

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Publications and Research

CUNY Graduate Center

2013

Queer Housing Nacional Google Group: A Librarian's Documentation of a Community-Specific Resource

Shawn(ta) Smith-Cruz
CUNY Graduate Center

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_pubs/24

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).
Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

Queer Housing Nacional Google Group: A Librarian's Documentation of a Community-Specific Resource

By Shawn(ta) Smith-Cruz

Published in In Morrone, M. (2014). *Informed agitation: Library and information skills in social justice movements and beyond*.

Introduction

There was a time in New York City when Craigslist was the only viable source for housing. When seeking to rent a room, with no other contacts, a queer person would often enter "lesbian" or "queer" in the Craigslist search engine, hoping that the two results would amount to possible lodging. Aside from bulletin boards at the LGBT Community Center in the West Village, or perhaps on college campuses if one was a student, there was no community resource for queer housing.

Queer housing is a historical necessity to the queer community (I'll use the word "queer" here for lesbian, or QWOC for queer women of color, because this is the segment of the community that Queer Housing Nacional serves primarily; this isn't a footnote because it is the purpose of this essay: 'Housing for Queer Women of Color!' as a necessity, a purposeful venture, a need unfilled and politically relevant, a librarian's resource). The lesbian separatist movement initiated lesbian land communities in the late '70s and early '80s where somewhere in the middle of the country, or at its borderlands, land was attained, and women had the ability to construct utopic coexistences, outside of the patriarchal culture. A documented herstory of lesbian land communities exists, as well as of its urban iterations such as collectively run organizations where consciousness-raising groups led women to gather and deconstruct race, gender, identity, and other political associations. Two such organizations from this time still in existence are in NYC: the Lesbian Herstory

Archives (LHA), of which I am a collective member, where archiving and access to lesbian culture is part of the mission, and the WOW Café Theater, where performance and radical theater is at the forefront of its mission. Each of these organizations remain with volunteer-led community practice as its base.

Although these volunteer-run collectives have legal ownership of their space, and LHA even has a caretaker who lives on premises, neither has housing at its center. The unpaid, work from sweat-and-love-and-community-ethic of the lesbian community still exists, yes, but the concept of a utopian existence of home life, where this culture is a possibility from the moment of waking to the moment of rest, where options for safety and shelter and uncensored living are primary—like the separatist housing communities of the past—has gone. Instead, we have an urban population in New York City where, whether in the outskirts of Brooklyn or the buildings that line the Bronx, a queer woman of color's access to affordable and safe housing is teamed against the gentrification of working class and people of color communities, masked as hipster intentional communities where food coops, coffee shops, yoga bars, and community gardens often leave queer women of color as the last to be chosen for housing.

The housing crisis for queer women of color is an issue of access. As a native New Yorker—born and raised in “the people’s republic of Brooklyn,” in neighborhoods during a time when they were still filled with like faces and foods and language—as a descendent of Jamaican and Guatemalan-Belizean-Garifuna peoples, the African and the Arawak; as an American same-gender-loving queer woman; as a City University of New York student and then employee; as legally blind; a rasta-man’s

daughter, sibling to nine brethren and sistren, eight surviving, with two mothers, two fathers, and cousins upon cousins to call home, *it is with the queer women of color(migrant) communities in mind that makes my work as a librarian—the ability to share resources and provide access—useful.* These are the communities from which I am bred, the places that have created me, and the identities that inform my work.

Where access is unattainable, librarians are necessary. As librarians, we learn that we have access to all information, and when we do not, we fight for this access and implement resource-sharing initiatives. Yet having access to information means noting the gaps. The work is in claiming, naming, and defining the collective community in order to close these gaps. Where information does not exist for others, we as agitated and informed community members take the risk of “creating” information by noting the gaps—the missing names, forgotten institutions, and skewed language—and filling them.

As a librarian of multiple communities, however, I often struggle with these ideas of communities and information access. If community exists in spatial realms, as does information, how then can we ensure access to all information if first we do not advocate to open all spaces? Information, like a physical space, is definitively closed to some while available to others. There are contextual boundaries that limit and arrange formations of thought and space. In this new open source age we as information creators and disseminators have the power to fill gaps of information access, widen spaces, reconstructing boundaries and how information is applied and utilized. To provide access to these spaces, however, one must not neglect the herstoric concepts of lesbian separatism. Some communities are intentionally

separate, with doors bolted from the inside, and require that these separations remain as collectively defined community. It is the model of a closed community resource that I found helpful in grappling with the contradictory nature of open source possibilities.

Ensuring users were at the root of information-gathering and dissemination is the core principle that I used for this constituency-based initiative. In other words, queer women of color decided how the resource was formulated and accessed. This article is meant to stand as a case study for how librarians can apply their skills of information dissemination and the theoretical tools of open access to specific community groups. An inadvertent result may be to further document the continuing journey of a queer housing movement.

In my work with Queer Housing Nacional, I have found that when community members have total power to uphold a mission, they grow stronger, share information responsibly, and ultimately find the community-based component to be the most valuable characteristic of the resource. One may, however, find that this resource complicates librarianship's promotion of open access since Queer Housing Nacional encourages closed participatory group structures, with collective distributions of power, using lesbian separatism as its guide. Nevertheless, honing the skills of my profession and allowing them to extend to those who share my own identity was a key factor in the success and depth of Queer Housing Nacional. As moderator, I received messages and screened them. Yet, as a librarian, I made specific choices to ensure that this was a useful, active, and relevant resource. Here I outline the ways in which the creation of a Google Group as a community tool benefited from

the skills of a librarian as moderator. I also discuss the challenges of simple classification when applied to an intangible and fluid community. An overview of my assessment and its implications, followed by an appendix listing survey questions and notable responses from list members, will conclude that efforts to create true community-specific resources are necessary and possible.

Information and Community

Firstly, what is information? The principles of records information management (RIM) generally teach us that there are four steps to birthing information. Step 1: All existence is data. Step 2: Data in context is a document. Step 3: A document must be 'managed' to become a record. To manage in this instance means to provide a story and attach this document to other data, or what we call in information science metadata. Step 4: The record must be accessed to finally become information.

Although data, documents, and records exist all around us, seldom are the datasets of *all* life—to be specific, Black life, Caribbean life, lesbian life, the list is infinite, really—documented, and even more seldom are they cataloged as records and then turned into information by the above definition. My role as a librarian is to provide access to information, but my role as a community member—as a black lesbian, an archivist, and a writer—is to create new information, by providing access to various forms of community documentation. My marginal voice and multiple

communities enhance my role as librarian and archivist in the information life cycle, constantly documenting, recording, naming, and creating context for our existence.

In some communities, there is a stable understanding of who and what belongs inside its borders. Although if I were asked to define a completely static community, this would be a challenge: Religiously-affiliated communities? Married people? Students? Librarians? Do we know where the folks of these communities end and begin?

In the library world, “community” takes on a geographic scope for public and new media libraries, or a cohort in academic libraries. Public service librarians see the community as the boundaries for which service should stretch, and so, with this in mind, community is at times expanded to include all possible patrons—those walking through the doors, those accessing the website, the campus at large, friends’ groups, and alumni. Although the library world’s concept of community varies in language based on type of library, the linking factor for a library’s community is based on a single characteristic: access. Those who have access to the library are the library’s community. In a technical sense, every person in the nation has access to at least one library. Privileged people have access to multiple libraries—a university library, a special or private library, and, of course, one or more public libraries. Less privileged people have only their prison library, or a single underfunded public branch library with limited hours. As an example, every person with a New York State address has access to Brooklyn Public library, New York Public Library, Queens Library, and any additional library that exists in his or her geographic territory. Consortiums such as the Metropolitan New York Library Council (METRO) and the

Academic Libraries of Brooklyn (ALB) give patrons with initial library privileges continued access to multiple libraries. As a student at Queens College and a faculty librarian at the CUNY Graduate Center, I for example have access to all CUNY campus libraries, our METRO membership, Columbia and New York Universities through a pilot program called the Manhattan Research Library Initiative, and the list continues. Furthermore, resource sharing and Web 2.0 information exchanges have blurred the lines of individual access, thereby definitively expanding the abstract definitions of community. The work that I do, whether or not I chose it, is affected by and deeply instilled in community. A career in librarianship was justified because it represented a vehicle, a tool, or a possibility for community-building in an expansive way, as well as a deeply rooted ethic for our mission of systemic access.

As communities are tightly woven together, it is difficult to comprehend the individual and her level of access. While some people may have many access points, others have very few. A strong community focus with a targeted scope will reify the community's definition. Just as how tools that librarians develop and promote are often those meant for direct community consumption, Queer Housing Nacional was intended for the queer woman of color community. This act of community-building begins with the following actions: Compiling information—what housing resources are available for queer women of color? Defining relevant sources—how can these resources ensure applicability to the QWOC community? Constructing tools for understanding information—which tool will allow information to come to the women directly? And, finally, a practice of outreach and engagement to disseminate these

resources—where are the queer women of color needing and offering intentional housing space?

Google Groups: A Community-focused Tool

Long before Facebook and other social networking sites, we had email. And email continues to allow for multiple communities to coexist. Within the queer community, anonymity is respected in the blank carbon copy (bcc field), and, due to Google, advanced search mechanisms allow email to quantify and track whole interactions. Like the wiki, which allows for all participants to contribute equally, constituency-based resources such as Queer Housing Nacional require participants to self-identify as a part of the closed group prior to access.

In this act of self-identification, the individual who signs on to the list defines herself as a part of the community. Furthermore, the participant, now member, sends her own messages to the board and decides when and if to share the information with others outside of the closed group. Although this is a description of rudimentary Google Group mores, when one considers the nature of the group—a queer woman of color community—it becomes clear that moderation of such a list is necessary, and that having this moderator be an “informed agitator” is the best practice.

Queer Housing Nacional was created simply because my social network was tired of receiving forwarded emails. One lesbian woman whom I work with at the Lesbian Herstory Archives actually wrote back one day and said, “Shawn, I love you, but for God’s sake, stop sending me these things.” I was surprised that she felt that

way; weren't we both librarians, and lesbians who wanted to spread the word about our resources? Perhaps it was because I sent three forwards in one week that she was frustrated. To solve the issue of no longer sending 50 hand-picked contacts an email that may seem solicitous, I sent one relevant email to all of my contacts. The message read:

Hello Friends,

Two things:

1) Every week, I receive an ad or a request from a friend who is seeking housing. Or, as someone who often has a room for rent. Here's where we ought to post people, this new listserv!

2) Summer 2010, I travelled to LA, DC, Michigan, and Toronto, and in each space, I met amazing Queer folks. And I always needed a place to stay.

Let's keep our revolving doors in the community shall we? If you are interested in joining this listserv, then accept the invitation.

Love,
Group Moderator
Shawn, Your Lesbian Librarian

Labeling myself "Your Lesbian Librarian" is something that I did in multiple contexts, and it became my signature for all things lesbian-related, and, slowly, librarian-related as well, although that was still mainly to close professional contacts. In this email, as it traveled into the inboxes of hundreds, the title bestowed on me the onus for this endeavor to become a viable community resource.

On September 27, 2010, a Google Group was born that would shift the queer community. Within the same day of sending this email to friends and close colleagues, about 50 people chose to join the group. The first message arrived the next day. It was an ad from my ex-girlfriend, who had an opening in her artist house. I wasn't sure what to do besides write "Please excuse cross postings," as is customary when forwarding a message to professional lists. *"room(s) for rent \$700 Lefferts Gardens"*

was the title. Although she had posting privileges, she sent the message to a list we both have access to with hopes that I'd send it to the queer housing list.

From this first message, I had to consciously manage user participation, especially because the list grew very quickly. It was important to have the people send emails directly to the list, instead of to me. For the first few posts, I worked with the limitations of Google to instruct members on how to send messages. Within one month, I received dozens of emails from queer women of color asking to be added, having been alerted by a friend. This meant that soon folks whose names and email addresses I did not recognize began to join the list. Although this was exciting, I had to consider the possibility that some of these folks might not be QWOC, and this was an actual pattern. The list quickly changed from QWOC only to QWOC and our allies.

One day in February 2011, I received an email that came to me in response to a post titled "*27 year old queer female seeks room in queer or queer friendly home.*"

The message to me read:

Member 11:03am: Peace Shawn. Is [name removed] a person of color?

That was it. No other disclaimers, no signature, no additional reason for asking, just this one question. And this baffled me; as moderator, I was supposed to be accountable for the messages that came in, for upholding the mission of the list, for determining the rights for the members to be present. Immediately I responded, and we had the following exchange:

Me 11:30am: Peace friend,
Let me check for you. I don't think that she is. But I'd like to confirm it before identifying someone without their consent.
Shawn

Member 11:30am: word up thank you

I dug through the add-on prompts to see who had recommended the poster, but Google deletes this information. I used Facebook to hunt for the person via their email address and any other possible clues I found in their post: address location, style of writing, etc. I was finally able to track down the poster and report back to the other list member.

Me 12:43pm:	So, I asked a friend. Who says affirmative, POC.
Member 1:00pm:	Thanks friend. What's her contact information?
Me 1:54pm:	I believe you should just send an email. No phone number was posted. Hope it works out well. Shawn

Aside from the two hours of mid-day time it took me to complete this interaction (while at the reference desk, hence the mild delays) this e-interaction led me to consider what necessary steps it would take to derail possible pitfalls of a community-specific resource. I began to ask myself questions like, who is an ally? Queer by whose definition? And what of this gender—"woman"—do we mean this as female-bodied, solely a gender identity, or sex? Was this language trans-inclusive? And, ultimately, I did not want to be the one to answer these questions. I chose to create a survey to inform my decisions and include user input. (See the survey questions in Appendix II.)

Although no one on the Google Group claimed separatism, throughout the years, messages came in requesting accountability from me, the group moderator and lesbian librarian, for how I was able to ensure that folks were queer women, of

color, or allies to queer women of color. Initially, I added everyone who asked, but after this February 2011 e-exchange, I realized there needed to be parameters.

Survey responses allowed me to reflect on how to guard the door to this resource.

Responses revealed:

- All but one respondent identified as a QWOC
- The majority considered a Google Group as the best way to communicate housing information, as opposed to Facebook or a website.
- The majority wanted to stay on the list, regardless of their housing search
- Definitions of who an ally is varied. (See Appendix III: notable answers to question 4 on Community.)

The survey responses made it clear to me that folks had real opinions on these matters of community and access, and that it was my role to steer the conversation.

I added a few questions to prompt incoming members to prove their connection with the community. Folks had to self-identify as a QWOC or not, name the person who directed them to the list, and, finally, state if they were an ally and, if so, the type of ally: a white person; a man; if a man, whether they were cisgender or trans; etc. Beyond explaining yourself to enter the list, there were also parameters to post: folks had to, within their ads, mention that they were either QWOC or allies to QWOC, and, if allies, what type. This proved productive for some time, until folks of other communities began to demand access without demonstrating whether they were allies or members of the community.

Community Service or an Organizing Tool?

Retraction came in small spurts. A handful of white queer people demanded to be added and not mention race in their ads. These aggressive requests to restructure the list and its language were often rectified with a few email exchanges. Still, some posters were clear that they wanted to live with someone like them—for example, in a gay white man collective house, a house of drag queens in Park Slope, Brooklyn, a hipster commune, etc. All variations were not likely fitting for queer women of color as a primary constituent for housing goals. Not allowing these folks to post meant they would seek other outlets, except, Queer Housing Nacional was the only of its kind.

The Queer Commons list, with over 1000 members—largely white and academic, as it began from a City University of New York queer student organizing list—began to receive housing requests. On July 23, 2012, I sent to the Queer Commons list an announcement, by the request of the list moderator, to introduce the Queer Housing Nacional list, since Queer Commons was being barraged with housing-related messages and was meant to be an events list and discussion board.

On the Queer Commons list, I posted:

“Hello all,

My name is Shawn, and I moderate the [Queer Housing Nacional](#) group. Thanks Karalyn and Adrien for sharing.

We're over 200 members now, from across the country, and I intend for it to be a resource where we can share great housing opportunities in our communities.

Before you consider requesting to join, please note the following:

- 1) We are a group for and by queer women of color (and our allies).
- 2) If shared space, all posts must state whether the people living in the space identify as queer women of color or qwoc allies, and if allies, the type (straight white allies, gay men of color, etc).

- 3) So not to over-saturate the group, not all allies are added, but will be put on a waiting list.
- 4) All messages are moderated.

Generally speaking, at this point, for every two self-identified queer women of color that request entrance, one ally will be added. Allies who are offering housing will only require a one-to-one rate. This is my current process, it was different in the past, and may change in the future. I simply ask that allies take into consideration the complexities of access when choosing to share and benefit from opportunities intended for queer women of color. Truly consider how you are an ally to the members of this list and include that in your postings and intentions.

In Housing,
Shawn
Founder/Moderator
Queer Housing Nacional

It took about one day for Queer Housing Nacional to receive about 50 requests for add-ons, mostly from allies, perhaps one or two from QWOC. Some were offering housing, but the majority were simply interested in being a part of this needed community resource. Some, however, were in desperate need of housing. This was a real dilemma. If all allies were added, then for sure any poster offering housing would receive more responses from allies than from QWOC, thereby replicating the issue that had led to the list's existence of the Google Group in the first place. I had to remember the women to whom I was accountable, "the mission" of the list. I began a wait list, asking allies who were waiting to get two QWOC friends to add before they stepped in line. Eventually, because the need for housing is a real and timely one, folks went back to the moderators of the Queer Commons list and requested a new possibility.

In July 2012, the Queer Commons Housing list was launched. The birth of this list initially felt like a shove to the side for Queer Housing Nacional. However, having somewhere to direct interested queer folks felt as good as the resource-sharing

models of libraries: “Sorry, we don’t have what you need, but this space does, and I’ll show you how to get there!”

The final step toward making Queer Housing Nacional an exclusionary list came when a trans man of color from the West coast had a problem with the parameters. Because he was a trans man of color, he didn’t see it necessary to name himself as an ally to women. Our conversation took place in August 2012, two years after the creation of the Queer Housing Nacional:

Mon, Jul 30, 2012 at 10:50 AM

I’ve read your post however, it seems unclear as to whether you and your roommate are cis-men or trans-men or gay men, etc. This may make a difference to the folks of this listserv. Could you clarify and re-post/re-send?

Mon, Jul 30, 2012 at 1:32 PM

hi shawn , my roommate is gay cis male and i am trans male. I am not sure i want to live with someone who makes the decision based on someone being cis and gay verses trans and queer. I’m looking for LGBTQ community but someone more open minded and laid back than that.

The discussion continued for a few additional email exchanges. It was good fortune that the Queer Commons Housing list was available to share information and divert any potential complications of this deliberately exclusionary resource. But it is as a result of these intentional and to some, harsh, exclusionary practices that many queer women of color have found Queer Housing Nacional to be a valuable resource. Without a QWOC focus, users would be overrun by the majority of those who often obtain access to information-sharing resources. The responses to question 4 of the survey distributed in February 2011, (see Appendix III) act as testimonies that queer women of color find it necessary to have a closed and exclusionary Google Group. Aside from the appreciation and successes that exist – one woman launched a self-sustaining business as a dog-sitter from initial contact through Queer Housing Nacional, others have responded to housesit queries, made friends and lovers, or

started housing communes – the low post rate is due to the fact that many are happily housed, but excited to know that they no longer have to worry about housing if the need arises. I sent a welcome message in 2012 (see Appendix I) thanking everyone for his or her contributions while describing the list as it stands as an intentionally separate space. Love letters and appreciations were returned.

Conclusion

To date, Queer Housing Nacional still exists. Messages come in from throughout the country, plus some from Canada, but primarily from the New York City region. Since the creation of the Queer Housing Nacional, what has erupted is a new way to envision queer housing. After the Queer Commons Housing list, a Facebook housing group has also appeared, starting on the West coast, and now present in NYC. In the span of three years, a single librarian's response to a missing community entity, queer housing, has led to the development of multiple venues to find queer housing, thereby, creating multiple community resources. Community members, both allies and queer women of color, request to be added to Queer Housing Nacional at a rate of about five per week, often sent by a friend or a Google search. As moderator, I've made it my duty to stay up-to-date with the traffic of my own list as well as Queer Commons Housing, and I find that most posts are replicated in both forums. When folks request membership to Queer Housing Nacional, standard messages are sent with instructions on how to post, and seldom are people excluded from the list. What has shifted communities, and sustained itself throughout the lists, however, is the culture and language of queer housing. What I find most

significant is the template for how to post to these lists. Regardless of which list you frequent, you'll find that folks announce their identities when seeking to share a space and will note whether they are an ally to queer people of color (women are often not mentioned, since in queer culture gender identity politics complicate singularities), using different terms such as "anti-racist," "inclusive," or "anti-oppressive." Soon, it may make sense to consolidate all resources in one space, which would be my personal goal, as I don't imagine moderating forever. When I pose the question to members individually, all will urge me to keep a list specific to queer women of color, yet the number of subscribers outweighs the number of posts in comparison to larger, more inclusive lists.

With consideration to librarian-specific goals and how this relates to libraries, Queer Housing Nacional calls for an open-access policy within a community-specific resource—a resource that is both open and closed at the same time, geared toward a single group, with the intention of reaching that group, and marketed specifically for the purpose of this group's access. When developing tools and programs, librarians ought to consider the limitations of communities and create one by acknowledging boundaries on the types of information that can be provided, firstly by outlining who this designated community will be in comparison to the larger one that the library generally serves. Examples of this practice exist in the curation of digital archives, for example, when deaccessioning or curating exhibitions. Designated communities are often at the fore of these curation policies. Whether an instrument is for a particular department, a campus-wide base, a Friends of the Library group, or another audience, creating resources that are managed by these communities may allow for

greater use and interaction within the communities themselves. As so often resources are underused, Queer Housing Nacional proves that unlimited and open access is no longer the determining factor for maximum patron use. When materials or resources are community-focused, outreach can be targeted. This act of community engagement will allow for greater access by a small number of community-focused individuals. Once the tool is implemented, it is possible that other communities may demand access, thereby opening the possibility for additional resources to be produced. The work of claiming, naming, and defining the community closes the gaps of information access when the users are the agents generating the information; the work of the librarian is to provide these forums and aid in their dissemination

Appendix I.
Queer Housing Nacional Initial Update

Thursday, May 17th, 2012 at 7:34pm

Welcome to the Queer Housing listserv. I'm happy to say that we have made it to 192 members, and 195 posts!

Give yourselves a round of applause. Everyone on here has helped to keep this space useful and alive, a network for us all.

Before we approach 200 members and posts, I felt it necessary to introduce myself and thank you for being a part of this possibility.

Before I share my queer housing story, I will outline where you are:

You are a member of the Queer Housing Nacional Listserv -*a listserv for queer women of color and our allies*:

1. All posts will be moderated by me -whom you will meet below.
2. All posts for shares/shared spaces must include identification of race, gender identity, and sexual orientation for those who will live in the space.
3. Please POST! Some people have vacancies and won't post, because they are waiting for a ...seeking add. Don't wait for others to post. Post yourself!
4. Use photos. Who doesn't like photos? -Specifically of the space, not yourself (these aren't personals).
5. Links to C-List and other websites like airbnb.com are okay, but use this opportunity to be personal and introduce yourself while offering the add as a supplement.
6. DREAM BIG, and don't be afraid to ask for what you want...In price, in space, in roommates... You can't receive it if you don't ask!
7. Be cautious -I know how each and every person on here has gotten here. I screen with a magnifying glass. A handful have come from a google-search engine, but I recognized their email addresses anyhow! We are a network of friends and lovers. Still, community does not guarantee integrity, so be cautious for how you choose to open your home.
8. Give me feedback by filling out the [queer housing nacional survey](#). I read all of them, seriously!
9. I am not a Realtor, only a curious librarian and faithful community participant. If you don't see what you need, then post; I cannot personally place people.
10. Have fun, and be good to each other.

My queer housing story:

I started Queer Housing Nacional in November 2010 after signing a lease for a large apartment. Somehow, I needed all of my friends to know when I had a vacancy, without going through my contacts list each time. Also, I remembered when I was looking for a place, and how Craigslist often felt like a maze, and I was caught in a time-warp... Before I panicked, I made a solution: Queer Housing Nacional was born...

Speaking of born...

I was 'Born and Raised' in Brooklyn, NY, in the projects in Brownsville, and then, in a one-family house in East Flatbush. I have family throughout the city, and NY will always be my home. 18 years ago, my grandparents sold their house while I was in gradeschool, my dad bought a BedStuy Brownstone building while my mom rented a three bedroom in Kensington; it's still the same. My family housed people like Abner Louima while his court proceedings littered our house. My cousin married the landlord's niece. My dad lost \$40k over ten years from tenants not paying rent, and survived two electrical fires. My mother's rent has doubled since she moved in. One aunt still lives in the projects and could never afford to leave... At 17 years old I leased my first place: \$875 for a brand new 2-bdrm apt. I moved in my ex, her new girlfriend, my brother, friends going through nervous breakdowns, you name it, I moved it in. Then as a budding and in love little dyke-ling, I put my name on a lease with three others, with a dream of living in a lesbian of color household, but a soured relationship led me to be taken off of a founders list from an organization I loved, then **sued** years later by the apartment's management company...a long story, but let's just call it a bad break-up from which my housing life took a while to recover.

... Renting has been my life since I came out. And Queer women of color have specific housing concerns, which is why:

The Queer Housing listserv is for queer women of color and our allies.

- If you are offering housing, and you are a true ally, you should be excited about the possibility of housing a queer woman of color.
- If you are seeking housing, and you are a true ally, then you should be looking to give your money to a queer woman of color as your new landlord.

This listserv fails if in a pattern, non-queer-women of color, connect with other non-queer women of color, and the people for whom it serves are still seeking.

I am very much sensitive to the housing wars of NYC. Women of color who, are gender non-conforming, have women as lovers, for their own reasons (not to be questioned) choose to not live with men, are artists, are nudists, are terribly brilliant or sassy or scared, these are the people that this listserv is for. Those women who continuously search for home, always wanting a new beginning, I hope you find a home through this service.

Those people of color, that do not identify as women, but are perceived as such, I hope you find a home through this listserv.

Those people of color, that identify as women, but are not perceived as such, I hope you find a home through this listserv.

I also hope that others do not gentrify the listserv, but remain as allies. That we will continue to step up, and step back, and think about our own privileges as we seek and offer housing. From the perspective of an owner, a renter, a boarder, a native,

knowing what it means to not have documentation or "on the books" income, but needing housing; knowing what it is like to compete with hipster kids who make other roommates "vibe" better and so they get chosen over you, knowing what it is like to have to be "evaluated" before a yes is given, knowing what it is like to walk into a housing interview and fear for my life, time and again,

We ALL need to figure out how to make housing work for US.

I'm sure everyone has their Queer Housing Story.

Through this listserv, I feel, even if temporarily, safe, in my housing. Since November 2010, I feel safe knowing that I can reach out when needed. I've found great roommates, and others have sent me stories of happiness, that they have found great roommates too.

Thank you for keeping this space for and about the housing of queer women of color. Allies, thank you for offering yourselves to a world with these intentions. Women of color, THANK YOU, for being brave enough to handle your own, and not settle for less in your home-life.

I had intended this listserv to be Nacional, but it seems as if in this great city, we continue to spin inside of ourselves.

Send me questions. I will gladly answer them.
Or send your Queer Housing Story, maybe I'll post a few.

Appendix II.
Survey Questions - Posted February 10, 2011

1. Demographics: For statistical purpose only, please tell me how you identify, in terms of your queerness, your gender, your race, and any other identifiers that you would like to claim. Be as specific or as broad as you like. But please answer. Please use the same level of specificity that you would like to see used in posts.
2. Do you identify as a queer woman of color?
3. If you are non-qwoc ally, do you have issues or questions regarding posting? This feedback is helpful to my own wording. The goal is for you to feel confident in your posting, not hesitant or guilty.
4. Community: In terms of queerness, gender, race, and any other identifiers are there specific groups of people that you would not consider community and that you would not like to have on this listserv? *A gay boy for example? A white gay boy? A white straight boy who has a queer sister? When if at all do we draw the line (please keep in mind that the purpose of this listserv is to house queer women of color, and our allies... Folks have to consider themselves an ally to join if not a queer woman of color). Allies in my understanding are: Trans folks of color, gender non-conforming folks of color, queer people of color (some men, but not majority), and some straight people if they have a place to offer, but not if they are seeking. This is completely confidential, and as a member of this listserv, you have the right to answer these questions and moderate your space.*
5. Have you posted to the listserv before?
6. Have you contacted any poster due to their posting on this listserv?
7. Have you had a negative experience on the listserv? *This includes reading something offensive, contacting someone and having a bad experience, seeing a place and feeling unsafe, or anything else that made your day sour. If yes, please be as descriptive as possible. If no, please write N/A.*
8. What city do you live in?
9. What is your primary reason for joining the listserv?
 - a. To offer a room for rent
 - b. Seeking a room for rent
 - c. Traveling to another city for a short period of time
 - d. Conference
 - e. To make friends
 - f. To be up to date with what folks are doing
 - g. I'm interested in real estate
10. Are you still interested in being on the listserv if you are stable in your housing? Meaning, if you were seeking or offering, (for example) do you still find the listserv interesting?
11. Do you think the listserv would be best hosted under a different format? From a scale of 1 - 5, which do you think is the most effective format for hosting

Queer Housing Correspondence Please keep in mind, this is without funding and on a volunteer basis, so we would need to use open source software and minimal maintenance.

- a. GoogleGroup (As IS)
- b. Facebook Page
- c. Blog
- d. Website
- e. Other Format?

12. Any additional comments or feedback? Knock yourself out! Be brutally honest. Tell me what you think is missing, what you'd like to see. Think big. Be unreasonable!

Appendix III.

Notable answers to question 4 on Community from February 10, 2011 – July 2012

- Male-identified people, white people.
- I'm fine with all queer women regardless of their color/whiteness, queer men of color are fine too. But I'm not sure about fun-loving white gay boy. It's fine to have a few of them, especially if they offer, but an ally is an ally so I would hate to say that a certain person is not acceptable. I don't know. I personally am hesitant of living with any heterosexual males but that is also my personal experience not too many!!
- For me, the line would be at homophobic straight people - of any color - but I guess they won't be joining anyways.
- ...my primary idea of allies is those who self-identify as part of the queer spectrum regardless of sexual behavior, and those who identify as part of or intrinsically linked to the people of color spectrum, regardless of pheno or geno type. Essentially its more about who you are, than what you are – but who must be central not a side part of you.
- I would rather not see white + straight people on the list serv. A white queer ally is cool. A straight person of color is cool. But if a white straight person is a real ally then they should have one of their queer or POC friends post. I don't think that's too much to ask. Understanding still that the list serv is to house Queer/SGL/LGBT women of color...
- I am willing to have anyone here who identifies as Queer. I don't have a problem with cis men or other white people, but unfortunately there's no way of discerning whether a person is Queer in the particular way we define it or a mainstream gay with bad politics, and being the identity police would not be fair. Housing can get a little sensitive because people make a lot of casually racist remarks about neighborhoods so if we're gonna open it up to more people and risk people being offensive in the name of being fair and not policing identities, there should be some kind of statement about what kinds of things are not okay to say.
- For the purposes of this list: straight men no (no matter how many gay relatives they have. White trans or gay men -no (they are in my community but not in this part of it -perhaps in my next lifetime -- I have not really found them to be among my allies when push comes to shove although they always expect me to be theirs.)
- I think that it is good the way it is. The fact that people can't post without being a member is good.