the way things are, only the way Orthodoxy would like them to be” (43). The “orthodoxy” of the classification system comes from whom it circumscribes as its assumed *audience*, which is a result of the LC’s roots in Charles Cutter’s 1876 Rules for a Dictionary Catalog. Cutter, who remains a governing source on which terminology will be used to represent a given concept in official libraries, makes the “public”—for him, the “*class of people who use the library*”—the arbiter of the language used in the catalogue. Library archivists are to make decisions about language through their presumptions of this imagined public’s “habitual way of looking at things” (qtd. in Olsen 55). As library science historian Hope Olsen explains, Cutter’s vision of the public is homogenous and singular: a unified community of library users with a shared perspective and social standing. Classifications are thus meant to convenience and anticipate the thinking of this imagined public, but in doing so, this public’s perspective is imposed upon those it excludes. As Olsen puts it, the “authority of the ‘public’ is the authority of an established mainstream perspective,” reinforcing the status quo (56). This example of the Library of Congress as an authoritative, powerful archival system further evidences the rhetorical nature of classification because it makes clear that the system has an imagined audience, and that classifying for this audience dictates organizing principles that reproduce the boundaries of that audience.

Even in more recent years, libraries and archives have had trouble knowing how to classify queer materials and books. Marvin Taylor, a librarian at New York University, contends that

Queer materials often stay in the backlogs long after less “problematic” items have been processed. Perhaps the subject headings are too difficult to assign properly. Queer materials go beyond pointing out the problems of these library procedures—they question the structure of knowledge on which the procedures are based. In response, these materials are the most closeted of all” (qtd. in Thistlewaite 10.)

The structure of knowledge supporting procedures of classification is one of certainty and definition—both, as I will demonstrate, vexed conditions in the history of sexuality. The Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College, for instance, does not assign a lesbian subject heading unless the author’s lesbianism was a central subject matter for her work (such as Adrienne Rich’s writings). Instead of “lesbian,” the Schlesinger Library used the subject headings “friendship” and “single woman” to code lesbian holdings (Thistlewaite). At stake for Schlesinger is the risk of “outing” a writer as a lesbian without her or her family’s consent or certain proof. But, for Thistlewaite, the “traditions of archival cloaking and exclusion are at the root of gay and lesbian invisibility in the historical record” (10). She sees the closeting of lesbians under more socially palatable categories like “friendship” to be a continuation of the longtime veiling of lesbian and gay history, offering lesbians and gays looking for representations in the library yet another “inheritance” of silence.

Thus, the system of arranging materials is intimately involved with which materials are acquired for the collection and how archivists imagine an ideal audience who will

access these materials. These elements—arrangement, acquisition, and access—each constitute levels of classification and will be treated in turn in my analysis of the Lesbian Herstory Archives’ approach to archiving differently.

### **3.1.2 The Epistemology of LHA’s Closets: Radical Openness and Fierce Guardedness**

In Thistlewaite and Taylor’s respective remarks, we can see an association between the classification of queer materials and acts of “closeting.” As I move into discussing the Lesbian Herstory Archive’s rhetorical composition of history through their subversion of traditional archiving practices, I suggest that a way of understanding their classificatory approach is through a framework of the closet in its complex historical sense. The relationship of the closet to the queer archive is at least two-fold. In the first sense, as Thistlewaite and Taylor each describe, “closeting” happens *to* queer materials *by* institutional archives: queer materials have historically been discarded, distributed across the library (un-locatable as queer materials as such), or simply hidden, unclassified, in a back room. In contrast, LHA is deeply committed to being radically open to the queerness that institutional archives cannot classify and thusly closet.

But, in a second sense, an archive itself is literally a closet: to research in the Lesbian Herstory Archives, one must physically enter closets where boxes are stacked 10 high and three deep, and pore through their contents. This tension—between the closeting performed by institutional archives through their classification practices and the closets possessed by the Lesbian Herstory Archives—is significant. The security of LHA’s own closets suggest a strict guardedness against homophobic, institutional, or mainstream-

societal interlopers. The simultaneous rejection of institutional closeting and enactment of their own form of closeting is pervasive across their rhetorical approach to archiving, creating a perpetual tension between radical openness and fierce protectiveness.

The tension between openness and guardedness is essential to the history of the closet, which is, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains, a “fundamental feature of social life” for gays and lesbians (3). As Sedgwick puts it, “closetedness” itself is a “performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence” (3): to be closeted is to *not say*, but to not say is as much a speech act as speech. As Foucault notes in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, “there is no binary division between what one says and what one does not say” (27); to not say is, finally, to say something. Sedgwick calls this aspect of the closet—a silence that speaks—a “telling secret” (67), a seen hiding, an open guardedness. By characterizing the closet as a “telling secret,” Sedgwick begins to get at its perpetual double meaning. The closet was, and is, simultaneously protective and threatening. Historically, for gays and lesbians, the closet could be an “embracing if temporary cocoon” or “a scary prison,” and for homophobic heterosexuals, the closet could be “a place where skeletons are secluded from view so that they do not disturb household harmony, or more sinisterly, a place within the home where lurk creatures who could break out and wreak havoc” (Eskridge 706). The closet, as I will show in the archival classifications of LHA, is imbued with this inescapable ambivalence.

I suggest that the trope of the ambivalent closet serves as a significant context for the design of LHA. The closet, now a classic metaphor for homosexual secrecy, actually emerges from a relatively recent history. Legal historian William Eskridge explains that the metaphor of the closet emerged in the 1950s and only came into common parlance in the

60s, in response to the increased scrutiny and social control of sexuality. While I have described in the previous chapter the constant threat of exposure for lesbians frequenting bars and the consequences of that exposure for their relationships with their families, churches, and employers, Eskridge contends that the threat transcended public places and violated citizens' private residences. As Eskridge describes, the 1950s and 60s saw a radical change in indecency, lewdness, and lewd sexual solicitation laws, which removed the requirement of a "public place" and made engagement in and even suggestion of consensual homosexual acts in a private place a crime.<sup>36</sup> With these legal modifications and many cases of arrests in the home, the sense that the closet—represented by the private home—was being regularly and forcibly thrown ajar was pervasive across gay and lesbian cultures.

At first glance, such changes in the law might seem to have little to do with an archive that began in the early 70s. But I contend that the increasing sense of violated privacy in the home and the increasingly narrow sense of socially acceptable sexuality—the policing and arrest of non-normative dress as well as sexual activity<sup>37</sup>—is a significant context for LHA's rhetorical design. Founders Joan Nestle and Deborah Edel were deeply immersed in the 50s and 60s culture Eskridge illustrates; they were, as Nestle has described, the victims of private and public raids, and of legal repercussions for dressing outside of gendered convention.<sup>38</sup> There was clearly a deeply felt sense that extraordinary protection was necessary to keep the lesbian history they were only beginning to assemble safe from violation. Simultaneously, there was the sense that a radical openness was necessary to bust open the narrowmindedness that precipitated closeting and harassment in the first place. This peculiar tension between openness and guardedness is fundamental

to the Archive's approach to "composing" lesbian history. LHA sought to throw open the closeting of their history in existing institutional archives and libraries, to expose the silences I described above in the very systems of classification, and to unearth the history literally hidden in closets, considered unworthy for official preservation: the yellowed love letters, the diaries, the clothing, the activist organization ephemera, the crudely hand-wrought publications. But the founders were simultaneously aware that these newly exposed papers and artifacts needed a new closeting in a sense, a closeting *on their own terms* that would protect their history in a way that the laws did not protect homosexuals.

### **3.2 SUBVERSIVE CLASSIFICATION: ARCHIVISTS, ACCORDANCE, ACCESS, ACQUISITIONS, AND ARRANGEMENT**

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to an analysis of the duality of the closet in LHA's classification practices on the levels of *archivists* (who may select and arrange the materials); *accordance of funding* (who may support the Archive financially and claim ownership of its contents); *access* (who may use the materials); *acquisitions* (who may donate materials); and *arrangement* (how the materials are organized in the archive).

#### **3.2.1 Archivettes and Accordance of Funding: the Ethos of Separatism**

In this section, I treat the classificatory levels of *archivists* and *accordance* in conjunction, because together these levels evince the ethos of LHA's infamous lesbian separatism. Classification functions here in the circumscription of which individuals can and cannot

work in and fund the archive. While many gay and lesbian archives founded in the 1970s were just that—gay male and lesbian archives—the Lesbian Herstory Archives was from the beginning a resolutely separatist lesbian organization, as independent from gay male activism as they were from mainstream institutions. LHA’s staunch separatism reflects their determination to “closet” on their own terms. The archive was founded in 1974 by Joan Nestle and her then-partner Deborah Edel in a lesbian separatist consciousness raising group at the Gay Academic Union (GAU). Within the GAU, Nestle and Edel could already see factions within gay and lesbian activism, evident in the consciousness-raising groups that quickly divided into “sexist gay men, Marxists, and lesbian-separatists” (Nestle, “Will to Remember” 227). The older participants in the lesbian-separatist group became concerned by the way gay and lesbian history was already being shaped by gay liberationist activism—particularly the 1969 uprising at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City—and they were worried that their vibrant pre-Stonewall lesbian culture from the 1940s and 50s was disappearing from memory.

The Stonewall Riots were quickly becoming positioned as the origin of gay culture and activism. Representatively, historian Martin Duberman writes that the five days of rioting, during which gay male bar patrons fought back against many years of police harassment and brutality, “changed forever the face of lesbian and gay life” (qtd. in Piontek 9). But, for Nestle and her consciousness raising group, setting the riots as a “beginning” elided the activism and lesbian culture thriving from San Francisco to New York long before 1969, and emphasized the role of gay male rioters over lesbian activists. Queer historian Thomas Piontek explains:



The insistence of the Stonewall Riots as a point of rupture, a radical break with the past, fabricates a historical scheme in which Stonewall separates the past repression of gay culture from its present glorious realization: once upon a time there was no gay organizing/movement/community; then came Stonewall, and now there is gay organizing/movement/community. The past becomes an amorphous mass without any distinguishing features, a block of time reaching, as it were, all the way from Stonehenge to Stonewall, during which there was only unrelieved oppression. In contrast, Stonewall itself is represented as an *absolute* beginning, the zero degree of gay and lesbian liberation. (10)

Seeing historical closeting and cooptation both within and outside gay and lesbian activism motivated LHA's separatist approach to lesbian historical activism.

Consequently, LHA's first classificatory principle is its commitment to be of, for, and funded by a *lesbian* community. The Archive is housed "within the lesbian community" in the historically lesbian Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, and is "curated and maintained by lesbians" (LHA Newsletter). Because the collections are owned by the lesbian community, they cannot be sold, in part or whole, to public or private institutions that are "by definition closed to many women" (LHA Newsletter). The Archive is funded by the community itself, through small, individual donations from lesbians and from radical, non-governmental, non-mainstream sources. In return for this funding, the Archive promises to fight the "political struggles of lesbian peoples" by archiving lesbian history (LHA Newsletter). Because LHA understood from the beginning the need to archive

differently than the official archives I've described, their activism is largely fought through the ways in which they select, arrange, and share their materials.

The elevation of these archival practices to the level of activism requires a principled ethos that the Archive works tirelessly to construct. The rhetorical acts of selection, access, and arrangement of archival documents become persuasive because of the ethos the Archives creates through its radical separatism: LHA firmly believes that “only lesbian archivists, supported and sustained by lesbian communities, can identify, preserve, and protect the richness of our cultures with the knowledge, passion, and integrity required,” and so the organization is entirely volunteer-run by a group of coordinators who make collective policy decisions (Thistlewaite, unpublished manuscript, LHA). To emphasize the requirement that archivists identify as lesbians, archivists at the Lesbian Herstory Archives are called “archivettes.” The term resonates with prior feminist activism, recalling the moniker “suffragettes,” for example, and underscores the activist nature of LHA’s work. Newsletters often remind readers of the sheer labor required to organize and maintain the vast archives as a way of reinforcing the importance of lesbian archiving. It takes hard work, fitted around regular full-time jobs, to clip, sort, and catalogue hundreds of thousands of lesbian artifacts—and that the collective works so tirelessly, the newsletters imply, underscores the import of the task of rescuing lesbian history.

### 3.2.2 Access: Demarcating Audience Through Material Space and Donor Proviso

While LHA's principled assurance that the Archive be of and for the lesbian community provides them with ethos by expressing their dedication, credibility, and the security of donated artifacts, it also incurs the question of how they define the community they envision. In tension with the separatist guardedness I've just described in who may lead and financially support the organization is the other half of LHA's duality of the closet: a radical inclusivity that results in a complexly diverse and unstable lesbian identity. Because LHA was founded to resist historical closeting by mainstream institutions and gay male accounts of history, they are exceedingly concerned that they do not perpetrate their own silences and exclusions by espousing a narrow conception of lesbian identity based on race, class, or disability in their policy of acquisition. As Thistlewaite explains, "lesbian lives exist in their full diversity and from our own points of view instead of the views of the people who hate us...No lesbian life is excluded" ("To Tell The Truth" 36). Consequently, one of LHA's enduring principles stipulates that "all lesbian women must have access to the Archives. No academic, political, or sexual credentials are required to use the collection; race and class must be no barrier for use of or inclusion of the Archives collection" (LHA Newsletter 16, 1996).

In this section, I focus on the procedures for "use": how the Archive circumscribes (that is, *classifies*) who may use its materials, which is another way of examining the Archive's audience. In contrast to more traditional archives, LHA attempts to achieve a balance of power by, at first, espousing a radically open policy of access to the collections

by the Archive, expressed in its policies and physical space, and, secondly, denial of access on separatist conditions by the donors themselves.

For access to the collections, the Archive as an organizational entity requires “no academic, political, or sexual” credentials (LHA Newsletter 16). Unlike traditional archives reserved for professional scholars, LHA prides itself on being available to the browsing, nonacademic lesbian and eschews the common request official archives make for a letter of support from an academic institution for use of the archives.

LHA’s material space expresses this open accessibility rhetorically. The Archives began in Joan Nestle and Deborah Edel’s upper Manhattan apartment and eventually moved into its current location, a house on a quiet Brooklyn block alongside other family-owned houses. The Archives has, in other words, been purposefully (as well as for practical reasons) situated as a “home,” separating itself from institutional archives in its very structure. The Archive’s situation as a home is intended to redress the sense of isolation Nestle felt in the 50s. Recalling this time, Nestle writes: “I knew we were not a people, just deviant, sad, wanderers meeting in dark places. It is the memory of this time, with its sense of homelessness, that is the core of my commitment to the Lesbian Herstory Archives” (LHA Newsletter 1). She sees LHA as a physical home, where isolated and dispersed lesbians can gather in a sense of identification much like kinship or ethnic heritage. This characterization of the Archives as a home where lesbians can cohere in identification is echoed in the physical space of the archive.

Through the material space of the archive, LHA actively resists the common perception of public archives to be austere and solitary. As Penelope Papailias notes, “historians often describe the actual...archive as a cold, empty place cut off from the

daylight and the bustle of the unfolding present, a sepulchral catacomb that isolates the historian from (contemporary) mankind” (11). In contrast, LHA’s collections are held in a residential house, pleasantly warm in the New York winter and cool in the sweltering summers. Once inside, visitors see an entryway with walls lined with revolving exhibits of work by lesbian artists. To the left of the entryway is the main reading area, with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves packed tightly with all manner of lesbian books from fictional, psychological, medical, historical, sociological, scientific, legal, and spiritual accounts of lesbian life. A soft couch, a dining table and chairs, and a kitchen with cups and snacks are available for visitors.<sup>39</sup> In addition to the comfort of home, LHA is designed to make a visitor feel in the materiality of the documents the sturdiness of the house, the fullness of the shelves and boxes, the vast history of a people. The freedom given to visitors to rifle through the boxes without archivist supervision is one aspect of LHA’s radical archiving, which contrasts the practice of many archives to have an archivist bring one box or folder at a time to a designated reading room, removing it and restocking it before bringing out another.

The Archive’s position of radical openness of access means that, in Michael Warner’s terms, its communication through its space is *promiscuous*; it abandons the security of a “positive, given audience” and “commits itself on principle to the possible participation of a stranger” (“Publics” 422). But, despite the outward sense that anything and anyone goes in the Archives, LHA’s physical space subtly constructs (and denies) more particular audiences. Warner argues that publics, and as in this case, counterpublics, come into being dynamically in the moment of address, rather than ontologically as an essential social category: “the existence of a public is contingent on its members’ activity, and not on

member's categorical classification, objectively determined position in the social structure, or material existence" (Warner 418). In the Archives, the space hails a particular audience in the Althusserian sense, by virtue of the visitors' recognition of the community's history in the displayed images and artifacts featured in the space.

For example, there are photographs from the long past through the present randomly placed on the shelves—the faces in the images are recognizable as members of the collective to those *already* familiar with the Archive's history. The photos have no context, no caption; they are like family photographs in a family home. There is an implicit assumption that the individuals in the photos will be recognizable as a part of the community. When visitors see these photos, they are hailed as a part of the Archive's community through the recognition of photographs and artifacts; there is a sense of identification between those "in the know." In Warner's words, the photographs are an address the Archive "hope[s] that people will find themselves in"; the photographs do not "simply reflect identities formed elsewhere" (418). Instead, visitors' participation in the counter public represented through the address of the archival space is "one of the ways by which its members' identities are formed and transformed" (Warner 424).

This stance and genuine practice of radical openness of access, nuanced by subtle calls of recognition and identification, is tempered by a perpetual tension with an intense protectiveness, a subtle exclusivity: the potential for denial of entry. This tension, motivated by the deep distrust of institutional and patriarchal cooptation of the Archives' contents, is also expressed in the physical space. The house, so warm and inviting inside, is cold and anonymous outside, one stone house indistinguishable in a homogenous line of many. The wheelchair ramp is the only unique feature in the line of stately family-owned

limestones extending down the street to Prospect Park, except for a small rainbow decal on the front door. There is no sign announcing the space as the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Like the photographs of the collective on the inside that only those involved with the Archive would recognize, the outside of the house requires visitors to already know where they are going and that they have arrived. In this way, the house itself circumscribes a community through recognition—those who recognize the house, like the photographs on the Archive shelves, are in the know and identify through this recognition with others who do too. In many cases, enemies of the Archive would pass by without knowing what they have passed, protecting the archive from confrontation or vandalism.

The Archive maintains its ethos of radical inclusivity through these means, while protecting the space from some audiences and hailing others into the community through recognition. But, evincing the duality of the closet, guardedness persists in donors' stipulations of who may view their collections. In this way, the Archive is able to preserve their ethos of inclusivity and their commitment to egalitarian archiving as an *organization*, while at the same time restricting access to the collections on an *individual* basis. The donors of artifacts decide whether men (gay or straight), straight women, or individuals who seek to use the materials publicly may view them. LHA coordinator Judith Schwarz explains that, when a woman donates her poems, letters, journals, artwork, leather jackets, T-shirts, or a tape of her music or of a day of her life to LHA, she is asked to write the "accessibility proviso" herself. She governs which future researchers will be able to use of her collection, and how. Schwarz offers the following example:

Let us say that [the donor] is a lesbian mother who has been fortunate enough to keep custody of her children in a divorce case. Will she allow

another woman in the same trouble to learn of her story and find useful tactics and information? Can we allow an author of a lesbian reference manual, a college student writing a paper, a journalist researching an article for the New York Times or the Village Voice, or a filmmaker to quote from her writings or use her photographs? (“Archivist’s Balancing Act” 187)

The donors decide the audience for their collections because it is their lives that would be affected in the event of misuse. A donor’s allowances of access could, for instance, “place her in future jeopardy of a new legal attempt to remove her children because she did not keep silent and is now deemed to be flaunting her sexuality, with or without evidence that she ever acted on her self-knowledge” (Schwarz 187). The donor can regulate access to her collection by degree: she can stipulate whether her name and holdings may be printed in the newsletter’s catalogue of the Archives; she can decide to close access to her collection for a certain duration of time to protect her family from harm; she can decide whether male researchers can see any, some, or all of her collection. Consequently, the Archive maintains its ethos of radical openness and egalitarian archiving—*archiving differently* by placing the control and power in the hands of the donors, not the archivists—whilst simultaneously integrating degrees of gatekeeping and denial. Such classification of who may donate and who may access reflects the duality of the closet in its simultaneous openness and exclusivity.

The tension here between protecting individual privacy (the real risks of openness) and contributing to a shared lesbian history (a goal of historical activism) is ever present in the archive and, though LHA gives donors total control over access to their collection, sometimes donors are not the only individuals affected by the collection’s contents.



Barbara Gittings, a prominent lesbian activist, librarian, and formerly a leader of the Daughters of Bilitis, the organization focused on in Chapter 2, donated the Philadelphia chapter papers to LHA in 1984. The collection held thousands of letters from lesbians around the country, who wrote them in a historical moment when the DOB chapters possessed the only published address to which women could write to learn about lesbianism. Upon finding out her materials were among those donated to LHA, a woman who had written a letter in the early 1960s was upset that the letters were being preserved and shared without her and other writers' permission. She wrote a furious email to LHA, arguing that preserving the letters could cause psychological distress and even physical harm to their writers. After months of discussion with Deborah Edel, the woman agreed to allow the collection to be shared at LHA if her own letters were removed and destroyed. LHA agreed to send the woman her own letters, but asked her to reconsider: if the collection was deemed safe and worthy of preservation, doesn't her own participation deserve a place in history? The woman apparently replied, "Yes...Keep them all safe from harm, including the harm I might do to them" (qtd. in Schwarz 188). The exchange is evidence that even when donors control the rights of access to their papers and artifacts, the passage of time and the dialogic, uncontrollable nature of correspondence make this control, like the "telling secret" of the closet, tenuous and unstable. The Archive's rhetoric of openness and guardedness does not always, as in this case, achieve harmony and safety in reality, and even a donor's accessibility proviso cannot protect the materials against future "promiscuous" use (Warner).

Discussing the donor's ability to stipulate who may access her collection leads naturally to a consideration of LHA's policies of acquisitions: who may donate and what

may be donated. In the next section, I examine how openness and guardedness, inclusivity and exclusion, function in the classificatory level of acquisitions, which is a question of how lesbian identity is defined by the Archive and what constitutes legitimate artifacts of lesbian history. The policies for acquisition can be read rhetorically as acts of *selection*, which make an argument for whom the Archive understands to be “lesbian” and what counts as lesbian history.

### **3.2.3 Acquisitions: the Rhetorical Composition of Lesbian History**

I suggest that we can read LHA’s acquisitions of lesbian papers and artifacts as part of a collective composition of lesbian history. Because the Archive must make decisions about which kinds of archival evidence of the lesbian past to solicit, accept, and preserve, they are *composing* that past in a sense, collaging the writings and possessions of a multiplicity of individuals into a single space in the name of lesbian history. Understood in this way, LHA’s classification of the materials they solicit and accept rhetorically shape this collaged lesbian history through acts of selection.

LHA collects donations from any lesbian-identifying woman and seeks especially the unpublished material of the ordinary and unknown. The Archive’s newsletter regularly pleads for donations from ordinary women, attempting to quell any notion a potential donor might have that her life is not significant enough for preservation:

Since the destruction of Sappho’s poetry, our herstory has issued us a warning that we are among the disinherited...There are many women who express surprise when we make a plea for tapes, writings, pictures, or other

materials...“Who me? Who’s interested in my life?” It is our responsibility to validate the Lesbian experience for each other because it is through our collective rejoicing, reclaiming, and renewing that our survival as a Lesbian community will be determined. (LHA Newsletter 4)

Donation and preservation are characterized as acts of “rejoicing, reclaiming, and renewing” which are imperative to the formation and survival of a lesbian community. Donation is depicted as a way for ordinary lesbians to join the community—to write themselves into the community by contributing written, spoken, or material artifacts to the collective history being composed inside the Archive.

LHA’s special interest in acquiring materials from “ordinary” lesbians is yet another distinct difference from traditional archives, another instance in which archiving differently is intended to effect a different balance of power than the traditional role of the archive as a mechanism of rule (Stoler). Generally speaking, archives receive an individual’s materials as a bequeathment in his passing, or the archive might purchase the materials during the individual’s lifetime. For items to be accepted and purchased, the individual’s success is usually known or confirmed as valuable for posterity. LHA, however, has on principle purchased none of their holdings, except, incidentally, the book library of the New York Daughters of Bilitis chapter.<sup>40</sup> Other than this single purchased collection, LHA actively seeks donations of anything lesbian-identifying women wish to give, and thereby infuses ordinary individuals and artifacts with the authority and importance—the “status”—granted by the archive (Mbembe).

The solicitation and selection of papers and artifacts from lesbians LHA classifies as “ordinary” is thusly part of LHA’s argument for what lesbian history is. Lesbian history is

not—indeed, cannot be—a succession of kings and wars, a collection of elite, powerful figures. It cannot be, firstly, because as women’s historians and feminist historiographers have long asserted, evidence of women’s activity in public and political spheres is difficult to come by, and, as I will demonstrate shortly, evidence of women’s sexuality is even more enigmatic. But secondly, LHA is making an argument for a reconsideration of what counts as history and what counts as archival evidence through their policies of acquisition.

LHA especially values ephemeral donations. Because early lesbian subcultures frequently coalesced in secret, threatened, and impermanent spaces and communicated through ephemeral means—short-lived publications, performance, and physical interaction—their archiving requires, according to queer scholar Elizabeth Freeman, “conjecture, fantasy, overreading, revision, a seemingly myopic focus on ephemera” (162). Likewise, LHA was founded in part because of concern over the fleeting nature of lesbian publications—how quickly they began and ceased due to funding challenges and harassment—so the Archive frequently sought donations of lesbian magazines like Vice Versa, Echo of Sappho, Lesbians Fight Back, Tres Femme, and many others in an attempt to preserve what was so rapidly disappearing (Newsletter 4, 1978). They wanted the poetry that was unpublished and hidden away, the poems written on “scraps of paper” and “not considered good enough” (Newsletter 4). They wanted information about bars, which were even more ephemeral than lesbian publications, shut down by police and reopened under new names. Always reminding potential contributors that their communications could be confidential, LHA sought bar names and locations, information about lesbian life and social networks, incidents, events impressions, stories, photographs and memories of pre-1970 New York City bar life. With this express solicitation of these ephemera, LHA

was making a classificatory argument for a reevaluation of the kinds of materials that are too easily thrown away and positioning themselves as “rescuers” of the history so often dismissed as trash and forgotten.

A central premise in this dissertation is that the rhetorical composition of a version of lesbian history helps to define, and collectivize, a conception of “lesbian.” That is, any conception of lesbian history requires decisions about who counts as legitimately lesbian. At LHA, the question of how “lesbian” is defined is perpetually open, particularly because of LHA’s search for everyday lesbian women who are not famous and therefore not famously queer. LHA’s requests for living women to donate their writing, photos, diaries, buttons, and the like address this problem to some degree because it is the donor who defines her membership in the lesbian community. LHA is in these cases not required to assess the sexual credentials of the artifact’s donor.

But the collection does not only contain the submissions of living lesbians’ personal materials—it also actively encourages a collective search for “found” papers and artifacts, evidence of lesbians in the past with no living person to vouch for it. In these cases, the Archive must navigate the challenge of discerning what can be classified as “lesbianism” in found papers and artifacts. Through its newsletter and speaking engagements, the Archives asks lesbians around the country to uncover evidence of lesbians in history—of women who may not be alive to confirm their sexual identity and whose artifacts have been, as described earlier, categorized into oblivion or rendered unrecognizable by contemporary understandings of lesbian sexual identity. I read the Archive’s call to women around the world to seek evidence of past lesbianism as the encouragement of a collective rhetorical project to compose lesbian history out of scraps and pieces.

Yett scraps and pieces, particularly when they are sought in service of the history of sexuality, are by nature incomplete. When lesbians are so often erased from history, how can one be known in an archival document when she is found? Judith Schwarz, an LHA coordinator, explains that defining—classifying—“lesbian” is a basic problem in doing lesbian history research, when there is rarely, if ever, “ironclad” proof of a “physical, sexually intimate relationship” with another woman (“Researching” 56). Indeed, proof of sexual intimacy is not required according to LHA’s 1996 published principle, which decrees that “every woman who has the had the courage to touch *or desire* another woman deserved to be remembered here” (emphasis mine, Newsletter 16).<sup>41</sup> The Archive thusly develops its own standards for the inclusion of a woman’s artifact in lesbian history. Schwarz decided that she does not require that a “woman who loves and cherishes another woman as her primary romantic attachment must have sexual contact with her before” calling her a “woman-loving-woman—a lesbian sister” (56). She is more interested in unearthing the history of women who lived their lives outside of the “standard protection and more accepted social position of a male-female relationship” than rigidly circumscribing what determines a lesbian (“Researching” 5).

Schwarz’s criteria establishes the nature of lesbian history at the Archive as *queer*, that is, defined not by narrow definitions of sexual identity but instead by a broader opposition to normativity.<sup>42</sup> “Queer” is commonly misunderstood as a synonym for LGBT subjects but, in queer theory, is more complexly understood as a persistent destabilization of categories, a constant challenge to any kind of normativity, including non-heterosexual identities.<sup>43</sup> Many of the archives’ holdings that were found, rather than donated by the authors themselves, exemplify Schwarz’s open criteria.<sup>44</sup> The Archives collective is fond of

perusing newspapers for obituaries that say a woman has “no known survivors” or that she lived with a female “roommate” for decades—both of which suggest a queer relationship outside of a “standard male-female relationship,” regardless of the precise nature of roommates’ relationship. LHA sees itself as a place for lesbians to mourn lost loves and lovers when such public sorrow was often silenced by the deceased’s family who wanted to keep their departed’s sexual orientation closeted, so they publish newspaper clippings like the following, marked “San Francisco—October 5, 1976”:

BOAT RIDERS WITNESS WOMAN’S DEATH: As more than 100 tourists on a pleasure boat watched, a young woman plunged to her death from the Golden Gate Bridge into San Francisco Bay...Bridge authorities said the unidentified woman carried a box containing the cremated ashes of a former female roommate. (Newsletter 7)

For LHA, this newspaper clipping reveals much more than its brevity suggests. It indicates the intensity of love possible between lesbians and the lack of mourning platforms for lesbian lovers at the time—a woman plunges to her death in front of 100 strangers, perhaps in a protest to make her mourning visible—both of which reinforce the need for the Archive’s historical activism. Furthermore, the clipping indicates the ways lesbian relationships are euphemized in mainstream press, revealed only in ambiguous hints, and thusly represents the kinds of scraps in which queer lesbian history is found.

This small example of a found acquisition would reveal a lesbian identity that is based on intense emotional attachment and enduring love, not unlike the lesbian identity suggested by the Daughters of Bilitis’s historical productions in the previous chapter. But LHA’s collections contain much more diversity than these examples indicate. They pride

themselves on their possession of rhinestone pasties once belonging to a lesbian stripper, housed alongside a hardhat with the Lambda symbol once belonging to a “passing” lesbian construction worker (a woman perceived by society to be male). Led by Joan Nestle, the Archives also put particular effort into recovering pre-1970s butch-femme culture, defending it against lesbian feminists who saw butch-femme relations as a reproduction of heterosexual relationship models. In celebration of contradiction and difference, the archive simultaneously sought to acquire the materials and artifacts of these lesbian feminists.

This project—the explicit seeking of pre-1970s papers and artifacts representing diversity within lesbian culture—exhibits LHA’s commitment to composing a dynamic and inclusive lesbian history that defies the closeting in traditional archival classification schemas. In a newsletter, Nestle describes the slew of lesbian-feminist books that emerged in the early 70s disclaiming the “more controversial, more marginal women.” The passing women, the lesbian sex workers, the working class lesbian “married” couples were dismissed as victims of oppression rather than legitimate historical lesbians. Nestle understands the motivations of the liberation movement to mischaracterize and disregard unconventional lesbians but finds the consequence to be the creation of a “history of middle and upper class role models.” I quote her at length here:

A historical continuum was set up moving from the romantic friends of the 1800s through the literary salons of France in the first quarter of the twentieth century to the Lesbian feminists of the early seventies. Yet, I suggest this view of lesbian history is prescriptive rather than descriptive, that it allows whole generations of lesbians who did not fit these categories



to fall out of history[...]. Our civil and psychological freedoms need no longer be bought with the sacrifice of our own cultural complexity....a people are free from oppression only when they no longer shape their histories, their collective memories to prove how human they are to those who have set up the self-serving definition in the first place. Our memories must belong to ourselves; they must be *as full and varied, as real as our lives have been. We must sacrifice no one to the abstract concept of what a lesbian should be.* (emphasis mine, Newsletter 8).

With this statement, Nestle most explicitly describes the radical inclusivity in LHA's procedures of selection and the correspondingly open classification of lesbian identity.

These procedures for selection—soliciting the papers and artifacts of ordinary lesbians and encouraging lesbians to collectively unearth ambiguous scraps suggesting queer relations outside of standard male-female relationship norms—would seem to imply that the definition of lesbian may be so open as to lose meaning, and therefore rhetorical design. However, LHA's radically inclusive definition of "lesbian" is not infinitely expansive. Each example I have offered depends on the stability of "woman" as a category: Schwarz's approach to recovering women who associate outside of traditional male-female relationships; the Archive's encouragement of donations from "any woman who has had the courage to touch or desire another woman"; and Nestle's defense of butch-femme relations based in the fundamental womanness of each partner in opposition to accusations of heterosexual modeling. In fact, it's possible that LHA can classify a radically inclusive and complex lesbian identity because the definition of "woman" is presupposed, although it is implicitly complicated by the diversity of gender performativity encompassed

in LHA's radically inclusive collections. Ultimately, the Archives houses the historical materials of women—biologically born female but potentially transgender—who desire other women and live outside of conventionally defined male-female relationships. Through these procedures for classifying acquisitions, the archive's materials come to constitute a diverse and contradictory lesbian identity.

It is this latter requirement that underpins Nestle's claim that, "while all Lesbian history is women's history, not all women's history is lesbian history. These identities may be intertwined at times, but they are separate, distinct legacies, and at other times they may be in conflict" (Restricted Country 115). The Archive's composition of lesbian history is a construction of contradictions that puts pressure on categories as they have shifted through time: categories of gender (woman, trans, butch, femme, passing) and sexuality (lesbian, bi, tribade, invert). Additionally, Nestle, raised Jewish and working class by a single mother in Queens, is keenly attuned to a complex picture of lesbian identity that appears when the vectors of ethnicity, class, ability, and family are considered. The question of what constitutes a classified "lesbian" is thus always open for LHA, its categorization based in part on the perceived biological sex of the individual in question regardless of her gender performance. A case in point: the Archive now contains several "Subject Files" on transgender men, from news clippings about Chaz Bono to critiques of media coverage of Brandon Teena to risqué pictures of Buck Angel. Rather than reconciling the contradictions—the cautions well articulated by transgender advocates and scholarship that transgenderism does not map on to homosexuality—the Archive seems to keep the question open. The individuals included in the files were biologically born women and typically date women but identify as men. Including transgender men in a lesbian

archive is a controversial move, as transgender advocates would critique LHA's attachment to the biological womanness of transgender men, but LHA does not shy away from controversy.

These acquisitions are rhetorical because they make an argument for a complex and inclusive lesbian history. Each acquisition the Archive is presented with or seeks out requires a conscious decision of selection on the basis of biologically-born femaleness, desire for other women, and a life lived outside of normative expectations for male-female relations.

### **3.2.4 Arrangement: "Associative Discovery," Materiality, and Repetition**

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, LHA's exigency for historical activism lies in traditional modes of classification, for when queer materials are sublimated under innocuous categories like "friendship," closeted in back rooms, or linked through library cross-reference systems to categories of disease and criminality, they are classified in such a way that erases or pathologizes historical lesbians. In short, one problem LHA's archival practices set out to change through historical activism was the *system* of classification that organizes lesbian artifacts. The archive opposed classificatory procedures that would prescribe and exclude people, orientations, and practices that did not fit in normative categories—or *homonormative* categories. As Joan Nestle wrote in an LHA newsletter, epigraphed in this chapter: "we create history as much as we discover it. What we call history becomes history and since this is a naming time, we must be on guard against our own class prejudices and discomforts" (1984). She declared that the Archive would

“sacrifice no one to the abstract concept of what a lesbian should be” (1984). Nestle’s words suggest that LHA’s approach to arrangement in “this naming time” works against schemas that exclude or pigeonhole on the basis of prejudice.

Combating “abstract concepts” and “naming” is a significant challenge in an archive, of course, because archives are by nature arranged in categories to facilitate researchers’ investigations. Artifacts are defined and filed according to a designation of their primary essence, distinguished from and grouped with other objects. In this section, I examine how the Lesbian Herstory Archive’s material arrangement attempts to put pressure on the boundaries of archival categories, resulting in a complex set of layered relationships between objects and individuals and creating a complicated sense of lesbian identity.

At first glance, the Archive appears to do little in the way of neat classification. The collections are cluttered and jumbled, with boxes and photos spilling out of closets, piled in the corners of hallways and in the middle and edges of rooms. Of the Archive, one could say that it appears “indiscriminate in [its] collections, recondite in [its] references, and arbitrary in [its] juxtapositions” (Janangelo 32). If the Archive is assumed to have no purposeful arrangement at all, its intentional rhetoricity is called into question. But I contend that the Archive’s collections are organized in a manner that encourages the bringing together of unlike elements through analogical association, facilitating the “discovery of affinity and meaning among disparate things” (Delagrange). Rhetorician Susan Delagrange argues that the purposeful arrangement of objects can encourage a “process of analogical manipulation that is deeply rhetorical.” To understand the rhetorical effects of arrangement in artist Joséph Cornell’s “Wunderkammers” (cabinets of objects), Delagrange translates traditionally verbal or textual devices to apply to material objects,

including *metaphor* and *metonymy*. Below, I demonstrate how these material analogies of metonymy and metaphor function in the Archive to draw connections between the objects, their donors, and the Archive's visitors—blurring the boundaries between classificatory categories and creating an experiential and associative research experience for the visitor.

### **3.2.4.1 Metaphor and Materiality**

While the majority of the Archive's contents are housed in boxes and folders, the house is littered with objects strategically pulled for display. Buttons and jackets are hung in the bathroom, for example; photos, book covers, and protest signs are set out on tables and shelves in the main rooms. I argue that adjacent displayed objects such as these are linked through Delagrange's concept of material metaphor. A metaphor makes claims for similarity between unlike elements—suggesting that knowledge of one element might help one understand the less familiar other. As I'll demonstrate, these metaphorical arrangements in the Archive gain intensity and affective rhetorical power through the evidence of their *use* and materiality.

As one example of how metaphor functions among the material objects in the archive, I focus on a pair of boots once worn by a marshal in the Lesbian and Gay Pride March in the 1990s and a bookcase containing pulp fiction from the 1940s and 50s. The boots and books are prominently displayed in the Archive's dining room—a room that frequently becomes a social hub for visitors and archivists, as it opens to the main reading room and contains the central work area for collective members.<sup>45</sup>

The artifacts' juxtaposition invites associative analogy, the drawing of similarity across the difference of the painted, feminine white women on the covers of the paperbacks

and the masculine, ironically patriotic boots worn by the parade marshal. Because of their proximate juxtaposition, the arrangement suggests that the boots “are like” the pulps in some way—in spite of the difference in gender aesthetics, function, and time period. Together the boots and books tell a unified, if incongruous, tale of lesbian history: a tale, in Nestle’s words, “as full and varied as our lives have been.” The pulps, which so often punished their lesbian characters with death or heterosexual marriage, juxtapose a pair of *pride* boots, suggesting a complex history of trauma and resilience. The juxtaposition of seemingly unlike objects disrupts neat classification of what, as Nestle put, a “lesbian should be.” Instead of *divisio*, the system of classification provokes analogic *association* between disparate elements.

While many archives, of course, contain objects that sit alongside to one another, the Lesbian Herstory Archive’s practice of collecting and displaying visibly worn artifacts intensifies the rhetorical effect of material metaphor. Possessions, like these pulp paperbacks donated by Mabel Hampton, a dearly loved member of the Archive’s collective, and the boots donated by the unnamed Pride Marshal, contain the traces of their donors and their donors’ worlds for visitors. As material culture theorist Greg Noble contends, collections of objects like these sediment “temporal and spatial networks of relationships”: the boots and books “connect and include us with others” in “webs of connection across time and place” (242).

The metaphorical relationships drawn are layered, and intensified by the tangible evidence of their use. The pulps’ worn pages and marginalia left by Hampton and the creases and wear in the boots create connections between these people and the objects they donated. Relationships are then drawn between the visitor and these objects, free to be

picked up and touched, and by extension, their donors are made real. It's no accident that the Archive's takes special care to collect clothing and other used or made objects, including:

Stickers, buttons, banners from marches, military uniforms, a feather boa, a leather jacket from the Dyketones, an assortment of hats, pasties donated by a lesbian stripper, board games like Lesbian Trivia, rainbow flags and Frisbees, fencing equipment, calendars and date books, roller skates, sculptures and collages. (lesbianherstoryarchives.org)

These worn, used objects suggest *bodies*: active, flesh-and-blood women's bodies that help "bring to life" a sense of dynamic lesbian history that itself depends on bodies—on the womanness, desire, and emotion that is the stuff of lesbian experience. The sense of community constructed through the material juxtaposition of objects helps sediment the historical reality of the figures who owned and used them for the researchers and visitors who see and touch them.<sup>46</sup>

The affective sense of community with the spectral past is not always a joyful one. An anecdote from researcher Edward Bishop's experience with material artifacts attests to their potentially traumatic impact:

I felt a physical shock. I was holding Virginia Woolf's suicide note. I lost any bodily sense, felt I was spinning into a vortex, a connection that collapsed the intervening decades. This note wasn't a record of an event—this was the event itself. This writing. And it was not for me. (34)

Though Bishop had seen the letter in print several times before, the material connection with Woolf's intensely personal and tragic note produced the note as "the event itself"

because he so affectively felt the very human, material, mark-making hand of its creator. Bishop's experience with Woolf's note was as a previously emotionally-detached English scholar and man in a traditional archive, a researcher who felt he was intruding on a deeply personal event whose actor never had any intention of including him. The Lesbian Herstory Archives, however, creates a very different research environment and, typically, invites a very different reader. The trauma housed in the Archive alongside the pride is meant *for* lesbian visitors, whom, the Archive hopes, will identify with that trauma and will identify that trauma with a collective lesbian experience, rather than feel Bishop's sense of invasion and distance. In this way, the traumatic material artifacts manifest Cvetkovich's understanding of trauma in the lesbian archive as a "collective experience that generates collective responses," felt experiences that can be "mobilized in a range of directions," particularly toward queer lesbian identities (19).

The Archive wants its visitors to feel the proud, traumatic, and populated history tangibly, to know affectively that a lineage of strong lesbians exists. In Noble's words, "the connectedness to others that we experience through objects is only tenable if that connection is felt as a lived experience, not simply a symbolic one" (246). The connection is *felt* in the consanguinity of objects, apparent in the affective language of love and hate used to describe objects in our possession (Noble 246). And, what results is "ontological proof" of "ancestry," "experience," and an "intersubjective world" (Noble 250). The affective pleasures are the "experience of that proof": joy, pain, happiness, and sadness in connection with objects that externalize and objectify a life once lived.

The classificatory arrangement of the boxes and files encourages this kind of "associative discovery" and metaphorical connections between lesbian lives-made-object.



The Archive's general arrangement actually *fractures* researchers and visitors' ability to search for the totality of a single subject or individual. The Archive, in other words, is arranged in a classification schema that prohibits a direct avenue to the object of research. The collection as a whole is organized through a set of categories, which are at times categorized according to the *medium* of an artifact and at times according to its *content*. Below, I outline how these two major categories of medium and content function (Table 1).

**Table 1**

	<b>Collection</b>	<b>Contents</b>
<b>Media-Specific</b>	Audio/Spoken Word	Cassette tapes recording hundreds of oral interviews, a project taken up by LHA, as well as tapes recorded and sent to LHA unsolicited, by “ordinary” lesbians
	Books	Published books by or about lesbians and sometimes homosexuality more generally
	Films	From professionally produced documentaries and fiction to personally videoed home movies and recorded television shows
	Graphic/Posters	Posters and graphics organized by “Political Events, Calls for Actions, Marches, Rallies” and “Lesbian (and Gay) Pride Events, Awareness Weeks, Conferences”, “Literary Events, Readings, Bookstores”, and so on.
	Periodicals	Serial newsletters and magazines with lesbian themes
	Photos	12,000 printed photographs, located in files, binders and albums as well as a collection of slides.
	T-shirts/Other Multi-formatted Ephemera	Shirts, “stickers, buttons, banners from marches, military uniforms, a feather boa, a leather jacket from the Dyketones, an assortment of hats, pasties donated by a lesbian stripper, board games like Lesbian Trivia, rainbow flags and Frisbees, fencing equipment, calendars and date books, roller skates, sculptures and collages, and

		more” (lesbianherstoryarchives.org).
<b>Content-Specific</b>	Archive	Correspondence, flyers, notes about LHA
	Biographical	Public materials <i>found</i> about well- and less well-known lesbians, including marriage announcements, obituaries, art exhibits, etc., organized by first name.
	Conferences	Flyers and records from lesbian-themed conferences
	Geographical	Maps, guides, flyers, newspapers, listings of events—largely brought to LHA by visitors, organized by country or US state
	Organizations	Minutes, flyers, and correspondence of lesbian organizations or feminist organizations with known lesbian members, organized by organization name.
	Special	Unsolicited submissions from individual lesbians, organized by first name.
	Subjects	Topics from “Abortion” to “Youth,” with topics in between including “Bars,” “Health Care,” “Marriage,” “Music Festivals,” “Publishers,” “Religion,” “Theatre,” and “Violence.”

The rhetorical effect of this system of classification is an intentionally exploratory, haptic research experience in the search for lesbian history. Dispersed across the medium-specific categories are a wide variety of topics, people, and groups. Similarly, content-specific categories contain more than their title suggests: *Organizations*, for example, often found, run, or participate in *Conferences*, each of which could alternately be filed *Geographically*; an individual who might be represented in a *Special* collection or *Biographical* file might also be an important proponent of a *Subject* like lesbian motherhood or employment rights, or a prominent advocate for lesbian-feminism or butch/femme cultural history, which they might in turn have published in a *Book*.

The significance of this system is revealed in an example. If we consider a poem composed by Del Martin, founder of the Daughters of Bilitis, its location is dependent upon how it was obtained by the Archive: if it was donated, it might fall under Special Collections, or it might be included in the San Francisco DOB folder in the Organization Files. If it was published in a newspaper, it might be included in the Biographical Files, or if it was published in the DOB's newsletter, The Ladder, it might be filed under Periodicals. But researchers, of course, rarely search for a document based on its medium or the way in which it was procured by the archive. A search for Del Martin in LHA would require an expansively cross-categorical endeavor: her published books in the *Book* Collection, her involvement in the San Francisco DOB in the *Organization* Files, her appearances and writing about topics like "Motherhood" and "Domestic Violence" in the *Subject* Files, her audio and video interviews in the *Audio and Film* Files, her contributions to The Ladder in *Periodicals*. Because many of its contents are not digitally catalogued, the organization of

the Archive compels experiential and material browsing, forcing the researcher to discover and analogically associate unexpected and seemingly unrelated documents.

While digitized archives and catalogues facilitate ease and efficiency for the researcher, allowing her to find precisely (or something close to) what she seeks, LHA's dual classification system of medium and content and their minimal, non-digitized finding aids facilitate a different experience that reflects the Archive's grassroots, volunteer, all-lesbian staff and projected lay lesbian audience. The encouragement of cross-categorical association helps to break down the *distinctions* between classificatory categories. By blurring the boundaries between categories through material metaphor, the Archive helps to construct a cohesive yet eclectic lesbian history through a system of classification that resists official archives' tendency to sequester queer materials in pejorative categories like disease or crime. Researchers and visitors following these traces and trails are encouraged by the classification system to engage with, and associate, a broader and more abundant array of tangible lesbian artifacts.

#### **3.2.4.2 Metonymy and Repetition**

Delegrange's second device of material analogy, metonymy, refers to a relationship between objects wherein one object represents the whole collection. Metonymy functions in the Archive to reinforce LHA's motivation and objective to rescue lesbian history when one artifact comes to represent the *Archive* itself. A particularly meaningful example of metonymy for the Archive is a letter from a collection of papers once belonging to Eleanor Coit, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century labor activist. The boxes were found outside a Greenwich Village apartment building by a friend of the Archives, who carried them home and discovered that

they contained Coit's love letters, wills, leases, and photographs revealing lesbian relationships she had had in her life. She had just passed away and her family had left her letters on the street to be disposed of as trash. One particular love letter, dubbed the "Gutter Letter" by the Archive collective, is symbolic because it represents physically for the Archive the ways lesbian history is passed over or thrown away. I reproduce the letter in part here:

Best Beloved,

I'm writing by the light of the two tall candles on my desk, with the flaming chrysanthemums you arranged, before me. It's such a lovely soft glow and I'm glad because this is a "candle-light" letter...I'm not at all afraid, dear, I know our love will help—oh so much—and not hinder, dear, it never does that, not even in my weakest moments...

"High thoughts and noble in all lands

Help me: my soul is fed by such.

But ah, the touch of lips and hands—

The human touch!

Warm, vital, close, life's symbols dear—

These need I most, and now, and here"

...I am so, oh so, happy that I know you and love you.

Alice

(circa 1920)

The letter is romantic, and describes the specifics of Coit's material presence in Alice's life, her proximate nearness; Coit had arranged the flowers that sit between the glowing

candles, whose light guide Alice's hand as she scrawls the love letter. The materiality of the letter composed by Coit's lover's hand as well as the contrast between the letter's sentimental description of the genteel scene of writing and the muddy New York gutter into which it was eventually cast elevates the letter to metonymy. The letter represents for LHA how so much of lesbian history is tossed away as trash, necessitating the Archive's mission to *rescue* the scraps from gutters and family shame.

The placement of the "gutter letter" in the arrangement of the Archive underscores its function as a metonymic object. The original letter is kept, as might be expected, in Eleanor Coit's files, which are in a Special Collection, ordered by first name. But the letter also *repeats* in other locations in the Archive. The letter is featured in the 1981 newsletter. While it is only the text that repeats in the newsletter, the newsletter itself is housed in the Archive, a document with its own materiality. The newsletter sits in a binder alongside other newsletters which had been sent to lesbians who had visited the Archive or donated objects or financial support; the newsletter binder is the first place a visitor goes to learn about the *archive*, not just its contents, and featured in an early newsletter is Coit's letter. The letter is reprinted in its entirety, recounting the circumstances of its acquisition and concluding with the following words: "The discovery became symbolic to us and we refer to the following letter as the gutter letter, emphasizing the reality that the documents testifying to our love are too often considered garbage and are destroyed by dismissing or frightened families" (Newsletter 7).

Its reprinting in the newsletter thus makes the letter both about Coit and about the *Archive*. Because it spans categories—existing in both Coit's special collection and in the

newsletters—the metonymic letter breaks down the separation between archival categories, no longer representative of itself alone but several categories simultaneously.

Further breaking down the boundaries between classificatory categories, the letter repeats again in the Archive’s long-running slideshow. The slideshow was a multimodal presentation shown to audiences of lesbians around the country and occasionally the world since 1975. In my interview with Nestle, she explained that the function of the letter in the slideshow was to “show the difficulties at the heart of the project” of archiving lesbian history. The letter was read aloud against a backdrop of “the arresting images of Eleanor to keep the audience’s attention.” Nestle and the other presenters used the letter to underscore that “so much of lesbian culture was considered garbage, and the goal of the archives was to cherish what the society wished to cast away. To turn shame, we said, into history.” Nestle saw the letter as “another national story to tell about lesbian lives” because the 1920s and 30s saw the “height of the national pathologizing of homosexual woman and yet here we had another voice, from within the lesbian world, claiming the life affirming power of this love.” For LHA, the letter was a counternarrative of sweet love to a national story of lesbian pathology. The slideshow is a material artifact with its own history. It too exists in the archives in several versions, each marked by the rhetorical design of a different member of the collective and the reception of hundreds of lesbians across the country—presentations that are recorded in the newsletters.

Many other examples of metonymy through repetition abound: for instance, the Archive possesses all five editions of Radclyffe Hall’s 1928 novel, The Well of Loneliness, plus a duplicate of each edition. The influential British novel, one of the first somewhat sympathetic treatments of lesbians in literary history (and the last for decades), is featured



in several newsletters. The novel is featured in one issue in an excerpt from a 1937 novel by Eric Ward, Uncharted Seas, in which a lesbian character uses the “well of loneliness” as a code to express her desire for another woman, who reads the code and advances her affection. Another newsletter published an extensive survey of the novel’s emotional, educative, and developmental impact in generations of lesbian lives, asking readers questions about how they responded to the novel, when they first read it, whom they read it with, and what their class position was when they read it—the hand-written responses to which are housed in the Archive (Newsletter 8). Finally, the novel, like Coit’s letter, is featured in the Archive slideshow.

The novel’s ambivalence, in addition to its significance, for lesbian readers through time elevates it to the status of metonymy. Stephen Gordon, the female protagonist, might be read by contemporary feminist readers as misogynist in her simultaneous disgust for girls and objectification of the women she desires. But the novel is also valued by generations of lesbians because it was often the first lesbian novel young women could find and because it was the first to refuse to condemn lesbianism, or “sexual inversion,” as Hall and contemporaneous sexologists termed it. The book’s differing and ambivalent receptions throughout history, and its emotional and educative role in generations of lesbians’ lives are all preserved in the Archive, and make it metonymic for the Archive: representative of the way queer documents and artifacts are ultimately “uncontainable”; as Nestle asserts, “they will float up to different surfaces, become another story when read through later eyes” (Newsletter 19).

Thus, the archive’s system of classification forges connections between different historical moments and individuals through a metonymy achieved through repetition.

Connections are drawn between Eleanor Coit and her lover Alice, the collective members who composed the newsletter, the collective members who composed and presented the slideshow, and the legions of lesbian readers, visitors, and spectators who have been materially touched by one or more of these repetitions.<sup>47</sup> The Well of Loneliness connects readers across time and place in a shared sense of the significance of the novel, despite, or because of, differing receptions of it in different historical moments. And its repetition in (then) new editions, newsletters, and the slideshow creates new material moments of communication and connection as readers leave marginalia or mail responses to the survey.

### 3.3 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have located LHA's exigency in the traditional systems of classification in official archives and libraries. I demonstrated how classification is itself *persuasive*, the selection and arrangement of archival materials making an argument about lesbian history and identity. LHA, I maintained, emerged to classify differently on five levels: 1) who may manage the Archive (archivists); 2) who may fund the Archive (accordance); 3) who may visit and use the Archive's contents (access); 4) which materials are selected and accepted to be housed in the Archive (acquisitions); and 5) how the materials are organized within the space (arrangement). I ultimately argued that each of these five levels of classification subverts the silences and biases in the classification of queer materials in traditional archives. Each level straddles the tension between a radical inclusivity—to break down the

exclusions and prejudice of traditional archives—and a fierce guardedness—to protect the Archive against the ill will represented by traditional archives. This tension was most apparent in LHA’s classificatory levels of archivists, access, and acquisitions, as the Archive dictated a complex procedure for who may manage, fund, and visit the Archives. As I have just demonstrated in the last section, the Archive’s procedures for arrangement provoke a cross-categorical, experiential research experience wherein visitors are encouraged to draw connections between seemingly unlike objects. These connections blur the boundaries between archival categories, as objects from different classificatory categories are linked by proximity and repeated in different forms and media. Ultimately, I have argued that classification in its many levels is *rhetorical*—with distinct effects on the archivization of LHA and researchers’ experience with and capacity to make use of the materials the Archive contains.

The Archive’s rhetoricity is, finally, most clear in the gaps and fissures in its plenitude. In LHA’s political and identificatory objective of inclusivity, there is evidence of absence—the absence of the conflict that likely exists in as diverse an archive and collective as LHA. In searching for the making of a 1988 documentary film about the Daughters of Bilitis, which was to be produced jointly by LHA and lesbian filmmakers Morgan Gwenwald, Manuela Soares, and Sara Yager, I found over 40 hours of raw audio and film footage of interviews with former DOB members from across the country; entire boxes of correspondence, scripts, and notes; and evidence of work-in-progress screenings—but somehow the Archive possessed no finished film. I continued to dig cross-categorically through the archive seeking answers that were not there to be found, an odd development for a video project that had so painstakingly documented itself. LHA co-founder Deborah

Edel eventually informed me that the DOB video project had dissolved, despite hundreds of hours of work, because of script, funding, and—most likely—group dynamic issues between the filmmakers. The Archive did not preserve any evidence of conflict or culpability between members of the collective and filmmaking team, or any strife in the Archive’s historical activist project. The gaps, where conflict was and is but cannot be found, are a part of this queer archive’s rhetorical objective of a radical inclusivity that incorporates difference without “having differences.” But the filmmakers elided the strife among lesbians revealed by the project’s dissolution, protecting themselves and their history from evidence of dissonance.

The next chapter takes up the question of culpability, or implicatedness, in the composition of lesbian history by examining how archival documents and artifacts are translated and reproduced in new, multimodal compositions of lesbian history. LHA is itself involved in repackaging archival materials outside of the archive’s walls—its newsletters, its slideshow, the video project that never was. These “remediations” of the Archive outside its physical space are a different kind of rhetorical activity than archivization. However, in their remediation projects, LHA do not make explicit their complicity in the history produced nor do they represent this complicity in their composition of lesbian history. Because their technology for composing lesbian history is archivization, LHA cannot undermine the status and authority they wish to bestow upon ordinary lesbians and the ephemera tossed away as trash. In contrast, as the next chapter will demonstrate, many more recent documentary filmmakers and digital media artists who employ archival materials in the making of new compositions of lesbian history *do*

grapple with historiography, using newer technologies and techniques. These compositions then become a part of the evolving lesbian archive.

#### 4.0 MULTI-MEDIATING LESBIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY: DOCUMENTARY COMPOSITIONS OF LESBIAN PASTS

With respect for the partially known, the unknown, and the never to be known, the archivist must gingerly embrace the remains and construct what must ultimately be considered fictive stories from the past.

–Barbara Hammer, Hammer!

One of the ways that documentary film and video expands the lesbian archive is by documenting the archive itself.

–Ann Cvetkovich, “In the Archives of Lesbian Feeling”

In the 1990s, lesbian history emerged in new forms as filmmakers such as Barbara Hammer, Cheryl Dunye, Su Friedrich, Jean Carlomusto, and others began to take on the challenge of composing lesbian pasts. While artists like Hammer, Dunye, and Friedrich were previously known for their experimental short films, their lesbian history compositions grew into feature-length documentary-style films, typically running 60 minutes or longer. These compositions “document the archive itself,” as Ann Cvetkovich puts it in the second epigraph: a meta-archival practice that encourages reflection on the *process* of preserving a lesbian past. Hammer’s epigraph describes this process as a “ginger

embrace” of the past’s remains and the construction of what must “ultimately be considered fictive stories.”

These epigraphs suggest that documentary compositions of lesbian history are more precisely compositions of *historiography*. That is, these compositions of history move beyond recording or telling the tale of the past to critically assaying how—and if it is even possible—to compose lesbian history. They address questions such as: what is the relationship between the archive and the past it represents? What is the role of the historical activist in the production of queer history? How do we deal with aspects of potentially queer, historical figures deemed “unsavory” by present standards? And how do we write “queer history” at all, when queer lesbian history means challenging the very category of lesbian in the first place?

The films’ emphasis on historiography is a marked departure from earlier forms of historical activism I have discussed thus far. The Lesbian Herstory Archives, for example, do not distinguish between their archival materials and the past the materials trace. Despite the impact of archivists’ rhetorical choices on the way researchers engage the materials, which I outlined in the previous chapter, the archive seems to treat its artifacts and documents *as* the past itself, unmediated by archivists’ rhetorical choices of selection and arrangement. Because LHA’s rhetoric of history depends upon their granting “status” to the artifacts and images of lesbians previously judged “unarchivable” (Mbembe 20), they cannot undermine the authority the archive is meant to offer the lives of past and present lesbians by exposing the archive’s role in the production of those lives. As a consequence, the collective does not make explicit the rhetoricity of their rhetorical choices. In contrast, the filmic compositions I will examine in this chapter are overtly and reflexively

historiographic, as the composers emphasize their role in making (and challenging) lesbian history.

While my previous chapters examined histories composed in print and through archivization, here I investigate how lesbian history, and more precisely queer historiography, is composed in film. I understand these films to wield *multimodal* rhetorics of history. Gunther Kress defines multimodal communication as the “the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event,” with particular attention to the “way in which the modes are combined” (20). As I will show, the multimodality of documentary films “remediates” (Bolter and Grusin) archival materials, enfolding and combining modes of print, image, moving image, and sound in filmic compositions. Because mediating technologies such as film and video allow for and encourage the *reuse* of archival documents in new compositions, the practice of remediating archival materials encourages a metadiscursive, historiographic approach to history and a disruption in viewers’ relationship to the past. While traditional history is typically composed from selective paraphrase and quotation from the archive, multimodal lesbian historiography frames, manipulates, and repurposes existing archival materials in ways that merely storing documents in folders or quoting in print cannot. This manipulation in turn becomes a metadiscursive comment on the production of history itself. That is, the obvious repurposing of other media calls attention to the composing of history, rather than to history as product. These composers make and manipulate archives and in so doing, question the capacity to compose lesbian history in the first place. What results is *historiographic* activism, as I’ll explain.



The filmmakers perform historiographic activism when they disrupt the direct relationship between the archive and historical reality. This disruption is particularly impactful with regard to lesbian history because it undermines the reliance of lesbian identity upon both glorified and stigmatized lesbian pasts—a reliance made clear in previous chapters and in gay, lesbian, and queer studies more generally. Suggesting this reliance on the past for present identity politics, Mathias Danbolt describes “queer politics as being a thing *of* the past,” referring to “the many ways in which queer politics continue to be touched by the past” (29). Elaborating, Scott Bravmann understands “lesbian and gay historical self-representation as a site of ongoing hermeneutic and political struggle in the formation of new social subjects and new cultural possibilities” (4). Bravmann continues, explicitly arguing that “these accounts of the past themselves help ‘make’ or ‘construct’ a fiction of the modern homosexual,” as I have demonstrated rhetorically in previous chapters. (23). These queer studies scholars demonstrate the strategic use of the past for present sexual identifications.

Therefore, it follows that if the reliance upon lesbian history is *constitutive* of present sexual identity, then the *disruption* of the indexicality of the archive has the potential to disturb the formation of identifications. The historiographers I showcase are motivated to challenge lesbian history because these histories can cement inequality within and between sexually identified communities by circumscribing static or exclusive identifications. It is in this way that the films are most rhetorical, for they put pressure viewers’ subconscious dependencies upon lesbian history for present sexual identification. The filmmakers use multimodal rhetorical strategies to challenge the use of history to justify present intra-community exclusion. The strategies help them question the

appropriation of historical figures in the undergirding of contemporary sexual identification, because they are conscious of the uses of history to justify stratification within lesbian communities along lines of age, race, region, sexual preferences, and other factors. As Lloyd Bitzer reminds, rhetoric “functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; it performs some task. In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality” (3-4). Here, the reality these composers seek to alter is a historical one: lesbian viewers’ reliance upon a glorified past for present identification.

My attention to films as compositions that employ multimodal rhetorical strategies is not without precedent in both new media and composition studies. Because of films’ capacity for repurposing existing media, new media scholars from Lev Manovich to Marshall McLuhan and multimodal compositionists from Jeff Rice to Joddy Murray have taken films as their central texts.<sup>48</sup> I follow Rice’s lead in mining films for multimodal rhetoric; as Rice argues, a “media-directed approach” to composing positions “media as applicable rhetoric to writing studies” and “view[s] film as another source of rhetorical expression for study and output” (78). But, even as I consider documentary films as multimodal historiographic compositions, I am less concerned with their qualities as *multimedia* (the particularities of film technologies) and more with the multimodal rhetorical strategies they wield.<sup>49</sup>

After a brief section outlining the context of gay and lesbian activism and queer studies in the 1990s, the chapter proceeds through five sections. In each section, I couple a conceptual innovation in lesbian historiography with the multimodal rhetorical strategy that facilitates it:

- 1) *Unstable identity categories*: the representation of fluid identifications and the resistance of historical subjects to being placed in static, primary, sexually defined categories by historians, employing the multimodal strategy I call “gainsaying.” This section focuses on Hammer’s The Female Closet.
- 2) *Achronological memory*: the use of memory as historiographic material, employing the multimodal rhetorical strategy of nonlinearity (Rice). This section focuses on Hammer’s Tender Fictions.
- 3) *Unapologetic imaging of taboos*: the visible and central role of archival images that are discounted or scorned both in within and outside lesbian communities, employing the multimodal rhetorical strategies of imagery and cinematic temporality (Murray). This section focuses on Hammer’s Nitrate Kisses.
- 4) *Fictitious archives*: the fabrication or obvious manipulation of archival evidence, employing the multimodal rhetorical strategies of appropriation and juxtaposition (Rice). This section focuses on Hammer’s History Lessons and Dunye’s The Watermelon Woman.
- 5) *Camp historiography*: the performative exaggeration of iconic lesbian history in order to simultaneously honor and critique representations of the lesbian past, employing the multimodal rhetorical strategy of embodied performance (Muñoz). This section focuses on Carlomusto et al’s Not Just Passing Through.

#### 4.1 CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND: QUEER RESISTANCE TO NEOLIBERAL HISTORICISM

Before I develop the strategies described above, it is important to first outline the activist and academic context in which these multimodal compositions are made, as this context informs the composers' queer approach to historiography. In this chapter, I rely more heavily on queer studies than I do in previous chapters because, unlike previous generations of lesbian historical activists, the filmmakers themselves are informed by the work of the field.<sup>50</sup> During the period when these films were produced in the late 1980s and 90s, queer studies and activism emerged in part to check the rise of neoliberal gay activism, which seeks access for gay and lesbian people to historically exclusive state institutions (namely marriage and the military). In contrast, queer studies defines its work as the “shared dissent of the dominant organization of sex and gender”—the binary, naturalized categories (male, female, gay, straight) that underpin inclusion or exclusion in state institutions in the first place (Duggan, *Sex Wars* 157).

Queer studies also impugns historical scholarship that reproduces the logics of liberal tolerance and fixed-identity politics that underpin neoliberal gay activism. As Michael Warner explains, “queer gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual, *and normal includes normal business in the academy*” (*Fear* xxvi, emphasis mine). “Normal” academic business is in part comprised of the creation of histories that recover gay and lesbian “heroes” without troubling the system of value that determines what “hero” means, the system that arbitrates what Dana Cloud calls the “good gays.” For Cloud, the “good gays” are the historical figures who “do not challenge

mainstream norms of intimate and familial behavior, the rules of capitalist society (to work and consume), and the assumption that one will work within a mainstream political framework” (25).<sup>51</sup> Judith Halberstam explains why neoliberal recovery is “problematic”: “Focusing excessively on a mythic queer past...actually produces a romanticized notion of a gay past (this is what Raymond Williams calls ‘tradition’) and then neutralizes the potency of critiques of that past that emerge in the queer present” (“Shame” 222). For Halberstam and Cloud, a glorified gay past obscures the inequalities *within* gay and lesbian histories that persist in the present—exclusions based on age, race, class, gender and other vectors of difference—and makes it difficult to challenge the traditions that seem to lead naturally to present inequity.

The lesbian historiographers I examine in this chapter emerge in this context with a hybrid stance that both *critiques* historiographies that operate in the normalizing logic of neoliberal gay activism while at the same time continuing to *compose history* in the hopes for a more equitable, inclusive future; this is their historiographic activism. That is, they recognize and represent the challenges, and even impossibility, of queer history but do not refuse to look creatively to the past and compose history of queer subjects.<sup>52</sup>

#### **4.1.1 Filmmakers and Festivals**

I focus primarily on the work of Barbara Hammer, as she was the most prolific producer of lesbian historiographic films in the 1990s with four such films, including Nitrate Kisses, Tender Fictions, History Lessons, and The Female Closet. Now a professor of experimental cinema in Switzerland, Hammer is considered the “grand dame” of lesbian film, producing

her first experimental short film on lesbian subjects in the 1970s. She is known for her humorous experimentation with formal film qualities, using optical printing, superimposition, and digital animation to create faded, overlapping textures and whimsical manipulations of existing media. Hammer's films illustrate her inspiration by queer studies, as she references Michel Foucault, Ann Cvetkovich, and Sue Ellen Case among other scholars in her films. When she began to make feature-length documentary films about lesbian history in the 1990s, she retained her experimental approach characterized by manipulated textures and non-narrative sequences. In addition to Hammer's films, I also examine The Watermelon Woman (1996), written, directed, and starring Cheryl Dunye, a Liberian-American filmmaker whose work often focuses on black lesbians and history, and Not Just Passing Through (1994), directed by Jean Carlomusto and several other filmmakers, which focuses on lesbian archives, history, and activism. Like Hammer, Dunye and Carlomusto are professors of film and media and their work is informed by queer studies. Thus, each filmmaker I showcase sits in a unique position between academic and public history, as they take inspiration from queer studies but produce lesbian historiography for audiences outside the academy.

Each of these filmmakers' work was first released at gay and lesbian film festivals, such as Outfest (Los Angeles) and Frameline (San Francisco) as well as international festivals such as Out in Africa and Mix Brazil. Queer film festivals create a unique rhetorical context, in which a majority queer audience gathers in a time and place to view films typically produced by queer filmmakers about queer subjects. Filmmaker Bill Basquin describes how LGBT festivals provide a "feeling of communion" among the audience rather than "just the pleasurable experience of watching a good movie" (124). Following Jennifer

Worley, Basquin calls the all-ages spaces sites of “queer reproduction,” a place where viewers learn about queerness and even learn to be queer filmmakers. Showings are regularly followed by question and answer sessions with filmmakers, facilitating interaction between the viewers and the composers. Another filmmaker, Q. Allan Brocka, describes queer festivals like this: “no matter where [in the world], once you get into a theater full of queer people...even if they hate it, they’re still there and there’s a reason to be there with the crowd and to see something of yourself in the film” (125). Perhaps for this reason, Olivier Ducastal and Jacques Martineau remark that viewers self-select along gendered lines which films they choose to see, commenting on the “total absence of guys during the screening of lesbian films, while the gals are more curious about the gay male films” (134). So, even though queer *festivals* are almost universally mixed in gender and sexual orientation, audiences of individual films—at least those produced by and about lesbians—are often segregated by gender, contributing a sense of separatist community in the rhetorical context. After the festival, the films are made available for (expensive) purchase from distributors such as Women Make Movies or through the filmmakers’ personal websites. Because of the expense, festivals may provide the largest audience of lesbian viewers the filmmakers can hope to reach.

In the next five sections, I identify and examine five historiographic innovations furthering historiographic activism. I focus primarily on the work of Barbara Hammer, who produced four historiographic films about lesbian representation in the 1990s. The emphasis of each section is on the multimodal rhetorical strategies employed in the films to complicate the project of composing lesbian history.

## 4.2 “GAIN SAYING” CLASSIFICATION: WHEN HISTORICAL FIGURES RESIST

### IDENTITY CATEGORIES

In this section, I identify “gainsaying” as a multimodal rhetorical strategy for resisting a historian’s neat classification into contemporary definitions of sexual identity. Gainsaying is the conversational altercation between a historian and her research subject, as both sides of the “argument” can be captured on film and video. Gainsaying preserves both the political and personal needs of the historian and the divergent desires of the historical figure as a conversation. This kind of recorded disagreement can be understood as subject matter for a different modality, like a recorded interview before it is refashioned into a feature story. In other words, if Hammer’s historical activist project were simply to write a history of a lesbian hero, she might have edited out the resistance of her historical subjects in her final composition. But instead, she *showcases* that resistance so that both the effort to recover a lesbian hero and the figure’s resistance are preserved.

The stable and consistent categorization of “lesbian” across time and place undergirds lesbian history as a concept. That is, lesbian history—and the recovery of historical figures into it—requires an enduring sense of transhistoricist essence that marks a figure as “lesbian” through time and culture. But what of the figures who *defy* being defined solely or primarily by their sexuality? What of those who object to becoming a foremother? This section examines the difficulty of circumscribing “lesbian” as a category through time and place, when historical figures refuse to fit neatly into contemporary definitions of sexual identity.



The media of film and video facilitate gainsaying, the conversational altercation between a historian and her research subject, because the medium can represent both sound and moving image.<sup>53</sup> A tenet of feminist rhetorical historiography is to “interrogate the contexts, conditions, lives, and practices of women who are no longer alive to speak on their own behalf” (Royster and Kirsch 71). Yet, in this filmic historiography, the filmmaker can frame an argument between the research subject and the historiographer who may be attempting to claim or position the subject in ways she does not desire; the historical figure becomes alive, as it were, to “speak on [her] own behalf.” By recording an argument, both sides—the political and personal needs of the historian and the divergent desires of the historical figure—come into view. This strategy enacts historiographic activism by allowing the resistant figure to speak. The resistant figure’s voice complicates simplistic neoliberal recovery by refusing to perform the role of a glorified heroine. But, because the historiographer is *also* able to speak, the strategy challenges the closeting of historical figures.

To illustrate the multimodal strategy of gainsaying, I concentrate on Barbara Hammer’s 1998 documentary, The Female Closet, a 60-minute film featuring three lesbian artists. This film is one of Hammer’s more traditional documentaries, neatly divided into three biographical sections on artists Nicole Eisenman, Alice Austen, and Hannah Hoch. In the interest of space, I focus here on the segments featuring Eisenman, a contemporary artist, and Austen, a 19<sup>th</sup> century American photographer. From these segments, viewers witness the acts of making history and naming lesbians as always contested and political. The segments suggest ways viewers might continue to examine and recover historical

figures as somehow lesbian while simultaneously resisting the capture of the figures into static, and anachronistic, identity categories.

The first figure, Nicole Eisenman, is a successful New York artist, well known for her large-scale, cartoonish murals and canvases featuring fantastical lesbian images: lesbians fighting minotaurs; lesbian super-heroes; Amazons capturing and castrating pirates. She is alive and able to personally gainsay Hammer's pressure to position her in history as a lesbian artist. In the segment, Hammer interviews Eisenman and impels the artist to save her artifacts, her sketches, the records of her life, because "after artists are deceased, if you don't declare your sexuality publicly, museums can say you weren't gay." Here, Hammer-as-interviewer echoes gay historians like Michaelangelo Signorile and Larry Gross, who argue that gays and lesbians in positions of power or fame have a responsibility to declare their sexuality for posterity—to become the heroes of history that challenge stigma for future gays and lesbians. Yet Eisenman is unconvinced by Hammer's pressure to preserve and declare her sexuality or risk its loss for future gay and lesbian people. She gainsays with surprise: "Really? You'd think it'd be a good thing [for artists] to say they're gay. I mean, I don't know any artists in the closet. It's too hard to be in the closet as an artist. You don't have much of a choice if you're showing it [in your work]. I'm not getting lower prices because I'm gay." Eisenman is incredulous that any artist would closet herself—or even be able to—because she understands art as a deeply expressive project; perhaps even more so, Eisenman understands that rebellion has currency in the economy of art. Indeed, she admits that she got her big break during the "lesbian chic" zeitgeist of the 90s. Later in the film, Eisenman shares her history of drug addiction, her cushy Scarsdale upbringing, and even admits that she'll pass as "straight" whenever it makes her life easier. At each turn,

Eisenman resists Hammer-as-interviewer's attempt to *use* her success for a present politics of heroic rescue.

Despite the success that is in part attributable to her sexuality, Eisenman resists Hammer's implication that she should be remembered "as a lesbian." Argues Eisenman, "I don't know that the word 'lesbian' pigeonholes an artist, but I don't want to see the totality of an artist's work be about one issue. I don't want to be trapped in any particular category." Hammer repeatedly makes assumptions about what is primary about Eisenman—namely, her sexuality—while Eisenman just as consistently rejects Hammer's attempts to name her. When Hammer pushes on, arguing that the graphic homoerotic scene she films Eisenman painting is "made for lesbians" (implying that Eisenman should identify more strongly as a *lesbian* artist), Eisenman laughs and replies, "actually, this is for a [heterosexual] married woman who wants a lesbian scene on her ceiling. It's erotic for everyone. It just looks good, makes for gorgeous subject matter. Heterosexual collectors buy this stuff up."

Eisenman's resistance to Hammer's attempts to categorize her and her viewers in sexual identity categories points to a challenge for queer historiography: the incongruence between queerness (the persistent destabilization of identity and normativity) and sexual identity-based recovery (the recruitment of historical figures into an identity category). Eisenman gainsays Hammer's attempt to position her as a "good gay," a historical heroine trailblazing the way for present and future lesbian artists. Eisenman even admits that she occasionally "passes" as straight when it conveniences her life. Although she generally considers herself an "out" lesbian, she shares on film, "I tend to make my life easier" by withholding her sexuality in certain situations. Despite the heroic fantasy world of her art,

Eisenman makes no claims to be a lesbian heroine herself, only a heroin addict who sometimes passes as straight to make life easier.

Film and video have the capacity to capture conversation: the emotion, the voices, the body language, and the interchange that happens in historiographic “gainsaying.” The multimodal nature of film captures Eisenman’s voice coming from her own body; it captures Eisenman’s surprise and frustration in response to Hammer’s pressure in ways that extend beyond language. As much as viewers understand that film, video, and photographs can be manipulated, there is no deception here. The video appears to have captured an unprovoked refusal to participate in the recovery brand of historical activism.

While Hammer’s presence in the film as an assertive interviewer reveals her conviction that lesbian figures should demand historical representation, the film itself represents the *tension* between a present desire to rescue lost history and the historical figure’s wishes to be remembered more complexly than by a primary identity category. Hammer does not edit out Eisenman’s responses, even though they seem to defy her project of recovering and preserving lesbian history. The multimodal nature of film, and Hammer’s preemptive recovery of a living artist who can still speak for herself, allows Hammer to argue for conscious efforts to preserve and declare nonnormative sexuality *and*, at the same time, indicate the potential resistance by historical figures to their being remembered solely by this sexuality.

The rhetorical significance of this strategy is in the interruption of lesbian viewers’ own claiming of Eisenman as a foremother. Viewers are left not with lesbian history but with its slipperiness, its evasion of Hammer’s and perhaps their own attempts to claim affinity with a successful artist. The gainsaying represented in the film models the queer

historiographic process in which efforts to produce a glorified lineage of a lesbian past come into conflict with the flawed and agential humanity of its historical figures. Hammer disrupts the constitutive identificatory potential of a lesbian history containing the vibrant and creative Eisenman.

The filmmaker's decision to show the constraints of identity-based historical rescue and the unruliness of historical figures anticipates queer historiographic cautions about recovery. In her contribution to Queering Public Address, Dana Cloud surveys historiographic efforts to claim Eleanor Roosevelt for lesbian rhetorical history and, ultimately, critiques the "logic of outing" historical figures as if their "identities were a knowable, fixed essence" (24). Roosevelt presents a complicated case for recovery into a lesbian history because of both her ambiguous relationship with journalist Lorena "Hick" Hickock and her difficult but affectionate relationship with her husband. But Cloud contends that it is precisely Roosevelt's ambiguity that should interest queer historians of rhetoric. Because queer studies understands sexuality identity as a "set of culturally constituted and collectively and individually performed semiotics and behaviors," historians cannot conclude with any assurance that any historical figure is "one of us (whoever we are)," writes Cloud (39). Rather than *recover* a historical figure within an assumption of an essentialist homosexuality that endures across time and culture, Cloud argues that queer historians should instead *queer* historical figures by examining how their private lives trouble "assumptions of heteronormativity" (39). In other words, Cloud suggests that queer historians should inquire into how the figures in fact defy inclusion into prefigured categories.

In Hammer's filmic representation, Eisenman's life and work, like Roosevelt's, suggest a fluid identity, one that shifts in its primary attributes—from artist, to lesbian, to addict, to passing as straight—at times intersecting attributes and at others rejecting them entirely. As Cloud argues, “it matters less what someone is than what they and the texts that represent them *do*” to our assumptions about sexuality. The multimodal nature of film allows Hammer to record Eisenman's resistance to being posed as a lesbian heroine, indeed her disinterest in being remembered as a lesbian at all. In this way, Hammer is composing the “queering” of history, rather than lesbian history per se. She is composing a history of the defiance of sexual categorization.

Hammer's acknowledgment of Eisenman's fluidity in the film and her resistance to circumscription within prefigured category is particularly pointed because Eisenman is alive and capable of speaking for herself; Hammer can represent an argument over historical representation because Eisenman is quite literally arguing with her. But, in the segment featuring 19<sup>th</sup> century artist Alice Austen, Hammer finds other ways to represent the figure's resistance to recovery as a lesbian. Austen was an American photographer whose work has been celebrated by art historians despite the frequently controversial scenes she staged and photographed. One example of her work is a photograph of Austen and her girlfriends in men's clothing, hats, and artificial facial hair with a phallic umbrella cheekily placed between her knees. These gender-bending photographs, along with her multi-decade romantic relationship with Trude Eccleston, have caused some historians to classify her as a lesbian, while other art historians have staunchly denied this classification. Therefore Austen's sexuality was already a source of contention between historical

activists who wanted to claim her for lesbian history and conservative art historians, such as the board of the Staten Island Alice Austen Society, who wanted to deny her sexuality.

Though Austen was long dead by the making of the film, Hammer's interviewees resist her classification as a lesbian *for* her. Members of the Alice Austen Society defensively responded to Hammer's insistent questioning about Austen's sexuality with angry refusals to discuss it or to let researchers who intended to "out" Austen into their archives. Hammer's interviews with the conservative historical society represent the research challenges lesbian historians have faced. While this response from the conservative historical society might be expected, given the exigency for historical activism I have demonstrated in previous chapters, Hammer also includes less expected responses, further complicating the simplistic recovery of Austen into lesbian history. She interviews researcher Amy Khoudari with the same insistent questions as she posed to Eisenman—questions about Austen's position as a lesbian foremother in the history of art—but Khoudari, a self-identifying lesbian, also refused to acquiesce. When Hammer directly asked Khoudari if Austen was a lesbian, the researcher answered that Austen "wouldn't have considered herself one, because that wasn't defined the same as today. But I do think she was thought of herself as a woman who loves women who wasn't attracted to men." While Khoudari's voice argues with Hammer's appropriation, images of Austen's photographs are remediated in the film, their gender-bending and sexually ambiguous images conflicting with and supporting her words.

Through interviews coupled with remediated archival photographs, Hammer again showcases both the desire to claim historical figures into lesbian history *and* the need to resist this desire, revealing how the figure gainsays the present categories we overlay on

the past. That is, while Austen could not speak for herself, Hammer recorded Khoudari's queering of Austen. On camera, Khoudari describes the ways that Austen herself defied then-present categories with her art and life, reading Austen's many photographs of her and her friends in costumes as an "opportunity to blur gender roles." Unlike many art historians, Khoudari reads Austen's photos of hyper-feminine dress a comment on "society's regulations concerning sexualities" just as the many cross-dressing photographs were. The frilly dresses were as much a costume as the men's clothing. Viewers read the showcased photographs against Khoudari's descriptions.

One of the ways Austen resists primary classification in contemporary sexual categories is in her defiance of ethical and political standards of contemporary gay and lesbian historians. Alice Austen is revealed in The Female Closet to be a visionary artist, a gender iconoclast—and a staunch racist. Historians interviewed in the film describe Austen as a "powerfully destabilizing figure...because her rebellion is so deep and so intimate": a "rather butch" woman who owned and drove several cars when few women knew how to drive, made repairs on the car herself, and lived with her longtime partner, Trude Eccleston, for decades. But immediately following this glowing recovery of an artist who bucked the gender conventions of her historical moment, Khoudari admits that "as much as I like Alice, she was a woman of her time. She was racist, an anti-Semite. I'm not going to make excuses because there is no excuse." Against Hammer-as-interviewer's pressure to glorify Austen for lesbian history, Khoudari insists that Alice Austen was "not a heroine": "people who knew her knew she was a nasty woman, an interesting bundle of contradictions." Austen's uglier side represents a challenge for lesbian historians who



endeavor to populate the past with successful lesbians to legitimate a more equitable present.

Thus, Hammer showcases rather than ignores the inexcusable flaws in her historical subjects, the attributes that even the queerest of historians would likely find distasteful. As Judith Halberstam explains,

As much as we have to excavate some histories that have been rendered invisible, we also bury others, and sometimes we do both at the same time. You could say that gay and lesbian scholars have also a hidden history, unsavory histories, and have a tendency to select from historical archives only the narratives that please (Queer Art of Failure 148).

Halberstam argues for a queer historiographic model that eschews the rescue of the “good gays” in *anyone’s* determination and that is instead “resigned to the contradictory and *complicit* narratives that, in the past as in the present, connect sexuality to politics” (149). Nonnormative sexuality does not, in other words, always map onto a rational, affirmative politics in which its figures emerge as heroic victims of a homophobic foe. Anticipating Halberstam’s argument, in The Female Closet, Hammer attends to the worst attributes of her lesbian artist subjects—Alice Austen, Hannah Hoch, and Nicole Eisenman—flaws she means not to glorify or even excuse because she cannot, but rather to embrace their “contradictions” and “complicity” as well as their genius.

The rhetorical significance of this historiographic-activist strategy is in the *interruption* of viewers’ affinity with Eisenman and Austen, their ascension of the artists as heroic foremothers. Viewers are left not with a canon of idealized lesbians but with its *slipperiness*, its evasion of Hammer’s and perhaps their own attempts to claim identification

with a successful artist. The gainsaying represented in the film models the queer historiographic process in which efforts to produce a glorified lineage of a lesbian past come into conflict with the flawed and agential humanity of its historical figures.

### 4.3 SHIFTING ALLEGIANCES AND RECONFIGURED MEMORY

Perhaps because of the challenges in composing lesbian history with appropriated figures, in her 1996 film, Tender Fictions, Hammer turns to her personal history of sexuality and her own archive of film footage, photographs, and memories. The 58-minute experimental documentary is ostensibly autobiographical, as it focuses on the filmmaker's life, but it is as much about the sexually identified communities she enters and breaks from as her life unfolds. Hammer continues to complicate lesbian history and the illusion of its coherence by moving from other historical subjects to herself. The film comments on the fluid and continuously changing nature of collectivity and self—questioning the very capacity to historicize either. Even as the film purports to be a history of Hammer's life as a lesbian, it calls into question whether it is possible to compose a history of sexuality as if sexual identification were enduring and unchanging through the course of a life. Because Hammer's sexuality was not constant, her history may not, or not always, be a lesbian history.

The particular multimodal rhetorical strategy enabling this complex historiography is *nonlinearity*. Jeff Rice defines multimodal nonlinearity as the composition of "various overlapping, nonsequential strands that one does not choose among but composes with

simultaneously” (116). That is, rather than composing with one “strand of causality” or even multiple “individual alternative routes,” Rice encourages a multimodal rhetorical approach that “tells stories from multiple strands” at once (116). Because Hammer composes with memory—the recollection of the past in a present moment and circumstance—the use of multimodal nonlinearity allows her to represent her present *reconfigurations* of the past. The affordance of a nonlinear multimodal approach to composing history is the disruption of a single narrative of the past as Truth and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of composing history from memory, even as memory is retained as a material for composing the past. As David Sheridan et al contend, the inclusion of “multiple retellings of a single event” in films is a “multimodal rhetorical strategy” to make “audiences realize that meaning is dependent upon the *way* an event is depicted” (821). Instead of one version of “what happened,” nonlinearity allows multiple tales of the past to be told at once, from different present moments. In Hammer’s film, this strategy undermines a viewer’s understanding of history as a series of “good gays” whose sexual identity endures through time, opening the historiographic field to multiple simultaneous alternatives.

Tender Fictions is an experimental, non-narrative film without a plot. It is a pastiche of Hammer’s personal archive of film footage—the footage she has assiduously recorded of her own life for more than 30 years. Hammer manipulates the footage with her signature technique of optical printing and overlays it with spoken quotations from philosophers and queer theorists. As the film unfolds, her collage of archival footage from her life suggests that her sexual identifications have shifted over time. Because she came out at 30 years of age some time after the end of a heterosexual marriage, she finds herself

between communities, severed from her husband but not yet accepted by lesbian audiences. When Hammer enters a different sexually-identified community as a lesbian, her prior autobiographical footage from before she came out conflicts with her new sense of self and her new audience. She harnesses the strategy of nonlinearity to *reconfigure* the footage of her former heterosexual life so that it historicizes her current identification as a lesbian.

In one exemplary scene of multimodal nonlinearity, the middle-aged Hammer films herself slowly and carefully applying artificial facial hair, a bowling hat, a tie. While she dons her masculine attire, Hammer's disembodied voice describes an early memory from the perspective of herself as a child in third person:

She looks in the mirror and examines her large broad face. Pitching her father's jaunty hat, something is missing. The charcoal on her cheek works well, giving her a five-o'clock shadow; the open blue collar of her dad's work shirt falls from her slight shoulders. The girl takes a comb, grabs her long brown hair in two handfuls, holds both below her chin and secures it with an elastic. She sprouts a new beard. I am 11 and cross-dressed for the first time.

The visual footage of Hammer reveals that her hair is regularly cropped short now, no longer the brunette lengths of her youth described in her memory, and she takes on a masculine swagger. The multiple modes—visual present and audio memory—allow her to inhabit two historical moments simultaneously, evincing the nonlinear rhetorical strategy Rice describes. Further blurring temporality through nonlinearity, this footage is made to look archival even though it is clear from her age that this is the contemporary Hammer; it

is slowed down like 8mm film in a projector; it is faded and otherwise silent except for the narrated memory of childhood cross-dressing.

It is only after this scene that we discover that Hammer's memory of childhood cross-dressing was for a Halloween costume. Her memory of this costume, which had no sexual significance at the time, takes on *new* meaning from her present position as a lesbian, a position of desire she maintains she never even considered until she was 30 years old. As Annamarie Jagose explains, "masculinity has persistently been the definitional ambit that enunciates the lesbian as spectacularly visible, lesbianism conventionally becoming legible through female masculinity's perceived clash of codes" (3). Looking back on her childhood memory of a Halloween costume, Hammer invests that costume with new meaning, a meaning of sexual visibility it never had until she refigured the memory from her present identification as a lesbian.

Hammer, in other words, *makes* the memory significant, and expresses this "making significant" by acting out the masculine dress of her childhood memory with her present, older body. She uses the rhetorical strategy of nonlinear multimodality—audio memories and a video present made to look past—to *announce* that these memories are not indexical. In film and historiography, "indexicality" means that the media, like an untouched photograph, maintains some material bond with the reality it traces. But, because the events of Hammer's life are largely remembered as she looks back from her present location, the memories she represents are not indexical to the past. "I promise *not* to tell the truth," her voice speaks in the film, not "the whole truth," nor "nothing but the truth." She frequently switches between first and third person, and present and past tense, describing the girl in her memories as "she" before abruptly switching to "I am 11 and

cross-dressed for the first time.” As a consequence, she blurs the distinction between her present and past self, between the woman and child she is and those she describes. Historiographically, the effect of the present invention and reconfiguration of memory is an undermining of any one version of the past. As Rice explains, “it is up to the reader [here, the viewer] to engage with these strands, reading them together or separately, to see them in conversation with one another or not, and to forge a variety of connections the author intended or didn’t intend to occur” (119).<sup>54</sup>

There is no Truth to be told of Hammer’s past: even the memories she holds at one point elude her later, change on her, take on new meaning as her life unfolds. When Hammer repeats a sound clip at different points in the film, juxtaposed with different archival images from her life, she prompts the viewer to question the authenticity of previous iterations and to find that each juxtaposition might be equally true. For instance, periodically throughout the film, a quotation is repeated by a low, disembodied voice, out of sync with any moving images: “Autobiography is not a timeless process but is embedded in ongoing history in the search for the identity of the individual and the communities in which she lives.” This repeated quotation from French philosopher Georges Gusdorf situates Hammer’s personal story and archive in a broader, ongoing—that is, changing and adaptive—lesbian history and a plurality of shifting communities.

To express this shifting, unreliable record of change multimodally, Hammer repeats the exact phrases she used to narrate her life with her husband when she later narrates her new life with Florrie, her current domestic partner. This is another example of repetition with a difference, enacting a multimodal rhetoric of nonlinearity by repeating a spoken phrase in a new context of images. In recalling the motorcycle tour of Europe with her

husband, she narrates that “the smell of diesel fuel brings back the memory of early mornings. We drove through Syria, Turkey, Iraq, until he fell from the machine, weak from the jaundice he picked up from the aluminum poles of the tent he bought second-hand in Florence.” This audio memory is spoken over archival footage filmed from the back of the motorcycle, while she is clinging to the back of her then-husband. She claims at this point that the present waft of diesel reminds her of those times; yet later in the film, spoken over several photographs of her and Florrie standing next to motorcycles and riding in Pride parades, she speaks this: “the smell of diesel fuel brings back early memories of the tent I bought second hand in Italy.” The smell has changed the memory it recalls: who bought the tent? Was she now alone then? Must she change those memories with her husband to historicize her present identity as a lesbian? Or are the memories already inaccessible and fabricated, able only to be constructed from her present perspective? The use of multimodal nonlinearity to disrupt any certainty about the past makes each past equally possible, and exposes the challenge in writing the history of a “Lesbian.”

Hammer, however, seeks some redress to this uncertainty. Late in the film, she returns to another childhood memory (evinced more nonlinear chronology) and articulates the memory as a parable, as a way she might continue to compose history when memory fails. Against the image of the lights and shadows of a tree in a suburban yard, her voice narrates:

In the back yard, there was an old nectarine tree the children liked to play beneath. We would bury the toys and dig them up again in the spring. It was a memory game and *if one couldn't find a toy, the other one might, so history*

*could be told and retold.* Today when I eat an overripe nectarine in the heat of summer, I remember a toy I never found.

The present cues of memory summon a past that cannot be found in totality; only its loss can be located, a “toy I never found.” But this is Hammer’s attempt at redress: histories are to be told collectively, with others, so that when memory fails, when the past cannot be found, another might find it, and so “history can be told and retold.”

These second-hand histories of her life are found by Hammer when she solicits and records her attempts to find herself through other people, by taping her calls to her old friends and lovers and asking them to tell her their favorite “lesbian memories” of her and their worst. These voices are witnesses and *participants* in her historiography, making it collective because as she has shown, she cannot write history alone. A different woman’s voice answers the phone call each time, sometimes expressing admiration, sometimes a trivial memory, but more often expressing an emotional or critical response to her interaction with Hammer: “I remember a story going around about you when you broke up with Terry Sendgraft. Someone asked you why you broke up with her and you said it was because she got more phone calls than you.” The next woman (perhaps Terry, but it is unclear) speaks this: “I thought you were treating me like I was a piece of furniture, a chair you could sit on. You were treating me like an object. It was hardest for me when you are wrapped up in trying to get the world to give you what you want.” These “archival records” seem the most authentic for Hammer in her search for her past lived among and against others: the confessions of lost loves, the gossip overheard, the “toys” found by someone else so “history can be told and retold.”



#### 4.4 “IMAGING” TABOOS: EXPOSING EXCLUSIONS WITHIN LESBIAN COMMUNITIES

Hammer’s willingness to expose herself in her films is not limited to her own flaws, body, and secrets. The third historiographic innovation I identify is the deliberate and sustained exposure of taboos: without apology or critique, without redress, without attempts to conform to social mores. Through this tactic, the margins of the margins are made central. In this section, I focus on Barbara Hammer’s 1992 film, Nitrate Kisses, a 67-minute experimental documentary. Announcing itself as a distinctly historiographic film, Nitrate Kisses opens with a quotation from Adrienne Rich:

Whatever is unnamed, undepicted in images, whatever is omitted from biography, censored in collections of letters, whatever is misnamed as something else, made difficult-to-come-by, whatever is buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying language—this will become, not merely unspoken, but unspeakable.

From this opening quotation, we learn that the film will be about the present dangers of allowing the past to become or remain “unspeakable,” forgotten. Nitrate Kisses is an attempt to redress these dangers by deliberately showcasing the taboo images and stories that are silenced even within lesbian communities and history. Hammer stages and films these taboo images, and displays them in front of a backdrop of oral history interviews with lesbians who have faced discrimination within their own communities.

The film utilizes the multimodal rhetorical strategy of “imaging” to showcase taboos. Multimodal compositionist Joddy Murray emphasizes the fundamental role of the image in

symbol-use. Drawing on neuroscience and cognitive psychology, Murray contends that “our brains function through image” in powerful ways:

Image is not only a basic unit of thought in the brain—the progenitor of language and a component of reason—but image also *shapes* the brain, constructs pathways and nodes which make up such potentialities as personality, health, and acumen. In other words, there are structural and functional elements in the brain that point to the centrality of image to thought—displacing alphacentric language. (6)

Murray’s primacy of the image emerges from his understanding of a fundamental relationship between image and emotion. He contends that because image precedes language (language is processed by the brain through translation into images), images “carry much more than representation,” including “the ineffable, the unsayable, the affective” (74).

Following Murray, I suggest that images of taboos—the bodies, acts, and qualities that are “ineffable” and “unsayable”—bypass language and affect viewers more viscerally on the level of affect. This section addresses the strategic use of filmed images to compose history in order to shock viewers, even and especially viewers who identify as lesbians. The purpose of this affective response is to expose exclusions *within* lesbian communities by prompting viewers to question the source of their surprise. The effect is a complication of any assumption of a clear hetero-homo opposition by highlighting divisions and exclusions within lesbian communities and historical representations. Because the imaging occurs in a film, it is, as Murray writes, a multimodal composition “constructed *in time*” (182). In Nitrate Kisses, the temporality of film forces the viewer to linger on unsettling historical

images, increasing the viewer's exposure to taboos until the taboos become *less* unsettling and more acceptable. The rhetorical effect is to encourage the viewer to redress the exclusions that the sustained attention of the film makes to appear unnecessary.

Soon after the opening quotation from Adrienne Rich on the dangers of historical suppression, Nitrate Kisses showcases two nude, elderly, white women engaged in explicit sexual acts, shot with an intimate camera moving deftly around the couple. The images are certainly taboo, even pornographic. Voyeuristically, Hammer films in black-and-white through shifting shadows cast through the leaves of plants and never stays on the couple for long, cutting to footage of ruined buildings to suggest that, like these ruins, aged lesbian bodies are abandoned.

The meaning of taboo images is revealed through the unsynced soundtrack that runs behind the visual footage of the women. While the images play on the screen, a group of elderly women describe their memories growing up gay.<sup>55</sup> A few women's memories particularly articulate Hammer's motivations for displaying taboo images. One woman's voice shares an experience in Prospect Park when she and her lover were pelted with rocks by neighborhood boys before a disembodied scholarly voice cautions against the narrowness of the dichotomous categories, "gay" and "straight," and encourages "orders of analysis more complex than binary oppositions." A second woman's memory then complicates the homophobic, straight-opposing-gay conclusions of the first woman's memory in the park. This woman sadly admits that "there is a lot of ageism in the lesbian community. I felt, and feel, invisible. Invisible." A third woman shares a similar sense of being left behind by a lesbian community as times, fashions, and gender expectations changed: "Things began to change, I was looked down upon by other lesbians [because of

my masculine appearance]. I felt like an outcast. Lesbians were beginning to look like women. Couples looked feminine. I was like, what? I don't know what's going on here."

These collected, disembodied aural fragments, played over the aged bodies of an intimate lesbian couple, suggest that Hammer's use of taboo images is an intervention in exclusions within lesbian communities. Hammer supports this intention theoretically with a quotation from Michel Foucault, boldly printed in white on a black screen:

If repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age, it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost: nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an interruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power will be required.

By making taboos shockingly visible, Hammer means to "interrupt the speech" with unthinkable images, to transgress the historical "laws" and "prohibitions" that inform not only a heteronormative society but the repressions within lesbian communities based on gender performance, age, race, and other vectors of difference.

Hammer reinforces this point throughout the film with more juxtapositions of taboo images with verbalized examples of historical repression *within* oppressed groups. She films a tattooed and pierced lesbian couple in bondage and backs images of their intimacy with the soundtrack of a disembodied voice of a German woman describing the plight of lesbians during the Nazi occupation. The unidentified woman describes the hierarchy within the woman's concentration camp, Ravensbrück: "the other women, the heterosexuals, the Jewish women, and the women in the concentration camps for political

reasons, they could raise up their voices...their social statuses were better” than the “prostitutes, criminals, and asocials”—the latter a category that included lesbians. After the war, no one told the stories of these asocial women, who had no one to “listen to their stories” even though some of them had survived to tell them. The unnamed speaker contends that these survivors had to claim they were “nowhere” between the years of the war, in another country, to hide the stigma of being imprisoned for sexual deviance. And later, even if someone asked, the narrator explains, they no longer “had words for it. For so many years, nobody asked, and then, when someone did, they have [*sic*] no answer anymore. The silence inside them is so deep, so it is very hard to find out what happened in this time.” Hammer draws connections between remembrances of exclusion with its present practices in lesbian communities.

By playing the story of these silenced—and then silent—historical women behind the images of a contemporary, heavily tattooed and pierced S&M couple and intercut footage of abandoned concentration camps in ruins, Hammer means to prompt viewers to examine their own perpetuation of exclusions, both in present communities and in historical recovery. S&M has had a vexed position within feminist history for its eroticization of violence, but Hammer suggests that any exclusions based on sexuality from within the lesbian community perpetuate the exclusions suffered *by* the community. She eschews narrative structure, constructing the entire film solely with juxtapositions of incongruent, taboo images and an unsynced soundtrack of interviews with unidentified voices. Thus, in both form and content, Hammer attempts to undo the “laws” and “prohibitions,” undermining the notion of taboo by making boldly controversial images visible, sustained, and unavoidable.

#### 4.5 FICTITIOUS ARCHIVES: MANIPULATING AND INVENTING THE QUEER ARCHIVE

Traditional historiography depends upon the credibility of the archive, which is enhanced when the archival material remains in its unadulterated, original form and indicates an accurate description of event it purports to describe. However, this approach to the archive often has little to offer queer historians, who seek to unearth a past that is historically elided by official archives and challenging to preserve anyway, characterized as it is by “intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism, all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive” (Cvetkovich, “In the Archive” 110). The filmic historiographers I investigate in this section employ multimodal rhetorical strategies to disrupt the dependence upon unadulterated, original archival materials by purposefully manipulating and even inventing archival materials to produce a new queer history.

In this section, I examine two films that appropriate and manipulate the archive. First, I discuss Hammer’s 2000 film, History Lessons, a 65-minute experimental documentary that employs the strategy of “appropriation” to manipulate materials from “straight” archives. Rice defines “appropriation” as a multimodal rhetorical strategy through which existing media is strategically employed in new compilations. Rice contends that “all writing involves some degree of theft, particularly when writing is introduced into the digital, an area that relies to a great extent on the ‘borrowing’ logic associated with appropriation” (57). He is describing the genre of the “mashup” or the “cutup,” in which the

composer appropriates “language, text, image, and ideas in order to fashion critiques of media and ideology” (57). In History Lessons, Hammer appropriates straight archival media, mashing them together and dubbing new voices onto archival video to construct a lesbian world that never existed but *could* have. Second, I discuss Cheryl Dunye’s 1996 film, The Watermelon Woman, which appropriates the *genre* of the archive: the collection of records from the past. Inventing an archive, Dunye fabricates photographs to tell the historiographic story of the search for an African American lesbian who never existed, but like Hammer’s manipulated archival world, could have.

In each case, the appropriations are “honest.” This historiographic strategy of fictitious archives reveals its deception because the manipulated media is so obviously manipulated. Yet, multimodal technologies—and the power of the authentic-looking photographic image—make the viewer disbelieve the deception and seek to find some truth in it even after she has been assured it is fiction. It is in this simultaneous deception and belief that the multimodal rhetorical strategy of appropriation finds its efficacy. Viewers’ sense of historical accuracy is undermined, but they are prompted to find truth in the composition nonetheless—to seek other kinds of historical truth about the queer past.

#### **4.5.1 Manipulating History Lessons: Speaking over Historical Subjects**

History Lessons is comprised of manipulated and selectively intercut film clips and photographs from “straight” archives, modified and rearranged to reveal lesbian history in unexpected places. In an interview, Hammer explains that she took images “made by men” and “reconfigured them, edited them, montaged them, [and] put them together in a new

way to show lesbian power. A representation of a world that never existed before” (special feature, History Lessons).

Hammer can be understood as an extreme example of what Charles Morris calls an “archival queer”: one who enters “the history housed in straight archives and circulated in straight collections”; “understands the archive’s promise as an inventional wellspring”; and, with “ingenuity, tenacity, and voice,” troubles “sexual normalcy and its discriminations” (“Archival Queers” 148). Hammer inventively troubles sexual normalcy in the straight archive by, quite obviously, *modifying* gender- and sexually normative cultural texts—filmed speeches, educational videos from the 1950s, military recruitment videos, vintage 1920s pornography—so that, with the right editing, these normalizing artifacts become evidence of lesbian history. She does so to make lesbian history “visible” in the heterosexual- and male-constructed film narratives, because she assumes these narratives obscure the existence of a lesbian past that she is sure was there, a lesbian past that “could be” there if not for the culturally enforced erasure of nonnormative sexuality.

In one memorable example, Hammer opens History Lessons with a film clip of Eleanor Roosevelt preparing to address a women’s conference in the 1940s. Roosevelt is introduced by a woman who asserts that “no one knows our country better than Eleanor Roosevelt, no one knows [dubbed:] *lesbians* better than her.” While the visual footage of the conference is authentic, Hammer manipulates the sound to replace the original speaker’s “women” with an obviously dubbed “lesbians.” After Roosevelt addresses the assembly of women, another speaker is dubbed to declare that “dykes are people too” and then continues in her original voice, arguing that “the constitution is the supreme law of the land. Therefore these rights have been guaranteed to us. We have the right [dubbed:] to be



gay and make love to whom we want.” Here, Hammer queers the straight archive by finding lesbian history where it wasn’t. But, at the same time, her manipulation of Eleanor Roosevelt isn’t entirely *untrue*. As I noted above, several historians have speculated about the nature of the First Lady’s romantic affection for journalist Lorena Hickock.<sup>56</sup> Hammer is inventing an archive to provide evidence for a historical sexuality that is the source of much speculation.

However, Hammer at the same time undermines the evidence she invents by making clear that her manipulations of the archive are appropriations. Her dubbed-over lines are spoken in a falsetto voice that no viewer would mistake for the speaker’s original voice. According to Rice, multimodal appropriation is a way to restructure language and thought because strategic appropriations of dominant texts are “both ideological (resistance to dominant thinking) and rhetorical (generating new thought)” (62). Through appropriation, Hammer is resisting the ideological primacy of the straight archive and rhetorically generating “new thought”—the possibility of a lesbian past. Yet Hammer’s “appropriation” is honest. Viewers know immediately that she is modifying the archive because her technique is intentionally crude and obvious. It is a call to action for viewers to boldly enter straight archives and “queer things up”: a rhetorical strategy to de-sanctify the archive, to reduce its hallowed status as the foundation of (hetero)history and to instead use the archive’s material to construct a world that “could have been.”

The remainder of the film is a pastiche of manipulated found footage of 1950s educational videos, the 1940s Women’s Army Core, female boxers, and many other black-and-white clips from the archive, which do not contain representations of “proved” lesbians but are “lesbianized” through their arrangement and dubbed-over sound. For

instance, Hammer takes a 1950s educational video about a group of young women learning about the new invention of parking meters and strategically intercuts it with vintage 1920s pornography, made “lesbian” by editing to remove the men. The story told by these mashed-up archival clips becomes the tale of a group of young women who get ticketed for failing to put another nickel in the meter because they are “distracted” upstairs (what they are distracted by is implied by the porn clips).<sup>57</sup>

Similar archival mashups are constructed out of clips of the Women’s Army Core, clips of female athletes boxing and exercising, and other footage from the archive.<sup>58</sup> These clips are “cut up” from their contexts and rearranged in new compositions to tell different stories than the heterosexual tales the original, intact footage tells. The technique is rhetorical because, as Rice explains, “the appropriations establish connections among disparate texts...and the appropriations work with these connections to persuade. Persuasion in this case relies on recognizable material, texts, and ideas that are already in circulation” (68). The effect of such parataxis is meant to disrupt the power of the narratives told by the archive Hammer samples, because, as Rice boldly claims, “we become as mixed and appropriated as the compositions we write” (69).

Despite occasional dark images, such as a clip from a 19<sup>th</sup> century snuff film,<sup>59</sup> *History Lessons* is meant to be a comedy, a whimsical romp into straight archives where queerness is condemned or absent. Once inside the archive, Hammer selects and edits film clips into a new arrangement to showcase, she asserts, “lesbian power,” using dubbing and mash-up to make historical figures speak as lesbians regardless of their self-identification. These historical figures become participants in the composition of lesbian history, appropriated by Hammer to populate the past.

#### 4.5.2 Honest Deceptions in The Watermelon Woman: Inventing the Archive

More audaciously than Hammer's manipulation of straight archives, Cheryl Dunye actually *invents* an archive from scratch to recover a fictional African American lesbian. Her 1996 film, The Watermelon Woman, is not expressly a documentary; Dunye calls her work "Dunye-mentaries," a genre of its own described by Alexandra Juhazs as a "hybrid of narrative, documentary, comedy, and autobiography" (291). The Watermelon Woman is a 90-minute film about the search for queer history by representing the excavation of a historical figure: "Fae Richards," a 1930s era, African American actress who "could have existed" but never actually did (Juhasz 291). The film is comprised of the lead character's video diaries narrating her search for Fae Richards, footage of the search itself, and "archival" film and photos of Richards.

Dunye plays herself in the film: "Cheryl," a 25-year-old black lesbian who works in a video store, videotapes weddings for extra cash, and wants to become a filmmaker. Cheryl is dissatisfied with her perennially single life and her nonexistent film career; she is simply "waiting" for film concept to come, knowing it "has to be about black women because our stories aren't told." While watching a (fake) film from the 1930s, Plantation Memories, she becomes fascinated with the beautiful "mammy" character and is shocked to see the woman credited only as "The Watermelon Woman" at the end of the film. Cheryl sets out to make a documentary biography of the mystery woman's life, and the film The Watermelon Woman becomes her search for "who she was and who she is," as Cheryl speaks into her video diary.

While Hammer's use of appropriation depends upon modifying and mashing up existing straight archives, Dunye's use of appropriation is even more radical. By making her own archive to historicize the fictional Fae Richards, she appropriates the *genre* of the archive—its authority to set the “conditions of possibility which shaped what could be written, what warranted repetition...what stories could be told and what could not be said” (Stoler 91). Dunye appropriates the archive's authorization of the stories that can be told, in order to make Richards' story possible. But, because her archive is fictional, she at the same time undermines the sanctity of the archive as the foundational source for history. Her historiographic activism emerges in this tension.

Dunye appropriates the authority of the archive to produce Fae Richards, while at the same time calling archives into question for their erasure of anyone like Richards, through a strategy of “honest deception.” The photographs and film clips are so vividly realistic, so skillfully aged and styled to look authentically “archival” that the viewer can forget, or even refuse to believe, that they are constructed, even when it is clear that the story the archival images support is fiction. Despite the realistic archival materials, the final credits reveal that the glamorous archival photos and film clips from the 1930s featured in The Watermelon Woman actually star a contemporary young actress shot by a contemporary photographer and, when the credits finish rolling, Dunye prints a quotation from herself: “Sometimes you have to create your own history. The Watermelon Woman is fiction’—Cheryl Dunye, 1996.” This honest deception is accomplished by making the archive *appear* authentic, using advanced editing technologies and carefully staged photography. This illusion of authenticity is then juxtaposed with the film's outright honesty about their construction (which admittedly comes at the end of the film).

Dunye's historiography operates according to what Saidiya Hartman calls a "critical fabulation": a past conditional temporality of what-could-have-been (208). Revealing the rhetorical effects of Dunye's strategy on viewers, Hartman contends that this temporality opens a subjunctive space—that is, an unreality, a fantasy, a wishfulness. This subjunctive space allows

a different kind of thinking, a space of productive attention to the scene of loss, a thinking with twofold attention that seeks to encompass at once the positive objects and methods of history and social science *and* the matters absent, entangled and unavailable by its methods (Lisa Lowe qtd. in Hartman 208).

In fabricating the archive of the Watermelon Woman, Dunye performs the "methods of history" to *create* a "positive object" that *would have been* left "absent, entangled, and unavailable" (Lowe) by its methods had she not overstepped them.

To demonstrate the limits of the archive's ability to preserve marginalized pasts, Dunye films herself following a chain of mostly dead-end research, interviewing strangers in the street; her mother who "saw all the movies in the 30s" and "saved everything"; the male owner of "Race Films" who knows nothing of black woman; and the local library, whose librarian can only tell her to check the "film," "women," or "black" sections. While none of these leads knew the Watermelon Woman, she manages to locate her mother's old friend Shirley, who remembers visiting lesbian clubs where the Watermelon Woman once sang. Shirley knows the woman's "real" name, Fae Richards, and tells Cheryl that Richards had a relationship with her white female director, Martha Page. Cheryl is ecstatic to find Richards was a lesbian, filming herself in her ongoing video diary of the filmmaking process, exclaiming "can you believe it? Fae was a Sapphic sister! A bulldagger! A Lesbian! I

knew something was up when I saw Plantation Memories...Guess we have a thing or two in common, Miss Richards: the movies and women.”<sup>60</sup> By filming her chain of mostly dead-end research and the fruits of Shirley’s gossip, Dunye is “documenting the archive itself,” in Cvetkovich’s terms: the queer archive, which circulates in gaps in libraries and rumors among friends of friends (“In the Archive” 251). Yet, Dunye takes her documentation of the archive a step further, since the archive and the historical figure she seeks in it are both fabrications. In performing and filming this artificial search, Dunye models for viewers how queer history must be researched and intimates that what is found is always in some sense a fiction of the historian’s present.

Because her historical subject is fictional, Dunye’s recovery of Richards is not quite indexical to the past, since Richard’s “past” is a fiction of the present. But Dunye’s historiographic search is still, ultimately, a project she performs for herself. This is clear in Cheryl’s response to a letter sent to her by Fae Richards’ former longtime love, June, a black woman who warns Cheryl not to focus on Richards’ relationship with Martha Page, since doing so would obscure a wholly African American history of Richards’ that could stand as a tradition for future black lesbian film artists. But Cheryl ultimately takes control of Richard’s history, deciding that her recovery of Richard’s is for *herself*. She speaks into her video diary a message for June:

I know she meant the world to you, but she meant the world to me too. And our worlds are different. What she means to me, a 25-year-old black woman, it means something else: hope, inspiration, possibility, history. Most importantly, I understand that I’m going to be the one who says “I’m a black

lesbian filmmaker who is just beginning,” but then I’m going to say a lot more.

She decides, with this statement, that she must find her own meaning, and *use*, from the history she composes, even if the subjects she represents object to her representation, because the history she composes is as much about her as it is about her subjects. That is, Dunye turns her character’s research into a *material* she can use to compose. The fictionality of her subject and archive, the fact that Fae Richards never existed, reinforces her implication that queer historiography is about what the search and the subjects mean for the present. Dunye films herself as Cheryl kneeling next to the television on which Richards acts the part of the stereotypical black plantation maid in her film roles, mouthing the lines along with Richards, speaking with her, speaking her, blending herself with her subject even as she lovingly mocks Richards’ melodramatic acting.

Dunye’s film is taking and granting a license to *make history* that “could have existed” when it cannot be legitimately found. She and Zoe Leonard, the photographer, made the authentic looking images of “Richards” into a book, published separately from the film. The book, The Fae Richards Photo Archive, 1993-1996, showcases the staged documentation of the fictional 1930s actress and itself becomes a part of the evolving queer archive. Leonard’s book contains 78 black and white seemingly authentic photographs, four color photographs, and a handwritten notebook, with photos often captioned with hand-scrawled phrases like, “me and the girls at the “Hotspot.” The book and its filmic inspiration suggests that contemporary queer historiography is about *documenting the search*, rather than finding the figure sought, and sometimes, the search documented is the search for the present queer self—though neither figure, as both

Hammer (Tender Fictions) and Dunye suggest, can be fixed or located. Figures past and present can, however, be invented through multimodal appropriation of the genre of the archive.

#### 4.6 CAMP HISTORIOGRAPHY, OR PERFORMING ARCHIVAL AMBIVALENCE

In this section, I examine a film that presents *performance* as historiographic material in the queer archive. Not Just Passing Through (1994) is a 60-minute documentary produced by Jean Carlomusto, Dolores Perez, Catherine Saalfield, and Polly Thistlewaite (a longtime Lesbian Herstory Archives collective member). The film's first three segments are biographical, featuring, for example, the life of Mabel Hampton, an elderly member of the Lesbian Herstory Archives collective who had recently passed, and the heroic recovery efforts of the Lesbian Herstory Archives to preserve the papers of Marge McDonald, a lesbian whose diaries were almost destroyed by her ashamed family after her death. These earlier segments situate the final segment, featuring the performances of the WOW Theater Collective in New York City, as *also* historiographic. The WOW Café Theater Collective has evolved since 1980 to become a majority lesbian and transwoman space to "promote the empowerment of women through the performing arts."<sup>61</sup> The WOW segment of Not Just Passing Through showcases clips from the live performances of the theater collective, contextualized by interviews with the performer-writers. In this section, I consider first, the performances themselves as historiographic material, and second, the documentary



film that captures and frames these performances by clipping and contextualizing them with interviews.

I argue that the WOW performers featured in the film enact what I call a “camp historiography”: a parodic strategy to critique iconic cultural artifacts from the past that represent lesbians as melancholic, suicidal, or eventually “turning” heterosexual in the end, while at the same time celebrating the artifacts for their complex resonance in generations of lesbian lives. Thus, like other multimodal compositions I’ve described in this chapter, these performances repurpose or reinvent archival materials in the composition of historiography. The archive being repurposed by the performers is a cultural one—containing the mid-century pulp fiction, the sensationalist 1960s films, the sexological studies—that had to serve as lesbian history before the efforts of the historical activists I have investigated in this dissertation. These cultural images are a distinct part of lesbian history: “real” lesbians were absent from recorded history, and so these fictional representations actually provide a lineage, a tradition, of a lesbian past made meaningful in their use by lesbians seeking information about themselves.<sup>62</sup>

Queer performance is, José Esteban Muñoz maintains, an essentially ephemeral form of evidence that is often disregarded by traditional historiographic standards. Yet Muñoz contends that queerness is precisely to be found in the “innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and *performances* that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere—while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility” (“Ephemera as Evidence” 6, emphasis mine). Like the anecdotes employed by the Daughters of Bilitis and the short-lived zines preserved by the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the ephemeral evidence of performance is a defining characteristic of

the queer archive. As Jody Shipka argues, multimodality need not be limited to new media texts. Like Shipka, I undertake a more expansive understanding of multimodality, considering the production of “live performance” (Shipka 348) and the subsequent use of performance as material in new filmic compositions as multimodal compositional acts.

The performances are multimodal in their employment of sound, facial expression, gesture, speech, and material objects—and in their appropriation of iconic cultural narratives. The documentary then captures these moments, and the motivations behind them, by juxtaposing clips of the performance with interviews with the actors. The performance is framed and preserved in layers in the new filmic composition, revealing both the performance itself and the reasons behind the rhetorical choices in the writing of the script and the direction of the acting. Like Hammer’s archival mashup in History Lessons, the performers splice together the archives of (this time) lesbian cultural artifacts in order to tell a new story. The performers’ historiography is then appropriated by the filmmakers, intercut with interviews, in the composition of still another lesbian historiography—this one preservable in the physical archive on film. At each level—the performers, the historical and cultural figures they perform, and the filmmakers—the composition is collective.

The performance artists featured in Not Just Passing Through are the Five Lesbian Brothers, a four-woman group of playwrights and performers in the WOW Café Theatre Collective.<sup>63</sup> In their play, Brave Smiles: Another Lesbian Tragedy, the Five Lesbian Brothers took and exaggerated melancholic popular culture images of lesbians. They wrote and performed scenes inspired by The Well of Loneliness, the 1928 novel by Radclyffe Hall so influential in generations of lesbians’ lives for its somewhat sympathetic, though deeply

depressing, portrayal of lesbian life; they also wrote and performed scenes inspired by The Children's Hour, the 1961 Audrey Hepburn/Shirley McClaine film about two girls in catholic school accused of being lesbians. The theater group drains some of the pain associated with these images by finding humor in their melodrama. Every attempt at lasting love in the play is thwarted with tragedy: "Ohhh! This life of sorrows," wails one character after her lover is run over by a truck. Another character, a teacher, is so tormented by her proximity to girls in catholic school uniforms that she promptly hangs herself. After the girls graduate from school, they go on to embody lesbian clichés like gymnastics, prison, and alcoholism—each turn resulting in yet more tragedy.

The film, Not Just Passing Through, selectively represents moments from the Five Lesbian Brothers' play and contextualizes these moments with interviews with the writer-performers. Between clips demonstrating the exaggerated performance of lesbian melancholy, group members describe their identification with the cultural artifacts they parody. One shares into the camera:

I knew I was a lesbian when I fell in love with my first grade teacher. From then I was constantly looking for lesbian images. In the pulps, lesbians are sad, end up lonely, never have sex, never have one lifetime partner, and they die to get acceptance. They have to have a grave disease or die to get accepted, become noble through suffering.

Her admission is a sad one—the seeming inevitability of loneliness reflected in the few historical images of lesbians available. Suggesting the resonance of these images, another actor jokes that they are not able to rehearse regularly because they all have therapy on different nights. But, the group's strategy to deplete the negative affect of these historical

representations of lesbians is to humorously overdramatize them by splicing them all together in one performance. As one member of the group explains in her interview: “If you add it all up, it becomes a farce.”

Through these interviews, the film reveals that exaggerated performance has a historiographic activist purpose. As one WOW collective member explains in her interview, “we’re interested not just in parodying [these cultural images]; we’re interested in how our lives are shaped by them. I love—LOVE—The Well of Loneliness. We don’t have to do that much to parody it; it’s already funny when we play it straight in this context.” In between clips of these interviews with the collective members, the film intercuts clips of their performance of Brave Smiles: dramatic drinking and suicides, a scene between two lovers who sob, “let’s pinch each other sometimes so we can tell we’re still living...” By splicing together the many melancholic cultural images of lesbians, and then explaining their intentions in interviews, the performers deplete some of the more subtle power the images’ wielded individually. At the same time, they honor the images’ impact on, as they put it, the “lesbian psyche,” by drawing these images together in one place—knowing they will be recognizable to their overwhelmingly lesbian audience. As Linda Hutcheon explains, ironic representation and reading “is doubly coded in political terms; it both legitimates and subverts that which it parodies” (101).

The performance of lesbian history through dramatic exaggeration of meaningful cultural images results in what I call a camp historiography. To camp is a historiographic act already because, as Mark Booth maintains, “camp takes styles from the past and uses them to sidestep the onward march of history”(144).<sup>64</sup> Pamela Robertson more specifically explains that “camp redefines and historicizes these cultural products not just nostalgically

but with a critical recognition of the temptation to nostalgia, rendering both the object and the nostalgia outmoded through an ironic, laughing distanciation” (2). A camp historiography, in other words, *performs* nostalgic images and laughs at the temptation to nostalgia itself, acknowledging the drive to retain these cultural products while draining some of the painful affect with laughter. It is, according to Andrew Ross, a scavenger historiography, a way of “scrounging history’s waste” in order to “rediscover surplus value” (320).

The “rediscovery” of value in melancholic images of a lesbian past is where camp historiography derives its rhetorical force. Jack Babuscio explains that camp effects laughter where there were once tears as a way of “dealing with the painfully incongruous situations of gays in society” (126). In other words, camp historiographic performance, and its framing in filmic compositions, has the rhetorical potential to alter viewers’ relationship with the melancholic cultural artifacts. The lesbian camp impulse to exaggerate historical representations of lesbians can be read as a strategic move to acknowledge and make visible, rather than deny or hide, painful or ugly pasts. As Heather Love explains, the “emphasis on damage” in queer culture “exists in a state of tension with a related and contrary tendency—the need to resist damage and to affirm queer existence” (3). A lesbian camp historiography functions through a performative parody of a tradition of melancholic representations of lesbians—made more poignant by the testimony of the performers in Not Just Passing Through. The exaggerated performance of these historic cultural artifacts makes them self-consciously conspicuous, and thus destabilizes them by making them visible through aggregation and exaggeration, and therefore available for analysis and criticism. The rhetorical impact on viewers of both the performance and its

appropriation in the documentary is the depletion of negative affect found in the cultural artifacts and the opportunity to critique previously impervious cultural artifacts.

#### 4.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have pinpointed five historiographic strategies for composing—and challenging—lesbian history. First, I identified “gainsaying” as a multimodal strategy for representing how historical figures resist being defined primarily by fixed, static, and contemporary sexual identity categories. Second, I examined how the strategy of nonlinearity (Rice) allowed Hammer to represent the complexity of her own fluid sexual identity over time. Third, I explored the affective impact of taboo archival images, set against an unsynced backdrop of oral history accounts, in challenging exclusions within lesbian communities. Fourth, I investigated the manipulation and outright invention of archival evidence as a multimodal strategy for finding lesbian history where it might have been and desanctifying the straight archive as the foundation for history. Finally, I pinpointed “camp historiography”—the performative exaggeration of iconic lesbian history—as a strategy to simultaneously honor and critique representations of the past. These five historiographic innovations and multimodal rhetorical strategies demonstrate *historiographic* activism: a queer form of historical activism that puts pressure on the logic of simplistic recovery and calls transhistoricist accounts of sexual identity into question.

## 5.0 PARTING THOUGHTS ON THE PAST AND FUTURE OF HISTORICAL ACTIVISM

Machines, of course, do not make history by themselves. But some kinds of machines help make different kinds of histories and different kinds of people than others.

—Susan J. Douglas

In the preceding chapters, I have explored the rhetorical activity of three lesbian collectives as they composed and leveraged versions of their past. I argued that each collective participated in historical activism: the strategic composition of lesbian history for then-present needs, including the shaping of identity and political expediency. In particular, I focused on the rhetorical strategies these collectives appropriated, invented, and wielded to compose and promulgate versions of their past. With attention to the medium used in their compositions of history, I investigated these strategies' exigencies and their effects on the kind of lesbian identity the collectives shaped.

In pursuit of the mechanisms of historical activism, I examined the midcentury San Francisco-based collective, the Daughters of Bilitis, finding their primary medium for composing history in the print newsletters and books composed collaboratively by DOB leaders and readers. I sought evidence of inventive rhetorical strategies in composing the past, with particular attention to how those strategies helped the DOB shape a sense of

their identity as an organization and as lesbians. *Lesbian/Woman*, the 1972 book by DOB founders, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, revealed one such strategy, which I identified as “anecdotal clustering”—the curation of brief, encapsulated experiences shared with the authors, who then archived the anecdotes in middle-class categories such as “motherhood” and “monogamous love.” Ultimately, I argued that this strategy helped the leaders cohere a middle-class lesbian identity premised on traditional femininity, respectable employment, and distance from the queer bar scene.

In Chapter 3, I focused on the Lesbian Herstory Archives—a material, place-based archive and activist collective in Brooklyn, New York. This collective’s primary medium for composing history was archivization: the collection and arrangement of materials and records. I argued that the LHA collective challenged bias and exclusion in traditional archives and libraries by *classifying differently*: through radically inclusive yet fiercely protective procedures for managing, accepting, and arranging archival materials. In one example of the archive’s historical activism, I demonstrated how the Lesbian Herstory Archives attempted to blur the boundaries between archival categories by repeating artifacts in different media across the archive and juxtaposing diverse and eclectic objects on display. By blurring the boundaries between archival categories, the archive disrupted the *divisio* of traditional classification systems like the Library of Congress, which sequestered queer materials in categories of crime and pathology.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I investigated the work of a contingent of documentary filmmakers from the 1990s, who repurposed and even invented archival materials in their compositions of lesbian history. I argued that these filmic rhetors were less historical activists than *historiographic* activists. Inspired by queer theory, filmmakers like Barbara



Hammer and Cheryl Dunye put pressure on the recovery logic that underpinned the earlier historical activist efforts of the Lesbian Herstory Archives and the Daughters of Bilitis. Hammer, for example, undermined the authenticity of archives that the Lesbian Herstory Archives promoted by quite obviously manipulating it. In History Lessons, she took existing media from the “straight” film archive and boldly adulterated it. Eleanor Roosevelt’s voice is crudely dubbed over in one memorable scene, the content and purpose of her speech changed by Hammer’s speaking the word “lesbian” over the original word “woman.” Roosevelt’s original audience of gender-normative women is also adulterated by Hammer, who intercut images of glamorous butch-femme couples and recognizable Lesbian Herstory Archives collective members. Rhetorical strategies like Hammer’s “archival mashup” repurposed media from the Lesbian Herstory Archives, altering it to tell new stories of the past. Hammer’s historiographic activism occurs in her challenge to the sanctity of archives and her exposure of the exclusions perpetrated within lesbian communities.

Hammer’s jarring “archival mashup” and selective dubbing of Roosevelt’s speech make the *act* of representation blatantly obvious; she “stretches or altogether ruptures the illusion of realistic representation” of the original archival materials (Bolter and Grusin 31). Hammer, in other words, brings the mediation of the archive to the fore, making it so unavoidable that it almost becomes a text in itself. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin call this effect “hypermediate” remediation: the blatant “representation of one medium in another,” which then becomes a defining characteristic of the “new” medium (here, the representation of archival photographs in documentary film). While Bolter and Grusin claim that the usual goal of mediation is to *conceal* its mechanisms—to provide the viewer

with “transparent immediacy” to the object represented (31)—Hammer’s goal is instead to *expose* her manipulation of the archive, to deplete the archive’s claims to “ultimate truth” (Velody 3) and “political power” (Derrida 4).

In this concluding chapter, I reflect upon the implications of remediation in historical activism. The obvious reuse of earlier, or older, materials in new compositions has implications for the relationship between the historical activist collectives I’ve examined in this dissertation. Looking back on the three case studies in this dissertation, it becomes clear that each chapter’s collective rhetors made strategic use of the materials produced by earlier generations of historical activists, framing these materials for their present purposes and politics. These remedial practices draw attention to the fundamental claim of this dissertation: that historical composing is purposeful, rhetorical, and activist. What do historiographic rhetors *do* with the contents and structures of archives? How do composers translate, reconfigure, and frame archival materials in new compositions, and to what present ends? My examination of the strategic reuse of prior historical activists’ materials should encourage rhetorical scholars to pay more attention to public modes of historiography and to what happens to historical evidence when it becomes part of new compositions, because as I’ve shown, these compositions have real effects on the shaping of collective identity and politics.

In the next two sections, I take a succinct look at remediation between the collectives featured in this dissertation to begin to parse its role in historical activism and the relationship between the collectives I’ve studied. I then look forward to archival practices happening today in the age of online new media to speculate on how emerging technologies impact contemporary “archive fever” and historical activism. In new media

historiography, archivization continues in new and different ways that nonetheless reflect earlier forms of historical activism.

### 5.1 FILMIC REMEDIATION OF THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES

In the Eleanor Roosevelt scene from History Lessons, Hammer films photographs of Mabel Hampton, an LHA collective member, that she takes *from* LHA's collection in order to retroactively implant Hampton as a member of Roosevelt's "audience." The impact of Hammer's reuse of Mabel Hampton's image depends on her recognizability to viewers familiar with LHA, who featured Hampton in many of their own mediated compositions. Hampton is famous among those "in the know" (Cvetkovich) for being out and proud for decades, for her spirited personality and courage despite the obstacles she faced throughout her life as a black lesbian. When Hammer takes Hampton's image and manipulates it so that it appears as if Roosevelt is addressing her, the filmmaker remediates the archive to tell a different story, to animate the static photographic evidence of Hampton. The product is an actualization of Hammer's historiographic fantasy that an allegedly closeted figure like Roosevelt might speak publicly to an unabashedly out figure like Hampton: that these figures might retroactively form a community that "should have" existed but did not.

Hammer is not the only filmmaker to reuse archival materials from and about the Lesbian Herstory Archives. In The Watermelon Woman, Cheryl Dunye's character, "Cheryl," seeks to uncover the fictional Fae Richards, an African American actress and

caberet singer and a romantic partner of white director Martha Page. Along the way of her quest for Richards, Cheryl visits the Center for Lesbian Information and Technology (C.L.I.T.), a lesbian separatist archive. The archivist informs Cheryl that the relevant materials she seeks are neither filed nor indexed because the organization is “volunteer-run.” Even when Cheryl manages to find photos of Richards among the mess, the archivist refuses to let her reproduce them until she has received approval by consensus from the C.L.I.T. collective. Cheryl then surreptitiously snaps a photo of the Richards images with her personal camera before bolting out of the archive.

Anyone, including myself, who has researched in the Lesbian Herstory Archives can recognize Dunye’s parody of the archive—I too have felt both frustration and admiration for the inconvenient classificatory and decision-making principles of the LHA collective. Writing of this Watermelon Woman scene, Cvetkovich notes that, while “those in the know” who recognize C.L.I.T. as a parody of LHA “might not find the joke funny, its humor can also be considered a form of respect and affection” (“In the Archives” 108). As Cvetkovich explains, the real-life LHA arouses the same allegiance and adoration that “draws Cheryl to Fae Richards” (108). In this scene, Dunye remediates the Lesbian Herstory Archives itself—not just its materials but the institution of LHA—to dramatize and record the experience of researching within the constraints of its principles. Dunye, that is, archives the *experience* of researching in the lesbian archive.

Even more than Dunye and Hammer’s films, Jean Carlomusto et al’s Not Just Passing Through devotes a significant portion of the film to the remediation of LHA. The film opens with archival footage of LHA’s grand opening of the Prospect Park house in 1993 and intercuts images of the LHA collective marching in the New York pride parade. The film

features interviews with LHA founder Joan Nestle, who asserts onscreen that “every lesbian woman is worthy of inclusion in history. And over the years we’ve said, if you have the courage to touch another woman, then you are a very famous person.” This opening suggests that the film will be about those “famous” women, as it follows with two full segments featuring individuals closely associated with the archive: Mabel Hampton, once again, and Marge McDonald. The latter’s segment emphasizes the heroic recovery performed by LHA, who rescued McDonald’s papers and diaries after they were almost destroyed by her ashamed family after her death. The film thusly positions itself as an extension of LHA’s mission—in a new medium, for a more popular audience than the narrower audience of researchers that the place-based archive itself might reach. As Cvetkovich explains, the film “uses the power of visual media to put the archive on display...extend[ing] the reach of the traditional archive, collating and making accessible documents that might otherwise remain obscure except to those doing specialized research” (“In the Archives” 109).

On the one hand, these myriad examples of the remediation of LHA and its contents demonstrate the *success* of LHA’s historical activism. The Lesbian Herstory Archives built itself up as an important part of the “lesbian cultural imaginary” (Cvetkovich, “In the Archives” 108). The archive made itself a recognizable part of lesbian history, both as an institution (demonstrated by Dunye) and as the source for compositional material (demonstrated by Hammer and Carlomusto et al). On the other hand, however, these examples also exhibit the *impermanence*—the malleability—of the history composed by historical activists. That LHA becomes available as material for future generations means that LHA’s historical activism is no more permanent than the pejorative accounts they set out to undermine and replace. Historical activism is premised on the notion that historical

compositions can be challenged and replaced—which means that those replacements too are vulnerable to revision. This impermanence, however, should be not be understood as historical activism’s failure. Indeed there is something essentially queer about the transience of historical activism’s compositions, their susceptibility to change and modification. In the next section, I look backward to earlier forms of remediation in the legacy of historical activism traced in this dissertation.

## 5.2 EARLIER FORMS OF REMEDIATION

The documentary filmmakers I surveyed above are not the first to remediate materials from historical activists prior. Indeed, LHA never served solely as a repository for materials to be reused by later generations of historical activism. In their long-running slideshow and sponsorship of documentary film projects, LHA too framed and reused materials from prior generations of historical activists—including the Daughters of Bilitis.

Running from 1975 through the late 1990s, LHA’s traveling slideshow was composed of a series of projected photographic images, accompanied by presenter commentary and mix tapes of lesbian music and presented by invitation to homes, bars, churches, classes, clubs, and other audiences of lesbians around the United States. Before it was a slideshow, LHA coordinators traveled around the country, and occasionally the world, with boxes of physical documents taken from the physical archive. Amy Beth, a former LHA archivist and slideshow presenter, describes how “dykes with milk crates” full of photographs, periodicals, and books “loaded them into a VW bug” and traversed the

northeast region (Interview). The traveling show soon transitioned from original artifacts to remediated slides as a way to protect the material condition of the documents while making a select few available to a geographically broader audience. Like the documentary films I described above, the slideshow was a way to expand the Archive's reach beyond its physical location in New York City.

Within the eclectic set of images that constituted the slideshow, the Daughters of Bilitis were featured prominently in many versions through images of the materials the DOB composed and archived. Several slides, for example, featured covers of The Ladder. The presenter's notes accompanying these slides describe the DOB as the first national lesbian organization and The Ladder as the first nationally distributed lesbian magazine, noting with pride that the DOB broke censorship laws in the process. The issues of The Ladder selected for the slideshow are the ones that most uphold *LHA*'s mission of diversity and inclusivity. The show features the cover art from the daring 1959 issue: a drawing of a woman with close-cropped hair dressed in masculine attire. The slideshow also features the 1963 issue, which showcased a photo of Cleo Bonner, the DOB's first and only black president.

The slides featuring The Ladder were followed by a number of other, increasingly radical lesbian periodicals, such as Hothead Paisan: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist (a 1990s comic by Diane DiMassa). In juxtaposing The Ladder with Hothead Paisan, *LHA* sought to display the most diverse collection of materials in the slideshow to emphasize the archive's mission of radical inclusivity. The slideshow suggests that the Daughters of Bilitis' more conservative mission belongs in the Lesbian Herstory Archives as one voice neither greater nor lesser than the many others *LHA* has recovered into its history. That is, while the

DOB's activism and identity do not map *onto* LHA's, they do fit *within* LHA as one element among many. The DOB functions in the slideshow as evidence of LHA's commitment to a diverse range of lesbian history.

A second example of LHA's remediation of the DOB is its 1987 documentary project. LHA sponsored three filmmakers—Morgan Gwenwold (a collective member), Manuela Soares, and Sara Yager<sup>65</sup>—to create a feature-length documentary film recovering the Daughters of Bilitis. The filmmakers recorded over 60 hours of interviews with former members and produced a 30-minute work-in-progress before the project dissolved over an undocumented disagreement between Gwenwold, Soares, and Yager.

Though the film was never completed, the filmmakers' meticulously documented research process provides some evidence of how they might have framed the Daughters of Bilitis in their remediation. As I demonstrated at length in Chapter 3, LHA was driven by a mission of radical inclusivity, with particular attention to class, race, and gender diversity in the selection of materials in the archive. The interview questions the filmmakers asked DOB leaders and members reflected this mission. LHA was not simply interested in celebrating the DOB, although the documentary was certainly motivated by the importance of the DOB for subsequent lesbian and gay rights activism. Rather, LHA set out to preserve the DOB through the lens of their own concern for gender, racial, and sexual diversity. For example, the interviewer's first question for former DOB members inquired: "Del and Phyllis made a distinction between homosexual and homophile. Did they understand themselves to be a sexual organization?" This question reflects LHA's longtime resistance to the censorship of women's sexuality and their willingness to be critical of the DOB's sublimation of sexual intimacy and disapproval of butch-femme relationship models. Joan



Nestle in particular frequently wrote and spoke out against 1970s and 80s feminists who condemned butch-femmes for reproducing heterosexual models of sexual domination. Another interview question suggests that the filmmakers were also skeptical of the DOB's assimilationist strategy: "Did [the DOB] really believe that the lesbian could integrate into society and did they see this as a positive step. *[sic]* In Lesbian/Woman they talk about trying to get women to tone down their masculine dress—how did they dress at the time? What were some of the reactions of the women. *[sic]*" These questions suggest LHA's subtle criticism of the DOB's encouragement of gender normativity in its constituents.

The interview questions also suggest LHA's concern for the class and race dynamics within the DOB's organization. The interviewers asked, for example, about "how class effected the DOB. *[sic]* How did most people perceive the organization—working class dykes? Middle class professionals?" They asked former DOB members to reflect on the participation of minority women, both at its origins and "as time went on." These interviews suggest that the filmic product, had it been completed, would have been a history of the DOB from the perspective of LHA, an organization with an abiding concern for radical inclusivity, sex-positive feminism, and critical race/class consciousness. Former DOB members' answers to these questions are now housed in LHA in the form of cassette and VHS tapes. These tapes are preserved as material for future researchers, with interviewees' responses shaped in part by LHA's questions and mission.

These examples of LHA's remediation of the Daughters of Bilitis help demonstrate the legacy of historical activism and the role of prior generations' historical production and lives as material in new compositions of lesbian history. The examples also demonstrate that the evidence housed in archives can be shaped by the archive itself, which should draw

rhetoricians and historians' attention to how historical evidence is produced and preserved—another central contention of this dissertation.

### **5.3 DIGITAL ARCHIVIZATION AND THE FUTURE OF HISTORICAL ACTIVISM**

The legacy of remediation in historical activism invites a future-oriented question about how historical activist material might become assembled, shaped and created by present-day rhetors. How might this material be “used” in new compositions and through what media and methods of distribution? What historiographic questions will present themselves in future political contexts? The ubiquity of amateur digital composing practices suggest that online new media might—might!—be the place where historical activism moves. As Dan Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig argue in their guide for composing online history, “the web...has given a much louder and more public voice to amateur historians.” Since a fundamental premise of this dissertation is that the technologies of historical production impact (but do not determine) the kinds of histories that rhetors produce, what kind of historiography might online new media encourage?

On the one hand, we might expect remedial historical activism to proliferate through digital platforms. After all, many digital compositionists have argued that new media technologies are especially conducive to the repurposing of prior media (Rice 57). Video, audio, and image editing software and self-publishing platforms such as blogs and video-sharing websites are widely available, making remediation more accessible to anyone with a computer and an internet connection—with the potential to reach a far

greater audience than, for example, LHA could hope to reach with their traveling slideshow. But, on the other hand, digital composing practices may also attenuate the sense that one must look backward to the long past to shape present community and identity. As I'll suggest in this closing section, historical activism may continue in the age of new media through digital *archivization* of video narratives that tell tales of the more recent, personal past. Digital archives look quite different than the material, place-based archives like the Lesbian Herstory Archives. But, as I'll demonstrate, the path from analog print and material archives to digital archives is not a neat line of progress nor a radical change. In some ways, the curation of personal experience online reflects the clustered anecdotes archived by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon in Lesbian/Woman. Below, I examine three video archives to begin to parse the nature of historical activism in the contemporary moment.

### **5.3.1 The “It Gets Better” Archive: Collecting Videos of the Recent Past**

In 2010, Dan Savage, a sex advice columnist, published a video in response to the suicide of Billy Lucas, a bullied American teen. In the video, Savage and his husband, Terry Miller, promised bullied teens that “it gets better,” recounting their own experiences as the victims of bullying in their youth before sharing their favorite, more recent memories of experiences they never thought possible as teenagers. Within a week, people across the world had made and uploaded 200 similar videos and, by June 2013, the collection has grown beyond 50,000 videos and 50 million views. Individually, the videos are progress narratives of the past: speakers film themselves with their web-cams and recount

memories of isolation, alienation, and bullying before sharing more recent, happier memories.

As a collection, the videos' historical activism works against the dominant narrative of the retrograde, hopeless queer. New media communication scholar Dustin Bradley Goltz explains that Savage's archive of videos combats the notion that

The future, for queers, is always "a harder path" of pain and struggle, a homophobic cautionary tale to prevent children from deviating from heteronormative trajectories of marriage, child, and inheritance. Discursively, the story has been, "it gets worse, much worse, for the queer." This essentializing master narrative does not specify its condemnation with regards to race, class, nation, or ability. LGBTQ people are people without futures—doomed peoples. (2)

En masse, the videos provide a collection of evidence against this dominant narrative, demonstrating that life *can* get "better."

Savage has been widely critiqued for defining "better" in terms of his own homonormative privilege as a wealthy, white man with a family and a legion of loyal followers, receiving particularly pointed criticism for sharing his favorite memory of walking the streets of Paris with his son (see Tseng). But, as Goltz argues, Savage clearly situates his video as *one* version of "better," his personal version, which is why the sizeable archive of submissions is vitally important to the project. The meaning of "better" is queered by the sheer number and "contradictory multivocality" (Goltz 4) of the videos. From a rhetorical standpoint, the massive archive, in which contributors create and submit their own videos, makes the composition of the collection a "*participatory* process that

deepens, extends, and contradicts the term [“better”] as additional voices continue to enter the discussion” (Goltz 4). Other videos besides Savage’s suggest that “better” may not mean family and wealth for some people, but it may mean *stronger*: the ability to handle the challenges of queer life more adeptly, rather than the absence of those challenges. Still other videos suggest that “better” means finding or creating community or progress in legislation for access to marriage and the military (Goltz 4).

Despite the difference in medium, Savage’s archive of videos has some parallels to the Lesbian/Woman archive, the book composed by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon nearly 40 years prior. Both the videos and the book compile and publish the *recent* past. Rather than preserving or appropriating records of a longer, extra-personal past (as the Lesbian Herstory Archives and Barbara Hammer did, with the exception of her autobiographical Tender Fictions), the It Gets Better archive collects, organizes, and distributes records of recent experience. Like Lesbian/Woman, the videos derive their rhetorical impact from the sheer volume of similar but subtly different anecdotes. As Goltz explains, It Gets Better’s “strength emerges through multivocality and internal contradiction, presenting a queer project of writing, rewriting, and reimagining what ‘better’ might be—actively pushing at the limited and limiting discourses of future” (5).

But, unlike Lesbian/Woman’s medium of print, wherein Martin and Lyon strategically paraphrased second-hand the experiences of women with whom they’d corresponded, the “vernacular video” medium of It Gets Better “affords a personal, direct, intimate element” (Goltz 7). There is *visual* evidence that the speaker has survived the challenges of his or her past, with testimony heard directly from the embodied speaker rather than a proxy like Martin and Lyon. Coming out on video may be less risky than in

the age of the Daughters of Bilitis, at least from a legal standpoint since homosexuality was an arrestable offense in the 1950s and 60s. However, the motivation for the It Gets Better campaign—extreme bullying and the hopelessness it can engender in young queers—makes coming out on video a courageous move. The courage of public, personal outing reinforces the videos’ message to viewers: that it might someday be possible and safe to come out publicly for them too. At the same time, the vastness of the archive provides some anonymity for videomakers, who may blend into the multitude.

Unlike Lesbian/Woman, this archive is not organized in classificatory categories. Instead, like most digital archives, the collection of videos is essentially a database, which can be browsed or searched for by words in the video titles and captions. This function ensures that videos are likely to be found by the niche audiences to which they are addressed. For example, a search for “lesbian” and “theater” or “butch” provides a video made by Carolyn Gage, a playwright, who addresses the video to “all of you lesbians who might be feeling despair about having a career in theater.” Gage recounts a memory of her struggle to find acting work early in her career because of her masculine appearance. She then fast-forwards to her recent past and shares that her life has “gotten better” because she became a successful playwright and *wrote* the roles that were not there for her in the decades earlier. Because her video makes her appearance visible, viewers see that Gage has not compromised her gender performance; instead, she has worked to create opportunities for others like her that she did not have. Gage’s narrative nuances Savage’s “better” life of gender normativity and family.

Because the narratives are in the medium of video and not text, they are not searchable except by what information the contributors provide about themselves in the

titles and captions. So while many, if not all, video makers *speak* their names, most do not put their names in the caption or title. By crafting their titles and captions, video-makers circumscribe their likely audience and protect a level of anonymity. This makes their disclosure more public than Lesbian/Woman's use of pseudonyms for its anecdotal individuals, but less public than it *could* be, if contributors were forced to identify themselves in the searchable text, which might then appear in a Google search. While nothing is "safe" on the Internet, the It Gets Better archive builds in some provisions of protection for its contributors.

Ultimately, the It Gets Better archive updates, but still reflects earlier forms of historical activism I've traced in this dissertation. More research into the impact of digital archivization and historical composing is needed to uncover their specific effects on the formation of lesbian identity and politics.

### **5.3.2 The Rainbow Family Tree: Networking Communication from Video Archives**

It Gets Better's focus on recent personal experience is apparent in other forms of LGBTQ composition that encourage more online communication between participants. The Rainbow Family Tree, for example, is an Australian website devoted to video narratives composed by LGBTQ individuals. Begun by PhD candidate Sonja Vivienne, the site sponsors digital storytelling workshops in which participants learn to shoot video, remediate their personal archive of photographs and footage, and organize their histories in the form of a digital narrative, which they then post on the site. To create networked community, the site invites visitors to watch the videos, post comments, contribute their

own experiences, and share on Facebook, Twitter, and email. Despite the videos' historical nature, as they tell the tales of past experience, the site itself encourages community in the present. The video makers are encouraged to leverage their shared experience to create digital bonds with other site-users.

Clearly, there are some connections with Lesbian/Woman. Like the Rainbow Family Tree videos, the clusters of anecdotes encouraged readers to respond to Martin and Lyon, seeking references for other lesbians near them with whom they might form community. But communication here is far faster and more networked, with the potential to reach far more people than the circle of acquaintances from which Martin and Lyon might find local women to refer letter writers. Also, there is little sense that the communication on Rainbow Family Tree would ever to extend beyond the digital arena into face-to-face communication. Instead, the networked feedback on the Rainbow Family Tree is primarily oriented toward providing support and empathy for the experiences shared on video.

This video archive, and built-in communication platforms, suggest that digital archives have the potential to speed up and proliferate communication between sexually identified individuals. More research on the effects of this communication, and its relationship to the archive itself, is needed to determine how it may affect the future of historical activism.

### **5.3.3 Coming Out on YouTube: Shaping, and Commodifying, Identification**

Similar to the recent-experience video narratives in the Rainbow Family Tree and It Gets Better archives, the “coming out” narrative has become a common genre of video



composition on YouTube. Compositionist Jonathan Alexander and media theorist Elizabeth Losh studied the thousands of coming out videos for their generic features, finding that the videos often take the form of a “self contained, recognizable, predictable story”: a “journey of assembling clues to personal sexuality that goes back to early experiences” (Alexander and Losh 39). Like the other video archives I’ve surveyed, these videos provide their makers with the opportunity to come out publicly, with some protection from a field so flooded with videos that theirs is unlikely to go viral or attract singular attention.

Wishing to gain more views, some viewers have capitalized on YouTube’s “video response” function, which links together original videos and other individuals’ video responses. This is a way of creating a “mini-archive” within the millions of videos on YouTube. Alexander and Losh found that one YouTube user, GDProphetXVII, received so many responses to his coming out video from viewers seeking more advice on how to come out to their own family and friends that he began to “archive” the videos. He did so by asking other “coming out” composers to “video respond” to his own video. That way, when users would find his video, they would find many more narratives linked to his own, creating a cache of videos that “might help someone come out for themselves” (GDProphetXVII qtd. in Alexander and Losh 33). These videos ultimately have a different historical activist purpose than the It Gets Better archive. Rather than teach viewers to have hope for a better future, this archive teaches viewers how to come out to their friends and family.

But, at the same time, the archive may also teach viewers what it means to “be gay,” reifying static sexual identifications by shaping individuals’ experience in its generic form. The genre of the coming out video encourages video makers to look for “clues” from their

youth that explains their present sexual identification. Alexander and Losh's study found that these clues were more often than not stereotypical "gay" qualities. The authors cite Kate O'Riordan, who argues that "although the ideal cybersubject as fluid and the ideal queer subject as fluid converge in fictions [about cyberspace]...there is more evidence to suggest that online queer communities are stratified into fixed identity hierarchies" (qtd. in Alexander and Losh 30). O'Riordan suggests that these fixed identity hierarchies may actually be reinforced online because of the commercial functions of the Internet. The reification of marketable categories of identity provide corporations with niche audiences to target. In contrast to the resolutely separatist funding for the Lesbian Herstory Archives, for example, online platforms for sharing experience are often means for collecting information for targeted marketing. On many sites, for example, visitors can choose an identity from a drop-down list rather than shape and reinforce it through historical activism.

Because of the commercial dimensions of much online composing, more research is needed on the impact of targeted marketing on the shaping of online expression, its archivization, and on the formation of sexual identifications and communities.

#### 5.4 CONCLUSION

The brief survey above demonstrates how the curation of lesbian experience continues online in the digital archivization of video narratives of the recent past.<sup>66</sup> As these examples demonstrate, there persists a driving concern to *archive*: to collect and arrange

past experience for present political and identificatory uses. Like the collectives I've studied in this dissertation, these archives have a purpose. It Gets Better is an activist campaign against hopelessness, suicide, and bullying. The Rainbow Family Tree is an activist campaign against the silencing of LGBTQ lives and a way to escape isolation by forging online community across the miles. YouTube coming out videos are part of an unorganized movement to help LGBTQ people learn to share their sexuality with their friends and families, though the archive may also have the effect of reifying static sexual identifications. These are historiographic compositional acts; through them, experience is recorded and archived, there to be *used* to shape collective history—as long as the sites are live and the corporate owners or sitemasters allow it.

But online new media also appears to change the nature of historical activism in some ways. While previous generations of historical activism were certainly participatory, the immediacy and dispersion of the Internet creates very different forms of community and communication. The nature of online media makes communication more networked and horizontal, less hierarchical. The YouTube archive in particular is continually constructed in a grassroots fashion, without organizational leaders like Martin, Lyon, or Nestle nor individual artists like Hammer and Dunye making ultimate representational decisions about the shape of lesbian history. However, the organic emergence of some of these video archives does not mean they are not shaped and curated. Savage's first It Gets Better video influenced the shape of those to follow and YouTube "archivist" GDProphetXVII's original video influenced the video responses he received. Contributions to each of the video archives I've discussed are shaped by the genre of the video narratives

already populating in the archives—genres that may encourage narratives of progress, of outing, and of fixed sexual identification.

As I think ahead to future research on historical activism and queer rhetoric, this reflection suggests that more attention remains to be paid to what happens to amateur historiography in digital media. Like the remedial historical activism I focused on in the first half of this chapter, the designers of digital archives make strategic *use* of their contents. These archives are designed for specific purposes, and it makes sense to ask who is curating them and to what end, since these archives provide both identificatory and scholarly resources. When considering digital historiography and archivization, it seems even more important to begin with collectivity as a *question*, rather than a given. In this dissertation, I argued that the Daughters of Bilitis, for example, cohered around middle-class values and the goal of social assimilation, while the Lesbian Herstory Archives sought to break down the boundaries of class through a radically inclusive policy for seeking out especially the histories and records of working class, non-white, and international women with same-sex desire. What happens to the boundaries of class, race, and nation in online historical activism? What is the nature of collectivity in digital arenas and what happens to “writing the past” when it is composed and archived online? What happens to the drive to recognition with the *longer* past, represented by the historical activism of the collectives in this study and theorized so thoroughly by queer studies scholars Scott Bravmann, Heather Love, and Ann Cvetkovich? How does digital archivization change the way historical activists build and engage materials? How do the commercial dimensions of online platforms affect the formation of sexual identifications, community, and communication? These questions, among many, remain to be answered.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> In The Songs of Bilitis, Louys describes Bilitis's matrilineal origins thusly: "[Bilitis] was the daughter of a Greek father and a Phoenician mother. She does not seem to have known her father, for he takes no part in the memories of her childhood. He may even have died before she was born. Otherwise it would be difficult to explain how she came to bear a Phoenician name, which her mother alone could have given her" (13, translated by Alvah C. Bessie).

<sup>2</sup> Representatively, in the introduction to their anthology of gay and lesbian recovery projects, Martin Duberman, Martha Vincinus, and George Chauncy argue that "some of the most important issues facing, agitating, and sometimes dividing" lesbian and gay communities "today, personally and collectively, are *best addressed historically*" (quoted in Bravmann 4, emphasis mine).

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Williams asserts, "even in the simplest group, there are, as in a 'society,' relations of tension and conflict as well as cooperation" (83). Like Burke, Williams parses the relationship between individuals and collectives, claiming provocatively that "the principle we need to break through to new meanings is that of the fundamental relation between organism and organization," neither of which are fixed. "To know ourselves and our world," he contends, we need to continually break down the organism and the organization to the "actual processes which are changing us and which we wish to change" (98).

<sup>4</sup> This "misrecognition" (Butler) is what Jose Muñoz calls "disidentification": the sense of both belonging and not belonging.

<sup>5</sup> Bravmann's focus is on the uses of queer history for academics situated in lesbian and gay studies. Despite claims to attend to "lesbian and gay studies *and* communities—their insistent engagement with history," virtually the entirety of Bravmann's analysis is devoted to lesbian and gay studies, not communities (3, emphasis mine). Thus, while Bravmann's excellent book, Queer Fictions of the Past, is an important foundation for this project, he conflates academic historiographers with the gay, lesbian, and queer figures and communities they claim to recover. His book surveys the historical work of scholars such as George Chauncy, Esther Newton, Lillian Faderman, Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis, Allen Berube, and John D'Emilio: each prominent historians in the history of sexuality with celebrated and widely read published books. Bravmann's primary goal is to

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“queer” the discourse of history by problematizing academic history writing as a “socially constructed and arbitrary regime of the ‘normal’ and the ‘natural’” (ix).

<sup>6</sup> As Glenn explains, “whether using Corbett’s, Kennedy’s, Kinneavy’s, or Murphy’s map, we followed an aristocratic blue line, a master narrative that started with Corax and Tisias and led directly to Plato and Aristotle, then Cicero, Quintillian, and St. Augustine, and eventually to Weaver, Richards, Perelman, and Burke” (“Remapping” 287).

<sup>7</sup> For an interesting example of this work, see Lindal Buchanan’s Regendering Delivery, which examines how women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century leveraged their maternalized gender expression to, paradoxically and rebelliously, speak publicly.

<sup>8</sup> This intervention comes in a long line of reflexive critique. One defining characteristic of feminist historiography is the willingness to think reflectively and critically about our own methodological shortcomings. Most notably, Carol Mattingly questioned feminist historiography’s tendency to recover historical figures—primarily elite, white suffragettes such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony—who reminded contemporary academic feminists of themselves, resulting in a canonization of *particular* women. Thus the move toward inclusivity that began as an effort to diversify the history of rhetoric by adding women to the cacophony of male voices began to diversify the category of women as well. For example, Shirley Wilson Logan’s 1995 book, With Pen and Voice: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth Century African-American Women, was intended to recover the voices and rhetoric of African American women into the history of rhetoric, to provide a storehouse of African American women’s discourse so that it could be heard and studied.

<sup>9</sup> Stuart Selber argues that “technological contexts have moved toward the center of disciplinary conversations and encouraged people to think expansively and sometimes untraditionally about their practices and perspectives.”

<sup>10</sup> Computers and composition focuses on the role and uses of technology in writing pedagogy, while technical communications specializes in the applications of technologies in nonacademic, often professional settings

<sup>11</sup> Prior to Morris’ call to public address scholars, Wendy Sharer advocated for rhetoric and composition scholars to attend to the material processes of the archive.

<sup>12</sup> These letters were received between 1972-1979 and are now part of the Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Papers at San Francisco’s GLBT Historical Society.

<sup>13</sup> Despite its infamy as a “wide open” city, 1950s San Francisco was also subject to Joseph McCarthy’s drive to rid the country of communism and any evidence of internal decay. Femininity and homosexuality became symbols of weakness and vulnerability while nuclear family ideals of patriarchal leadership and heterosexual monogamy (at least by women) were lauded in both official and vernacular discourse. As Nan Boyd explains, homosexuality became ideologically fused with other sins that defied social control, such as prostitution and juvenile delinquency, an association that played out in the reality of the bar scene. The conflation of homosexuality with immorality, prostitution, and drug use produced widely disseminated stereotypes of lesbians as dangerous delinquents and resulted in severe police aggression and social ostracism.

<sup>14</sup> Boyd chronicles the gender transgressive and working class culture of queer bars in San Francisco, arguing that the “roots of queer activism are...found in the less organized (but numerically stronger) pockets of queer association and camaraderie in bars and taverns”



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(10). She unearths an entwined history of sex tourism (voyeuristic tourists interested in witnessing cross-dressing and “same-sex and cross-race sexual display”); prostitution; drag king entertainment; and lesbian culture in the North Shore bars of 1930s-50s San Francisco (15).

<sup>15</sup> The split across class and race lines was not conscious at the time; in *Lesbian/Woman*, Martin and Lyon write that “only recently have we realized that the DOB split was along worker/middle class lines” (222).

<sup>16</sup> The Mattachine Society and ONE, Inc. were the first organizations in the homophile movement but were primarily run by and for gay male activists. The DOB was formed in part because issues distinct to lesbians were not considered by the movement; the existing organizations focused more on public sex laws than issues like lesbian motherhood and employment rights, for example.

<sup>17</sup> This transition is evinced in the DOB statement of purpose, which occurred without editorial comment in *The Ladder*. From the statement’s inception through 1966, the first purpose had included (among several other dictums) the phrase, “education of the *variant*...by advocating a mode of behavior and dress acceptable to society” (1966, 11.3). The January 1967 issue’s first goal reads, “education of the *Lesbian*...by providing the Lesbian a forum for the interchange of ideas within her own group” (1967, 11.4). There is some evidence that women with same-sex desire referred to themselves and each other as “gay,” but there is little to no use of the term in DOB-composed literature, perhaps in an effort to distinguish themselves from the gay men of One, Inc. and Mattachine.

<sup>18</sup> For a longer history of lesbian identification and naming, see David Halperin’s *How to Do the History of Sexuality*, in which he traces the first usages of “Lesbian” and other classifications of relations between women.

<sup>19</sup> Members primarily joined feminist efforts rather than gay liberation after the DOB-NACHO convention in 1966 (a joint conference between the DOB and the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations). The conference, which brought together several, primarily gay male, homophile organizations overwhelmingly featured male speakers and issues. After the conference, DOB members began to feel they were more aligned with the burgeoning feminist movement than gay activism (*Lesbian/Woman* 256). *Lesbian/Woman* primarily recounts experiences of women Martin and Lyon had met during the 1950s and 60s but does reveal its historical moment in the brief, final chapter, a manifesto for lesbian-feminist liberation exhorting readers to eschew toleration and demand acceptance. Interestingly, no readers referenced this chapter in their letters.

<sup>20</sup> Ann Aldrich was Marijane Meaker’s pseudonym. It was chosen because it seemed to be a benign American women’s name. Meaker wrote under other pseudonyms in her other kinds of work (Vin Packer, for example, was her name on her mystery fiction books).

<sup>21</sup> Despite the negative representation, many women in the 1950s responded gratefully to Aldrich, appreciating the veritable guidebook to the New York lesbian bar scene that her books provided for women seeking the company of women and having no other recourse to find it. Aldrich received hundreds of letters, apparently mostly positive, from her lesbian readers. She devotes one chapter in *We Too Must Love* to reprinting excerpts from the letters of her fans.

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<sup>22</sup> Gene Damon was the pen name of Barbara Grier, who wrote the literary reviews for The Ladder for many years. She also wrote under the pseudonyms Lennox Strong and Vern Niven. In 1968, she became editor of The Ladder, expanding its page count to 40 glossy pages and removing the word “Lesbian” from the cover in an attempt to reach more women. In 1970, when the DOB disbanded, she and then-DOB President Rita LaPorte, broke into the DOB office, took back issues and the two existing copies of the mailing list, and moved production of The Ladder to Reno, Nevada, without informing Martin or Lyon. This amounted to a theft of the magazine, according to Martin and Lyon, because, to assuage the fears of exposure held by subscription holders, there were only the two copies of the mailing list.

<sup>23</sup> Their move to oppose and revise professional medical opinions shows a transitioned understanding from the DOB’s early days. The DOB spent much time seeking to participate in “authorized and responsible” psychology and sociology studies to better understand the “variant” (as described in the organization’s first published goals). They first sought to work *with* medical professionals, but through the experience of working with “experts,” they concluded that biases blinded researchers from objectively designed studies and interpreted results. Consequently, their longtime research director, Florence Jaffee designed and interpreted many surveys of The Ladder readers, the results of which came to be regularly printed in the newsletter.

<sup>24</sup> The DOB’s naming after Bilitis, Sappho’s fictional “contemporary,” suggests the complexity of disidentification: the sense of both belonging and “misrecognizing” a historical figure (Butler; Muñoz).

<sup>25</sup> Incidentally, Marijane Meaker (Ann Aldrich’s real name) is credited with writing the first mass-marked pulp about lesbians, Spring Fire, in 1952. Meaker wrote more than 16 pulps under her lesbian fiction pseudonym, Vin Packer.

<sup>26</sup> On the inside cover, the authors write: “The people in this book are real. The incidents are true. However, we have changed most of the names and places to protect the innocent, lest they be punished for the infamous crime of being.” I enclose these names in quotation marks to emphasize their pseudonymic nature.

<sup>27</sup> The rurally-based women who wrote Martin and Lyon commonly cited feelings of “isolation”. But, as scholars such as Mary Gray and John Howard have argued, it is important to nuance the metronormative narrative that positions the rural as a space that must be “left behind to reach gay culture and community formation in the cities” (Howard 63). As some letters suggest, some writers did have access to gay bars but avoided them because they felt out of place among the patrons. Connection with other lesbian-identifying women may have been possible in non-urban locations, but these individuals’ sense of lesbian identity precluded membership in bar-based community.

<sup>28</sup> While Meeker’s point is mostly accurate, Lesbian/Woman does briefly acknowledge that black lesbians were often forced to “make a choice between the two ‘causes’ that touched their lives so intimately”: civil and gay rights (114).

<sup>29</sup> Martin and Lyon’s contract was also terminated because the editors complained that the authors refused to admit any doubt about their “choice of lifestyle,” when “it’s the nature of being human to have doubts.” But Martin and Lyon refused to suggest that lesbianism might be a moral, mental, or physical illness, even if their contract was terminated. Because

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they were promoting a collective self-acceptance, they attributed the problems lesbians suffered to the hostility of society, not lesbians themselves.

<sup>30</sup> San Francisco's Glide Publications picked up the book.

<sup>34</sup> Though I pose this question to queer archives, it has been asked of queer history more generally by theorists such as Thomas Piontek, who critiques the narratives that set the 1969 Stonewall Inn uprising as the origin of gay activism and community and thereby discount and reduce earlier homophile efforts. Queer theory's opposition to contemporary forms of homonormativity makes it difficult to place earlier forms of proto-homonormative activism.

<sup>32</sup> Such questions become particularly pointed when historians and activists seek information about a historical figure's sexuality, which may be concealed, excluded, or protected from access in the archive. For example, Long Island's Alice Austen Society, an archive of the eponymous photographer's work and life, has been accused by lesbian activists like the Lesbian Avengers and in documentaries by Su Friedrich and Barbara Hammer for destroying documents referencing Austen's sexuality and preventing historians who intended to "out" Austen from using the archives.

<sup>32</sup> Similar tales are told of Willa Cather, who destroyed many of her own letters and personal documents before her death, and restricted future scholars from quoting from the personal papers that remained in archives; Cather's lesbianism is, perhaps consequently, hotly contested by historians and queer scholars. See Andrew Jewell's essay "'Curious Survivals': The Letters of Willa Cather" for more information on Cather's destruction of and restrictions on access to her personal papers.

<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, the edited collection Refiguring the Archive, which includes the proceedings from a conference in South Africa on reconsiderations of colonial archives post-Apartheid. See also two thematic double issues of Archival Science, Vols. 1-2 and 3-4 in 2002, edited by Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook, and Rodney G.S. Carter's article in Archivaria, "Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silence, and Power in Silence" (Spring 2006).

<sup>34</sup> The archive also serves as a repository of national and sub-national community or group history with the potential to provide a basis for connection across difference. As a recent example of the significance of archives, the destruction and looting of Iraq's national museum, library, and archives has meant the loss of an "artifactual heritage that might have provided a basis for building a common culture among Iraq's disparate ethnic and religious groups," the loss of a way to link evidence of shared history to the construction of a new, cohesive and harmonious government (Manoff 12).<sup>34</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Manoff summarizes Derrida's example supporting his claim that the technical structure of the archive determines what is archived. The history of psychoanalysis depends greatly on the preserved paper correspondence between Freud and his colleagues. Access to different technologies (fax machines, email, etc) would have dramatically changed the kinds of work early scholars and psychoanalysts did and how it was preserved for future generations of psychoanalytic scholars and practitioners.

<sup>36</sup> Eskridge describes cases beginning in the early 60s where the newly created vice squads would follow same-sex pairs into their homes, listen outside until they heard evidence of

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intimate relations, and break down the residence doors to arrest the parties. Couples could be arrested if seen or heard through a peephole or through a vent (724). Often, members of the squad would act as “decoys” to attract same-sex advances, lure the unsuspecting parties to a private place, and arrest them (720).

<sup>37</sup> New York and California had statutes making it illegal to appear in public wearing a “disguise” or “masquerade.” Eskridge contends that these laws were not intended to police cross-dressing but were utilized as such. Eskridge, Nestle, and Martin and Lyon each write independently of the “three-piece” rule: a woman must wear at least three pieces of women’s clothing to avoid arrest.

<sup>38</sup> See [A Restricted Country](#)

<sup>39</sup> The house is intended to be so welcoming, in fact, that after my initial visit and tour, I was given a key so I could return each day when the Archives was closed to visitors.

<sup>40</sup> Joan Nestle was walking down a New York street and happened upon a “lesbian fiction sale.” In a stroke of luck, it turned out to be DOB NY’s library, the contents of which had once loaned to members who sought representations of lesbians in the 50s and 60s.

<sup>41</sup> The publishing of this principle in the 16<sup>th</sup> newsletter marks a change from previous newsletters. The first newsletter, published in 1975 includes a statement of purpose that articulates many of the enduring principles—the goal of preserving lesbian life and activities for future generations against patriarchal and homophobic historiographic practices; government by a lesbian collective; acquisitions of any materials possessed and/or produced by a lesbian woman. But in this inaugural newsletter, “lesbian” is not defined. The original statement of purpose reappears, mostly consistently, in subsequent newsletters until 1986, when it is omitted for the next 10 years. Its reappearance in the 1996 newsletter, revised to define “lesbian” as any woman who “has the courage to touch or desire another woman” suggests that issues of definition may have bubbled behind the scenes of LHA’s public documents.

<sup>42</sup> For a scholarly example of queer historiography that resonates with Schwarz’s approach, see Judith Halberstam’s book, [Female Masculinity](#). Halberstam examines various cultural manifestations of female masculinity from the long past to the present, and analyzes their purposeful gender bending and ambiguity for its transformative potential. Instead of looking at men or maleness, she looks at “masculinity” as a construct that only becomes “legible” when it emerges in bodies that are not white, middle-class males. Her book unfolds not chronologically like many sexual histories, but rather through various “embodiments” of female masculinity, which she names and historicizes (the tribade, the invert, the stone butch, the female-to-male transsexual, cinematic female masculinities, drag king performers, and finally, her triumphant image of the “raging bull (dyke)”). The book is an example of an attempt to compose history of sexuality without forcing contemporary conceptions of “lesbian” on past gendered and sexual expression.

<sup>43</sup> See Michael Warner’s [Fear of Queer Planet](#) for elaboration. Warner asserts that “Every person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that her stigmatization is connected with gender, the family, notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about the

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bearing of the body. Being queer means fighting about these issues all the time, locally and piecemeal but always with consequences. It means being able, more or less articulately to challenge the common understanding of what gender difference means, or what the state is for, or what “health” entails, or what would define fairness or what a good relationship to the planet’s environment would be...queer struggles aim not just at toleration or equality but at challenging those institutions and accounts” (xiii).

<sup>44</sup> Schwarz’ approach may not have been or be employed universally by other archivettes. Indeed, LHA’s definition of lesbian intentionally seems never to have been codified; there are no pre-established rules for archives volunteers to follow to define what a document must contain to suggest same-sex desire between women. But Schwartz’s criteria does explain the diversity in the collection.

<sup>45</sup> The arrangement of displayed objects is, of course, impermanent. At any moment, depending on the whims of an archivist or the uses of the physical space for different events, the objects may be rearranged, removed, or replaced. But the eclectic nature of juxtaposed objects suggests that there is some effort to display diverse and disparate materials.

<sup>46</sup> Bishop’s experience dramatizes Katherine Hayles’ description of the interactional nature of materiality: “Materiality is not merely an inert collection of physical properties but a dynamic quality that emerges from the interplay between the text as a physical artifact, its conceptual content, and the interpretive activities of readers and writers. Materiality thus cannot be specified in advance; rather, it occupies a borderland—or better, performs as connective tissue—joining the physical and mental, the artifact and the user.” (72)

<sup>47</sup> Many other examples of metonymy are present in the archive through repetition: for example, the pulp fiction described earlier in the chapter exist in the shelves housing their collection, their covers are reproduced and enlarged in a traveling exhibit, entitled “Queer Covers,” as well as photographed for in several slides in the slideshow.

<sup>48</sup> For example, Manovich writes in The Language of New Media that “the printed word tradition that initially dominated the language of cultural interfaces is becoming less important, while the part played by *cinematic elements* is becoming progressively stronger. This is consistent with a general trend in modern society toward presenting more and more information in the form of *time-based audiovisual moving image sequences* rather than as [static] text” (78, emphasis mine). Murray calls cinema the “logical conclusion” of current trends in rhetoric and composition, arguing that “not only is rhetoric based in multiple modes, it is also the case that we are headed for an intellectual environment that will privilege multiple modes composed *in time* as in cinema” (182). Further, he writes that, “as we move toward the increased ubiquity of computers and the simultaneous ubiquity of digital products, textual production will move toward the cinematic and immersive, requiring writing teachers to be better equipped to analyze, instruct, and assess modes of text constructed not only within space but also constructed within time” (182).

<sup>49</sup> It also bears mention that, while the majority of scholars in multimodal composition and rhetoric make claims for the affordances of *digital* multimodality in particular, in this chapter, I follow the examples of scholars such as Jody Shipka and Kress and Van Leeuwen, who each expand what can be defined as a multimodal text. Shipka examines “texts” such as performance or the marking of material artifacts, like ballet shoes, with words as

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multimodal texts. Kress and Van Leeuwen use the example of the arrangement of objects in a child's room as a communication event.

<sup>50</sup> Previous chapters relied much less on queer studies and theory because the collective rhetors featured preceded the advent of the field. I contextualize the multimodal composers in this chapter with queer theory to better understand the composers' design and purpose of their historiographic films.

<sup>51</sup> This queer resistance to the structures underlying the determination of figures worthy of recovery is not itself radical—it emerges from a longer feminist tradition led by historians like Joan Wallach Scott and rhetorical historiographers like Barbara Biesecker and Michelle Ballif, with roots in Nietzsche and Foucault. Indeed, Cloud cites Biesecker's groundbreaking 1992 feminist historiography article, "Coming to Terms with Recent Attempts to Write Women into the History Of Rhetoric," and extends its reproach to the liberal recovery of queer subjects, contending like Biesecker that the "project of liberal recovery risks replicating an unhelpful ideological individualism that fails to recognize the structural contexts of and possibilities for queer subjects to emerge" (Cloud 25).

<sup>52</sup> "Queer" is defined by David Halperin as "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative" (Saint Foucault 62). "Queerness" then, is without essence, a mobile orientation against normativity that is necessarily fluid, multiple. I am contending that these multimodal historiographers take a queer stance by simultaneously critiquing and claiming shifting allegiances to different versions of a lesbian past.

<sup>53</sup> While gainsaying is facilitated and enhanced by multimodality, it does not require it. In Women on the Margins: Three 17<sup>th</sup> Century Lives, Natalie Davis' preface is a script of a "play" in which Davis, as a character, converses with the three women whose autobiographical journals she analyzes in the body of the book. The three "historical" women argue with Davis about their juxtaposition, claiming that their different religions make them too dissimilar to be bound together in the same book. Davis uses her character to defend her choices and to acknowledge the necessarily presentist, personal motivation for her study. The "historical" women object to Davis' modern day terminology of marginalization and her claims of their "adventurous" courage until Davis admits that it is she, the historian, who wants the adventure, who wants to liberate these women and make them strong figures of history (1997).

<sup>54</sup> Hammer's representation of memory reflects David Lowenthal's contention that we "select, distill, distort, and transform the past, accommodating things remembered to the needs of the present...Memories are not ready-made reflections of the past, but eclectic selective reconstructions based on subsequent actions and perceptions and on ever-changing codes by which we delineate, symbolize and classify the world around us" (210). Hammer admits and even emphasizes the mediation of her memory, the way in which her experiences are reconfigured by her "subsequent actions and perceptions"—her subsequent identification as a lesbian, the "everchanging codes" through which she organizes herself within a network of communities.

<sup>55</sup> One woman's voice shares, "I don't know, maybe I wanted to pass for a male, I certainly felt like one. When I left home, I changed my name to Sandy Kern, because it could be male

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or female.” The unnamed voices share memories of life in the Christopher Street bars in the 40s and 50s; memories of close gay male friends lost to AIDS; memories of working in factories during WWII; memories of first sexual experiences; memories of finding space to be together in public: “We went down to grand central to take trains together because women couldn’t be seen together hugging, kissing [anywhere else]. We’d pretend we were leaving one another and we’d kiss goodbye.”

<sup>56</sup> For histories’ suggesting Roosevelt’s “lesbianism,” see works by Blanche Wiesen Cook (Eleanor Roosevelt, Vol. 1, 1993), Neil Miller (Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present, 2008), and Roger Streitmatter (Empty Without You: The Intimate Letters Of Eleanor Roosevelt And Lorena Hickok, 2000). See also Dana Cloud’s “The First Lady’s Privates” in Queering Public Address, 2007 for a critique of moves to either claim or deny Roosevelt into “lesbian history.”

<sup>57</sup> Mashups like these are another example of multimodal nonlinearity. By mashing together clips from different periods of time, Hammer undermines linear chronology, any sense of a causal temporal march that might lead a particular present. Instead, Hammer employs multimodality to tell multiple time periods simultaneously.

<sup>58</sup> When Hammer could not gain access to an archived film reel to manipulate, either because of copyright or because, for example, a newspaper tabloid story did not have a film equivalent, she employed actors to perform what “would have been” archival footage. For instance, intercut with images of a tabloid headline about lesbians “nabbed for armed robbery,” Hammer films New York drag kings acting out a mob scene in the streets. In another filmed scene, Hammer has actors play a doctor, a femme patient, and the patient’s butch partner. The doctor, played by gay composer David del Tredici, tries to measure the patient’s lesbian anatomical difference, implicitly referring to the sexological studies of the late nineteenth century. But in a twist, Hammer has the patient (art critic Coco Fusco) and her lover (artist Jane Fine) turn the measuring tool on the doctor, pinning him down and assessing his masculinity.

<sup>59</sup> Hammer includes footage of an 1896 snuff film featuring a woman being hung. She has no evidence that the woman in the film was hung because she was a lesbian, but she assumes that such violence was perpetrated against lesbians, or against women whose desire in some way exceeded demands for feminine chastity. In an interview, Hammer speculates on the woman’s identity: “Maybe she’s a prostitute, maybe she was strictly sexual and erotic, maybe she was just your run-of-the-mill lesbian witch! But we do know that lesbians were murdered for their sexual principles throughout the ages, in all different kind of ways. So she stands as a marker of lesbian persecution” (Handelman n.p.).

<sup>60</sup> “Cheryl’s” pleasure at finding a historical lesbian with whom to identify recalls the first film I analyze in this chapter: Hammer’s The Female Closet. While Hammer represented the refusal of a historical subject to fit in her prefigured, presentist categories and the tension this creates with a motivated historian, Dunye represents the affective *need* for the queer historian to identify with her historical subjects. Because Richards is fictional, it is the need for affective “touch across time” that is emphasized in her film (Dinshaw 4).

<sup>61</sup> From WOW’s mission statement: <http://www.wowcafe.org/story/>

<sup>62</sup> The meaningfulness of the pulps is apparent both in the frequency of mention in the Daughters of Bilitis’ The Ladder magazines—in which significant sections were devoted to

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“literary reviews” and many letters from readers discussed the texts. The DOB compiled a library of these books and others to lend to local members. Similarly, the pulps donated to the Lesbian Herstory Archives by Mabel Hampton are one of the archive’s most prized collections, frequently referenced in their slideshow, traveling exhibits, and newsletters. The archive conducted and preserved the results of a survey of the effects of The Well of Loneliness on readers—many of whom had been given the book by their mothers.

<sup>63</sup> The first three segments feature, respectively, Mabel Hampton, an elderly African American member of the Lesbian Herstory Archives collective; Marge McDonald, a woman who willed her diaries and letters to LHA, who then had to rescue the materials from McDonald’s family’s destruction; and Asian Lesbians of the East Coast, a collective of Asian American lesbians.

<sup>64</sup> Caryl Flinn describes the nostalgia of camp as a “morbid” one, preoccupied with “fleshy, grotesque, decaying death” (435).

<sup>65</sup> Other accounts, such as Soares’ chapter on The Ladder in Sonya Jones’ collection, Gay and Lesbian Literature Since WWII, claim that Soares collaborated with Yager, Kelly Anderson and Trista Sordillo.

<sup>66</sup> While I chose to focus on video examples here, historical activism may well proliferate in other forms of digital composing, such as blogs and social-networking sites.