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### Building “A Home of Our Own:” The Construction of the Lesbian Herstory Archives

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## **Building “A Home of Our Own:” The Construction of the Lesbian Herstory Archives**

### **A Presence in Our Own Land**

April 1975

Dear Sisters,

We are a group of women who met initially at the first conference of the Gay Academic Union in the fall of 1973. Some of us formed a C-R group, and as we grew closer to each other we began to focus on our need to collect and preserve our own voices, the voices of our Lesbian Community. As our contribution to our community, we decided to undertake the collecting, preserving, and making available to our sisters all the prints of our existence. We undertook the Archives, not as a short-term project, but as a commitment to rediscover our past, control our present, and speak to our future...Sahli Cavallaro, Deborah Edel, Joan Nestle, Pamela Oline, Julia Stanley<sup>1</sup>

So began the first newsletter of the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA). The First Gay Academic Union (GAU) conference was held during the 1973 Thanksgiving weekend at John Jay College in New York City, attended by independent scholars, activists, college faculty, and graduate students. The project was conceived in a lesbian-feminist CR group that had begun to meet separately from the men in GAU.

Reflecting the emerging politics of both lesbian-feminism and gay liberation, LHA was founded to nourish the ideal of community through the strategy of institution-building. LHA founders saw Lesbians<sup>2</sup> as "a people" and sought to congeal a lesbian identity and community, distinguishing lesbians both historically and culturally from straight women and gay men. It was formed to identify, chronicle, rescue, preserve, and share the historically suppressed "silences," "continuities," and "invisibilities" about sex and love between women. LHA was a project designed to redress the monopoly on lesbian representation held by colonizing mainstream interests and to create a multidimensional lesbian historical record, useful in tracing and advancing the political struggles of lesbians. Informed by lesbian-feminism and gay liberation, LHA founders believed that a collectively assembled, authentic, accessible, and celebrated Lesbian history would work to unite lesbian people and empower resistance to oppression in its many forms. The principles of the Lesbian Herstory Archives were published in 1979 by Joan Nestle, the best-known founder and spokeswoman for the project.

#### *Notes on Radical Archiving from a Lesbian Feminist Perspective*

1. The archives must serve the needs of the Lesbian people.
  - a. All lesbian women must have access to the archives; no credentials for usage or inclusion, race and class must be no barrier.
  - b. The archives should be housed within the community, not on an academic campus that is by definition closed to many women. The archives should share the political and

cultural world of its people and not be located in an isolated building that continues to exist while the community dies. If necessary the archives will go underground with its people to be cherished in hidden places until the community is safe.

c. The archives should be involved in the political struggles of the Lesbian people, a place where ideas and experiences from the past interact with the living issues of the Lesbian community.

d. The archives should be staffed by Lesbians so the collection will always have a living cultural context. Archival skills shall be taught, one generation of Lesbians to another, breaking elitism of traditional archives.

e. The community should share in the work of the archives; contributing material, indexing, mailings, creating bibliographies and other forms of information sharing.

f. The archives will collect the prints of all our lives, not just preserve the records of the famous or the published.

g. Its atmosphere must be nourishing, entry into our archives should be entry into a caring home.

h. The works of all our artists must be preserved -- our photographers, our graphic designers, our scribblers, our card makers, our silversmiths.

i. The lesbian feminist archives must refuse cooption from the patriarchal society around it even if it comes in the name of a "women's college."

j. The collection must be kept intact and never be bartered or sold.

k. The archives is an act of mothering, of passing along to our daughters the energies, the actions, the words we lived by. It is a first step in reclaiming a place in time; our response to the colonizer who makes us live on the periphery or not at all.

2. There should be regional Lesbian Herstory Archives, preserving and gathering the records of each Lesbian community. A network can then be set up.<sup>3</sup>

With this radical set of motives, the Lesbian Herstory Archives began to amass records and evidence of lesbianism from sources both conventional and bizarre by mainstream archival standards. The Lesbian Herstory Archives opened for "community use" in 1976 in Joan Nestle's apartment (an apartment she then shared with Deborah Edel and subsequently with Judith Schwarz, Mabel Hampton, and Lee Hudson) on Manhattan's Upper West Side, and remained there until it reopened in 1992 in a Brooklyn town house. Uncompromisingly lesbian-focused, LHA rejected traditional, elitist collection development practices outright in favor of an open call welcoming donations of all things lesbian. LHA collected lesbian and "womyn's" books and periodicals published by alternative presses then uncollected by all but specialized archives in a few academic institutions. The Archives collected mainstream works about homosexuality and lesbianism written by doctors, sociologists, psychologists, pornographers, and clergy - called "enemy literature" - reflecting the politic of understanding the philosophies and mechanisms of lesbian oppression in order to combat them. Lesbian donors and volunteers "rescued" or appropriated material from the mainstream press and other archival collections, material often unidentified as lesbian-relevant in original contexts, re-establishing it within LHA as lesbian-relevant "found" texts and images. The founding philosophy of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, "maintained by and about Lesbians and our communities,"<sup>4</sup> assumed that a self-identified community of class- and race-conscious lesbians could together identify, assemble,

and organically construct a lesbian history with political integrity and meaning that would serve to inform and empower resistance to lesbian oppression and the destruction of “herstory.”

The LHA's liberationist, institution-building strategy of grassroots archiving has not been uniformly embraced by gay activists. Jim Monahan of Chicago's Gay Academic union criticized "ghettoized," "separatist" grassroots lesbian and gay institutions as not only wrong-headed, but divisive and dangerous. Jim Monahan and Joan Nestle both published articles about grassroots archiving in the spring 1979 issue of *Gay Insurgent*. Monahan wrote:

A collection of resources in an archive established to serve the interests of the gay community and available mainly for those interested individuals who wish to document what has been diminishes the vision of gay history to not much more than antiquarianism....To remain separate, both physically and intellectually from general history is to cultivate parochialism....Separatist tendencies and factional politics are odd luxuries to be suffered only until they militate against this goal, and that they seem to be doing...  
...If archives remain precariously preserved in the ghettos, their preservation is next to pointless.<sup>5</sup>

Monahan asserted that academic institutions were the best place for gay and lesbian archival collections because recognition by academic experts offered gays and lesbians acceptance and assimilation into mainstream culture. He argued that lesbian and gay lives would be unignorably present and more readily studied by mainstream authorities in academic settings. Monahan neither romanticized nor valued the organic construction and lay use of gay and lesbian archival collections. Instead he argued that only qualified activists, academics, and students should have access to archival collections:

...Gay archives should go into repositories located within academic institutions [because] research is better facilitated; the economic burden of a researcher is lessened; the historical profession is faced with a body of rich material that cannot be ignored.  
...Access to the materials cannot be accorded every curiosity seeker or individual not pursuing serious research...  
The researcher should give evidence of one of the following: 1. membership in a gay organization 2. appointment at an academic institution 3. student status at an accredited institution [with] a letter of support from an instructor.<sup>6</sup>

Nestle's “womyn's”-language response to Monahan articulated the case for establishing independent lesbian and gay archives outside academic settings. Her words reflect mistrust of a patriarchal world and mainstream institutions where lesbians exist, yet mask themselves. She advocated investing in institutions "in our own land" where an otherwise diminished lesbian presence is realized:

Radical lesbian feminism is a challenge to do things differently, to recreate the energy of hags and form a world reflective of an age old spirit reborn. We cannot trust "historical

understandings" or "academic institutions." Both of these terms are failures.

...The Lesbian Herstory Archives must stay in its community, not out of parochialism but out of herstorical vision. We do not exist in historical understanding or academic institutions, though we travel incognito. We live in our homes, on the streets, in the bars, at our desks, at our jobs, with our children, in our groups, and we create our herstory every day. It is this story the archives wants to preserve and share. Once Lesbians have generations of herstory to experience, they will change history by the force of their presence.

...When a people transform a world, that can never be parochial; it is the other world that must question its ways. Our concept of an archives must be different; we are different. But difference is not invisibility; it is presence in our own land.<sup>7</sup>

Monahan raised issues of archival security, which he answers with recommendations for credentialed, professional handling of archival materials. Non-experts were likely threats to the physical security as well as the political usefulness of archival material, aggravating the potential for government intrusion and inappropriate storage:

Security is the major problem; it is compounded by an unqualified policy of access to the material...While no site can guarantee 100% security, an established repository is in a better position to stave off police incursions, deal with the matter of subpoenaed materials, and provide the appropriate storage facilities.<sup>8</sup>

Given the frequent arson attacks on lesbian and gay bars, publishing offices, and community centers which continue from the 1970s to this day, most grassroots archivists shared Monahan's concern. Nestle addressed Monahan's concerns for security and his call for a regimented archival professionalism by emphasizing different notions of safety, a political safety, at the heart of LHA archival philosophy. In words mirroring the sentiment of Audre Lorde's oft-quoted phrase, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house,"<sup>9</sup> the 39-year-old Nestle argued that to secure lesbian history, lesbians must forge and safeguard it in new territory:

To ask the patriarchal destroyer to preserve is a suicidal act. It does not express our sinister wisdom. We would be surviving in their context, in an ongoing world dedicated to power, elitism, and survival of the patriarchal fittest.<sup>10</sup>

Notions about the mission, constituency, and safety of lesbian and gay archival collections hold entirely different meanings for Monahan and Nestle when grounded in their differing political strategies. For Monahan, the research institution provided more safety with better locks and alarms, environmental control, professional assurances of privacy and protection, and an unavoidable and potentially empowering presence in a respectable, academic world. For Nestle, the "community-based" setting -- in this case her home in an apartment building with a doorman, advertised by word-of-mouth and community-based publications -- was the better guarantor of safety, integrity, growth, and lesbian ownership of the collection.

The differences between Monahan and Nestle reflect strategies drawn in the 1970s Black,

feminist, and Gay political movements. The tensions established then between the political strategies of liberation and reform, separatism and assimilation still structure divisions within lesbian and gay political communities today. These competing political ideas continue to inform the institutional placement, content, and structure of lesbian and gay history, crisscrossing discussions about the content and safety of queer history.

The language articulating the early work of community-based history projects, the LHA in particular, celebrates the imparting, discovery, and possession of personal histories and collective memory as a healing, recuperative, empowering individual acts fostered by a "safe space," a nourishing home of a community-based archive.

Always there was the incredulity at our assertion that her life was the important one. But I had known this deprivation so searingly in my own life the it was a question that brought out all my fire and love --yes, yes, you are the Lesbian the archives exists for, to tell and share your story.<sup>11</sup>

LHA provided a physical and historical space for women to transform themselves, to "come out" - first to recognize and understand themselves as lesbians, then to come out into a community - a grassroots public that stationed itself between isolated private and mainstream public spheres. This community-based archival space transcended the physical geography of bars, social groups, and political meetings in that it promised lesbians temporal endurance, a lasting place in lesbian history. LHA and grassroots archives did not promise individuals fame or a position in mainstream history. But grassroots lesbian and gay archives, LHA in particular, campaigned and allowed for lesbian and gay lives to be held in esteem by their own community, the members of which would in turn benefit from knowledge of other lives and protect them from danger and dishonor.

Activists since the 1970s have celebrated "coming out" as an individual's liberation from the psychological deprivation and solitude of the closet that gay liberationists vilify as a primary structure of lesbian and gay social and self-oppression. A lesbian's coming out into "the community" is embraced by that community as a courageous, politically relevant, mentally healthy act. Gay historians D'Emilio and Chauncey<sup>12</sup> both describe "coming out" post-Stonewall as an act performed in a mainstream context - with family, friends, or employers. LHA, though, has assumed that a lesbian's coming out is relevant primarily to her "community," not necessarily to her non-lesbian public of friends and family. LHA considers coming out to be a personal "step" taken with considered risk, over which the "out" individual is likely to desire and deserve control. LHA recognizes that individuals are often differently "out" in different social venues, that being "out" bears tremendous variety and nuance, and that "coming out" is not generally a wholesale surrender of a private life to the scrutiny of a mainstream public. Therefore, LHA guards against exposure of lesbian lives and archival records to the non-community public, particularly when that exposure involves inclusion in the mainstream press or media. Many collections donated in the 1970s and 1980s came with explicit agreements granting the widest public access, but in the absence of explicit agreements only a community-based public is assumed permissible. LHA positions the non-community public as a sphere separate from and potentially hostile to lesbians.

This assumption is buttressed by a knowledge and stories of disasters, even annihilations of identity, that befall lesbians exposed to family, friends, employers, doctors, clergy, or government. During the 1990s, with growing mainstream interest in lesbian and gay archival collections and lives coinciding with activists' continuing challenges to the closet, (i.e. the advent of the queer political strategy of involuntarily "outing" closeted individuals), LHA developed explicit donor agreement forms making clear terms of access to individual collections, given the plethora of understandings about privacy, the closet, and coming out.

With its formation in the 1970s, LHA welcomed every lesbian to come out in a new community-based historical venue not only for personal but also for political reasons. Gay liberationists theorized that a political movement would be fueled by individual acts of coming out. Greater public visibility would not only beget greater tolerance for lesbian and gay lives, it would also force the destruction of social and political oppression while strengthening a lesbian and Gay community. A 1978 LHA newsletter proclaimed, "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."<sup>13</sup> Suggesting an evolving vision of LHA's future public, the LHA spring 1979 newsletter included *A Plea for Coming Out*, "We need women to tell us if they should be part of the Archives. Help us end silences if not for now at least for the future."<sup>14</sup> LHA founders believed the future would hold in store another kind of end to silences, with lesbian voices announcing themselves in a mainstream arena from positions of strength forged by the construction of a lesbian community base.

LHA sought to establish itself as a project providing "safe space," protecting its constituency and its collection against particular hostilities infringing on lesbian lives, history, and culture. Violent attacks on gay and lesbian public spaces fed the perception that the world is precarious harbor for an individual and institutional lesbian presence. Several LHA founders, lesbians in their 20s and 30s in the 1970s, had immediate experiences with police- and criminally-regulated queer spaces - the New York City bars of the 1950s-1970s. The desire for safe or self-regulated, uninfiltated lesbian space was informed by these experiences as well a radical feminism which positioned patriarchy in general, and men in particular, as primary oppressors of women. Police violence against Civil Rights, Black Nationalist, and anti-war demonstrators, the Stonewall riots, and the 1950s excesses of McCarthyism all positioned the government as an aggressive enemy of "the people" and their political movements. The prospect of government siege or systematic persecution of lesbians and gays was a trepidation widely shared in liberationist circles, reflected in the third LHA principle, above, asserting that the community-based collection might be harbored and protected by its people under siege. The specter of the Holocaust and Nazi book-burning loomed large in grassroots archival lore - the first gay archive, the Institute for Sexual Science established by Magnus Hirshfeld in 1933 Germany was destroyed in this manner.<sup>15</sup> LHA's self-protection was informed against a historical backdrop of lesbian persecution and oppression.

The metaphor of LHA as "home" took hold as LHA functioned and grew within Nestle's own apartment. Nestle and Edel's warm hospitality, reflected and enhanced the homeliness of the project. That there was no money available for any other archival home was, initially at least, a

secondary reason for embedding LHA in Nestle's life and apartment as it was. Founders sought to provide a safe, nourishing context for lesbian history.<sup>16</sup>

The LHA was not constructed for a mainstream and academic public, but for a lesbian constituency coming out in the 1970s, believed to be deprived of and hungry for access to lesbian history, culture, and community. LHA's politic was shaped by lesbian-feminists and gay liberationists opposed to an assimilationist politic, attempting to combat and remedy the "invisibilities" of lesbians in the historical mainstream. The legal status of archival collections, i.e. whether or not they were legally secured by the institution and legally ready for publishing researchers, was of secondary importance. LHA's primary concerns were to build the collection for lesbian visitors to share, to garner reciprocal trust and ownership, to protect the privacy of individuals named in the collection (from the dangerous public sphere outside the community), and to guarantee a political and financial future for the institution.

Upon its opening, the LHA collective began to explore the possibilities for situating itself within mainstream legal frameworks, primarily to obtain tax-exempt status to garner financial contributions for the project. The obvious first option considered was incorporation as an official archive and educational institution, sanctioned by the New York State Board of Regents. This option was rejected, however, because it risked too much state intervention, inspection, and control. Many fledgling lesbian and gay cultural projects had been denied, scrutinized, and challenged as they attempted to incorporate, mainly for advocating radical political positions.<sup>17</sup> But in 1979, the group successfully incorporated the project as an educational corporation with the New York State Division of Corporations and State Records that, unlike the Board of Regents, has no authority to inspect the collection and no explicit legal provisions for confiscating the property of organizations under their purview. So the Lesbian Herstory Archives became legally recognized as the Lesbian Herstory Educational Foundation (LHEF). The collective strategized to position LHA outside the legal definition of libraries and archives given the high degree of state regulation required, yet fit itself inside the legal definition of a tax-exempt organization to allow it to gain financial strength.

Throughout the 1970s, LHEF built its collection and constituency through slide shows and presentations in community-based venues - meeting in bars, homes, festivals, conferences, churches, and synagogues. In 1980 LHA began to sponsor "women welcome" events called "At Homes," first in Nestle's apartment and later in the larger Women's Coffee House room in New York City's Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center. Members of the LHA collective staffed information tables at local and national lesbian gatherings, soliciting volunteers with flirtatious invitations to "help file, stamp, stuff, and lick" at the Archives every Thursday evening, with the promise of sisterhood and/or sexual attention. The Archives also staged itself in the most public of community-based spectacles, New York City's annual Lesbian and Gay Pride March, with a popular, photogenic contingent. All women have always been welcome to march with LHA in the front section of the march reserved for women's groups, with marchers carrying poster-sized images of lesbians and "word signs" bearing multi-lingual slang and formal names for "lesbian" (i.e. dyke, fem, bulldagger, tortillera, marimacha, uranian). In 1975, LHEF began an annual-or-so newsletter free to individuals and organizations on the mailing list, and in 1978 the

lesbian, gay, and feminist press began to carry articles about the project. LHA listed its mailing address - but never the project's street address -- in lesbian, gay, and women's directories. These community-based activities, services, events, and publicity brought LHEF into the lives of lesbians who donated archival collections and money to the project, sustaining it to this day.

Upon its inception, LHA assumed a politic of anti-racism and sought to achieve class and ethnic inclusivity (see the LHA principle 1a., above). Throughout its history, LHA has made frequent efforts to represent and incorporate the lives and collections of lesbians of color, featuring racial and ethnic inclusion in its descriptions and representations of the collection. This politic of "diversity," practiced by many post-Stonewall Lesbian and Gay political groups, inevitably situates its proponents as self-consciously lacking yet accountable for the racial and ethnic diversity it idealizes. The backdrop of "whiteness" of LHA in particular and "lesbian culture" in general is revealed both by its fundamental politic of inclusivity as well as by the predominance of white women among its proponents and participants.<sup>18</sup> The language of multi-culturalism (e.g. the terms "outreach," "difference," and "inclusion") works to highlight and embrace diversity (i.e. "others") against a body self-conscious about its own whiteness and about the potential racism realized by that too homogenous composition. The Lesbian Herstory Archives, a cornerstone of lesbian culture, represents a predominantly white, Jewish, and self-consciously anti-racist leadership, constituency, and collection that reflects and desires ethnic and racial variety in all aspects of its operation.

Collections donated to LHA in the 1970s represented a predominantly white group of lesbians participating in New York City lesbian life, culture, and politics. Early LHA collective members Joan Nestle, Deborah Edel, and Judith Schwarz and other LHA volunteers offered up their own selected papers, hoping to build an archive and inspire community trust by offering up their own collections as example. Lesbian activists Frances Doughty, Bettye Lane, Janet Cooper, Karla Jay, Joan E. Biren, Julie Lee, Naomi Holoch donated collections early in LHA's history. Writers Adrienne Rich and Elsa Gidlow contributed personal material soon after LHA opened, as did J.R. Roberts, a white lesbian librarian who used LHA's collection to construct the first published bibliography on Black lesbians.<sup>19</sup> Lesbian organizations and cultural projects donating records in the 1970s included the Lesbian Cultural Festival, the Lesbian Front, and the Lesbian History Exploration group.

Several lesbians of color have joined LHA's governing collective over the years, crossing lines drawn around participation in Lesbian identity-based groups by both white racism and ethnic nationalism. In LHA's early years Georgia Brooks, Irare Sabasu, Rota Silverstrini, Mabel Hampton, and Paula Grant made significant contributions in shaping the collection and the institution, establishing a New York City lesbian community prominently manifest with women of color. LHA collective member Georgia Brooks (who was also among the founding collective of NYC's Salsa Soul Sisters in 1976) organized a discussion and study group for Black lesbians that met weekly during the spring of 1980 in the Archives, Nestle's apartment. The first Black lesbian writing group that met formally in NYC (The Jemima Collective) donated work and records to LHA in 1977, and the group producing the Black lesbian journal *The Echo of Sappho* donated the project's original artwork and paste-ups to LHA in 1979. Prominent and influential

among the Black lesbians who donated collections and labor to LHA were the writer Becky Birtha who donated poems, stories, articles in 1979, and Audre Lorde who donated many of her early manuscripts and correspondence to LHA in 1983. Mabel Hampton (1902-1989), an African-American butch elder, was a consistent presence at LHA until her death, in great part due to her life-long friendship with Nestle. Hampton was crucial to LHA's politic embracing racial diversity and to LHA's mission to offer heroines to a community in short supply of accessible elders, and LHA provided Hampton with a home filled with friends and admirers and a platform for her community-based renown. Through her willingness to be "out" in her work with the Archives and SAGE (Senior Action in a Gay Environment), and with her appearance in the 1986 film *Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community*, Hampton came to be a lesbian celebrity and role model, unique for someone of her generation and social standing.<sup>20</sup>

In New York City during the late 1970s and early 1980s, ethnic identity-based lesbian groups formed independently to assemble historical images and narratives. Asian Lesbians of the East Coast (ALOEC) co-founder Katherine Hall, wrote a letter published in the 1984 LHA Newsletter:

ALOEC started organizing in August of 1983. In our formation we began to realize that we needed a history. Without a history, we had no past from which to identify ourselves....so we ventured up to the Lesbian Herstory Archives where we found a fine collection of Asian Lesbian and gay books, periodicals, photographs, letters, etc. all on us Asians....That's when we decided to start an Asian Lesbian History Project...Many thank you's to the Lesbian Herstory Archives for your support and assistance in helping Asian Lesbians of the East Coast in finding their roots.<sup>21</sup>

Though Hall's review of LHA's assistance was gracious, ALOEC did not intend to combine its work with LHA, but instead formed its own Asian Lesbian History project. June Chan, who along with Hall co-founded Asian Lesbians of the East Coast, popularized this work with a slide show of Asian lesbian images and historical tales which screened in mostly Asian lesbian venues during the 1980s.<sup>22</sup>

The whiteness of the Archives often signaled and justified the need for and value of ethnic-based lesbian history projects. In her preface to *Compañeras*, the first published anthology of Latina lesbian writing, Juanita Ramos noted:

Although the Lesbian Herstory Archives has always been very supportive of the project, the journals and books we researched confirmed what we already suspected: only a handful of Latina lesbians had ever been included in any of these publications...<sup>23</sup>

Upon completion of the project, LHA sponsored an "At Home" reading from *Compañeras* (June 21, 1983) to benefit Latina Lesbian History Project members. Over the years, LHA has co-sponsored readings, performances, and events showcasing the ethnic diversity of lesbians in New York City. LHA has generally neither underwritten nor appropriated the work of independent scholars and lesbian history projects, but rather assisted, promoted, and supported independent projects designed "by-and-for" lesbians and particular communities of lesbians. With

the participation of some dedicated lesbians of color in the Archives' collective and by the LHA extending support and valuing a range of ethnic- and identity-based historical work, LHA positioned itself in a multi-cultural milieu reflecting a lesbian community that is predominantly white, while overtly inclusive and ostensibly open to lesbians of "all" ethnicities.

Joan Nestle's writing, particularly her political stance around butch-fem and the lesbian-feminist "sex wars" of the 1980s, has shaped the scope and popularity of the LHA collection, and expanded understandings of what a lesbian might be. Nestle, whose writing became best known with the 1987 publication of *A Restricted Country*, broke with dominant lesbian-feminist politics by defending and honoring working class butch/fem identities, S/M practices, and the possibilities of intergenerational sex. Though winding up on many a lesbian-feminist "enemy list,"<sup>24</sup> Nestle and the Lesbian Herstory Archives explicitly welcomed the presence and solicited the records of lesbians marginalized by lesbians for their class standing and sexual practices.

Still, the LHA has firmly stationed "lesbian" within the category "woman." While recognizing the instabilities of lesbian identities and fluidity of genders and sexualities, the organization continues to affirm itself as a lesbian and a feminist one.<sup>25</sup> With the lesbian-feminist traditional "all women welcome" policy for most LHA-sponsored events, LHA continues to embrace the mission of providing "safe," "comfortable," "connectivist" social space for lesbians who prefer the absence of any kind of man. All women's events are staged to honor and celebrate lesbians and to enact, represent, and inspire the political ideal of a cohesive movement or community of lesbian women. The Archives continues to welcome men (and women) to use the collection, however, by appointment outside of the hours reserved for welcoming women only.

In the early- to mid-1990s, with the rise of a transgendered movement in general, and particularly with the presence of openly male-identified butches and male-to-female lesbians as volunteers, LHA's collection and constituency expanded to include transgendered lesbians. LHA welcomes material relevant to all self-identified lesbian lives, including former or current lesbians living female-to-male or male-to-female. However, former butches who have become transgendered self-identified men are presently unwelcome at LHA's "women welcome" hours or now sometimes "dykes welcome" events. Straight and gay men are unwelcome as well at most LHA-sponsored events designed to forge and strengthen communities of women, dykes, and lesbians.<sup>26</sup>

In the late 1970s, LHEF began to obtain grants from women's, lesbian, and radical funding sources for special projects such as publication of the newsletter and purchase of archival supplies and electronic equipment. Into the 1990s, LHEF persisted in building a funding base of mostly individual lesbians, true to the vision of an organization by-and-for lesbians. The organization has never pursued funding from government sources given both the invasive nature of state oversight and the capriciousness of government funding for lesbian and gay projects. In the 1980s, LHEF organizers started a fund which enabled the purchase of its own building in 1990. With the final payment on its commercial loan in 1996, the 4-story town house becomes the first building in the New York City metropolitan area owned by a lesbian organization, the culmination of Nestle's vision for lesbians to possess a history "in our own land."

In both the tradition of feminist collectivity and as a condition of the loan obtained for the purchase of the building, LHEF has remained an all-volunteer organization up to this point. Staffing for visitors and researchers is currently available by appointment nearly every Saturday or Sunday, as well as a few evenings and afternoons during the week. A group of from 10 to 15 self-appointed volunteer lesbian "coordinators" meets about every 3 weeks, deciding political and practical issues through the process of discussion and consensus. This practice is based on the notion that lesbians who do the everyday work of the Archives are entitled to govern the organization, not a board of directors or advisory group assembled to raise money or window-dress a constituency with race, class, ethnic, age, gender, or geographic parity. LHA's governing practice resembles the styles of contemporary direct action groups such as ACTUP and the Lesbian Avengers. This politic assumes that "a people" working together can best manifest an organization and collection with political integrity, cultural authenticity, and an unwavering mission to represent its constituency.

The building now housing the Lesbian Herstory Archives is located in Park Slope, Brooklyn, a well-known lesbian neighborhood.<sup>27</sup> LHA continues to position itself as a community-based institution guarded against a mainstream public. The building is unmarked except for a small plaque beneath the doorbell and rainbow flag on the front door. The Archive's street address is unpublished except on occasional handbills advertising events to the community. A caretaker lives on the top floor of the building to provide the best possible security for the collection. However, because the Archives is not staffed and open everyday and because there is no consensus among LHA coordinators about the gravity of risk should the building become public beyond the community-based venue of its origin, the Archives remains publicly unmarked as a lesbian institution.<sup>28</sup> The LHA phone number and P.O. box mailing address are listed on LHA publicity, in national and local lesbian and gay directories, and in New York City's Yellow Pages.

Over the 1970s and 1980s, the Lesbian Herstory Archives and other grassroots archival projects pioneered and popularized a lesbian and gay history unprecedented and unimaginable in mainstream institutions. Lesbian and gay archival projects established new space - historical, psychological, and physical - that worked to promote the value of lesbian and gay self-representation and diminish the power of scientific, religious, legal, and academic professions to pathologize and oppress. Born of and sustained by feminist and liberationist politics, the Lesbian Herstory Archives has functioned to define Lesbian identities and to coalesce a lesbian community featuring class, ethnic, and sexual diversity. This community, as reflected and represented by LHA, positioned itself in opposition to the state, mainstream institutions, and the non-community public, all which were understood to be exploitative of individual lesbian lives and hostile to lesbian community.

### **Outlaw Material in Mainstream Settings**

In the recent body of professional archival literature pertaining to gay and lesbian material, the terms "headaches," "vexing," and "problems" appear frequently. Lesbian and queer archival material presents "special needs" to mainstream archivists, requiring the application of extra sensitivity, and discretion. The language archivists use to talk about the trouble with queer

material is the language the heterosexual world uses to talk about the trouble with queers.

Ruthann Robson wrote, "We call each other lovers, friends, sisters, compañeras. We are coupled or not, sexual or not, co-habiting or not. But whatever we are, we are not legal."<sup>29</sup> The legal system, she explains, works against queers to separate parents from children, to trivialize queer lives and relationships. Similarly, the legal system works to detach queer people from ownership and inheritance of archival material. By privileging biological or heterosexual family structure, the laws of inheritance interrupt the impulse for lesbians, gays, and others with non-normative families to bequeath their property to loved ones and to make their private lives public after their death. There is ample archival literature providing harrowing tales of how lesbian, gay, and sexually suggestive archival material in mainstream institutions has been disguised from or denied to researchers, removed from collections, or destroyed by biological family or family executors entitled by law to do just that.<sup>30</sup>

Even with the absence of legal privacy protection for dead people, mainstream archival institutions often invest in garnering the goodwill and financial support of the presumed-to-be homophobic executors of a collection by restricting or more subtly discouraging its use. Historian and LHA archivist Judith Schwarz points out that, "while individual privacy and confidentiality may be of paramount concern while the individual lives, a full disclosure of deceased individuals' history can do little harm and yet add much to the lives of others".<sup>31</sup> While mainstream institutions most often govern themselves in a legalistic fashion around acquisition and use of archival material, grassroots archival concerns are not those involving homophobic relatives or executors fearing the revelation of sexual activity or identity of a deceased relative. LHA's practice, for example, reflects the desire to provide the broadest possible on-site, "community-based" access to the collections of deceased and living lesbians, unless the collections are specifically restricted by the donor or unless they threaten to expose another lesbian to mainstream scrutiny against her will.

Researchers and publishers using grassroots archives are sometimes frustrated to find that a good amount of the material is not legally sanctioned for use or display in a mainstream public. This is due to the outlawed, "extra-legal" status of queer lives and families. When a lesbian brings her deceased lover's collection to the Lesbian Herstory Archives, for example, she is not recognized as the legal owner of copyright to the collection unless there is a will or other legal document that makes it so. Instead, homophobic next-of-kin may be the legal bearers of property rights and/or copyright to her collection. In many cases, their legal reckoning with the collection may threaten its very existence. Much of the time, the risks of publicizing a lesbian or gay life in any venue are few. "Lesbian history is made up of other people's garbage," Nestle offers, and most homophobic heirs to lesbian collections do not care much if or where it exists, as long as it remains out of the range of their attention. But lesbian history is in large part an outlawed history, meaning its existence is contested by the state. Queer archival material, particularly that reflecting closeted lives, might only survive if it remains outside legal boundaries, away from the attention of a mainstream public.

Queer archival material constitutes a precarious historical record. Mainstream archival collections

are formed and designed to serve researchers and publishers who generally operate within legalistic frameworks - and the content of mainstream archives reflects that. Mainstream archival practice prescribes explicit, legal deeds of ownership for any collection of papers accepted by a mainstream institution. The Society of American Archivists recommends, for example, "before entering into a gift agreement, the archival institution should make sure that the prospective donor is competent and has clear title to the materials."<sup>32</sup> This professional tenant poses an impossible standard for lesbian and gay people seeking to control either public or private history. If a lover or friend of a deceased person offers a collection up to an archive, he or she must be legally sanctioned to give it away, or else present an archive with a legal conundrum. Non-biological queer "families" are not, without legal maneuvering, holders of "clear title" to the documents of deceased loved ones. In the 1990s, more lesbians and gays are out in the most public of spheres, and some are both inclined and wealthy enough to make legalistic arrangements regarding the inheritance of their property. But this is true for only for a fraction of the population. Queers without traditionally valued property are less likely to make those arrangements. If queer archival material is not properly willed or deeded by legally recognized executors, it may never find its way into historical record except through private or community-based collections or through professionals resisting or ignoring professional archival standards.

Contrary to Monahan's 1979 prediction about the "security" of mainstream archives, even collections that are the legally recognized property of an archive and restricted from public access are not protected from outside, particularly government, intrusion.<sup>33</sup> Lesbians and gays have a history strewn with instances of state surveillance and regulation. The professional ethic of librarians and archivists assures the privacy of donors and researchers, however, the state is routinely successful in undermining that assurance.<sup>34</sup>

Aside from under-valuing queer archival material and failing to collect legal and "extra-legal" archival material, perhaps the most prevalent state of compromise mainstream libraries and archives exhibit around queer material is in the description and classification of those records. Ellen Greenblatt has outlined the Library of Congress' history of classification of "homosexual" material, detailing how subject headings have failed to reflect changes in both popular nomenclature and self-definition.<sup>35</sup> Subject headings applied to gay literature are perpetually clumsy and out-of-date.<sup>36</sup> Mainstream library catalogs and periodical indexes are plagued with deficiencies in description, foiling computer subject and keyword searches. A world of lesbian, gay, transgendered, and queer-relevant material languishes unidentified and even uncataloged in libraries and archives.<sup>37</sup> While it would be an impossible task for archivists to ferret out contemporary research interests and assign relevant headings to every piece of archival material,<sup>38</sup> mainstream archivists too often fail to assign relevant subject headings to queer archival material due to their own queer-phobic concerns.

Much archival material relevant to homosexuality is found in the collections of individuals who were either closeted, or who did not self-identify as queer, homosexual, lesbian, gay, or transgendered. So, what's an archivist to do? In an 1992 talk at the Society of American Archivist's (SAA) convention, Eva Moseley of the Schlesinger Library suggested that archivists use language "obviously tentative" in the narrative of archival finding aids to suggest to the

researcher "that someone may have been bisexual or indigent or polygamous." She discouraged archivists from using subject headings, a researcher's primary finding tool, because it "makes a rather bald statement and there is no room for explanations."<sup>39</sup> Moseley's primary concern then is not about the accuracy or helpfulness of a description, but rather the library's social or legal liability in relationship to that description. Susan VonSalis, another Schlesinger archivist at another SAA convention offered a story about a researcher looking for archival material on friendships between women. The researcher, perplexed, commented to her, "All these collections on 'friendship' seem to be about lesbians."<sup>40</sup> This practice of coding or softening the language used to describe archival collections is at the root of queer "invisibility" in historical record. It is this tradition of closeting by mainstream archivists that leaves lesbians present, yet "incognito" in mainstream historical record. When archives fail to name or explicitly identify collections with established or even speculated queer content, they construct a veiled, closeted history -- a silent, unannounced inheritance no more apparent in the mainstream public than it was in the pre-Stonewall era.

Professional archival standards must evolve to reflect regard for the historical value of archival records, with secondary concern for the legal issues pertaining to use and publication. Archivists and librarians must devise their own non-LC subject headings, or pressure the Library of Congress to change theirs, in order to provide meaningful access to queer archival records.<sup>41</sup> Brenda Marston at Cornell's Human Sexuality archive, for example, routinely uses the non-standard heading "Gays and Lesbians" instead of the LC heading "Gays" so that a catalog keyword search on "lesbians" will retrieve records relevant to lesbians when gay men are involved as well. The presence, longevity, and integrity, then, of queer archival records, like other aspects of queer lives, can be endangered and compromised by mainstream institutions in ways grassroots and private archives are positioned to safeguard.

### **The Mainstreaming of Lesbian and Gay History**

Twenty years after activists began grassroots lesbian and gay archives, mainstream institutions are beginning to value lesbian and gay archival material and to solicit holdings to fortify their collections. With the embrace of multiculturalism by the liberal mainstream and the rise of queer studies in the academy, libraries are finding it appropriate and beneficial to create gay and lesbian archival collections, often by acquiring or conjoining the collections of grassroots projects. Mainstream research institutions are poised to colonize queer archival material in new, problematic ways.

San Francisco's Gay and Lesbian Historical Society (GLHS), founded in 1985, is a successful, well-known grassroots archive which now houses an impressive collection of well-indexed materials stored in climate-controlled space on Market St. Begun by community-based activists and historians, GLHS is now governed by a board elected by its dues-paying members. The collection is administered by a full-time professional archivist and a fleet of volunteers. In 1996 the board of GLHS, announcing an end to lengthy negotiations with the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) regarding partial deposit of their collections in SFPL's new James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, assured their constituency:

The Library will be open to provide research access six days a week, and its facilities will be able to accommodate more users than the reading room at GLHS. However, we have been concerned with the long-term protection of our collections. The Library is, after all, a government agency and subject to ever-changing political winds and city-budget priorities. While gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual people currently enjoy a degree of "normalcy" and protection unavailable in many other times places or times, history has taught us that such conditions can change. The agreement GLHS has negotiated with the Library has been designed to meet these concerns. In other words, as a deposit agreement, this contract provides GLHS with the means to remove our collections from the Library should they ever be jeopardized.<sup>42</sup>

The June L. Mazer Lesbian Collection was founded in Oakland in 1981 and moved six years later to Los Angeles with the support of the Connexus Women's Center. Named for its early donor and benefactor, the collection has now established itself in West Hollywood. After initially agreeing to accept the University of Southern California's (USC) 1995 invitation to provide housing and financial support, the Mazer collection reversed that decision given the small space, increasing costs, and lack of long term security USC was willing to offer. The Mazer collection's letter to its constituency explains that the collection has always represented an effort "where all lesbians come first," and that "the future preservation and accessibility of our lesbian life-stories will be best protected by lesbians ourselves."<sup>43</sup>

In the summer of 1994, coinciding with the wider-spread mainstream recognition of a lesbian and gay "market," the New York Public Library (NYPL) mounted the grand exhibit *Becoming Visible: The Legacy of Stonewall*. The exhibit featured a history of the city's lesbian and gay citizenry and trumpeted the arrival of lesbian and gay history to New York's cultural mainstream. It was a significant political marker for lesbian and gay history, a "coming out" in new territory.

The exhibit portrayed the NYPL's historical relationship with lesbian and gay material as one of happy inclusion. For example, the research guide published to coincide with the *Becoming Visible* exhibit states:

The Research Libraries of the New York Public Library have managed since their beginnings to collect materials relating to this large, but submerged, population. Although the subject entries in the Dictionary Catalog of the Research Libraries, 1911-1971, employ terms that appear today to be abstruse or arcane, the very presence of these works, some quite rare, attests to the Library's interest in acquiring in this field.<sup>44</sup>

*Becoming Visible* provided the New York Public Library with the platform to present itself as having "long been a friendly place for queers,"<sup>45</sup> implying that lesbians and gay men have always been welcome, recognized, and well-represented as one of the many parts of its diverse collection. This institutional fluffing or face-saving masks a history of cloaking lesbian and gay books and archival collections. To point to these texts, both those with and others without subject headings, as the NYPL does in its research guide, proclaiming them evidence for a long-lived interest in

collecting lesbian and gay history plays on the duplicity of the closet the Library has imposed on lesbian and gay titles. Material that has languished in the stacks unnamed or ineffectively named for years is only in 1994 highlighted in a research guide to coincide with the timely *Becoming Visible* exhibit. The Library more appropriately might have been reflective about its problematic relationship with lesbian and gay material, perhaps by offering plans for correction and reclassification.

A *Donors and Lenders* panel bearing the names of 82 individuals and organizations contributing to *Becoming Visible* was erected only days before the exhibit opened, and then only at the insistence of the Lesbian Herstory Archives. LHA had offered several display items for the exhibit and provided curators with indicators to lesbian-relevant material unmarked and unacknowledged as such in several archival collections, including NYPL's very own. Tucked to the left of the exhibit entrance (in striking contrast to the *Financial Contributors* panel prominently displayed to the right), the panel represented a break with New York Public's policy, in that it was the first time that the Library recognized outside lenders in such a "prominent" fashion in any curated exhibit.<sup>46</sup> Stretched to the limits of their courtesy by this unprecedented gesture, New York Public Library officials refused to include information about how exhibit-viewers could contact any contributing archive or organization. There was no significant information about the history of the New York Public's International Gay Information Center collection, the folded grassroots archive donated to NYPL in 1988 that provided the bulk of original artifacts for the exhibit. The *Becoming Visible* exhibit was willfully framed to appear as though it had been berthed from the stacks, archives, native savvy, and magnanimous goodwill of the New York Public Library, doing a magnificent honor for gays and lesbians, deprived yet deserving of mainstream recognition. For this service, NYPL expected immense gratitude and humility. Riding the wave of queer culture chic, the Library was eager, upon the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall Rebellion, to represent itself as the largest, most accomplished, major repository of lesbian and gay history.

*Becoming Visible*, as it turns out, was one of the largest money-making exhibits in the New York Public Library's history.<sup>47</sup> Shortly after the exhibit opened, the Library issued a fund raising appeal written by gay marketer Sean Strub, signed by gay playwright Tony Kushner, and mailed to potential lesbian- and gay-friendly donors. It incited a size war and invited a gay market to "become a Friend of the New York Public Library," boasting that "the Library's gay holdings are the world's largest" and added, inexplicably, that the New York Public Library "receives no public funding to build and maintain its great research collections, like its gay and lesbian archives."<sup>48</sup> The New York Public may have boasting rights to the largest gay collection in a mainstream institution only if you interpret "gay" to mean only gay men, not lesbians. But even this is questionable given the size of Cornell University's Human Sexuality Collection.

For the Library to misrepresent the contributions of non-NYPL history projects while failing to address its own tangled relationships with the lesbian and gay history secreted in its stacks is not only less than gracious, it is a self-serving betrayal of the processes and institutions which have constructed the history it sought to exhibit. Queer people are starved for historical recognition, not only from "community-based" organizations but also by "major" mainstream institutions.

Institutions building the legacies of marginalized people will position themselves with respect to that content with various political agendas. It is important to consider how each institution is vested in accommodating archival records, how individuals and organizations will be represented in them, and how these institutions will selectively preserve historical evidence.

## **Conclusion**

Both mainstream and grassroots archives, like all social institutions, are shaped and reflected by individuals and communities bearing both shared and conflicting political beliefs, goals, fears, and ideologies. The Lesbian Herstory Archives was shaped by 1970s lesbian-feminist political ideals and strategies of institution and community building. LHA is a resource created to honor, heal, and inspire individual lesbian lives, to provide a "protected" social and historical community-based space for woman-identified lesbians to come out to each other, to make themselves known to each other present and future. This project was designed to remedy the personal and historical deprivation lesbian and gay liberationists identified in the post-Stonewall 1970s, embracing the ideal of lesbian community while pointing to mainstream social institutions as sites of colonization incapable of generating a liberating remedy. LHA was designed to ensure that, in a "community-based" context, authentic, inclusive notions about lesbian identity, history, community, and history could form and sustain themselves, fortifying the people it sought to represent by forming a tangible historical presence "in our own land." LHA has into the 1990s refrained from forging a high-profile position in a mainstream public experienced and theorized as hostile to lesbians, assigning itself instead to function within the community-based home of its origin.

The advent of a multi-cultural mainstream interest in lesbian and gay archival record has expanded and positioned queer history in the most public of venues and institutions. Reflecting the success of a grassroots archival movement, this development is welcomed by community-based activists, but it is also greeted with as much suspicion. The construction of an archival record offers it up for a multitude of political uses. Mainstream institutions, hopping on a multi-cultural bandwagon, may now present themselves as wonderlands to their newly recognized gay and lesbian constituencies and markets, but in doing so threaten to appropriate the work, recognition, and funding of grassroots institutions.

The "outlaw" status of queer collections and the near impossibilities of guaranteeing legal, "safe" space for those collections, continues to regulate the acquisition, availability, description, and use of queer archival material by all constituencies. When applied to a lesbian or gay archival record, issues of safety transcend commonplace professional understandings of security and preservation. Institutions complacent within legalistic frameworks are severely circumscribed in their ability to construct a viable queer historical record. Institutions that can work outside legalistic frameworks in some sense, mirroring the complexity and subversiveness of the people that history represents, are more successful in constructing a multi-faceted archival record. Queer archival record is loaded with conflicting political meanings for its public and community-based constituencies, and it is likely to remain highly contested for some time to come.

## Endnotes

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1. *Lesbian Herstory Archives News*, April 1975, 1.
2. I use "Lesbian" with a capital "L" in this essay when published that way in original texts following the use of activists mainly in the 1970s and 1980s to reflect notions of nationalism, unified culture, or confederate identities.
3. Joan Nestle, "Notes on Radical Archiving from a Lesbian Feminist Perspective," *Gay Insurgent* 4/5 Spring 1979, 11.
4. *Lesbian Herstory Archives Guide to the Collection*, 1993.
5. Jim Monahan, "Considerations in the Organization of Gay Archives," *Gay Insurgent* 4/5, Spring 1979, 9.
6. Ibid.
7. Nestle, "Radical Archiving," *Gay Insurgent* 4/5, Spring 1979, 10.
8. Monahan, 9.
9. The title of an essay in Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 110.
10. Nestle, "Radical Archiving," 10.
11. Ibid., 90.
12. John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 235-6. George Chauncey, *Gay New York*: (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), 8.
13. *Lesbian Herstory Archives News* 4, February 1978, 3.
14. "A Plea for Coming Out," *LHA Newsletter*, Spring 1979.
15. John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)*. (New York: Times Change Press, 1974), 40 - 3.
16. For a critique of the feminist use of the concept of "home," see Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?" in Teresa de Lauretis, ed. *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 191-212.
17. In 1967, the New York State Attorney General unsuccessfully challenged the incorporation of the Daughters of Bilitis as a group "contrary to public policy or injurious to the community." (In

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the Matter of Daughters of Bilitis of New York, Inc., Supreme Court of New York, Special Term, New York County, 52 Misc. 2d 1075; 277 NYS 2d 709, 28 February 1967.) 1973, both the Gay Activists Alliance and the Lambda Legal Defense Fund encountered legal resistance to incorporation in New York State, though both Groups eventually won the battle to incorporate. (Harvard Law Review, eds. *Sexual Orientation and the Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 156.). In 1974, lesbian feminist publication *Big Mama Rag* was denied federal tax exempt status by the IRS, though Colorado had granted it the requisite non-profit status. The publication finally won the right to incorporate in 1980, when the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit reversed a rule that allowed the IRS to withhold tax exemption based on the "content and quality of an applicant's views and goals." (*Big Mama Rag, Inc. v. United States*, 631 F2d, quoted in Harvard Law Review, eds. *Sexual Orientation and the Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 157.).

18. For more about the "whiteness" of Lesbian culture, see Nan Alamilla Boyd, "Beyond Lesbian Bodies: Lesbian Nationalism in the 1970s." Paper presented at the American Studies Association Conference, Kansas City, May 1996.

19. J.R. Roberts. *Black Lesbians: An Annotated Bibliography*. Tallahassee, FL: Naiad Press, 1981.

20. For more background on Mabel Hampton, see the video by Jean Carlomusto, Dolores Perez, Catherine Saalfeld and Polly Thistlethwaite, directors/producers. *Not Just Passing Through*, Women Make Movies, 1994.

21. "Announcements," *Lesbian Herstory Archives News* 8, Winter 1984, 3.

22. *Not Just Passing Through* contains a 10-minute segment on ALOEC including some of Chan's slide show.

23. Juanita Ramos, ed. *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians, An Anthology* (New York: Latina Lesbian History Project, 1987), xv.

24. See Nestle's essay, "My History With Censorship," in *A Restricted Country* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1987) 144 - 50, for details.

25. The New Alexandria Archive, in contrast, has transitioned from a collection with a lesbian focus to one embracing a variety of queer identities. For more information see Clare Hemmings, "From Lesbian Nation to Transgender Liberation: A Bisexual Feminist Perspective," *Journal of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity*, 1 (1), January 1996, 35 - 59.

26. For more about how lesbians and female-to-male transsexuals distinguish themselves and their territory from each other see Nan Alamilla Boyd's "Bodies in Motion: Lesbian and Transsexual Histories," in Martin Duberman, ed. *A Queer World: The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.

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27. Tamar Rothenberg, "And She Told Two Friends: Lesbians Creating Urban Social Space," in David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds., *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
28. For evidence of LHA's low mainstream profile, see Mark Francis Cohen, "Neighborhood Report: Park Slope; In Lesbian Archive, Education and Sanctuary." *New York Times* 7 April 1996, sec B, 9. Interestingly, the New York Public Library coded the banner advertising its 1994 exhibition on lesbian and gay history, ironically titled *Becoming Visible: The Legacy of Stonewall*. The arrival of lesbian and gay history to New York's cultural mainstream was thus announced subtly, "in code" to those clued-in to queer history and iconography. The banner bore only a pink triangle and the exhibit title, not the words "gay" or "lesbian."
29. Ruthann Robson, *Lesbian (Out)Law: Survival Under the Rule of Law* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1992), 117.
30. Lesbian Herstory archivist Judith Schwarz documents an incident in which the descendants of Margaret Sanger refused historian Jonathan Katz access to love letters written by Marie Equi to Sanger, housed in Sanger's collection at Smith College (Judith Schwarz, "The Archivist's Balancing Act: Helping Researchers While Protecting Individual Privacy," *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 1, June 1992, 184). Elena Danielson describes similar incidents in which the families of such influential figures as Sigmund Freud and Ludwig Wittgenstein refused a biographer access to papers (Elena Danielson, "The Ethics of Access," *American Archivist* 52, Winter 1989, 52-62). Martin Duberman describes a library staff's refusal to grant permission to publish the homoerotic letters between antebellum politicians James H. Hammond and Jeff Withers housed in the South Caroliniana Library (Martin Duberman, "Writhing Bedfellows in Antebellum South Carolina: Historical Interpretation and the Politics of Evidence," in *About Time: Exploring the Gay Past* (New York: Meridian, 1991)). Roz Baxandall notes in her acknowledgments to *Words on Fire: The Life and Writing of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987, ix.) that party members staffing the American Institute of Marxist Studies library in New York somehow "lost" intimate letters between Flynn and Marie Equi (the same Equi involved with Sanger, above) collection as they were transferred to the Tamiment Library at New York University.
31. Schwarz, 189.
32. Gary M Peterson and Trudy Huskamp Peterson, *Archives and Manuscripts: Law* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1985), 24.
33. For example, the Anne and Carl Braden papers at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin were subpoenaed in 1986 by the FBI, over the restrictions placed on the collection by Anne Braden. The court ruled that the archival restriction did not protect Braden's collection from subpoena, and the Historical Society granted the FBI access. See Elizabeth Knowlton, "Researcher Access to Records Documenting Human Sexuality vs. Donor Privacy Concerns,"

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Paper presented at the Society of American Archivists Meeting, September 1993.

34. The Reagan administration's "Library Awareness Program," 1986-1987, recruited library staff to identify people with foreign names or accents (allegedly potential spies) who spend time in science libraries reading technology journals (Natalie S. Robins, "The FBI's Invasion of Libraries," *The Nation* 246, 9 April 1988, 481.). In 1991 the New York City police department subpoenaed and readily obtained circulation records from the New York Public Library bearing the names of patrons who had recently requested Aleister Crowley's *Book of Law*, a text with which the media-hyped "Zodiac Killer" was evidently familiar. The NYPD's dull-witted investigation led to the questioning of a wall street executive who was quickly determined not to be a suspect, unfortunately for him not before he was pictured in police custody on the front page of the *New York Post* ("Police Subpoena Library Records in Hunt for NYC's Zodiac Killer," *American Libraries*, September 1990, 703.).

35. Greenblatt explains that 'Homosexuality' did not become an authorized subject heading until 1946, however, and "lesbianism" was not recognized by LC until 1954. LC continued the 'see also' reference from these terms to 'sexual perversion' until 1972. It was not until 1976 that LC denoted 'lesbians' and 'homosexuals, male' as classes of persons, and 'gay' was only sanctioned as a subject heading in 1987. See Ellen Greenblatt, "Homosexuality: The Evolution of a Concept in the Library of Congress Subject Headings," in Cal Gough and Ellen Greenblatt, eds. *Gay and Lesbian Library Service* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1990).

36. "Gays," for example is used as an umbrella term instead of "Lesbians and Gays." In addition, LC subject headings do not exist for crucial, let alone nuanced elements of lesbian and lives and culture. The addition of subject headings such as "Butch-Fem," "Lesbian feminism," and "Lesbian separatism" would be useful. In addition, there are few headings to describe the literature pertaining to the varieties of non-normative sexual identity that are not necessarily lesbian or gay. There is no heading for "Transgender," for example, or "Queer," for that matter. There is one for "Transsexuals," but nothing yet to distinguish works on male-to-female from female-to-male transsexuals. In addition there are no headings for "American Literature--lesbian authors" or "American Literature--gay authors" equivalent to "American literature--Asian American authors" or "American literature--women authors."

37. See Marvin Taylor, "A Queer Point of View: Looking Askance at Library Collections." Paper presented at New York American College and Research Libraries Diversity Committee Conference, John Jay College, New York City, October 1994.

38. Eve Sedgwick, (*Epistemology of the Closet* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990) suggests that the great part of Western literary canon can be understood as homo-relevant in a most essential way, and therefore inadequately subject headed.

39. Eva Moseley, "Describing Sex and Gender in Historical Collections," a presentation for the panel session "Finding Sex and Gender in the Archives," Society of American Archivists

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Meeting, September 1992. St. Petersburg, FL: Convention Recordings International.

40. VonSalis uttered this poignant quip during a panel session at the Society of American Archivists annual meeting in Cincinnati, OH, 1994. (St. Petersburg, FL: Convention Recordings International).

41. See Sanford Berman, *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1971.

42. 15 February, 1996 letter to GLHS Members.

43. March 15, 1996 letter to June L. Mazer Collection supporters.

44. "Gay and Lesbian Studies," Research Guide 29 produced by The New York Public Library General Research Division, June 1994.

45. For a laudatory account of NYPL and *Becoming Visible*, see Lisa Duggan, "Becoming Visible: The Legacy of Stonewall, New York Public Library, June 18-September 24, 1994." *Radical History Review* 62, Spring 1995, 188 - 94.

46. Telephone conversation with Mimi Bowling, Curator of Manuscripts, New York Public Library, June 1994.

47. Telephone conversation with NYPL public relations office representative, 12 January 1996.

48. "Discover the Legacy of Stonewall...At the New York Public Library," Fund raising letter of the New York Public Library, 1994. Special collections, Lesbian Herstory Archives, New York.