

“WE ARE EVERYWHERE!” RHETORICAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF LESBIAN ARCHIVES ON
COMMUNITY BUILDING

by

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ABSTRACT

During the Gay liberation and feminist movement of the 1970s, lesbians quickly recognized that they were being excluded, erased, and forgotten as they faced sexism from the gay rights movement, and homophobia from the feminist movement. Due to this unique positioning in the public, lesbians relied on one another to maintain and record their existence and memories. This thesis analyzes how lesbians began creating their own personal archives as ways to combat lesbian erasure, fight oppression, and spread community. Specifically, this thesis focuses on the archival collections of Sandi Strong, The Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition, and Reverend Marjorie Ragona, and how each of these collections demonstrate rhetorical properties of community building among lesbians at the time, in the archive, and in the future. Each of the women responsible for these collections were heavily active in LGBTQ+ activism in Alabama, making the understanding of their rhetorical strategies and public memory all the more important.

DEDICATION

For Sandi Strong, Reverend Marjorie Ragona, and the women of the Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition. Thank you for fighting to preserve lesbian life, history, and love. I am forever grateful for the community you forged for the next generation of lesbians, and for myself.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As a nation somewhat obsessed with our origins, it took the United States over a century to begin any sort of formal archival process to preserve its own history. As fires and wars endangered government documents, manuscripts, and federal records, citizens and leaders in the United States during the 1880s finally began to recognize the precarity of their history - and the public memory that would maintain it.¹ Shortly after, a number of official archival organizations such as the American Historical Association and the Public Archives Commission would be born within the U.S., with the hopes of organizing the documents that created the country and preserving them for generations to come.² The archive, then, as an institution, began to do more than just preserve the laws and records of a nation - it created and maintained a national identity equipped with dominant ideologies, beliefs, and specific versions of history. Those that controlled the archive, controlled the past - they could decide what they wanted their citizens and thus, the public, to believe and feel about the public sphere they were living in.³

The United States was not the first to utilize archives as a means of manipulating and sustaining an idealized version of the past. Archival scholars have long examined the ways records in ancient times were kept and curated by the most powerful in society and in ways that

1. <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2009/summer/history.html>

2. National Archives and Records Administration. <http://archives.gov/>.

3. Jimerson, Randall C. "Archives and Memory." *OCLC Systems & Services: International Digital Library Perspectives* 19, no. 3 (2003): 89-95. doi:10.1108/10650750310490289.

benefited that same group.⁴ Although it was best serving the interests of the elite, the archive created public memory regarding most historical events that made up a country. Archives became “surrogates” for how people “interpret society, past and present.”⁵ As archives collected artifacts of memory, individuals within that society began to cling to these tangible relics of memory in an effort to create a sense of belonging for themselves within that society and ultimately, a greater national identity.⁶ These archives of American history have provided a way for people to connect to the past and form a community with others that share those memories. Thus, the archive became an institution that built and sustained a sense of community and identity for those that felt represented by its artifacts of the past.

However, as with any institution created by those in power, not everyone in American society made it into the archive (that is, any archival collection that existed in the states during the birth of the Archival profession). With little recollections of the ways they contributed to, engaged with, or were present in society, marginalized individuals were forced into believing in a public memory that excluded them. Or, they were included in ways that misrepresented their contributions and culture. How do you build a sustainable and equitable place of belonging in a society that does not remember your existence, either deliberately or accidentally? How do you do this if the way your society has remembered you is in a disparaged way? If you are not included in the ancient or modern archives, what’s to say you existed at all? In reckoning with these questions, archivists became increasingly interested in this idea of archival gaps, erasures,

4. Jimerson, “Archives and Memory,” 91.

5. Jimerson, “Archives and Memory,” 91.

6. Jimerson, “Archives and Memory,” 89-95.

and silences that happened in the archival record, as an attempt to include those left out and have a more comprehensive archive.⁷ As theoretical archival studies have proven that archives hold power, it has also been shown that even within the most complete archive networks, “power to exclude is a fundamental aspect of the archive. Inevitably, there are distortions, omissions, erasures, and silences in the archive. Not every story is told.”⁸ In this acknowledgement, archivists push others to include the silenced, while also recognizing that individuals who have been excluded may now prefer their own means of archiving because of their ability to correctly tell their story completely.⁹

For LGBTQ+ individuals, and lesbians especially, we are faced with the reality that “gay and lesbian history even exists has been a contested fact.”¹⁰ Archives are meant to represent what a society deems important to remember, instituting the creation of a collective thinking about the past.¹¹ However, what is deemed important usually sways towards a masculine, heteronormative idea of public interactions and events, leaving out queer people, women, and especially then, lesbians. LGBTQ+ history and archival artifacts are continuously left out of the conversation, especially when those LGBTQ+ people are women. This makes creating a public sphere, a public memory, or even a community that includes lesbians - all the more difficult.

7. Carter, Rodney GS. "Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence." *Archivaria* 61, no. 61 (2006) 215-233.

8. Carter, “Of Things Said and Unsaid,” 216.

9. Carter, “Of Things Said and Unsaid,” 216.

10. Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Duke University Press, 2019. 242.

11. Schwartz, Joan M., and Terry Cook. "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory." *Archival Science* 2, no. 1-2 (2002): 1-19. doi:10.1007/bf02435628.

Lesbians had to find ways to organize within a public that did not acknowledge their significance or public actions, due to being left out of memory again and again.

This thesis investigates the rhetorical significance of including lesbian artifacts in this memory, and what those artifacts were doing at the time of their creation. As lesbian artifacts eventually made it into any archival collection, they were often not categorized as being lesbian, queer, or LGBTQ+ in any sense. Traditionally, archives use directories for archival readers and users to utilize, so that specific artifacts for their research are more readily available and accessible. Regarding lesbian or LGBTQ+ history though, such classifications were either seen as unnecessary or invalid as a means of record keeping.¹² As a result, for many years, searching directories or other archival category navigators were unable to point people to all lesbian or queer artifacts. Instead, archival users could only hope to find lesbian artifacts within the archival collections by just stumbling upon the material by happenstance, especially when using a queer lens approach to the archive.¹³ Essentially, the only way to know these artifacts existed at all was by searching through various collections and finding the artifacts that *should* have been classified as queer, lesbian, or LGBTQ+. Some archival research even points to the importance of the archivist having a queer perspective themselves in order to document and keep records that represent queer folks, and represent them in the archive as such.¹⁴ Unfortunately, queer lenses were not and are not common in institutional archives, despite them being crucial to ensure

12. Zepeda, Lizeth. "Queering the Archive: Transforming the Archival Process." *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*, no. 27 (2018). 94-102. <https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.27.14>

13. Zepeda, "Queering the Archive," 94.

14. Zepeda, "Queering the Archive," 95.

“processing archivists do not disavow queer possibilities.”¹⁵ This is not an issue of the past, but one of the present.

Similar tensions illustrating the need for queer or lesbian specific perspectives on archives are exemplified and combatted in the Lesbian Herstory Archives, or LHA. LHA is currently the largest existing archive for lesbians, housing any and all artifacts lesbians donate to the archive.¹⁶ These artifacts, historically, were deemed unfit or unworthy of being archived at all - they go against the masculine, patriarchal norms that dictate archives. Creating and maintaining archives for lesbians, by lesbians, continues to be imperative to lesbian survival and culture. Founder of LHA Joan Nestle explains lesbian history had rarely ever been seen or told through a lens that was not patriarchal in some way. Lesbians recognized and reveled in “a world of lesbian culture that had nourished us but that was rapidly disappearing.”¹⁷ As LHA grew, the archival desire among all lesbians grew - and soon LHA was not the only lesbian archive in America. Archives that centered lesbians combatted “the historical invisibility of lesbians and their absence from archives that are part of the ‘military industrial complex.’”¹⁸ Thus, lesbian archival expansion was crucial to lesbian survival.

The rapid and vast success of LHA and archival collections that followed shows just how meticulous and detailed lesbians were in their record-keeping abilities - even without being professional archivists of any kind. Throughout *all* lesbian archival collections there are

15. Zepeda, “Queering the Archive,” 98.

16. Corbman, R.F. “A Genealogy of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, 1974-2014.” *Journal of contemporary archival studies*, 1. no. 1 (2014) 1.

17. Nestle, Joan. “The Will to Remember: The Lesbian Herstory Archives of New York.” *Feminist Review*, no. 34 (1990): 87. doi:10.2307/1395308.

18. Corbman, “A Genealogy of the Lesbian Herstory Archives.” 5.

countless diaries, love letters, poems, home-written erotica, and photographs detailing lesbians and their interactions with lovers, family, and the outside world.¹⁹ In addition to the intimate, there are also documents of correspondence between organizers, activists, and leaders in the broader lesbian community at the time, as well as invoices, taxes, and academic documents. Lesbians recognized the importance of these contents that would normally be excluded from mainstream, institutional archive collections and therefore, the public eye as a whole.²⁰ These collections preserve records of lesbian culture and lesbian's simply existing - memories that were never meant to be in an institutional archive.²¹ For lesbians living in the South specifically, finding their own means of storing their personal and historical documents was all the more critical to preserving their culture.

Today, Southern lesbian archival collections can be found scattered across the Southeast in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The Invisible Histories Project, a queer community archive project, has worked tirelessly to collect these artifacts and sustain them by partnering with institutional archives such as the Birmingham Public Library and the University of Alabama.²² The collections of Sandi Strong, the Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition, and Reverend Marjorie Ragona are among those archived by IHP, and prove to be unique archival collections that illustrate the community building efforts of lesbians throughout the 80s to late 90s. Sandi Strong's collection details the 1987 Gay and Lesbian March on Washington. The Tuscaloosa

19. Corbman, "A Genealogy of the Lesbian Herstory Archives," 12.

20. Chenier, Elise. "Reclaiming the Lesbian Archives." *The Oral History Review* 43, no. 1 (2016): 170-82. doi:10.1093/ohr/ohw025.

21. Nestle, Joan, "The Will to Remember," 87.

22. Invisible Histories Project. <https://invisiblehistory.org/>.

Lesbian Coalition's details their engagement and work to bring culture, art, music, and other community building events to central Alabama, as the only known lesbian group on the University of Alabama's campus at the time. Reverend Marjorie Ragona's collection proudly details her involvement with churches throughout the South, and her efforts to expand community for lesbians.

This thesis is focused on analyzing these specific archival relics in the libraries of Alabama, each donated by lesbian activists in the state, due to their distinct effectiveness for building, sustaining, and immortalizing the community around them. This is especially crucial to understand, as they were constructing these communities while they were being excluded from every other version of community. The contents within lesbian archival collections are already particularly unique from a rhetorical standpoint, as they go against common rhetorical and contextual norms within traditional institutional archives, as they are not masculine or heteronormative in a patriarchal sense.²³ These artifacts often consisted of memories of emotions, feelings, sexuality, and even trauma that institutional archives did not account for in their collection foundations.²⁴ Women, in public and private spheres, were not supposed to love and be with other women in the same way they would with men. Knowing this, artifacts that belonged to, were created by, or archived by lesbians inherently went against the archive as an institution.²⁵ Additionally, it should be noted that queer archival pieces of any kind "are indeed rhetorical sites and resources, part of a diverse domain of the usable past that... nevertheless

23. Chenier, "Reclaiming the Lesbian Archives," 181.

24. Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Duke University Press, 2019. 241.

25. Chenier, "Reclaiming the Lesbian Archives," 171.

functions ideologically and politically, and often insidiously.”²⁶ This critique from Morris justifies this analysis and the urgency to understand lesbian archival pieces for the rhetorical significance they innately hold just by simply existing.

Lesbians could not separate their private, intimate, and personal lives from their professional, public, and/or academic life. We were under attack for our intimate selves, our privacy was being policed and so, lesbians took these issues to the public sphere. Lesbians had to be both “personal and public, political and confidential,” so they utilized each of these avenues to fight for their rights to exist in every sphere. As the founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives explains, even to be a lesbian at all is an act of resilience, and thus worthy of being remembered for.²⁷ Therefore, communication and rhetorical artifacts passed between lesbians and then sent on to be stored in community archives by those same lesbians, remain of the utmost importance to rhetorically analyze.

My analysis examines the rhetorical strategies lesbians used to build themselves a community within a public sphere that included and remembered them. Although archives are not a total representation of the public, they do attempt to represent what the public believes is important to remember, thus not being represented in them still reinforces exclusion from public memory.²⁸ In both the institutional (the University of Alabama) archive and the community (Invisible Histories Project) archive there are documents from lesbian organizers, leaders, and activists from the 1980’s to early 2000’s who were focused on finding lesbians like them across

26. Morris, Charles E. "Archival Queer." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9, no. 1 (2006): 145-51. doi:10.1353/rap.2006.0028.

27. Nestle, Joan, "The Will to Remember," 88.

28. Carter, “Of Things Said and Unsaid,” 233.

the country and creating an almost familial community with them. These documents highlight various rhetorical artifacts where lesbians use specific strategies to become closer with one another for what seems like an attempt to survive within a public memory. Perhaps most importantly, these rhetorical attempts are happening often within spaces that were never meant to *see* lesbians, let alone remember their presence. The archive is a space where lesbians were not originally intended to be remembered. The artifacts within these collections can provide a lens into the ways lesbians maintained their culture and history despite not having traditional spaces to do so.

This analysis focuses on three lesbian archival collections in the American South: materials donated by Birmingham resident Sandi Strong, the Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition, and the collection from Rev. Marjorie Ragona. Sandi Strong's collection consists of a scrapbook she created detailing the organization of the March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights in the 1970's. The Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition (TLC) is a large collection that deals with the organization of lesbians at the University of Alabama and efforts to reach lesbians in the South to build community. Reverend Ragona is a lesbian activist from Alabama who donated her life's work and personal artifacts to the Invisible History Project in Birmingham, Alabama.

Each collection has a vast selection of lesbian activism and organization throughout the 1970s to early 2000s. Reverend Ragona's artifacts highlight her passion for bringing lesbians closer to Christianity, as well as her passions for sexual liberation for all, not just lesbian women. Ragona's collection is by far the largest of the three - with personal archival pieces such as tax returns, invoices, receipts, bills, newspaper clippings, college exams, photographs, essays, newsletters, and even more. Sandi Strong's collection is the smallest, but still just as impactful as

the scrapbook keeps a meticulous detail of the various events, beliefs, and organization that went into planning the 1987 March on Washington.

The Invisible History Project, which houses Ragona and Strong's collections, uses a combination of a community based archive model through the Birmingham Public Library. The Invisible History Project is itself a community archive that has worked with the institutional archive at the Birmingham Public Library to bridge the gap between the public and the institution and provide archival records and access to the community at greater rates. The University of Alabama's collections are an academic institution for archives, with limitations to access. Due to this difference in where the collections are housed, there is certainly going to be a difference in the kinds of artifacts present in each location, as well as their accessibility.

My analysis examines the rhetoric within the collections themselves, as well as the archive in which they are housed. The collections from Ragona may lean more explicit, personal, or intimate, while the Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition collections will focus more on what the institution finds necessary for an archive. It is imperative to this research to understand how the rhetorical artifacts shift between community archives and institutional archives and other challenges the collections may encounter, in addition to the rhetoric of the collections themselves. This was done to understand what rhetoric may have been hidden, what rhetoric prevailed, and what rhetoric stayed consistent in each collection. Considering the barriers lesbians continue to face in being acknowledged, remembered, and celebrated for their sexuality due to the unique, combined stigmatization of their gender and sexuality, my analysis asks the following research question: How do lesbian archival collections create community in the South?

To answer, it will be important to first understand the research that makes up the lens of this analysis. I utilize literature that uncovers public memory in the public and private spheres

with a feminist and queer lens. To do this, I first discuss the problems with the public and private spheres. Then, I will look at the public memory of those spheres, and how public memory is typically curated and created through rhetoric. While looking at public memory, I examine literature surrounding queer memory and how it challenges our perceptions of public memory, and provides the potential to include lesbians within public memory. Finally, I discuss the importance of the archive within public memory, the rhetorical significance of archives, and what archives are born to combat the institutionalization of memory. Alongside this, I invoke research regarding the impact of lesbian and queer specific archive collections and tie it into how archives play a role in the rhetoric of public memory and community building. Understanding the diverse and unique rhetorical properties of lesbian collections will be best done through a theory of memory that each of the following pieces of literature will help this analysis develop. Indeed, I use this research to create a lens that more adequately accounts for lesbian archival artifacts - a lens of lesbian memory.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Public and Private Spheres

Before we critique the perceptions of public memory and how lesbian collections interact with public memory, we must understand how the public sphere itself has changed and been challenged throughout rhetorical criticisms. Indeed, articles discussing public and private spheres in regards to rhetoric have been around quite some time and there is a vast amount to pick from - this thesis, though, is focused more so on the criticisms that discuss memory and interventions within these spheres. The following literature allows my analysis to build on itself effectively, as the literature uses a vast canon of public memory and public sphere research from the past to come to their own conclusions. Initially, the public sphere may include everything we believe to be important and included in public memory, while it also includes the collective which makes up the remembering aspect of public memory or rather the participants in that sphere. However, what constitutes as “public” is not “uncontested,” as it remains an “elastic concept” consisting of various events, interactions, collective beliefs, attitudes, “normative standards, and instantiations between the individual and the state.”²⁹ The public sphere has its own controversies because what has been considered as public is often, as Fraser argues, “the elaboration of a distinctive

29. Dickinson, Greg, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott. *Places of Public Memory the Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*. University of Alabama Press, 2010. 4-5.

culture of civil society and of an associated public sphere [that] was implicated in the process of bourgeois class formation.”³⁰

As what was widely considered the public sphere was often inaccessible to marginalized individuals within that society, it is more accurate to acknowledge that there are multiple public spheres existing at once.³¹ Catherine Squires asserts in their research on Black public spheres that “people of color, women, homosexuals, religious minorities, and immigrant groups have created coexisting counterpublics in reaction to the exclusionary politics of dominant public spheres and the state.”³² However, archival records, as they were started by the powerful institutions, largely documented only those that were participating in ‘important’ civic events.³³ It took quite some time for the publics of marginalized groups to even be theorized as valid, let alone documented in the archive of the nation as such.³⁴ With this in mind, it makes sense that memory of the events, attitudes, and interactions within this “public” sphere excluded these individuals as well.

To account for the ways women have been excluded from the public sphere, Fraser and others engaging in the literature have used feminist lenses of public spheres and public memory to account for interactions lost in what was dubbed the private spheres. Feminist theory is

30. Fraser, N. “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy.” *Social Text*, (25/26), (1990): 60. doi:10.2307/466240

31. Squires, Catherine R. "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres." *Communication Theory* 12, no. 4 (2002): 446-68. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00278.x.

32. Squires, “Rethinking the Black Public Sphere,” 446.

33. Schwartz, Joan M., and Terry Cook. "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory." *Archival Science* 2, no. 1-2 (2002): 1-19. doi:10.1007/bf02435628.

34. Squires, “Rethinking the Black Public Sphere,” 451.

certainly helpful for understanding this exclusion, however, “feminist thinking explains gender injustices, it does not and cannot provide by itself a full explanation for the oppression of sexual minorities.”³⁵ Sexual oppression and injustice against sexuality that deviates from hegemonic, patriarchal norms is faced with a “barbarity of sexual persecution” and thus, critical and rhetorical lenses that seek to identify, understand, describe, explain, and finally denounce these “erotic injustice(s)” utilize a “radical theory” of sex - a theory that goes beyond just feminist critical thought.³⁶ Rubin explores how non-normative sexuality that disrupts the traditional family model of the American Dream is routinely punished, either legally or societally, specifically when it comes to gay and lesbian relationships. This analysis uses Rubin’s examination of the way lesbian women have been labeled unfit in motherhood as their lesbianism makes them unfit for womanhood and vice versa. Looking at public and private spheres through a queer lens, we see who has been pushed even further into the private sphere of society where they are supposed to remain quiet, or receive punishment. Women were meant to remain in the private sphere, lesbians are villains to womanhood, and should remain in an even more private, unspeakable sphere. There are certainly a number of queer theorists to pull from to justify the ways in which feminist critical thought and theory is not inherently enough to analyze injustices, experiences, and erasures faced by lesbians, but Rubin’s argument is sufficient for this analysis as it directly calls for a more radical theory that will parallel radical theories in the archives as well.

35. Rubin, Gayle S. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." *Culture, Society and Sexuality*, 2007, 166. doi:10.4324/9780203966105-21.

36. Rubin, “Thinking Sex,” 172.

Rhetoric, History, and Public Memory

Rhetoric, definitionally, has gone through quite an evolution since it was first theorized. Still, there are debates regarding what is rhetoric, and how much the definition should cover.³⁷ For the purpose of this analysis, we will stick to two crucial perspectives in rhetorical theory of rhetoric's definition. Initially, rhetoric "includes words, images, and gestures presented to an audience for some kind of purpose" including the "content as well as the style or form in which they are presented."³⁸ Analyzing rhetoric, then, by this definition and for the purpose of this thesis is especially concerned with the implications of each of these factors. The gestures or images mentioned in the definition can also be interpreted in various ways, such as space or place, and will be for this analysis. Indeed, when analyzing the rhetoric of space and place, especially spaces of memory, rhetoric is also seen as the spaces or places which garner attention and "constitute the rhetorical performance of political identities."³⁹ This observation of space and place rhetoric will be substantial for analyzing the messages the archive sends about the collections, and how the archive as a space/place reinforces or obstructs the rhetoric of the artifacts.

History and memory are not terms that can be used interchangeably, in fact, they are "far from synonymous [and] in fundamental opposition."⁴⁰ When they are discussed in this thesis,

37. Borchers, Timothy A., and Heather Hundley. *Rhetorical Theory: An Introduction*. Waveland Press, 2018.

38. Borchers and Hundley, *Rhetorical Theory*, 5.

39. Ewalt, Joshua. "A Colonialist Celebration of National : Verbal, Visual, and Landscape Ideographs at Homestead National Monument of America." *Western Journal of Communication* 75, no. 4 (2011): 367-85. doi:10.1080/10570314.2011.586970.

40. Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire." *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-24. doi:10.2307/2928520.

their use will be deliberate. Compared to history which is a “reconstruction...of what is no longer,” memory “remains in permanent evolution... life, borne by living societies... a bond tying us to the eternal present.”⁴¹ Lesbians are left out of history, indeed, but this is unsurprising as history has always been “problematic and incomplete,”⁴² even more worrisome is their erasure from memory, as this eliminates any chances or possibilities of our existence being remembered, and may resemble a deliberate choice of forgetting.

There are several ways one could consider interpreting or analyzing public memory. Initially, researchers Blair, Dickinson, and Ott note how a public’s memory is often less concerned about preserving the actual events, people, or artifacts of the past, but rather how that past can enlighten the present, and what it says for the future.⁴³ They also explain a public memory as represented by space, place, or specific location could consist of the ways groups narrate “a common identity” and affinity to a collective, in some ways scholars have articulated this version of public memory as patriotism.⁴⁴ Next, they describe the “affect” public memory as one where a group does not remember the entirety of a society’s past, instead just the ones they deem “worthy of preservation” and that they may feel emotionally tied.⁴⁵ Lastly, and perhaps most importantly for this analysis, the research furthers that the fourth perspective of public memory is that it is often challenged because it can and will be biased and partisan throughout

41. Nora, “Between Memory and History, 8.

42. Nora, “Between Memory and History, 8.

43. Dickinson, Blair, and Ott, *Places of Public Memory*, 6.

44. Dickinson, Blair, and Ott, *Places of Public Memory*, 7.

45. Dickinson, Blair, and Ott, *Places of Public Memory*, 7-8.

time.⁴⁶ Their research focuses heavily on the rhetoric of memory places and how these spaces impact the memory of a society or specific group. Noting how Dickinson, Blair, and Ott focus in on memory places is pertinent to analyzing the rhetorical impact of the archives that house the collections for this analysis. Considering the first aspect of public memory is that it influences how individuals want to shape their present and future, not being represented within that public memory space can create not only dissonance for marginalized individuals excluded from that memory, but continued and cemented erasure, as even the very individuals impacted have no words, records, or memories to describe and explain their experiences.

Queering Public Memory

Accounting for the loss of queer history within public memory, rhetoricians have developed lenses of queer memory to allow for a “revolution of public memory” that combines sexuality and public memory.⁴⁷ Revolution in this sense of public memory is described more so as a memory that acknowledges erasures and absences due to sexuality, rather than one that is focused on the tangible presence of memory artifacts.⁴⁸ Additionally, Morris explains that gay and lesbian people in particular may have trouble constructing a public memory of anything “preliberation” or before and during the AIDS epidemic, and this “counternostalgia” to separate gay men especially from their traumatic past was pushed by neoconservatives.⁴⁹ Rather than engaging in counternostalgia and ignoring the past that has excluded queer individuals because

46. Dickinson, Blair, and Ott, *Places of Public Memory*, 9.

47. Morris III, C. “My Old Kentucky Homo: Abraham Lincoln, Larry Kramer, and the Politics of Public Memory.” *Queering Public Address: Sexualities in American Historical Discourse* (2007). 95.

48. Morris, “My Old Kentucky Homo,” 111.

49. Morris, “My Old Kentucky Homo,” 96.

of the trauma and lack of queer visibility and public, Morris suggests being “disciplined” with queer memory and remembering - working to find these pasts that do exist but have been hidden from public memory.⁵⁰ This perspective argues there are “moral and rhetorical imperatives to this mandate of memory.”⁵¹

This view of queer memory examines how some may almost succumb to the erasure that public memory has put on them. A better response to this erasure, though, as explained by Morris, is to work to rediscover queer past to create queer public memory - we must remember and acknowledge the archival gaps and the memory gaps, the traumatic memory and history, and how we are all related to one another in this queer memory. This allows us then to create tangible queer public memory that is everything queer people are, rather than just the erasures and trauma. This analysis is useful to lay out how queer people have viewed themselves in public memory and how they viewed public memory itself in response to the hegemonic public memory that excluded queer people. However, it should be noted that this research from Morris’ article deals primarily with gay men and their perspectives of public and queer public memory, and lesbians likely have a slightly different relationship with this memory as they are additionally excluded due to their gender and their relationship to the patriarchy.

Whiteness and Exclusions within Memory Spaces

Due to the history of archival institutions rooted in dominant power structures, attempted interventions of these normative memory spaces is not easy. Black Americans have long been shut out of archives and other memory spaces, but even when spaces are supposed to be

50. Morris, “My Old Kentucky Homo,” 109.

51. Morris, “My Old Kentucky Homo,” 110.

inclusive of their history and past – Black queer people are continuously left out.⁵² More specifically, Matt Richardson analyzes how Black lesbian short stories and novels exist in their own archive, scattered yet connected to one another in their fighting of oppression, as “the novels and short stories are artifacts of denied memory.”⁵³ This declaration of a *denied* memory existing among queer Black Americans is powerful in its call to recognize history ignored and erased within institutional archives, as memories that have been taken away and refused by the dominant groups.⁵⁴ Richardson provides a queer memory lens that highlights the “fractured and incomplete nature of the archives” as no queer archive or Black archive fully encompasses a full story for Black queer people, due to the racist and homophobic erasures existing in the root of traditional archival spaces. Richardson’s analysis is key to understanding the limitations of this analysis as the collections and where they are housed do not adequately include Black queer people, even if the people within the collections believed to be anti-racist allies.

Although my thesis is pushing for a lens that encompasses lesbian erasures within memory artifacts and spaces, it is imperative to keep Richardson’s research alongside this analysis. Doing this allows my analysis to acknowledge and critique the absence of queer Black people within these archival spaces, while also critiquing the limitations of this analysis. Even though analyzing these collections may lend insight into how some lesbians were able to build community in the South, it would be ignorant to assume this analysis speaks for all lesbians

52. Richardson, Matt. *Queer Limit of Black Memory: Black Lesbian Literature and Irresolution*. Ohio State Univ Press, 2016.

53. Richardson, *Queer Limit of Black Memory*, 6.

54. Richardson, *Queer Limit of Black Memory*, 1.

when Black lesbians in particular have been continuously left out of archival spaces.⁵⁵ In this thesis specifically, it should be noted that although the women in each case study were active in pushing anti-racism advocacy and movements, they are all white women. The archives did not provide any collections of lesbian women of color, but these women of color were certainly at the events that the archives document.

When lesbians are memorialized in the public, too often their sexuality is deliberately left out of this memorialization - while cis gay men often receive memorials celebrating their sexuality alongside their accomplishments.⁵⁶ Queer people are often represented in memory spaces in a light that does not adequately represent their queerness. This happens even when the state attempts to put queer people into memory through museums and other institutional spaces, as the memory spaces often miss the mark on how to properly remember and celebrate these queer lives.⁵⁷ For the few lesbian public memory artifacts that exist, it seems that they are for “remembering these women in spite of their sexualities, not because of them.”⁵⁸ This is concerning when one considers that this narrative is not consistent with how gay men are remembered. It has taken longer for lesbians to be memorialized and even then, they are not being remembered alongside their lesbian identity - even though, “between 1978 and 2016, dozens of monuments, memorials, and commemorative zones were named for gay men

55. Richardson, *Queer Limit of Black Memory*, 2.

56. Dunn, Thomas R. "Whence the Lesbian in Queer Monumentality? Intersections of Gender and Sexuality in Public Memory." *Southern Communication Journal* 82, no. 4 (2017): 203-15. doi:10.1080/1041794x.2017.1332090.

57. Woods, Carly S., Joshua P. Ewalt, and Sara J. Baker. "A Matter of Regionalism: Remembering Brandon Teena and Willa Cather at the Nebraska History Museum." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 99, no. 3 (2013): 341-63. doi:10.1080/00335630.2013.806818.

58. Dunn, “Whence the Lesbian in Queer Monumentality?” 204.

worldwide, often explicitly inscribing their sexuality and achievements into public memory in the process.”⁵⁹ Due to the intersections of homophobia and misogyny, lesbians have not been granted this same status in memory spaces.

Although queer lenses are crucial to understanding the queer history that has been forgotten or wrongfully categorized, it is important to note that queer lenses could complicate archival artifacts if they seek to out previously closeted individuals. This analysis will not use any lens to analyze artifacts from individuals who were private or not open about their lesbian sexuality in an effort to out them for the sake of representation. The instinct of keeping matters private could also be a form of internal silencing, while also justifying archival erasures of other individuals. Archivists continue to reckon with and debate what the public deserves to know about an individual for the sake of public memory, and what the individual deserves to keep private. This analysis is not focused on challenging either side, as my thesis deals with the collections of women who were out and loud about their lesbian identities.

Memory of the Queer South

As this thesis specifically examines lesbian archival collections in the South, it remains important to understand the public memory of a queer South. As previously mentioned, being queer in the South has never been easy, but being queer in any region of the U.S. has also never been easy. Regardless, misconceptions surrounding the South and queerness continue to perpetuate public understandings and memories. More specifically, queer people within the South feel erased and ignored by the queer people outside of the Southern regions, while also

59. Dunn, “Whence the Lesbian in Queer Monumentality?” 204.

being erased and ignored by Southern history and Southern memory.⁶⁰ Mainstream ideas of queerness and queer communities typically exist in larger cities, nowhere near the South, resulting in a lack of public understanding and acknowledgement of queer Southerners. Queer Southerners have their own rich culture of being both Southern and queer, filled with church experiences (both church as oppression and church as resistance), Southern hospitality, Black civil rights activism, and more that has been left incomplete in the narratives of queer history and experience.⁶¹

These stereotypes and misconceptions of the South erase the queer people and people of color that have long lived in the South, as well as the struggles queer people face there and other regions. Thus, it is critical to note that this thesis is not concerned with queering the South through these archival collections, nor is it using these collections as “proof” that queerness exists in the South. Instead, I concur that the South has “always already been queer.”⁶² Due to this, we must understand how queer Southerners and specifically Southern lesbians grow and maintain flourishing communities in the South, in order to continue sustaining these communities and networks outside of mainstream queerness. Reading and applying literature that examines queer specific issues and characteristics in the South allows this analysis to paint a clearer picture of the work that was going into the community building of these collections. The queer people outside of the South ignore Southern queerness, the heteronormative people in the South ignore and threaten Southern queerness, and queer men cannot fully understand lesbian

60. Morris, C. “Introduction: ‘Travelin’ Thru the Queer South.” *Southern Communication Journal*, 2009. 233-242.

61. Morris, “Travelin’ Thru the Queer South,” 239.

62. Johnson, E. Patrick. *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. 5.

adversities. And yet, the women in the following collections constructed communities that worked for them and their needs.

The Rhetorical Power of Archives

Archives are rhetorical in every aspect and level of their existence.⁶³ Within their rhetorical properties, archives present distinctive rhetorical artifacts that should be analyzed for interpretation as these artifacts are “ghosts” of the past, “neither absent nor present, but both,” as they have the ability to retell history and a larger narrative through critical interpretation.⁶⁴ At their core, these perspectives on rhetoric and archives push rhetoric scholars to analyze and critique archives and archival collections because the archive allows us to deconstruct fact, history, and memory, and “delivers that content over to us as the elements of rhetoric.”⁶⁵ Or rather, critical theories within rhetoric give us the correct lens to analyze rhetorical artifacts to create a rhetorical history or memory.

When analyzing archival collections, the rhetorical significance goes beyond the rhetoric on the pages that have been archived. The archivists play the role of a rhetorician as they decide what pieces of history are worthy of being preserved in the archive, and what pieces can be discarded. This is a rhetorical act, as the archivists hand pick the information that will be passed on as historically significant or crucial to one’s memory.⁶⁶ Archivists send a message to archival users and readers regarding the importance of artifacts in their selection and categorization

63. Biesecker, Barbara A. "Of Historicity, Rhetoric: The Archive as Scene of Invention." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9, no. 1 (2006): 124-31. doi:10.1353/rap.2006.0018

64. Biesecker, “Of Historicity, Rhetoric,” 126.

65. Biesecker, “Of Historicity, Rhetoric,” 130.

66. Biesecker, “Of Historicity, Rhetoric,” 124-131.

processes. Once the archivist has decided to keep an artifact, they then must preserve and categorize it. These steps have rhetorical implications as well, as the ways in which artifacts are categorized impact how they are viewed and interpreted by the archival users. The space where these artifacts are held is also crucial, as a messy, disorganized archive may communicate that these artifacts are not meant to be found or read. On the other hand, an extremely exclusive, locked down archive may communicate that these archives are only for the elite.⁶⁷

Understanding the ways the archive produces its own rhetorical strategies and scenarios will be beneficial for this analysis to understand the various ways the lesbian collections are preserved and how that impacts their rhetorical significance and community building efforts.

The rhetorical significance of these archival artifacts and their impact on memory, be it public or specific to queer and lesbian memories, is most crucially explained by examining the rhetorical impact of archives on public memory in a more general sense. Digital archival collections have opened up a host of opportunities for LGBTQ+ archives and this is especially seen through a rhetorical lens of public memory.⁶⁸ Literature currently examines how digital LGBTQ+ archives are rhetorical spaces that contribute to public memory by challenging conceptions of history and encouraging a queered version of civic engagement.⁶⁹ As a result, scholars are increasingly encouraging pedagogy and approaches to archives to utilize rhetorical skills and theories to examine archival collections especially when looking for their impact on public memory.

67. Chenier, Elise. "Reclaiming the Lesbian Archives." *The Oral History Review* 43, no. 1 (2016): 170-82. doi:10.1093/ohr/ohw025

68. VanHaitsma, Pamela. "Digital LGBTQ Archives as Sites of Public Memory and Pedagogy." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 22, no. 2 (2019): 253. doi:10.14321/rhetpublaffa.22.2.0253.

69. VanHaitsma, "Digital Archives," 263.

Scholars Enoch and VanHaitma propose examining archives through their rhetorical properties regarding “archival selection, exigence, narrative, collaboration, and constitute.”⁷⁰ In fact, many archives house primarily communicative and rhetorical artifacts, and these archives “wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies.”⁷¹ Thus, using archival artifacts is not only justified for this particular analysis, but in many ways, encouraged. Archives, long before they even included or accounted for queer contributions, have always played a significant role in how institutions remember events, as well as how these institutions influenced the ways the general public remembered them. This communicative process between the institution and the public is rhetorical in itself as the archive is presenting information to influence a particular public memory.

In fact, archivist research suggests that the archives are especially important in how societies remember and forget (either deliberately or accidentally) events in history.⁷² Moreover, using archives for a rhetorical analysis in regards to memory making is distinctly interesting due to the fact that “archives had their institutional origins in the ancient world as agents for legitimizing power and for marginalizing those without power.”⁷³ This means that the archive as a broad institution collects, preserves, and presents memory artifacts in ways that benefit those in

70. Enoch, Jessica, and Pamela VanHaitma. "Archival Literacy: Reading the Rhetoric of Digital Archives in the Undergraduate Classroom." *College Composition and Communication* (2015): 218

71. Schwartz and Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power," 2.

72. Cook, Terry. "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift," *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997): 18.

73. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," 18.

power, thus creating the need for community archives - archives that are for the people.

Essentially, there is room to discuss the literal archives present within this research, as well as the barriers to their presence, and what may be missing. This analysis will use this context of archives maintaining power and status quo to determine the barriers these artifacts had to circumvent, as well as the barriers that still hold these artifacts back.

Due to the rhetorical nature of archives it is crucial to understand the rhetoric of archival gaps, silences, and erasures. When individuals are not represented in a particular archive, even though they did exist in the context in which the archive is concerned, it is a gap in the archive.⁷⁴ In relation to public memory creation, then, these gaps create erasures and silences of particular groups. Erasure and silence cannot always be used interchangeably even though both indicate these archival gaps, as erasure tends to be more of an active effort to rid an archive of a certain group, while silence may be more passive exclusion.⁷⁵ However, due to archives following what the *dominant* society views as acceptable or important, and inherently being rhetorical, for the purpose of this analysis, erasure and silence are both tools to ensure lesbians are continuously left out archival spaces.

Institutional and Community Archives

Archival appraisal theory has been critiqued for the ways in which it values artifacts of the oppressors or artifacts that reinforce that power, and ignores those of the oppressed.⁷⁶

Institutional archives are those that were created for academia, the government, and to represent

74. Carter, Rodney GS. "Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence." *Archivaria* 61, no. 61 (2006) 222.

75. Carter, "Of Things Said and Unsaid," 223.

76. Caswell, Michelle. "Dusting for fingerprints: Introducing feminist standpoint appraisal." *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 3, no. 1 (2019): 1-36.

the ‘public.’⁷⁷ As marginalized groups were continuously left out of the appraisal process and archival record, community archives formed to bridge this gap, creating new appraisal considerations and procedures in the process.⁷⁸ Community archives work to solve for the issues of being forgotten and being shut off from memory knowledge, as they allow the community to access them without barriers. Community archives focus on archiving the members of their own community, whatever that may be to the specific archive, and actually allowing community members and the public to access these archives. While many institutional archives are less accessible and sometimes completely inaccessible to those that are outside of their institution, community archives open their doors to all for the sake of democratizing knowledge and histories.⁷⁹ Some community archives though, like that of IHP, have to partner with institutions to sustain themselves funding wise. It is also very likely that this dependency can lead to issues of preservation of that archive and even the appraisal processes being influenced by the higher institutions that maintain the funding. The collections this thesis is analyzing were once personal archives of the donator, that were then archived by a community archive (IHP), and one of the collections is being held at an institutional, academic archive. Understanding the appraisal and access differences between these two forms of archives is crucial for getting to the implications of this analysis.

Community archives typically reject the institutional archive by remembering the marginalized and existing for the marginalized. This role of community archives furthers the idea

77. Caswell, “Dusting for Fingerprints,” 14.

78. Caswell, “Dusting for Fingerprints,” 28.

79. Chenier, “Reclaiming the Lesbian Archives,” 170-82.

that these collections are rhetorical by existence.⁸⁰ The archivists who maintain these community archives are engaging in rhetorical strategies by choosing to challenge the dominant institutional archive, collecting the artifacts institutions historically rejected, and sending them out as messages to the world – making community archivists *activists* as well, both within the field of archival research and within human rights activism.⁸¹ Research analyzing community based archival collections as works of advocacy and activism will inform this thesis in examining the ways that the lesbian collections represent activism in their own right, both in their community and institutional homes. Viewing community archives and their archivists as activists presents a lens to understand how these archival collections advocate for a more inclusive public memory and create community themselves, even when they may face institutional barriers.

Defining Community

In order to analyze the case studies in an organized way that displays their community building and answers the research question, community itself must first be defined. Community archive literature allows us to better understand what community means for those within the archive. In “Archivist as Activist,” the researchers use a definition of community derived from the founder of the International Gay and Lesbian Archive, Jim Kepner, as they explain community as “a way to describe a group of people ‘partially joined to each other and

80. Morris, Charles E, "Archival Queer." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9, no. 1 (2006): 145-51. doi:10.1353/rap.2006.0028

81. Wakimoto, Diana K., Christine Bruce, and Helen Partridge. "Archivist as Activist: Lessons from Three Queer Community Archives in California." *Archival Science* 13, no. 4 (2013): 293-316. doi:10.1007/s10502-013-9201-1.

82. Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge, “Archivist as Activist,” 294. doi:10.1007/s10502-013-9201-1.

distinguished from others' by characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes.”⁸² Their definition is substantial for the context of understanding community archives, however, there is more nuance to fully grasping what community means to those that belong to it. In one Feminism and Psychology study, 28 lesbian women were interviewed on their own personal definitions of community, where they identified characteristics such as, “support, together, a community is there for you, just kind of a permanent base, someone to turn to.”⁸³ Their study concluded that many of these women were seeking more than entertainment based friendships – when they said support they were referring to a community that was ready to help them with resources, real assistance, and other tangible well-being initiatives. These two definitions are fascinatingly different, but the combination of the two may prove crucial to how we understand the community building that the lesbians within this analysis are engaging in.

Literature within and outside of archival studies is noticeably lacking on what community itself means and what it means to those within it. Thus, based on observations from community archival research and the rhetoric of the collections, this analysis will combine this research to create a definition of community that is crucial for understanding the impact of each case study. Although there is not significant research defining community across the board, there is archival research that concludes definitions of community can be unique to the community described within the archive or community-archive. More specifically, they explain, “community archives *users* form and utilize their imaginaries both to continually define their communities, by negotiating and imagining elastic boundaries, and to anticipate future shifts in the boundaries of

83. Rothblum, E. “Where Is The ‘Women’s Community?’ Voices of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Women and Heterosexual Sisters.” *Feminism & Psychology*, 20, no. 4 (2010) 454–472. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353509355147>

their communities.”⁸⁴ Essentially, my role as the archival user of these collections allows this thesis to uncover a definition of community that is distinct to the archival collections in the case studies by analyzing them with this imagery in mind. Even though the archival collections are not housed within strictly community-archive bases, they were collected and curated by a community-archive initiative. The aforementioned literature from “Archivist as Activist” and the *Feminism and Psychology* study provide a starting point for scholarly definitions of community, but I believe the lesbians within these collections may provide their *own* definitions of community that they are striving to fulfil.

Lesbian Archival Significance

Queer history has long existed outside of a lens that a traditional archive could ever hope to capture.⁸⁵ Queer people often must limit their existence to more private spaces, making the moments that exist within these spaces all the more important to study. However, these spaces are more inaccessible from rhetorical analysis or archival properties, due to their private nature.⁸⁶ As a result, queer rhetorical scholars believe pushing the bounds of both rhetorical methods and archive spaces can help us “capture fleeting and affective moments of queer collisions and becomings.”⁸⁷ Acknowledging queerness, and especially lesbianism, as something that goes beyond what traditional archival spaces can document due to their unique characteristics of

84. Brilmyer, Gracen, Joyce Gabiola, Jimmy Zavala, and Michelle Caswell. "Reciprocal Archival Imaginaries: The Shifting Boundaries of "Community" in Community Archives." *Archivaria*, 88 (2019): 46.

85. Beck, Sarah Lindsey. "'Doing It' in the Kitchen: Rhetorical Field Methods, Arts/Practice-Based Research, and Queer Archives." *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 21, no. 1 (2020): 16-26. doi:10.1177/1532708620960160.

86. Beck, "'Doing It' in the Kitchen," 17.

87. Beck, "'Doing It' in the Kitchen," 16.

existence, substantiates the claims of this thesis that a unique lesbian lens is an effective way to analyze the significance of these collections.

To account for the often deliberate erasure that occurs in institutional archives and memory spaces, lesbians began archiving their own materials that they would end up using to create their own archives, or donate to community archives. Curating one's own documents for the sake or hope of being archived and one day read by someone in the future is something that has only usually been explored through the lens of family archives. Researchers have examined the ways individuals have created family archives within their homes in order to maintain a sense of identity and self for the family name to continue.⁸⁸ Although not always considered an archive by all, family kept archival records "speak to the individual, our present understanding of self, our anxieties about contemporary society and our vision of the future."⁸⁹ Essentially, what an individual documents or preserves within their own familial or personal history, explains a larger historical context about who they are as an individual within society. There is calculated meaning behind what we keep in our own personal manifestations of archives. When applying this idea of familial archives to lesbian archives, the same notion rings true. Lesbians began documenting their own personal histories in an effort to maintain their lesbian identity and sense of self for other future lesbians to learn from or maintain. This also then suggests, depending on the context of these lesbian archival collections and their futures, that lesbian collections are familial in relation to all other lesbians by nature and purpose.

88. Woodham, Anna, Laura King, Liz Gloyn, Vicky Crewe, and Fiona Blair. "We Are What We Keep: The "Family Archive", Identity and Public/Private Heritage." *Heritage & Society* 10, no. 3 (2017): 203-220.

89. Woodham, King, Gloyn, Crewe, and Blair, "We Are What We Keep," 217.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives, as described in Chapter 1, were among the first examples of lesbians archiving their lives in a familial archive way. These interventions of traditional archives and memory were intended to do more than just provide lesbian representation within historical moments, they were to critique the entirety of the society, to provide an entirely new glimpse for how we could perceive memory and interact in the public. More specifically, volunteers at LHA point to how “LHA has remained faithful to the revolutionary vision of participatory democracy. All have a say, all contributions are valued, and all are encouraged to value their contribution as a function of the organization’s survival.”⁹⁰ Thus, lesbian archival collections, of any kind, are attempting to create a society where all are encouraged to bring their perspective to the table. To them, maintaining a community through these archives allows us to build a memory and therefore a public that is inclusive and revolutionary.

The founders and volunteers committed to LHA posit that LHA is inherently fighting against oppressive systems not only by remembering lesbians that would normally be erased or forgotten in history, but by providing a community and democratic like space for lesbians to learn about that history. As previous research pointed to how memory can form community and identity,⁹¹ LHA’s model of their formation process and maintenance provides an excellent segue into how other lesbian collections can form their own lesbian memory by building community. This implication derived from this research surrounding LHA’s purpose from then to now is

90. Smith-Cruz, Shawn(Ta), Flavia Rando, Rachel Corbman, Deborah Edel, Morgan Gwenwald, Joan Nestle, and Polly Thistlethwaite. "Getting from Then to Now: Sustaining the Lesbian Herstory Archives as a Lesbian Organization." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 20, no. 2 (2016): 213-33. doi:10.1080/10894160.2015.1083827.

91. Jimerson, Randall C. "Archives and Memory." *OCLC Systems & Services: International Digital Library Perspectives* 19, no. 3 (2003): 89-95. doi:10.1108/10650750310490289.

crucial for seeing how lesbian archival collections achieve this same goal, as well as face barriers due to the different models of archival collections that these artifacts outside of LHA are collected in.

In this context, the debates over institutional and community archives become particularly significant. Historically, institutional archives have excluded queer and especially lesbian artifacts for their queerness and in the same way, their explicitness.⁹² However, as queer rhetoric and artifacts have started to work their way into the public, institutional archives have begun to take an interest in archiving these artifacts for their own purposes. For many lesbian archivists, this new interest in their artifacts is concerning because lesbian archival artifacts, to them, are an inherently “anti-elitist, antihierarchical politic that seeks to empower the oppressed.”⁹³ Whereas institutions are more so interested in collecting these artifacts as capital for their collections.⁹⁴ This is even more concerning considering lesbian archivists’ concerns regarding how to adequately and accurately archive lesbian artifacts. Although it should be exciting that institutional archival spaces are taking an interest in lesbian artifacts and that we as lesbians may finally make it into a consistent public memory, it will not be worth it if we are archived in a way that does not fully document our lives and significance.

Lesbian archivists are fighting to take back lesbian archives from the academic and institutional archives because these particular collections need a community based model. Institutional and academic archives often make these collections completely inaccessible or even meaningless, while “Community-based archives functioned as community trusts where identities

92. Chenier, “Reclaiming the Lesbian Archives,” 173.

93. Chenier, “Reclaiming the Lesbian Archives,” 170-171.

94. Chenier, “Reclaiming the Lesbian Archives,” 174.

are affirmed, LGBTQ people empowered, and communities of resistance built.”⁹⁵ According to this observation, lesbian archival collections thrive best under a community based model because the collections themselves are meant to build community and subvert oppressive, inequitable barriers. This examination of the anti-institutional community building lesbian archival artifacts provide lesbians with will enable this analysis to more thoroughly understand how the following collections use this community building to create lesbian memory and vice-versa.

Method: Analyzing Lesbian Archival Significance

As a means of determining what pieces of each archival collection prove most significant to analyze for community building concerns, this analysis looks at Cvetkovich’s book, *An Archive of Feelings* which explains how the unique *contents* of lesbian archival spaces or collections contribute to memory and community building. Cvetkovich’s research into how these contents challenge and impact collective memory due to their distinct lesbian characteristics, will provide this analysis with a look into how lesbian collections in the South did the same in their rhetorical efforts to build community. Cvetkovich’s research is ideal to build on Chenier’s and LHA’s explorations to form a lesbian memory lens, as Chenier, LHA, and Cvetkovich each center lesbian memory and show how doing so emboldens the lesbians that created the records, kept the records, archived the records, and viewed the records. Cvetkovich points out how lesbian archives are inherently affective and powerful in being useful archives because as they are archives for sexuality and lesbian life, they “must preserve and produce not just knowledge

95. Chenier, “Reclaiming the Lesbian Archives,” 171.

but feeling.”⁹⁶ Cvetkovich explains this dual production of knowledge and feelings is a distinctive quality of lesbian archival artifacts.

Cvetkovich concludes that in order to archive, interpret, and record *accurate* lesbian history, lesbians need a “radical archive of emotion in order to document intimacy, sexuality, love and activism” because each of these areas of lesbian life are nearly impossible to “chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive.”⁹⁷ Cvetkovich’s assertion of the power and uniqueness of lesbian archives and archival collections is ideal for this thesis - because it validates the creation of a lesbian memory lens - as Cvetkovich makes it clear that lesbian archives and archival collections are their own unique form of rhetoric and public memory building. Furthermore, these archives address the loss of history and memory that created “sexual publics” and community for lesbians, or rather, how lesbians built community by archiving the gaps in their history.⁹⁸ Utilizing Cvetkovich’s perspective of what makes lesbian archival contents significant, this thesis better understands the archival artifacts that are analyzed in each case study. Specifically, Cvetkovich proposes that affects or feelings such as “nostalgia, personal memory, fantasy, and trauma, make a document significant.”⁹⁹ Critically, Cvetkovich also notes that lesbian archival contents go beyond tangible documentations that a traditional archive relies on, but instead can be the feelings the archival reader is left with, as well.

96. Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Duke University Press, 2019. 241.

97. Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 241.

98. Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 241.

99. Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 244.

In addition to Cvetkovich's conclusions about archival significance characteristics, this thesis utilizes archival research that proposes the need for archival readers and archivists to read collections through a feminist radical empathy lens. This lens builds on Cvetkovich's observations by providing a specific framework and justification for//Within deliberations on the critical role of the archivist and how that role impacts memory, community, and even human rights, archival scholars have proposed ways archivists can shift how they view their relationship to the archives they collect and maintain. Scholars Caswell and Cifor look at how radical empathy in record keeping could solve issues of erasures, violations of human rights, and the maintenance of human rights through archives. Their ideas align with Cvetkovich's nicely for the purpose of this thesis. In their article they explain how institutional archives, even those that claim to be concerned with social justice and human rights, still care more about those in power as opposed to those being oppressed or that were oppressed in the violations the archives documented.¹⁰⁰ With radical empathy and feminist ethics as a guiding force, though, Caswell and Cifor argue that this new approach would "make survivors and implicated communities not just a target group of users, but central focal points in all aspects of the archival endeavor, from appraisal to description to provision of access."¹⁰¹ This would effectively counter the elitist, individualistic, and oppressive nature of the institutional and academic archives by using empathy and care to create an "affective, user-oriented, [and] community-centered service space."¹⁰² As Caswell and Cifor's research is concerned with the archivist's relationship to the

100. Caswell, Michelle, and Marika Cifor. "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives." *Archivaria* 81, no. 1 (2016): 23-43.

101. Caswell and Cifor, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics," 24.

102. Caswell and Cifor, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics," 24.

archives, their framework of radical empathy benefits me as the archival reader as well.

Throughout this analysis, lesbian archival artifacts call for this same level of empathy when they are being analyzed.

Due to the unique circumstances of being both lesbian and woman, lesbians have been excluded from archives, memory, and even the research that seeks to acknowledge this gap in public memory. A noticeable gap in the literature of queer memory is that the foundational rhetorical research on queer memory comes from men.¹⁰³ Lesbians have a distinct relationship to patriarchy that impacts their representation in memory. Therefore, methods that seek to analyze rhetorical aspects of archives, especially when approaching lesbian artifacts, must use a lens that accounts for each of these erasures and exclusions. Thus, as feminist lenses of public memory did not account for queer individuals, queer memory lenses are often catered to queer men, and the archive itself often fills more masculine perspectives of memory; lesbian archives may need a separate approach to fully understand and appreciate their rhetorical significance. In order to center lesbian memory and fully grasp the rhetorical functions these lesbian artifacts utilize, this thesis uses a combination of queer memory, feminist ethics and radical empathy, and archives as rhetoric theory to construct a lesbian memory method of analysis. This will include using queer memory and radical empathy questions to examine the artifacts, working to understand the impact of erasure and archival gaps on these artifacts, the feelings associated with the artifacts, and how they challenge hegemonic patriarchy within archives and public memory.

Therefore, by combining these methods to account for the erasure, silence, and misunderstanding of lesbians in archival collections, this analysis constructs lesbian memory as the main, critical lens to examine these artifacts. This distinction from feminist or queer lenses is

103. Morris, "Archival Queer," 145-51.

crucial because lesbians have a complex relationship to patriarchy and how it impacts everything, especially memory. Dunn's research further justifies this distinction by noting "lesbians face obstacles to recognition and inclusion in the meaningful venues of [heterosexual and homosexual] public life. The underrepresentation of lesbians within queer monumentality are endemic of this point and can be traced, at least in part, to a set of cultural assumptions about lesbians as women, even within the LGBTQ community."¹⁰⁴ Dunn's point highlights how even the very methods we use to memorialize, remember, and analyze queer impacts can exclude lesbians and their contributions. Thus, to analyze lesbian rhetorical artifacts, a lens that acknowledges and subverts this exclusion is the most effect way to investigate these works.

To fully explore the research question through a lesbian memory lens, I will analyze three different case studies of lesbian archival collections and the barriers each collection faces due to them being *lesbian* artifacts. The case studies are broken up by the collections of Sandi Strong, the Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition, and Reverend Marjorie Ragona. I explore how the rhetoric of these archival collections built community in the South, and continue to build community as they are cemented in time through archives. When I analyze the artifacts from the lesbian archival collections, I utilize the same empathy and feminist ethics from Caswell and Cifor while engaging with the artifacts - trying to place myself in the shoes of the women that donated the records, that created the records, and fully empathizing with them. This means that when analyzing artifacts I recognize the bond I have as the reader to the archival documents as, "subjects are embodied, that we are inextricably bound to each other through relationships, that we live in complex relations to each other infused with power differences and inequities, and that

104. Dunn, "Whence the Lesbian in Queer Monumentality?" 205.

we care about each other's well-being.”¹⁰⁵ Using this framework within my analysis, I effectively analyze the barriers faced by the archival collections and the rhetoric that was fighting against barriers in order to build community with lesbians anyway.

First, what the artifacts show about the community building efforts of those moments in time, what rhetoric these lesbians used to reach out to each other, support one another, and organize movements and collectives. Then, after analyzing all of the collections, I will discuss significant consistencies and differences in their rhetoric to fully understand the various ways their rhetoric builds community. This process will seek to account for the erasures and obstacles that impact the rhetoric, and the ways the rhetoric pushes against those barriers. Lastly, I will analyze the barriers each of these collections faced (and may continue to face) in building community or sharing their rhetoric, both in the moments of time they are documenting, and in their time being archived.

To begin, in Chapter 3, I analyze the rhetorical properties of Sandi Strong's archival donation - her scrapbook on the 1987 March on Washington. Strong's scrapbook is a mini archive in itself, as she kept an intense detail of the events leading up to, during, and after the March on Washington. Both the contents within the scrapbook and the scrapbook itself present rhetorical strategies that can influence audience memory and therefore, public memory. I use my combination method of feminist, queer, and lesbian archival perspectives to understand the specific rhetorical properties of the scrapbook, news clippings, photographs, and newsletters. This allows me to analyze if, why, and how this collection built community for lesbians in the South during its creation and its archiving.

105. Caswell and Cifor, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics," 31.

Next, in Chapter 4, I will continue by analyzing the rhetorical artifacts I find in the Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition's collection in Hoole Library. TLC was a group for lesbian women in Tuscaloosa at the University of Alabama during the 1990's. The artifacts in this collection include newsletters and correspondence between group leaders to organize various events in the South for lesbians and other queer people. With each of these rhetorical artifacts, I analyze the rhetoric the organizers of TLC used to garner more attention from lesbians in their area and how they planned meetings to advocate for lesbian rights. After their initial community is built, I analyze how they expanded community in the South while working against obstacles that being lesbians in Alabama provides.

In Chapter 5, I finish the case studies with the archival collections donated by Reverend Marjorie Ragona, a lesbian in Alabama known for her commitment to activism, academics, and Christianity in the South. Ragona's collection is by far the largest of the three. Ragona, still alive to this day, donated her personal financial documents, personal essays on sexuality and religion, photographs, poetry, letters, newsletters, newspaper clippings, exams, and a two-hour oral history on her life. I will be analyzing Ragona's vast collection first through analyzing the rhetoric of the pieces she donated. As Ragona's collection is large and covers a wide-range of topics, I sorted her artifacts for this analysis by looking at what documents seemed to overwhelm the collection, what she had an abundance of, and which of these proved her community building efforts in Alabama.

In Chapter 6, I will investigate the various ways the collections relate to each other, the consistencies in their rhetoric, as well as how they differ from one another. Through this, I will also compare the barriers each collection faced and a possible central, underlying barrier. None of the archival collections were archived in lesbian specific archives. This is a crucial distinction

to make at the end of the analysis, as we can begin to further investigate not just how the collections varied between an institutional and a public archive, but also how the collections may have been completely different had they been archived within a lesbian archive. In this aspect of the thesis, it will be important to reflect on who can access these archives, how the audience is controlled, and what this communicates about how the archival institutions see the collections.

CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDY ONE: SANDI STRONG'S COLLECTION

Sandi Strong's scrapbook was laid out onto the table for me when I arrived to the archive. I had told the archivists I was interested in any lesbian or LGBTQ+ archival collections they had ready. They felt Strong's scrapbook was the collection every reader should begin with during their research. It rests on a podium-like piece of plastic meant to support the bindery of the old book. I immediately felt like I was looking at an aunt's scrapbook passed down to me. Strong had documented quite literally every photograph or piece of information that represented the march in 1987. Using the scrapbook as her own little archive within her home, she carefully put the book together as if it were always meant to be something sent through generations of queer people to learn about their family history. Knowing how family archives are maintained to preserve a certain familial identity, this made Strong's scrapbook choice all the more interesting. Each news clipping was carefully glued to the page, some photographs that had not yet found a home on a page were stuffed into back pockets. There were still a few empty pages in the back as if to suggest that this family history was not yet over. There were still other stories to be told. I felt all off this just from flipping through the pages on my initial visit. The rhetorical power of Strong's decision to archive these documents in this way hit me with a wave of emotion. I felt a connection to her, imagining her cutting out the news articles, putting Elmer's glue on slightly sun-damaged photographs.

Carefully opening the large scrapbook delicately set on the table, I find myself diving into a moment of queer resistance as if it were a family heirloom. In big, black letters a booklet

reads, “National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights – 1987.”¹⁰⁶ The booklet is loosely placed in the scrapbook on top of pages that are much more secure, the font bold with purple designs in the background. There was one faded photograph and one small handout placed on the booklet, not glued in with the rest of the scrapbook. The photo showed a group of people at the march holding a sign up with two wooden poles which read, “the Lord is my Shepard and knows I’m gay.” The handout behind the photo advertises the march, exclaiming “Come out... Come out.” The discolored pages and photographs instantly put me into a time when LGBTQ+ people were building a movement for their survival and well-being. There was an overwhelming yet satisfying amount of rhetoric and information teaching me about a point in time that until this point I knew very little. This scrapbook is a snapshot of a vast moment in queer memory, offering various arguments and directions I could take this analysis, but for the sake of detail and close reading, this will only focus on a few.

The following excerpts that I have chosen to analyze more closely represent clearly the fact that community building was happening for lesbians in these moments, why they needed to do so, and how they accomplished this. This collection as a whole left me in awe at its carefully well-kept pages and the love displayed in each photograph, but the following artifacts from the collection changed how I thought about this moment in time entirely. The scrapbook begins by giving the origin of the march – how it began, who organized it, how it was organized, and why it was organized. However, this is not done by simply stating the facts or summarizing the events. Sandi illustrates these moments by including news clippings, newsletters, and photographs that tell the story of the making of this movement. The only way to understand the

106. Booklet, Box 2185, 1987, Sandi Strong Scrapbook Collection of the March on Washington, Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

context of any of this is to engulf yourself in all of it. Although the purpose of the march consisted of fighting for LGBTQ+ civil rights protections, AIDS funding and education, and other discrimination prevention measures, there was also the underlying goal of many LGBTQ+ individuals to gain visibility and create community with other LGBTQ+ people. For many, the idea of finding people who were just like them was one they were sure was possible, but one they had not yet experienced.

Finding People Like Us

Not all of the protest signs or demands were based in legislative or government rights. Instead, there is strong evidence surrounding the community building goals of the march. Community was a priority for many going into the march, both consciously and subconsciously. One student wrote in a newspaper interview, “I’m going to the march for solidarity and to see who’s out there. We’re invisible. I don’t know who’s who, and I think it would be incredibly validating to see thousands of gay people who are just like me.”¹⁰⁷ This woman is clear in why she wants to attend the march – beyond fighting for rights, she simply wants to know others like her exist. Using “we” to describe herself and other LGBTQ+ people, she argues a collective identity and experience for people who are strangers to her. She explains that her presence alone will allow her to feel validation. Through her description, it is clear that finding a community – “people who are just like me” – is her main concern. There is emotion behind words such as “invisible” “validating” and “solidarity.” There is also this raw emotional feeling her words give as she is vulnerable and honest about the fact that she has never had people around her that she

107. Newspaper Clipping of Pam Stewart, Box 2185, 1987, Sandi Strong Scrapbook Collection of the March on Washington, Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

can relate to in these ways. Many people are attending this march to fight for the rights of queer people – but they are also going to *feel* community with others. This exemplifies the ways in which community *is* survival for LGBTQ+ people – as the public outside of this community have isolated us to the point of a need for community. Looking back at Squires research regarding counter-publics and the need for acknowledging public spheres outside of the dominant, hegemonic group, we can better understand why so many LGBTQ+ people were needing this march for community.¹⁰⁸ As queer people, especially lesbian women, have been pushed into private spheres and unacknowledged by the dominant public sphere, the march provides a space to build a counter-public as they find more people like them that they did not know existed.

At the march, many lesbians were utilizing visibility of their unique identities as a means to find space for them within the community, or to build a community of their own that would include them. In one photo, a group of women are seen searching and perhaps demanding community as they hold a sign that proclaims, “SUPPORT LESBIAN MOTHERS”¹⁰⁹ The sign was focusing in on an aspect of lesbian life that was significantly less discussed and perhaps vilified in the past. Their proclamation emphasized to people in America simply that lesbian mothers exist. It is a deliberate rhetorical decision to center their lesbian motherhood in their protest concerns, indirectly arguing that lesbian mothers are not currently receiving adequate support. By implying this with their demand, they carefully display why they want to build

108. Squires, Catherine R. "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres." *Communication Theory* 12, no. 4 (2002): 446-68. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00278.x.

109. Newspaper Clipping, Box 2185, 1987, Sandi Strong Scrapbook Collection of the March on Washington, Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

community: they feel abandoned as lesbians and as mothers, especially when the two are put together. This feeling of abandonment had driven them to want to build community, and the march was the best place to do it. By pointing out their motherhood alongside their lesbian identity, they push those with familial ties of any kind to rethink their position on lesbians. The sign pushes its audience to humanize the women holding it by forcing them to think of them in a new light. Another sign from one woman amongst a group of lesbian Alabamians reads simply, “LESBIAN ALABAMA GRANDMOTHER.”¹¹⁰ She wants people to know she exists, to know who she is as a lesbian, Alabamian, and grandmother. She is showing people that you can be each of these things no matter how much the public may push you to believe otherwise. Motherhood is, especially in this time, seen as a concept that only exists within and for the traditional, heteronormative, patriarchal family.¹¹¹

On an aesthetic yet still rhetorically significant note, each of these signs are on paper slightly smaller than that of a poster board, written with what appears to be a large black marker. The signs and the women holding them are photographed in black and white by the newspaper. The sign’s appear to be almost hastily made, with big, almost sloppy handwriting. However, I do not think the haste of the efforts make them any less passionate. Instead, I find this aspect of the photos to be all the more interesting, as they suggest perhaps these women put the signs together at the march. The women likely engaged in a tangible form of community building by sharing paper, markers, and ideas to create loud and heard protest signs. I can imagine women mingling and chatting about their experiences as lesbian mothers as they thicken the lines of their block

110. Newspaper Clipping, Box 2185, 1987, Sandi Strong Scrapbook Collection of the March on Washington, Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

111. Fraser, *Rethinking the Public Sphere*, 60.

letters, talking to other women who relate. They created these signs seemingly in the spur of the march and their lesbian motherhood was the first thing to come to mind.

Radically, the women from each of the photos highlight that women can be both lesbians and mothers in order to combat the narrative that lesbians are unfit for motherhood in the traditional family archetype. Rubin's article reminds us how lesbians have been labeled as unsuitable for motherhood, and have even gotten their children taken away due to their lesbian identity.¹¹² These women are highlighting these identities to show they are no longer afraid of these consequences, and they deserve and need support to continue doing so. For each of these two posters, the women holding them are focusing on their lesbian identity and their motherhood or grand-motherhood during a *public* event meant to impact *public* memory - only adding to the rhetorical significance of this moment. Not only have lesbians been excluded from the traditional archetype of motherhood, but both motherhood and lesbians have long been shut into the *private* spheres.¹¹³ These women accomplish their rhetorical goals of community and support by pushing their once private sphere identities out into the open public, allowing for others to do the same. By proclaiming their intertwined identities they say, they will no longer be hidden or forced into the private sphere. This photograph effectively cements their private into the public, as they take it upon themselves to find a community that does support them, and resist the public that wants to discipline them.

After leaving the march, one woman, C. McDonald (as they have authored the article), wrote about the "dream come true" that was the march and the feeling of belonging it held for

112. Rubin, Gayle S. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." *Culture, Society and Sexuality*, 2007, 166. doi:10.4324/9780203966105-21.

113. Beck, "'Doing It' in the Kitchen," 17.

everyone there.¹¹⁴ She heard people cheer on the subway home from the march, “we are everywhere!” When they had to return to her home in Alabama, she felt she was having to leave the “sunlit, open place,” to go back to the “dark closets some of us call home.” However, because of the march, she realized Alabama had more community for her than she had originally thought. She realized some of her coworkers had been at the march – coworkers she was not previously out to, nor were they out to her – and she realized there were coworkers that *wished* they were there, too. In addition to that, she points out the comfort of seeing signs such as, “Gay Rights, Y’ALL!” next to Alabama dancers. She originally thought of Alabama as a place faced with drought when it came to LGBTQ+ people like her. She never thought she would have community there – but now, she realizes there was always a community there for her.

Her realization echoes both Morris and Johnson’s observations regarding the misinterpretation of the South as *not* queer, while also confirming their arguments that it indeed always has been.¹¹⁵ This realization for her is enlightening and revolutionary as she begins to realize the community she has always had around her, and the potential for that community to grow in a way that builds an even larger movement. Her consciousness surrounding the queer South made her feel more at home in not just her state, but within herself and her own identity. We are only able to make this conclusion with the knowledge from Morris and Johnson’s research, furthering the need to understand the South through the lenses they provide. McDonald closes her op-ed with, “The depths of cruelty to which this “free” nation has plunged have

114. Newspaper Op-ed from C McDonald. Box 2185, 1987, Sandi Strong Scrapbook Collection of the March on Washington, Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

115. Morris, C. “Introduction: ‘Travelin’ Thru the Queer South.” *Southern Communication Journal*, 2009. 233-242. | Johnson, E. Patrick. *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. 5.

inspired a radiantly non-violent and lovingly firm response at last.” Here, she argues the shared, collective experience of oppression (“cruelty this free nation has plunged”) is the precise reason why so many people had the motivation to join each other in this march.

Overcoming Barriers

Black LGBTQ+ people faced distinct situations at the march that influenced how they built community with other LGBTQ+ people. Black civil rights activists, both LGBTQ+ and not, played a major role in the inspiration behind the march. LGBTQ+ and racial inequalities were (and are) intertwined. Many people at the march were aware of this, and made it a point to acknowledge it in interviews or march signs. A large photograph of Black queer people at the frontlines of the march is captioned “many gay/lesbian activists know our movement grew in the context of a U.S. that had been deeply challenged by the Black civil rights and liberation movements.”¹¹⁶ Here, the rhetoric of the caption is working to set a distinct memory and context of the march. It is crediting the role Black activists played in making this march happen in the first place, as Black civil rights movements in years past have forced the U.S. to open its mind to the rights of the marginalized. The writer points out that the gay and lesbian march/movement would be no where without the Black organizers and activists that came before it. This rhetoric is significant in how it attempts to interrupt the misconceived narrative and memory that white gay men were the sole organizers of LGBTQ+ movements during this time.

The phrasing of the caption also illustrates the exclusionary obstacles Black lesbians and Black queer people in general faced when confronted with the whiteness of some LGBTQ+ spaces. The caption does not fully rid itself of the whitewashing of queer movements, as it

116. Newspaper Clipping. Box 2185, 1987, Sandi Strong Scrapbook Collection of the March on Washington, Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

frames the march as something that grew from the context of Black activism rather than saying Black queer activists are a part of the movement. The Black lesbians photographed above the caption are nameless and not heard from in the article. These are Black queer people that both created the ability for the march to grow *and* participated in the march as queer people themselves. In another news excerpt, one woman, named Mandy Carter, briefly states her reasoning for attending the march and confirms this idea, explaining, “as a Black lesbian, I wouldn’t miss this march for the world.”¹¹⁷ Highlighting these two intersecting identities, she rhetorically resists her exclusion and suggests she is there to cement the existence of Black lesbians like her. As a leader in an anti-war organization, Carter is concerned with all aspects of oppression in their activism. She is putting each of her identities into the public eye to resist being excluded and forgotten from public memory and history.

Richardson’s aforementioned research on Black lesbian archival contents reminds us how Black and lesbian identities have been intertwined for centuries. Each were framed as diametrically opposed to “womanhood” within “white society.”¹¹⁸ As a result, Black lesbians have been at the forefront truly inclusive feminist movements, LGBTQ+ movements, and Black movements due to their ability to reimagine society through “a tradition that is based on racial critique of gender categories.”¹¹⁹ With this in mind, it makes sense that Carter would highlight these two aspects of her identity, because these are the identities that have thrust her into activism, the march itself, and building space for these movements. However, Richardson’s

117. Newspaper Clipping. Box 2185, 1987, Sandi Strong Scrapbook Collection of the March on Washington, Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

118. Richardson, Matt. *Queer Limit of Black Memory: Black Lesbian Literature and Irresolution*. Ohio State Univ Press, 2016. 17.

119. Richardson, *Queer Limit of Black Memory*, 8.

research also sheds light on the barriers created within the queer community as white LGBTQ+ people ignore the Black lesbians a part of the movement. White LGBTQ+ people are not always concerned or aware of the necessity for a racial critique of gender because they still benefit from whiteness. The presence of these Black lesbian activists within the scrapbook both resist this whiteness, while also still being victims of it as most remain unnamed or barely acknowledged.

Even within queer spaces, barriers to community building were common from those who were unable to understand those that faced additional marginalization due to intersecting identities. The scrapbook highlights the barriers created by those who were not interested in joining in on the community building and organization that was happening throughout the march. One news article interview towards the front of the scrapbook detailed a gay man's thoughts on the demands of the march and the lesbians participating. While the march was still being planned, he states his disdain for the demands and calls to action from other organizers, specifically calling out and mocking lesbian separatists for their fights against racism, sexism, and the patriarchy. In these remarks, he continues,

the whole tone of the document, with its 'demands' and cries of 'oppression.' It smacks of the same mentality that motivates the Lesbian-separatist spellings of "womon" and "wimmyn" ... to conceal the "patriarchal" roots of those words – a practice as silly and false as that of people who, with ostentatious humility, write their names in lower case...Are the organizers serious? Alas, they are. Listening to them, one realizes how thoroughly people can be people can be blinded by their ideology.¹²⁰

There is a clear residue of misogyny coated on his words. He claims his concerns are with how these demands delegitimize the fights for AIDS funding or federal gay and lesbian rights, but his decision to single out lesbian separatists and their concerns with patriarchy in a condescending

120. Newspaper Op-ed from Rick Rosendall. Box 2185, 1987, Sandi Strong Scrapbook Collection of the March on Washington, Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

manner reflect otherwise. He puts patriarchal in quotes as if to say it is not a real, oppressive system that exists. He double downs on this belief by explaining how silly and false it is to say so.

This op-ed certainly does not contribute to the community building that Strong is seeking through her scrapbook archive of this march. Instead, though, his patronizing and lofty article provides extensive proof for why lesbians were honed in on building community with themselves and all of the oppressed. This op-ed is an example of the many other forms of community that were forming and formed outside of lesbian activists at this time. Although he was not concerned with building community with “lesbian separatists” he was concerned with building community among those that agreed with him. His use of a public op-ed was an attempt to gain support with those that agreed with him that other communities had gone too far. The man later stated in his op-ed that he would be attending the march, begrudgingly, because he believed in fighting for the rights some gay men were seeking – AIDS research and funding. He was likely not alone in his thinking, as he says about those who agree with him, “[despite the] radicals *we* will be marching, too.” Here, another side of the “community” is revealed. The side that has forced lesbians, trans people, and Black queer Americans into forming a community that is actually inclusive in the first place. The literature from Dunn and Nestle contextualizes this bitter sentiment by reinforcing that queer communities were not always inclusive, accepting, or understanding of lesbians and their specific needs. This op-ed only further confirms the ways lesbians are constantly in need of not just their own community networks, but their own archives, memory, and research. This is just one of likely many examples of the other community building that was happening at the time in opposition to lesbian community building. Even when the default or dominant group is being challenged and new public memories are being formed, we

are not in the conversation, we are mocked.

Photographs

Strong made room in the scrapbook to highlight even the most simple versions of love that were sustaining the march and perhaps the larger lesbian community as a whole. In the back of the scrapbook, there is a photograph from the AIDS quilt at the march. It is of one small piece of cloth that reads “To Jean E. Cook, I love you. Donna D,” in faded Sharpie.¹²¹ Strong must have taken this photo. What made her take a picture of this part of the quilt over anything else? Perhaps she wanted to preserve the small act of love between two women. Maybe she knew a lesbian like myself would one day get to see this photo and feel close to women that I will never even see in my lifetime. With her intentional documentation of heartfelt excerpts and moments during this movement, Sandi Strong sends a message to every future reader of this collection that there is a long history of a community filled with love waiting to be discovered. Even the small gestures of “I love you” between two women matters in this collection. To Strong, all of it mattered. Sandi Strong’s documentation of these events within the scrapbook illuminate a specific lens for how readers should view the march. Every move that lesbians made during this time mattered. Using Cvetkovich’s observations of emotion prevalent in lesbian archives alongside radical empathy we can argue that in Strong’s eyes, the emotional pulls of lesbian motherhood, lesbian searches for belonging, and love were the defining aspects of the march. As Cvetkovich reminds, archives “of lesbian life must preserve and produce not just knowledge, but feeling.”¹²² That is exactly what Strong does by showcasing these photographs of women and “I

121. Photograph. Box 2185, 1987, Sandi Strong Scrapbook Collection of the March on Washington, Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

122. Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 241

Love You” side by side. It is as if Strong knew this collection would feel familial and emotional for all that may experience it. Through this feeling, Strong continues to build community, even passively, by evoking feelings of belonging, hope, and love in the LGBTQ+ people that turn each page.

Through the various artifacts within this one scrapbook organized by Strong, there are several suggestions regarding what community was to Strong and the lesbians alive in her scrapbook. The protest rhetoric that focused on visibility proposes community building efforts relied on disrupting the public sphere with ones oppressed, silenced, private sphere identity to embolden others to do the same and thus, form a community through that shared experience. Within and outside of the march, these particular lesbians were resisting forces of exclusion together. Additionally, the rhetorical significance of Strong documenting these events in such a way reflect her community building efforts were that of remembering these moments in order to build a connection of community with lesbians who would look back on or learn about these moments through her scrapbook. Strong’s collection relies on building community through resistance rhetoric as well as memorializing that rhetoric in a familial way to avoid being forgotten. Strong’s collection and her concern with mobilizing movements pairs nicely with the next chapter of the Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition – it could even be argued that Strong may have found herself at some of T.L.C.’s community building events.

CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDY TWO: TUSCALOOSA LESBIAN COALITION'S COLLECTION

The Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition, as described by the institution housing the collection, was a “community-based production company dedicated to bringing popular lesbian artists and other lesbian cultural events to Tuscaloosa in 1986 [formed] by Rose Gladney and Marcia Winter.”¹²³ T.L.C. was keen on bringing musicals, bands, plays, and other forms of art and performance to the South – especially those that focused on the lesbian or general LGBTQ+ experience. It was founded by Rose Gladney and Marcia Winter, professors at UA at the time. Within the collection, there are dozens of correspondence between members of the organization, letters they wrote to potential guests and performers, newsletters they sent out across the South, and information about the events they held. T.L.C.’s collection, unfortunately, is only accessible through its digitized version. Although a different experience than handling the physical documents, I was able to analyze potentially even more documents by having access to the artifacts right from my own computer. Browsing through the vast collection, there are documents from T.L.C. members ranging from 1986 (its inception) all the way until 2010. Though, the group is noted to have disbanded in 1996.

The collection is broken into sections such as “Early Activities” which consisted primarily of yellow notepad notes-to-self and others organizing meetings and committees,

123. Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition Records, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections <http://archives.lib.ua.edu/repositories/3/resources/3884> Accessed January 25, 2022.

another labeled “Newsletters” consisting of the monthly announcements lesbians signed up for T.L.C.’s newsletter would receive. The collection is substantial, with documentations of lesbian festivals and conferences happening across the country alongside broader campus events for all Alabama students. In choosing which documents to closely analyze for this case, I focused on documents that illustrated the core beliefs and purpose of T.L.C., as well as the members of T.L.C. working to grow their lesbian connections, to grow T.L.C. itself, and to spread their ideals and hospitality to others outside of Alabama as well. The following documents not only demonstrate T.L.C.’s commitment to reaching and supporting other lesbians, but also best exemplify the rhetorical tactics they used to do so.

Getting Started

The rhetoric embedded in their documents whilst organizing events exemplifies how they were intentional about protecting their community, whilst building it. In one newsletter they sent out to lesbians they knew in the area, they write, “we’ll lock the door. It’s just for T.L.C. Free; everyone come and bring your lesbian friends.”¹²⁴ It was no secret that T.L.C. was constantly trying to expand their organization and connect with more lesbians with every meeting and event. In each of their documents, they are adamant about “SISTERS” and calling for all to “come out and share the fun.” And yet, they write, “we’ll lock the door. It’s just for T.L.C.” right before inviting “everyone” and friends. Their rhetoric is inviting and casual, yet stern and protective. They are working to connect with lesbians that they have not yet met. Calling them sisters and emphasizing that their event is free. However, they also, to an extent, want the event to be exclusive to only lesbians, likely for the safety of themselves and their members.

124. Newsletter. Box 3691.002, Folder 008, 1988. Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition Records, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections <http://archives.lib.ua.edu/repositories/3/resources/3884>.

Considering the specific oppression and exclusion lesbians themselves have faced, this exclusion as a means of protection and practicality makes sense.¹²⁵ T.L.C. was trying to avoid interference or disruption to their meeting and their community. A lesbian specific space, to T.L.C., also meant a space that would be safe for them and isolated from the communities that were opposed to them. Without saying it explicitly, their rhetorical choice to emphasize first and foremost that this meeting is only for T.L.C., yet the greater lesbian community is included in this, suggests that they knew they could not truly be open to the public. They had to assure their audience and potential attendees that they would not let just anyone in – and that only T.L.C. members and friends would be aware of it. This suggests that if they do not lock the door, or do not assure potential attendees that it will be locked, there is a fear of (homophobic) outsiders ruining the event. Or, they could be seeking to encourage members who are conceivably not open about their lesbian identity – but need the safety of a T.L.C. meeting to feel that connection.

Performance and Art

T.L.C. hosted and promoted festivals and events that utilized performance and art to bring lesbians together in the South. In their newsletters and organizing meetings, they explained they wanted to, “We also want to sponsor more social events, such as potlucks, dances, film or video screenings in our homes, so that Tuscaloosa area lesbians can get to know each other better and, in turn, increase support for lesbian interests and concerns.”¹²⁶ They believed that by

125. Dunn, Thomas R. "Whence the Lesbian in Queer Monumentality? Intersections of Gender and Sexuality in Public Memory." *Southern Communication Journal* 82, no. 4 (2017): 203-15. doi:10.1080/1041794x.2017.1332090.

126. Newsletter. Box 3691.002, Folder 008, 1988. Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition Records, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections <http://archives.lib.ua.edu/repositories/3/resources/3884>.

promoting lesbian art and communal support in the area, the overall support for lesbian social and political issues would grow, and a lesbian united front would bloom.

Each show was centered towards celebrating lesbians. The first production put on by T.L.C. was in collaboration with JEB (Joan E. Biren) and titled *Out of Bounds: A Lesbian Journey*. It was a lesbian feminist performance of “narration, herstorical images, and over 200 of JEB’s own powerful photographs of lesbians and the natural world.”¹²⁷ The initial announcement of the production is a compelling rhetorical representation of the performance itself. Utilizing “herstorical” instead of “historical” to emphasize “her,” they make a rhetorical choice to remove the patriarchal nature of the concepts and to highlight that history has not always accounted for or remembered the women or lesbians within those moments. The word catches the attention of any reader, because it stands out as a misspelled word that when put in the context of the play is easily identifiable as a purposeful misspelling. Another interesting choice of words is their description of the play as a performance of the “natural world” alongside photographs of lesbian women, as if to dispel the myth and counter the arguments that homosexuality is unnatural. The performance used this rhetoric to captivate audiences in hopes of inspiring them to uncover their own lesbian identity. It shared experiences, vulnerable and intimate, as natural experiences in hopes of allowing other women to feel like they had a community like them. Cvetkovich described some aspects of lesbian archival relics as feelings and emotions that cannot be captured or documented within an archive fully or tangibly, thus needing lesbian specific ideas of archives to capture them.¹²⁸ These performances, in that way, served as archives for those

127. Announcement, flier. Box 3691.002, Folder 002, 1988, Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition Records, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections <http://archives.lib.ua.edu/repositories/3/resources/3884>.

128. Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*

emotions and feelings. The fliers give us a small glimpse at the real memories and emotions that were actually induced by these performances. The performances hosted by T.L.C. mirror Cvetkovich's observations of lesbian archival significance both by their capacity to create intangible archival artifacts and by their commitment to showcase the vulnerable, intimate experiences of lesbians that usually go unreported and unremembered. Due to their mirroring of these observations, T.L.C.'s rhetoric generates community building through evoking valuable emotion and memories that are specific to lesbian experiences.

The description of the performance continues to blend the rhetoric of revolutionary politics and intimacy:

The show moves from the amazon and the witches, through the raunchy 1920's, to JEB's own coming out in the 1960's, and into our own time with portrayals of lesbian politics and lesbian passion. It inspires us to keep on resisting and kissing.¹²⁹

Here, JEB inserts her personal experience of coming out alongside decades of LGBTQ+ history. As its own moment of time, JEB pushes forward that each individual experience within the community is valuable to the history and public memory of LGBTQ+ people. The sentence that stood out the most in this excerpt though, is "...portrayals of lesbian politics and lesbian passion. It inspires us to keep on resisting and kissing." Linking the words "politics and passion" "resisting and kissing" they assert firmly that the intimate parts of lesbian lives cannot be separated from the political parts of lesbian lives. This rhetoric reflects Joan Nestle's aforementioned claim that lesbians cannot separate their private lives from their public activism, to engage in kissing *is* resistance, or as Nestle clarifies, to be a lesbian is a political act.¹³⁰

129. Announcement, flier. Box 3691.002, Folder 002, 1987, Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition Records, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections <http://archives.lib.ua.edu/repositories/3/resources/3884>.

130. Nestle, Joan. "The Will to Remember: The Lesbian Herstory Archives of New York."

Fighting for lesbian rights means fighting for intimacy, passion, and kissing – kissing means to fight for lesbian existence. T.L.C. argues that resisting and kissing are equally crucial to one another, and watching JEB’s performance “inspires” other lesbians to do the same.

The play, *Immediate Family*, was performed in the auditorium of English Hall on the University of Alabama’s campus (at the time, it was Morgan Hall). The play starred Iris Bloom, and was written by Terry Baum, a San Francisco playwright that had already seen *Immediate Family* tour across the U.S and Europe. It depicted the story of Virginia and her lover Rosie who is in a coma. During this time, Virginia is battling the State as they refuse to acknowledge Rosie as Virginia’s immediate family, due to them being lesbians.¹³¹ In conversations with Rose Gladney, Iris Bloom (who played the lead for the Alabama performance,) emphasizes the “humor and tenderness in the piece as well as the subject matter. I’ve been calling it a lesbian love story lately.”¹³² Bloom does that in hopes that advertising the play as even more than its heavy subject matter will encourage more women to attend. To Bloom, the love story of the performance is just as important as the underlying subject matter of homophobia and other societal issues. She wants women to attend the play for its love. Bloom highlights that focusing in on the emotional “tenderness” of the art she is performing will bring in more women, and thus, build community with more women through the experience. In this case, Bloom’s rhetoric surrounding the play and the play itself utilize the emotional significance of lesbian archival

Feminist Review, no. 34 (1990): 86. doi:10.2307/1395308.

131. News Article from *The Tuscaloosa News*. Box 3691.002, 1987, Folder 002. Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition Records, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections <http://archives.lib.ua.edu/repositories/3/resources/3884>.

132. Personal Letter to Rose Gladney, from Iris Bloom, 1987, Box 3691.002, Folder 003 Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition Records, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections <http://archives.lib.ua.edu/repositories/3/resources/3884>.

pieces described in Cvetkovich's book, but focus on the "tender" aspect of this emotion, rather than the traumatic. Rather than focusing on the hardships or trauma aspects of emotion that lesbians deal with (though still important), Bloom believes it is just as important to focus on the tenderness and warmth that lesbians experience as well. Bloom argues that this will bring in more lesbians to the community who may have originally shied away at the thought of something that would be emotionally difficult to watch.

Growing Community through Hospitality

T.L.C. faced barriers of being lesbians in the South when seeking guests and new members. On top of dealing with the homophobic systems at the time, T.L.C. was battling the narrative that there was no place for queer people in the South at all. To combat this, members of T.L.C. were incredibly friendly to those they reached out to when organizing events, especially if those they were reaching out to were not from the South. Many potential visitors had never been to the South, and were therefore wary of entering a space that at first seemed scarce of anything LGBTQ+ or LGBTQ+ friendly. The members of T.L.C. made it their mission to not only debunk this stereotype of the South, but assure their guests that they would have a safe place to stay and friends that were excited to see them. Visitors or performers for T.L.C. were often surprised but delighted at the community they found in Alabama. In one exchange of written letters between founding member Rose Gladney and artist/performer Iris Bloom, a friendship is formed through the planning of lesbian performances and events.

Letters reveal how comfortable, friendly, and familial they were with their visitors in order to make them feel welcome. Rose Gladney wrote to Iris Bloom to convince her to do a performance in Tuscaloosa or even a tour in the South. Gladney even offered her home to Bloom for Bloom's stay in Tuscaloosa so that she would not have to worry about housing. Gladney asks

Bloom about her preferred diet, whether or not she is a vegetarian, and if she would prefer Gladney's two cats to be separated from her room. Gladney is intentional about making sure Bloom has a safe, comfortable space for her time visiting the South. It seems this effort was effective. Once she leaves the South, Bloom writes Gladney a letter where she states, "thank you so much for your generous hospitality. You certainly made the South a wonderful place to be."

¹³³ The letter is signed, "Forever, Iris Bloom." Bloom expresses her gratitude for Gladney's hospitality, while also making it a point to acknowledge how welcoming Gladney and the T.L.C. community *made* the South for her.

Bloom's choice to emphasize the South and that Gladney *made* it wonderful, stress that it was only the community work of T.L.C. that allowed the South to be this "wonderful" place for lesbians. Through Bloom, someone who had not visited the South before her experience with T.L.C., acknowledging the communal safe space that was created by these women in Alabama, it is demonstrated just how effective T.L.C.'s community building efforts were in the South. T.L.C. made the space so welcoming that even those outside of the South felt taken in and accepted. Gladney and other members of T.L.C. identify with the observations made from previous queer Southern research that discuss the importance of hospitality in Southern queer culture, and they utilize this aspect of their identity to grow that community. They know firsthand the South is scary for people who have not been there, and the dangers that may come with being queer in the South or openly queer *anywhere*. Rather than be ashamed of their Southern identity, they utilize the rich parts of that culture that have the potential to make people feel welcomed and loved. Through their Southern queer hospitality, Gladney and the other women at T.L.C. effectively

133. Personal Letter to Rose Gladney, from Iris Bloom, 1987, Box 3691.002, Folder 003 Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition Records, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections <http://archives.lib.ua.edu/repositories/3/resources/3884>.

show Bloom the growing and “wonderful” lesbian community that exists within the South. Their effectiveness with this rhetoric confirms previous literatures’ observations regarding the ways queer Southerners value and utilize their Southern culture in a unique queer Southern hospitality.¹³⁴

T.L.C. was determined to grow lesbian communities throughout the Southeast, expanding their networks beyond the borders of Tuscaloosa. They helped coordinate larger music festivals in the Gulf, and the first National Lesbian Conference through their Southern regional planning meetings. T.L.C. kept and spread many of the fliers for the 2nd Annual Gulf Coast Women’s Festival, encouraging lesbian women in Tuscaloosa to attend the events. In the flier for the festival, lesbians are greeted, “DEAR SISTERS,” with the following excerpt describing the festival:

COME OUT and share the fun, excitement, entertainment, workshops, arts and crafts, and hospitality of your Southern Sisters. Our herstory is rooted in a tradition of strong womon bonding. Our festival will be a space to network, play, share skills and ideas with each other; a space in which to continue our herstory and to build a strong community of women...

We gather for our reunion to create an environment that is safe, loving, and nurturing for ourselves and each other. We come to renew our strength, to grow, to learn, to know that Together Everything Is Possible... We welcome women and children of every race and culture, class, size, ability, age, relational, spiritual and religious preference. ‘Womon’ created safe space is very rare for us here and is indeed very precious and necessary for our growth and healing process.¹³⁵

In the flier, the rhetoric is focused on igniting a feeling of empowerment within women inviting them to an environment where they are loved, nurtured, and celebrated. The flier pulls

134. Morris, C. “Introduction: ‘Travelin’ Thru the Queer South.” *Southern Communication Journal*, 2009. 233-242.

135. Flier, Box 3691.002, Folder 003, 1990, Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition Records, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections <http://archives.lib.ua.edu/repositories/3/resources/3884>.

on emotional rhetoric to make any woman feel included in this invitation. The second sentence, “our herstory is rooted in a tradition of strong womon bonding,” hopes to connect the audience with women they have not yet met, suggesting that we each, due to our womanhood and lesbian identities, share the same “herstory” of community with other *strong* women. Initially, using words such as “herstory” and “womon,” the flier takes out any words that have a man centered root – history and women. These words, again, stand out due to their deliberate misspelling and curious wordplay. The idea of having a shared collective memory with other women, having tradition with other women, and bonding with other women, is an emotional response these words pull from their audience. Women have always been pushed into the “private” sphere of society, teaching them they have no history or tradition other than what is in their private homes.¹³⁶ This flier flips that notion on its head, pushing women reading it to realize they *do* have history, community, and tradition.

The second half of the flier is just as important for growing the audience at the festival. The rhetoric hones in on being inclusive and safe so that any and all women feel welcome in the space. The women sending the flier out know it is not enough to imply that all women are welcome, as many women have additional marginalized identities that intersect with their womanhood. So, they explicitly state, multiple times within the flier, “We welcome women and children of every race and culture, class, size, ability, age, relational, spiritual and religious preference,”¹³⁷ in order to speak directly to anyone that may feel inherently unwelcome due to

136. Fraser, N, (1990), Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy, *Social Text*, (25/26), 60. doi:10.2307/466240

137. Flier, Box 3691.002, Folder 003, 1990, Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition Records, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections
<http://archives.lib.ua.edu/repositories/3/resources/3884>.

their marginalized identity, that they belong at this festival. The women organizing the festival seem to be well aware that building community for lesbians means building community for anyone else that has been historically marginalized. This rhetoric is compelling for building community, because it works to counter the exclusionary nature of dominant groups within public spheres, and the exclusion that has happened even within LGBTQ+ spaces due to racism, sexism, ablism, and transphobia.¹³⁸ By accentuating the need to explicitly *welcome* individuals of all backgrounds, the rhetoric acknowledges and affirms Squires' observation regarding how public spheres and the communities within them have excluded and ignored those individuals, and attempts to prevent this exclusion from their community.

Lastly, the festival is especially interested in building community through more intimate and emotional routes such as nurturing and healing. When describing the events, meanings, and purpose of the festival, they use words like, "We come to renew our strength, to grow, to learn, to know that Together Everything Is Possible," and "safe, loving, and nurturing for ourselves and each other."¹³⁹ For the women of the festival, caring for yourself and others is the most crucial component. Similar to events hosted on the University of Alabama's campus by T.L.C. exclusively, emphasizing safety is an imperative aspect to getting women to attend. It is more than a space to make friends or experience art, it is a space to allow yourself to grow, heal, and "renew," in the presence of other women. In this space, healing is a powerful word and concept on its own, and yet it also can mean something different for each woman. Each of these aspects

138. Squires, Catherine R. "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres." *Communication Theory* 12, no. 4 (2002): 446-68. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00278.x.

139. Flier, Box 3691.002, Folder 003, 1990, Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition Records, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections
<http://archives.lib.ua.edu/repositories/3/resources/3884>.

are focused on the emotional intelligence and growth of women to build community with others and continue that growth long term. In this sense, the flier indicates that the most effective way to build community is to focus on “loving” and “nurturing” each other, and the most effective way to grow your own strength and healing, is to build community.

T.L.C.’s efforts to reach more women in a safe, communal way seemed to work. Their strides in the community made an impact on many lesbians off campus as well. One woman received word of T.L.C.’s work in a newspaper in 1989, where T.L.C. had posted a newsletter. In 1991, she had found where she kept the paper because of that passage, and finally the courage to reach out. She wrote to the women of T.L.C.,

Hello: My name is Desdemona and I have been living in the state of Alabama for four years now. I am a single lesbian wishing to find out different events in your community...I’d also appreciate receiving your T.L.C. newsletter regularly. Your sister, Desdemona.¹⁴⁰

Desdemona writes to the women of T.L.C. as if she is writing a friend. She tells a small amount about herself, indicating why she is interested in them, introduces herself. She states she is single. Perhaps, hinting that she is in need of a larger community of lesbians. She is new to Alabama, explaining she has only lived there four years. She had originally seen the flier for T.L.C. three years before writing this letter. Her letter, though short, is honest and hopeful in that, despite it being three years, she finds it necessary to reach out anyways. She signs the letter, “Your sister,” highlighting that she does indeed feel inherently connected to the women at T.L.C., even without knowing one personal detail about them. If a random lesbian woman in Birmingham, Alabama can find T.L.C. and feel drawn to them even three years after learning

140. Personal Letter, Box 3691.002, Folder 003, 1991, Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition Records, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections
<http://archives.lib.ua.edu/repositories/3/resources/3884>.

about them and originally saying nothing, it is safe to suggest T.L.C. made an impact on every lesbian they encountered, no matter how brief. Here, their goals of community building were reached.

The T.L.C. archival collection built community by finding different avenues to showcase lesbian experiences in order to connect with a wide range of lesbians across the South. They also utilized unique Southern aspects of their identity such as hospitality in order to make the South a more welcoming place for those outside of the South. Beyond performance and art rhetoric that showcased lesbian experiences for the sake of building relatability and therefore community among lesbians, T.L.C. also used organizational rhetoric to maintain this community. There weekly or monthly newsletters and meetings allowed them to share the same messages and present similar but new goals to their growing body of lesbian sisters. This allowed them to ensure a uniformity in their objectives as a community while also maintaining a frequent connection with anyone on the mailing list. To T.L.C., building community meant sharing experiences, being there for one another, and organizing this communication in a way that cemented into the minds of others as a movement.

However, it should be noted that the archive housing T.L.C.'s collection notes that T.L.C. disbanded in 1996, after ten years of activity. T.L.C.'s community building efforts, then, in some ways, may not have been as successful as they had hoped. Unfortunately, it is unclear why the group broke up – the archives even have documents from the year they disbanded where they are still organizing events, meetings, and fundraisers. Their breakup does show that perhaps the barriers and obstacles of creating an organized and recognized lesbian group on a southern university campus prevented them from lasting longer. It is noted that the founder of the group had moved away the year of the disbanding, and perhaps it was unable to stay afloat without the

original founders. Their breakup could be seen as something that counters the arguments of this thesis on community building, but instead, I think it reflects how complicated community building and sustainment can be when faced with the barriers lesbians dealt with everyday. Despite the barriers and inability to continue their group long into the future, these women worked hard to create something meaningful for the lesbians around them. Additionally, it should be noted that there was evidence of these women still staying in touch even a decade after the group disbanded.¹⁴¹ This, along with the donation of the collection, shows that perhaps their community building efforts, while stunted, were not completely derailed, as they were still able to build meaningful connections with each other, and with lesbians reading their efforts in the future.

141. Personal Letter, Box 3691.002, Folder 003, 2001, Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition Records, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections
<http://archives.lib.ua.edu/repositories/3/resources/3884>.

CHAPTER FIVE: CASE STUDY THREE: REVEREND MARJORIE RAGONA'S COLLECTION

Reverend Marjorie Ragona's collection was recommended to me by the Invisible Histories Project, as it was the most recent and largest collection that the Birmingham Public Library had just processed. I was told about Ragona's vast collection and how unique it was that she had donated practically her life's work of materials and artifacts while she was (and is) still alive. Little research exists that dives into the significance of donating archival contents while one is still alive. However, Reverend Ragona had been keeping up with her life's work for decades, seemingly knowing it would be necessary and crucial for queer people in Alabama to learn about it. This relates directly back to research regarding the purpose of family archives, the documents that Ragona found necessary to preserve over time directly reflect her values, her identity, and how she viewed her legacy.¹⁴² Due to this, each of Ragona's documents feel like they are reaching out to an audience even beyond that of the times they were documented – the records were created in a way that was prepared to carry them into future memory spaces. We can assume this is the case based on Ragona's own notes on the documents, her diligence in recording every aspect of her life, and her personal donation of these collections. This suggests Ragona's archives are meant to be read as familial documents for all lesbians. Ragona proved to be a critical lesbian leader in the South, her documents shine a light on that leadership and effort.

142. Woodham, Anna, Laura King, Liz Gloyn, Vicky Crewe, and Fiona Blair. "We Are What We Keep: The "Family Archive", Identity and Public/Private Heritage." *Heritage & Society* 10, no. 3 (2017): 203-220.

She was a popular religious figure in Alabama, especially among women. As a Minister with the Metropolitan Community Church, “she was one of the first women ordained to the MCC,” and lead churches in Mobile, New Orleans, and Birmingham.¹⁴³ Her religious endeavors focused on women and lesbian women specifically, as well as AIDS outreach and activism with her partner. Ragona’s documents display her efforts of building and maintaining church communities for those the church had excluded at the time. Ragona’s fascination with building church community for lesbians was not only significant due to the church’s exclusion of lesbians, but due to the church’s efforts to exclude lesbians and LGBTQ+ people from *all* spheres of life. The following materials best illustrate this fascination, as well as exemplify the radical lengths Ragona went to ensure lesbians felt safe, included, and remembered.

Within her vast collection, there are documents ranging from academic materials to property rights to theatrical scripts to newsletters, cementing the existence of lesbians in every area of life. Throughout each moment or idea archived, lesbians were always at the forefront of Ragona’s actions, politics, and beliefs. In an oral history of her life that she did for the archive, she talks about being an orphan, running away, being unhoused at a very young age, and facing abuse from members of her family. When she was a teen and living on the street, she explains that she found her way back into spirituality after she met a woman who encouraged her to do so. Ever since Ragona was young, she sought meaningful connections and community for her own survival, and wanted others to find this community as well. The documents highlighted in this chapter represent my interpretation of Ragona’s major priorities within lesbian community-building. The artifacts cover an extensive range of topics and issues, but I chose these particular

143. Collection Finding Aid. Marjorie Ragona Collection. Box 2174.01-15. Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

aspects as they collectively represent her overall collection in content, tone, and purpose.

Finding Community through Finding Aids

Despite IHP's endorsement and support of the Ragona collection, my experience accessing it revealed the complexities of lesbian community-building. There were over a dozen boxes within the collection, and at each visit in the archive I was given a binder with several sheets of paper that listed the categories of the documents that had been preserved. I was asked to write down three different sets of documents on a small sheet of paper (the most I could examine at one time) and hand it back to the archivist. Three manilla folders would be brought back to me in a white plastic bin, their category labels written in pencil on the tab. Sometimes, the folders were bursting with papers, photos, and other documents. Other times, the folders had one or two sheets of paper within them, sometimes not accurately matching the category label. I was grateful for the binder that served as my reference guide through Ragona's large collection. However, I did notice that some of the categories were a bit vague – making it difficult to know which documents I should choose to look through first. Some documents were merely labeled, “Burn Out,” others, “Women,” “Unlabeled” (news clippings) and “T.V. Special.”¹⁴⁴ There were multiple labels titled, “Personal Correspondence,” and while I was hoping to find something intimate or *personal*, I received envelopes addressed to various businesses, check stubs, and other mundane items.

It took me coming across the label, “Lesbian – Generalism” and “Christian Lesbians,” both a tad more specific than “Unlabeled” or “Women,” for me to find the bulk of Ragona's community efforts. Each of these folders were pouring out documents of community rhetoric and

144. Collection Finding Aid. Marjorie Ragona Collection. Box 2174.01-15. Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

lesbian stories. These two folders started to bring the collection to life, and I learned a bit more about how Ragona worked community into each aspect of her life. There were remnants of these same efforts in the vaguely labeled folders as well – I just had to learn how to identify them. In a folder labeled “Sex Play: A Feminist Manual,” I found more than 2nd wave feminist writings – I found lesbians fighting for recognition and inclusion within feminist organizations – working to be seen within their communities, and working to be safe within in them. They were trying to expand their community to those that were not seeing them. This same theme was present in Ragona’s documents about Christianity or about LGBTQ+ activism. Lesbians were seeking and constructing community any and everywhere.

With this in mind, I was diligent about looking through as many documents as I could – searching for key words and moments in Ragona’s life that spoke to who she was to her community. I am, of course, very grateful for the work done that has preserved these documents. However, it is still important to analyze how these documents are being preserved and categorized in order to fully understand the impact these documents have within public memory, or the obstacles they still face. The categorization of Ragona’s documents in a way that is, at times, missing the larger picture of what these documents are doing, suggest the crucial dynamic that lesbian archives and archivists add to the archiving process. Through the feminist radical empathy lens and Cvetkovich’s understanding of lesbian archival contents and archives, Ragona’s collection may have been preserved in a way that prioritized the community that her collection *still* has the ability to build and maintain.

Lesbian Community in Spirituality

Ragona seemed especially concerned with reaching internal (lesbians and Christian lesbians) and external (non-lesbian Christians) audiences to both protect and bolster community

for lesbians. Alongside appealing to already Christian lesbians, the artifacts called for lesbians to explore their faith, offering them community within God and lesbians just like them. At the same time, the artifacts called for Christian women to explore their sexuality in a way where they had the support to do so, or at the very least learn to love and embrace their Christian lesbian sisters. In one newsletter, executive members of Christian Lesbians Out Together, or CLOUT, went into intimate details about their past relationships and lesbian reckonings.¹⁴⁵ One woman named Laurie Fox, in a letter titled *Getting to Know You*, writes about her life and how she found her lesbian identity and Christianity. She opened up carefully about her time in college, explaining, “I had an intimate friendship with a woman at college, but didn’t know loving a woman was an option, so I didn’t take that relationship seriously.” She then tells readers about the marriage to a man she convinced herself to be in for 20 years,

“The last 7 [years] were pretty painful, but finally I got up the courage to leave. I moved in with my best friend. A woman... with whom I had fallen in love with the year before. She died of lung cancer 7 months later. That was 6 years ago... now I’m alone, and trying to get to a place where I can be comfortable with that.”

Fox’s letter is personal and honest. It is emotional and straight-forward about the hardships she faced as she grew within her identities.

Fox’s instinct to share her feelings of mourning, loneliness, and adversities echoes Cvetkovich’s observations regarding the archiving of lesbian emotion and trauma as memory and history.¹⁴⁶ Fox uses these experiences and emotions to reach an audience that she believes needs to hear stories like hers, to feel the emotions she felt. She is upfront about the fact that she had two children with a man she did not want to be with at all. She is honest about her love for

145. Newsletter. Marjorie Ragona Collection. Box 2174. Folder 14.16, Christian Lesbians. 1995. Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

146. Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*.

women that did not go anywhere because she simply was unaware that it *could* go somewhere. Fox explored these experiences as she retold them, reassuring herself and others that there is community for women just like her. Retelling stories of emotion, loss, and life are exactly what make both the tangible and intangible archival documents that Cvetkovich argued as significant for lesbian archival memory, as it sticks to other queer folks throughout time.¹⁴⁷ Fox ends her portion of the letter by stating, “CLOUT gives me a chance to celebrate all aspects of myself and be appreciated for who I am today. Thank you for sharing your lives with me.” *Sharing your lives with me*. From this letter, it is clear that CLOUT is dedicated to forming a community, and perhaps a family with other Christian lesbians. They tell their stories alongside the emotion and trauma that goes with them in order to reach women who may think they are alone. Or, who simply “didn’t know loving a woman was an option.” To Fox, the community she found through CLOUT has allowed her to live her life to its full potential. So, she focuses the rhetoric on her personal experiences in order to relate to her audience and connect with them well enough to where they want to join the collective of Christian women she helps form. This rhetoric reflects Ragona’s intentions with her archival collection and the rhetoric within it – she is interested in the collective well-being of other lesbians. For Ragona and the other’s in her collection, it was about more than sharing their stories – it was about building meaningful, spiritual, and supportive connections.

Ragona’s documents exemplify women refusing to be excluded from the Christian community, pushing their lesbian identity and womanhood at the forefront of their spirituality to counter patriarchal understandings of religion. The Christian lesbian women within these documents explicitly state the community and belonging they have found through both

147. Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*.

Christianity and other lesbians simultaneously, while also noting the ways they have been excluded from masculine, patriarchal church spaces. They explain:

We have experienced a sense of home, a sense of family. We feel a sense of community. The church is our roots. It has been our family and our home. And it has been a source of pain... Up from the past rooted in pain, I rise. Leaving behind self-hatred and fear, I rise.

It is precisely because of the oppression they have faced as lesbian women both in and out of the church that these women not only feel called to support and *rise* with each other, but also feel called to the church. To these women, they must provide community for themselves and others in order to let go of the pain they have felt from their oppressors. Rather than allow these oppressive forces to push them out of their community spaces like the church, they actively strive to build a church space that does include and celebrate them. They do not accept the patriarchal assertions that they should stay away from these spaces, instead, they refuse to be shut out. The community they have maintained in these environments allows them to relieve themselves from pain, fear, and other negative feelings that they felt before they had this community and familial support. This also then implies that they only felt this community, belonging, and love when they started interacting and finding other lesbian women like them.

As a leader in the church, Ragona used her unique position to strengthen the community in a way that protected lesbians in and out of Christianity by promoting documents that debunked homophobic myths. These documents were focused on disproving Christian ideology that would normally keep lesbians away from Christianity, or Christians away from sexuality and sexual liberation. An academic article written by Dr. Robert T. Francoeur was meticulously read by Ragona (as illustrated by her hand-written notes, highlights, and underlines on the document itself). It seemed Ragona was interested in this article for her purposes as a Church leader – something she could pull from when speaking to other Christians or queer people or both. The

article is titled, “How Sexual Can You Be and Still Be Religious?”¹⁴⁸ Circled by Ragona in black pen is the statement, “many religious people are rediscovering the sensuality of Judeo-Christian tradition.” The article focuses on pulling from Biblical scripture alongside the traditional anxiety and negative thoughts surrounding sexuality and religion, in hopes of providing relief to the audience that is battling these anxieties. Specifically, it explains how Jesus never said anything about sexual morality, but instead, always encouraged *love*. The article utilizes explicit, intimate rhetoric of experiences in life such as sex and masturbation, combining it with the rhetoric of biblical scripture – two things that have always been presented as counterintuitive. It is not uncommon for spiritual texts or academic documents to make it into traditional institutional archives, especially when they are curated and created by the dominant group in power.¹⁴⁹ However, it was/is uncommon for sexually explicit documents and personal narratives, especially from the non-dominate group, to make it into institutional archives.¹⁵⁰ By documenting these items that also display non-normative characteristics, Ragona has compiled both acceptable institutional archival rhetoric (biblical scripture, spiritual texts, academic articles) *and* unacceptable rhetoric that has been deemed unfit for archival spaces (intimacy and specifically lesbian intimacy). In doing so, Ragona uses institutional archival standards to combat those very standards and limitations within archives. Ragona combats the limitations that do not allow sexual documents in the archive.

Ragona’s notes on a memo pad next to the article and her underlines all over the

148. Article. Marjorie Ragona Collection. Box 2174. Folder 14.16, Christian Lesbians. Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama

149. Schwartz, Joan M., and Terry Cook. "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory." *Archival Science* 2, no. 1-2 (2002): 1-19. doi:10.1007/bf02435628.

150. Schwartz, Cook, “Archives, Records, and Power.”

document show not only her interest in this topic, but how she was maintaining a healthy relationship with herself and her spirituality. It also shows her dedication to helping others maintain that same level of health and well-being, as she wrote notes pertaining to her role in this education and counseling as a religious leader. She turned to science and theology research that supported all of her identities. This allowed her to keep herself informed and in touch with what others may be battling internally, enabling her to revamp her community building and connecting strategies. Ragona was well aware of the damage and oppression caused by harmful Christian belief systems, but she also knew the refuge that her own Christian beliefs gave her. These documents that breakdown the homophobic Christian misconceptions of the Bible allow her to continue growing herself and others in a way that is safe and comforting to her.

In addition to healing lesbian relationships with Christianity, the article seeks to reach an audience of Christians that had isolated and drove lesbians to seek community and spirituality elsewhere in the first place. This rhetoric puts traditional American Christian beliefs to the test and forces homophobic ideology to reckon with its false interpretations of LGBTQ+ people and Christianity. Ragona took in everything she could from this document to expand her own theological knowledge and understands of sexuality, likely to combat anyone who may challenge her as a Christian leader and follower. As a prominent activist and Reverend in Alabama, there is no doubt she faced scrutiny from those within and outside of Christianity. These documents allowed Ragona to remain prepared for any debate. Through the stories of Christian lesbians and this academic article, Ragona expands the community around them in ways many never thought were possible, while also fighting the system that has oppressed lesbians for centuries.

A Focus on Love and Sexuality

Two folders within Ragona's collection emerged to me as they seemed to teach lesbians

and women in general more effective activism, life, and happiness. Both Ragona's spirituality artifacts and feminism artifacts reflect her and other lesbian efforts to reach two different audiences in two different ways at the same time. In the Christian documents, Ragona was reaching Christian lesbians, non-Christian lesbians, and non-lesbian Christians that were invested in similar belief systems. Within these manuals for women, Ragona was reaching lesbians and non-lesbians that were in some way still fighting for the same cause. These next documents, while echoing Ragona's Christian spirituality texts, focused on uplifting women in way that encouraged love with themselves and others. In doing this, the women would be more inclined to engage in and spread community efforts.

Initially, a document titled *Sex Play: A Feminist Sex Manual* by the Rainbow and Lightening Collective layouts the experiences and concerns of lesbians that they believe should concern all women. This manual is concentrated on pushing women to understand sexuality, sex, and life through a feminist lens in order for them to truly understand themselves and others. Before the manual begins, there is a yellow letter typed by a group called Female Liberation. The letter seems to be an opening for the sex manual directed at members of the group. The letter calls for its members to be more supportive, understanding, and better advocates for their lesbian sisters in and out of the group. It begins by describing the tensions that exist among feminist liberation movements between lesbian women and straight women, as these tensions prove to be obstacles preventing true liberation for all.

To calm these tensions, the letter works to appeal to straight women and first recognize their own concerns of oppression, but then explains "the fact remains that Lesbians are oppressed

in every aspect of their existence.”¹⁵¹ The letter does not say this to put down straight women’s concerns or feelings, but to get them to understand that lesbian issues and concerns are also concerns for straight women. More specifically, it continues, “this oppression affects Lesbians directly, straight women indirectly. No woman can be free until all Lesbians are free, for if the option of Lesbianism is closed, no one can fully know her own sexuality.” Here, the members of Female Liberation are arguing that it is only by advocating and fighting for lesbians’ right to live and love fully that all women will be able to understand and empower themselves completely. Arguing that due to lesbianism being stigmatized and kept out of the conversation for so long for all women, we never really understand ourselves, lesbian or otherwise, until all women are able to truly speak, think, and love for themselves.

In this excerpt, the letter is concerned with addressing women who are not lesbians and encourage them to fight alongside lesbians and lesbian concerns because these concerns impact every woman, regardless of sexuality. This letter, before the manual even begins, builds community for lesbians by creating a path for solidarity among lesbians and women who maybe until this point were not concerned with lesbian issues. Even though this letter is directed towards a specific group, it can serve as a road map for other groups that are experiencing similar tension that is preventing solidarity and collective growth. This letter combats the obstacles within the collective, enabling this specific movement of activists to grow more organically and effectively by understanding the intersectional barriers each of them may face. The rhetoric of this letter resembles that of discussions between feminist public sphere interventions and queer interventions, as not all feminist interventions or advocacy movements completely account for

151. Letter. Marjorie Ragona Collection. Box 2174. Folder 07.09, Sex Play. Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

the experiences of lesbian women within them.¹⁵² This letter symbolizes these conflicts and exclusions within interventions, while also providing a way for movements to combat these issues through narrative and empathetic rhetoric that seeks to understand and acknowledge both sides.

The manual shares stories from women discovering a love for their sexuality and the power within themselves. It explains it is different than other “popular” or mainstream sex manuals because it is in no way focused on men, nor is it focused on heterosexuality, nor is it focused on the pressure to look “sexy” during sex.¹⁵³ The guide is the most explicit out of any of the documents I’ve encountered thus far. It provides tips and psychology behind masturbating in a way that uplifts the inner self. It explains,

If you can’t get excited with your partner and you want to get into yourself more, try being alone where you won’t be interrupted and try making love to yourself, or in the usual term, masturbating.

The manual focuses on breaking down heteronormative and patriarchal barriers surrounding sex and sexuality, as it believes these barriers prevent individual and collective growth. Essentially, according to the manual, we must nurture and care for ourselves especially in ways that have been stigmatized as inappropriate or centered around men (sex, orgasms, etc.). Repairing the inner self in this way is also uniquely powerful for lesbians who suffer from being oversexualized and separated from the public due to our identities.

152. Dunn, Thomas R. "Whence the Lesbian in Queer Monumentality? Intersections of Gender and Sexuality in Public Memory." *Southern Communication Journal* 82, no. 4 (2017): 203-15. doi:10.1080/1041794x.2017.1332090.

153. Manual. Marjorie Ragona Collection. Box 2174. Folder 07.09, Sex Play. Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

The manual continues, as women we “were barred from culture. Exploited in their role of mother.” Therefore, we must find ways for feelings of intimacy, love, pleasure, and sexuality to feel like they are truly and only for us. This rhetoric is also reminiscent of the same tones of lesbian archival rhetoric described in *The Archive of Feelings* from Cvetkovich as the manual rhetoric is focused on healing traumas, centering emotions and self-exploration. The archival artifacts in this folder are explicit, emotional, and honest. This manual attempts to reclaim sexuality for women in that way. The manual wants women to feel empowered within themselves sexually in order to forge solidarity with all women. It is only by addressing all of the barriers and adversities preventing this empowerment (capitalism, patriarchy, heterosexism) that this is possible.

While the *Sex Play* manual focuses primarily on revamping second-wave feminist activism and the sexuality of women, the next manual *The Woman Identified Woman* is focused on enlightening women of the possibilities that exist with themselves beyond that of man, beyond sexuality, an identity that exists completely separated from anything patriarchal or man-centered.¹⁵⁴ This particular document believes that the lesbian woman is a political act just in her existence – as “she is in a state of continual war with everything around her,” whether she realizes it or not. They explain this is the case because the “rigid” sex roles and binaries that women have been boxed into have existed for men and for capitalism, for their legacies to continue on. So, when a woman is a lesbian, she is

“the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion.” because “to be a woman who belongs to no man is to be invisible, pathetic, inauthentic, unreal... he defines [our womanhood] in relation to him – but cannot confirm our personhood. Our own selves as absolutes.”

154. *The Woman Identified Woman Manual*. Marjorie Ragona Collection. Box 2174. Folder 12.25, Lesbian, General. 1970. Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

The article argues that by acknowledging the ways that the dominant, capitalist society has assigned our roles and oppresses us even deeper for not abiding by these roles, we can find “liberation of the self, inner peace and the real love of self and all women.” However, only women, through loving themselves, are capable of changing this narrative.

In these documents, self-love and self-liberation is imperative to their activism and growth as women, because it is what invokes community building and community movements. They explain, “consciousness” is crucial for creating a “revolutionary force” to end the “imposition of all coercive identifications, and to achieve maximum autonomy in human expression.” They are clear and direct with their purpose here – if we encourage a new mindset among women, one that encourages, not forces, them to see themselves outside of a man’s eyes, we can begin a revolution that tears down all oppressive forces. They are careful with their word choice – they write, “we must be available and supportive of one another, give our commitment and our love, give the emotional support necessary to sustain this movement.” They use emotional words of caring and supporting other women to encourage women to feel this support and experience this consciousness on their own. They want to subvert any and all coercive behaviors. They persuade their audience in a way that does not seek to put power over them or change their mind in a forceful way. Instead, the language they use is thoughtful and uplifting, allowing women to think and have this realization on their own. They are demanding, yet demanding of love and support. They do not use words with negative or more violent connotations because to them, that is not what lesbianism is, and that is not how you start a revolution.

According to this document, women, particularly lesbians, have faced barriers to community, love, healing and happiness due to patriarchy, capitalism, and heteronormativity

with each reinforcing one another. Thus, it is crucial to our existence and livelihood as lesbians to recognize the world that we could have, the peace that we could have, and the support and care everyone could have, if we shifted our consciousness away from the man-centered universe it has grown up around. They explain, “lesbianism isn’t another way to ‘do it’ it is a whole other way to have contact... we are able to create better models of the way we want the world to be in ourselves and our relationships.”

At its core, this document, while also echoing and summarizing the ideas of Ragona’s entire collection eloquently, articulates the ways in which lesbians have a community and collective building nature inherent to them. We are a whole other way to have contact or rather, we create interactions and support that humanity has yet to conceive. Lesbian is an identity that can be completely removed from the heteronormative, patriarchal man. However, it only has that potential if we acknowledge its potential, nurture it, and support it. If this manuscript written and signed by “Radicallesbians” argues that experiencing an awakening and love for our inner selves we spark a revolution and collective movement amongst each other, they are also saying we have had that revolution and community instinct in us all along.

The community building in Ragona’s collection focuses on encouraging and strengthening lesbians to feel more comfortable with their sexuality and spirituality. Ragona’s community building is best understood through Cvetkovich’s investigations of feelings captured within archives, as well as feelings serving as our own personal archive.¹⁵⁵ The rhetoric of these documents reflect almost as instructions for lesbians to follow as they navigate life and adversities. According to the manuals within Ragona’s collection, if we feel comfortable with

155. Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Duke University Press, 2019. 241.

ourselves, we can begin to encourage that in others, and then finally build a larger movement in favor of all of our values as marginalized people. Ragona also utilizes similar tactics to that of Strong's collection – where personal experiences enable lesbians to more readily build collections with those around them. These instructions and personal narratives seem are used in order to evoke feelings and emotions of understanding of oneself as the first step of community building.

CHAPTER SIX: LESBIAN COMMUNITY: STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES

Reflecting back on our research question: How do lesbian archival collections create community in the South, we can better evaluate the rich rhetorical properties and implications derived from each case study to understand the similarities and distinctions necessary for community building among each collection. According to Cvetkovich, affects or feelings such as “nostalgia, personal memory, fantasy, and trauma, make a document significant.”¹⁵⁶ There were several threads and pieces of similarities in each case that I believe prove crucial to the question of community building and sustaining, as well as additional trends that lend themselves to future research. In addition to trends within the rhetoric of each collection, there were trends with each collection itself. Each collection battled their own network of forces that either prevented community or established a need for community. Each collection was also donated by women who were collecting a moment of time in their (and other women’s) lives, becoming an archivist themselves.¹⁵⁷ Through these oppressive forces or obstacles, each collection found rhetorical strategies to build community anyways. These strategies not only built community among lesbians at the time, but allowed the community building to continue as long as *someone* had access to the rhetoric they engaged in.

156. Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Duke University Press, 2019. 241.

157. Nestle, Joan. "The Will to Remember: The Lesbian Herstory Archives of New York." *Feminist Review*, no. 34 (1990): 86. doi:10.2307/1395308.

Initially, there were threads of familiarity, sisterhood, and bonding in each of the collections, suggesting this is what allowed them to build community in a more support-driven way, and thus sustain themselves for generations. The rhetorical use of sisterhood or connections with other lesbians was never solely about the individual, but instead the preserving and bolstering of lesbian publics. However, in order to create and preserve these publics, lesbians knew that the inner self of others must feel protected, appreciated, and understood. Each collection provided examples of lesbians sharing emotional and even potentially traumatic experiences, in order to make other women feel like they could join in their community and have someone who knew how they felt about the world. Lesbians wanted others to feel sure of themselves so that they would feel confident to join in on lesbian movements. To spark this confidence, lesbians had to share their experiences so that others knew they were not alone. This rhetorical process is present within each case study.

In Strong's scrapbook, lesbians felt like they belonged when they were around other lesbians, even strangers, due to the rhetoric of the march, confirming the purpose and impact of the connection-centered rhetorical approaches. Specifically, in the reflection from a lesbian post-attendance, she explained what it meant to be around those like her, those she did not know existed, to connect with people who have shared their experience of oppression in the world.¹⁵⁸ In addition to the rhetoric within the scrapbook, Strong's scrapbook provided its own feelings of familiarity and connection as it felt like a family scrapbook being passed down to lesbians. Strong could have just donated her collection of news clippings and photographs in folders or stacks of paper, but she made a scrapbook instead. In the T.L.C. collection, nearly every

158. Box 2185, 1987, Sandi Strong Scrapbook Collection of the March on Washington, Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

newsletter or flier addressed to prospective T.L.C. members or potential event audiences uses the word “sisters” to describe any lesbians they may come in to contact with, furthering the necessity of this rhetoric.¹⁵⁹ T.L.C. gained membership and attendance by utilizing familial, bonding rhetoric. Women felt safe at T.L.C. events and thus, emboldened to join their community. In Ragona’s collection, women share personal, vulnerable, and intimate stories to women they have also not yet met in order to build that connection with them – they write, “thank you for sharing your lives with me.”¹⁶⁰ Even though the women within these newsletters do not know their audience personally, they write their feelings of support and belonging to a group that has been connected by relatable experiences and narratives. All three collections demonstrate the innate duty lesbians feel to one another to make the world a place of belonging for them. They demonstrate the intrinsic value that community, support, and acceptance adds to the livelihood of lesbians. To the women within these collections and the women that documented them, a core aspect of their rhetorical efforts in community building is making other lesbian women feel like they are not alone, but instead, a part of a larger network of sisterhood.

There are also distinctions between each collection, which is exciting for future research in terms of the possibilities for other rhetorical properties of community building among lesbians. Initially, Strong’s collection showcased rhetoric based in resistance, visibility, and activism/protest rhetoric. The rhetoric within the scrapbook all came from protest signs or reflections about the march from people who attended the march. The reflections served both as testimony that the community efforts were working, and as continuous community building

159. Box 3691.002, Folder 003, 1990, Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition Records, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections <http://archives.lib.ua.edu/repositories/3/resources/3884>.

160. Newsletter. Marjorie Ragona Collection. Box 2174. Folder 14.16, Christian Lesbians. 1995. Invisible Histories Project, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

through women putting their experiences in newspaper interviews that could reach even more lesbians. The individuals within Strong's collection were using rhetoric that allowed them to both fight for their rights *and* to create communal bonds with those that were doing the same. As Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge explain in "archivist as activist," activism is "those practices which are used to challenge injustice and discrimination in order to create a more inclusive and just environment."¹⁶¹ By actively participating in the march while also centering the needs of their identity and others like them, these women are challenging injustices political and societal injustices by being there, sharing their message, and by creating community. The exclusion of lesbians from the public and broader community is an injustice in itself, so by using activism to combat that exclusion along with political struggles, they successfully advocate for a more inclusive environment and therefore, a community.

Strong's collection is also distinct from the others, as the scrapbook serves as its own archive and artifact simultaneously, while also more literally appealing to familial characteristics. The scrapbook as a medium for the collection secures itself as a larger memory of community simply by the nature of a scrapbooks general purpose. The process Strong took to create the scrapbook is similar to that of an archivist, as she sorted through newspapers, documents, and photographs to create a specific memory of the march. In this instance, Strong also portrays herself as the archivist that has "embodied activism" by documenting activism and documenting events of memory that combat unjust versions of public memory that have excluded LGBTQ+ movements and especially lesbian ones.¹⁶² Strong's collection poses

161. Wakimoto, Diana K., Christine Bruce, and Helen Partridge. "Archivist as Activist: Lessons from Three Queer Community Archives in California." *Archival Science* 13, no. 4 (2013): 295. doi:10.1007/s10502-013-9201-1.

162. Wakimoto, Bruce, Partridge, "Archivist as Activist," 297.

questions for future such as, how does the medium of archived documents impact how they are read? Her documentation of these documents also asks, to what extent do activists have a responsibility to their movement to document these events in a way that speaks to future movements?

Art, performance, and assembly were each crucial rhetorical aspects for how the Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition built community. They put on shows and promoted performances coming to the South that showcased various lesbian life experiences. According to those putting on the performances, showing lesbian life through art allowed women to see the happiness and love that makes up lesbian experiences, alongside the pain caused by oppressive forces. Art allowed performers to balance these encounters, and present them in a way that was freeing and inspiring to other lesbians. The performances were meant to inspire others to engage in resistance movements *and* continue engaging in lesbian love – presenting the two as intertwined. Lastly, T.L.C. prioritized monthly meetings with its members, where their rhetoric focused on safety, education, and community. Potlucks were the common medium for these meetings. T.L.C. used these meetings to bring in new members as well as keep all of their current members on the same page so they could focus on what mattered. Through reading T.L.C.'s collection and others similar, additional investigations may ask the question, what role does the physical community/area play in community bonds being built? Or even, how does lesbian art impact public memory?

Ragona's community building rhetoric relied on the spirituality of women and intimate experiences or discussions. Ragona's collection detailed sexual information rhetoric that was meant to counter dominant narratives surrounding lesbian sexuality in both the church and patriarchal society as a whole. As a leading member of churches throughout the South, Ragona

focused on building community for lesbians who may have been excommunicated from their spirituality or church communities due to their lesbian identity. To combat this excommunication, Ragona's documents prioritized sexually explicit language that would have never traditionally made it into any institutional archive. The manuals on sexuality enabled Ragona to address the parts of lesbian life that had been targeted by the dominant society especially within religion. Ragona's rhetoric then flipped these notions of lesbianism on its head by using rhetoric that explained why being a lesbian is itself spiritual. Essentially, Ragona's community building efforts combined two ideas that were usually seen as diametrically opposed: spirituality and sexuality, and encouraged the radicalization of both of these within women. Ragona's insistence of the linkage between these two concepts posits other questions of, how do lesbian perspectives of Christianity change public perceptions of religion?

An intrinsic part of community building in each case relied on pushing back against the experience of being excluded, whether it was the resistance by the women at the time or that of the documents forcing their way into archival memory. Due to the collections being donated to larger archives by women were/are still alive, they were intentionally seeking to cement these community efforts in public memory – relating directly back to the research behind familial archive purposes, showing a continuation of the community building.¹⁶³ These women wanted to leave these heirlooms with their future lesbian family. Familial or institutional archival collections may be passed down to next of kin after a death, in a normative societal sense (such as traditional patriarchal family structure).¹⁶⁴ Lesbians subverted and resisted this archival norm

163. Woodham, Anna, Laura King, Liz Gloyn, Vicky Crewe, and Fiona Blair. "We Are What We Keep: The "Family Archive", Identity and Public/Private Heritage." *Heritage & Society* 10, no. 3 (2017): 203-220.

164. Woodham, King, Gloyn, Crewe, Blair, "We Are What We Keep."

by passing down their personal collections *themselves* and choosing *where* these documents ended up to ensure they would continue building community. If these collections were left to someone related to them (after they had passed) but not familiar with the lesbian community they were building, who knows if these documents would have ever made it into any archival collection. Due to not being valued by the dominant public, lesbians were, and in some cases still are, the only ones valuing their archival documents, so they had to be the ones preserving them and donating them. The instinct to document yourself and your communities' actions is inherently an act of resistance, when the dominant, oppressive norm is to ignore, erase, and forget you.

Lastly, the archival collections build community through me, the archival reader and researcher that is thrust into these moments of community engagement, and moved by the rhetoric within them to continue these community goals and ideals. Essentially, the community efforts within these collections allow me to feel, belong to, and share this community with others due to their carefully crafted pieces of rhetoric that relate to any and all lesbians. Throughout this process, I have discussed this analysis with countless scholars and researchers outside of myself and even my committee. I find myself retelling the stories of Strong, T.L.C., and Ragona to my classmates, students, and family members when they ask about my thesis project. As a participant in The University of Alabama 3-Minute-Thesis competition, I had the opportunity to share these stories, their rhetoric, and my research process with students and faculty across campus. Some of the more refreshing conversations I have had about my research came from individuals in departments completely outside of mine such as in the engineering or business college, where they tell me they appreciate my research and what I am doing.

I have also met people through working with the archival research department, students who focus solely on archives, tell me that what I am doing is not only important for lesbians and public memory, but it is also important for archival research as a whole. When Strong, T.L.C., and Ragona donated their artifacts to an archive, they surely knew they were cementing lesbian memories into archival spaces that would impact lesbians like myself in the future. However, the community I have been able to connect with as a result of this research goes beyond that. I have been able to introduce people to the community created by these collections, as well as create my own community network of my thesis committee, department, and classmates who are learning about my experiences with these collections. Once this thesis project is finished and submitted, other people will be able to carry this on as well. Even if it is just a classmate who overheard me talking about my research, mentioning it to one of their friends when something about archives or lesbian activism comes up, the memory of these collections will linger. The community and connections this project has brought me are connections I will keep with me for the rest of my life. Lastly, the memory of these collections will remain with me in each piece of writing, research, and any moves I make as a lesbian in academia. Due to the unique and impactful feeling of community this collections have built within me, I feel more than justified to argue their community building efforts were a success.

A Lesbian Definition of Community

The rhetoric of these collections builds community through every aspect of their existence. “Community” for these lesbians is complex and layered. Thus, this analysis has constructed a definition of community that each of these cases lend themselves to in their community building efforts. Through the analyzing of these case studies, community is a noun *and* a verb, defined as explaining the feelings, goals, and actions between a group of people who

are related on some level of experience (proximity, oppression, similarities). Due to this relation, this group has a shared interest fighting oppression, supporting each other, welcoming others, sustaining their space, and preserving their memories and community as an act of resistance. Personal experiences, emotions, and needs are all important to this definition, as the lesbians in these cases utilized building connections or relationships with each other in order to expand the community. To these collections, if they were not actively engaging in behaviors that supported and liberated others in that community in the past, present, and future, then they were not a community at all.

Lesbians within the collections were engaged in multifaceted meanings of community, generating their own meaning. The words used to describe the purpose of community events such as “healing, empowerment, support, bonding, and belonging,” resonate with what women described as community in Rothblum’s study, while also providing tangible evidence that those words brought in community.¹⁶⁵ T.L.C. newsletters discussed high attendance and “success” for their meetings and events, Strong’s scrapbook details the thousands of people who felt connected to one another, and Ragona’s collection showcases multiple women who describe their feelings of belonging thanks to the support within their specific community groups. The archiving of these documents was proof that these methods of support, empathy, emotion, and care are effective, just as archiving these feelings are effective to remember lesbian experiences.¹⁶⁶

165. Rothblum, E. “Where Is The ‘Women’s Community?’ Voices of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Women and Heterosexual Sisters.” *Feminism & Psychology*, 20, no. 4 (2010) 454–472. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353509355147>

166. Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Duke University Press, 2019.

This definition further explains that as a lesbian in this community, you are making every act a move to free others from oppression, and those within your community are doing the same for you. Each artifact in these collections showed this effort. As Richardson's research on Black lesbian archival contents reminds, it is the proximity to oppression and their experiences that has made Black lesbian feminism have the ability to reimagine a truly inclusive world.¹⁶⁷ And as Nestle reminds, being a lesbian is revolutionary enough to be worthy of being remembered.¹⁶⁸ This seems to be an idea that spread among lesbians enough to make them want to join in on efforts that were expanding various activist movements. Lesbians within these collections were concerned with making the physical community around them better by helping with marches, church services, festivals, and community-centered events. They were focused on those within their lesbian-based community, and the physical community *space* they lived in. By engaging in direct mutual aid such as raising money for defense funds, holding advocacy workshops, and expanding support for LGBTQ+ people and experiences, each collection demonstrated a wide range of lesbians that each shared the same values. The active care and support of other lesbians and other marginalized people that each collection participated in demonstrates a perhaps innate love lesbians feel within their activism.

These collections provide a lesbian definition of community that is desperately needed in research, activism, and life. As previously discussed, literature surrounding the definition of community is sparse, but these women and those inhabiting their collections all seemed to know what it meant to them. Additionally, my role as the archival reader and engager gives me the

167. Richardson, Matt. *Queer Limit of Black Memory: Black Lesbian Literature and Irresolution*. Ohio State Univ Press, 2016.

168. Nestle, Joan. "The Will to Remember: The Lesbian Herstory Archives of New York." *Feminist Review*, no. 34 (1990): 86. doi:10.2307/1395308.

ability to imagine and derive meaning from the specific community within these collections.¹⁶⁹ Prominent definitions of community usually deal with proximity or relation to determine community in community archives, but the findings in these case studies show an even more specific and necessary definition of community.¹⁷⁰ The case studies relate to how other lesbian women have identified with community in the aforementioned study from Rothblum, where support, trust, and care were much more instrumental than location or relation.¹⁷¹ Whether it was their inherent feeling of connection through their identity or the sharing of knowledge throughout newsletters and events that illustrated these beliefs, lesbians knew what one another were seeking and needing. They documented these understandings, in hopes that these needs would ring true for lesbians in the future and provide a sense of self and community for generations.

Barriers to Community

Initially, the messages that the *archives* send about each collection are conflicting, complicating the community building potential of the collections. As mentioned in the literature review, archivists engage in rhetoric when they pick and choose what documents should be preserved and how they should be preserved. Each of these decisions tell the archival readers or publics how they should feel, remember, or forget an event or person in time. The archivist is persuasive in how they argue what is or is not important. In Sandi Strong's collection, the

169. Brilmyer, Gracen, Joyce Gabiola, Jimmy Zavala, and Michelle Caswell. "Reciprocal Archival Imaginaries: The Shifting Boundaries of "Community" in Community Archives." *Archivaria*, 88 (2019): 46.

170. Wakimoto, Diana K., Christine Bruce, and Helen Partridge. "Archivist as Activist: Lessons from Three Queer Community Archives in California." *Archival Science* 13, no. 4 (2013): 293-316. doi:10.1007/s10502-013-9201-1.

171. Rothblum, E. "Where Is The 'Women's Community?' Voices of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Women and Heterosexual Sisters." *Feminism & Psychology*, 20, no. 4 (2010) 454–472. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353509355147>

archive clearly values her collection, but the messaging of the archive sends mixed signals. Although they chose Strong's scrapbook as a notable representation of their vast LGBTQ+ collection, there are a few details missing that suggest otherwise. In this thesis, I have been spelling Strong's name as *Sandi* Strong, however, her name is listed in the archive directory as *Sandy* Strong. It is only one letter of a difference, but that is one letter too many. I discovered the true spelling of Strong's name by finding her Facebook profile, and other documents online that note her contributions to LGBTQ+ history. Even on the Invisible Histories Project's website (the organization that is partnered with Birmingham Public Library to house the collection), Strong's name has two different spellings on the page detailing her collection.

Strong donated her personal archival collection of an important moment in history for her. She worked diligently to create a scrapbook that was encompassing of an entire movement of over 600,000 people in one specific moment in time. And yet, even those that are housing her collection, those that are supposed to be celebrating her contributions, have not taken the time to ensure her name is spelled consistently in archival directories and bios. Strong's collection is maintained in an institutional archive that has partnered with a queer community archive to help sustain such collections, complicating this observation even more. An institutional archive likely would not even take Strong's collection on its own, without the persistence of the community organization. In previous research, community archives have proven to be a way for documents to reach archival status even when they did not fit the dominant archival standard. Although we have community archives to thank for Strong's archival status, her lesbian identity may be the underlying factor as to why the correct spelling of her name was not diligently reviewed.

TLC faced their own unique barriers as they have been archived by a strictly institutional archive base, that constrains the community building to the institution. The collection was

donated to the University by former UA professor and founder of TLC, Rose Gladney. Unfortunately, as stated on the institution's digital archive site, "on-site access is restricted" for the collection. Meaning, I cannot access the physical documents of the collection. Thankfully, the digitized versions of the collection are extensive. Though, there are some documents, valuable to my analysis, that are difficult to read in the digitized format. Some of the letters are blurry or have entire paragraphs nearly blocked out due to the University of Alabama Special Collections stamp of ownership placed directly on top of each document. Additionally, I cannot help but wonder why UA chose to restrict this collection. Without being able to access the physical documents, I'm left wondering what is being hidden, or what was deemed unworthy of digitizing? what may be missing from the digitized collection, if it is something that is already being hidden and made inaccessible in some ways? This is also another way this barrier serves as an obstacle to community building, as well.

Through restricting this collection to online-only, the potential community that could have been built at the physical location of the archives is completely gone. Perhaps the archive wanted to avoid the queer bodies building community in their physical presence, it wanted to disrupt one of T.L.C.'s last goals of community building. It should be noted though, that when it comes to community archives focused on digitization, online access does enhance accessibility.¹⁷² And yet, there is still something inherently frustrating and inaccessible about one of the only collections of LGBTQ+ archival artifacts at the University of Alabama being labeled "restricted." Focusing on what the archive communicates about this collection and communicates to me, a lesbian researcher, it is almost as if the archival institution would rather the LGBTQ+

172. VanHaitsma, Pamela. "Digital LGBTQ Archives as Sites of Public Memory and Pedagogy." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 22, no. 2 (2019): 253. doi:10.14321/rhetpublaffa.22.2.0253.

individuals interested in these materials stay far away from the archive. We can have these collections, research them, write about them, but we cannot queer the archive space itself.

Whiteness and Limitations in Archival Community Building

A substantial complication and barrier to community and understanding community building within lesbian spaces is the overwhelming whiteness of the collections. Although the archival collections allow us to peer into lesbian life in the South, they are not all encompassing of what Southern lesbian life was like for all lesbians as there were no significant pieces from women of color. Initially, each of the archival collections were originally curated and donated by white women. It should also be noted that the archives they were housed in did nothing to describe these women or highlight other characteristics about them. Despite the Birmingham Public Library archives having a long list of queer collections to choose from, none from what I could find were women of color. I had to do my own investigations to uncover these details about these women, though. As each of these women are still alive at the time this research is being done or at the time of their donation, I was able to find each of them on social media platforms like Facebook. It is only there that I learned demographic details about these women that the archival institutions did not detail. This observation is not to say that racial, ethnic, or class identity determines the significance of a collection, or that it should be the main focus of these particular artifacts. However, demographic information within archival labels and descriptions can allow readers to fully understand the significance, meaning, and makeup of the collections. This information must be handled precisely in order to account for the archival gaps within the collections.¹⁷³ This thesis was able to learn how white women built and maintained

173. Jimerson, Randall C. "Archives and Memory." *OCLC Systems & Services: International Digital Library Perspectives* 19, no. 3 (2003): 89-95. doi:10.1108/10650750310490289.

their communities in the South, but there is still much more to discover about the archival contents and collections of women of color that are blatantly missing from the archival institution.

Although these collections provide this thesis with necessary definitions of community and the rhetoric of community building, they are certainly not all encompassing. It is necessary to point out that none of the collections were from women of color, particularly from Black lesbians, who, as discussed in the literature review, provide a new perspective to archives that counters “denied memory.” Richardson reminds, Black lesbians are left out of archival institutions, queer archival spaces, and even Black archival spaces.¹⁷⁴ The exclusion of Black lesbians within the collections is alarming and indicative of the need for not only additional rhetorical research, but continued interventions of the institutional archival space. This is the case especially when considering that Black artists, activists, and other lesbian figures were indeed mentioned or documented in each archival collection by the collection itself. There were Black lesbians engaging with T.L.C., performing at events that T.L.C. was promoting, Black lesbian activists documented in Strong’s scrapbook, and activism workshops in Ragona’s collection that were explicitly anti-racist. Despite Black lesbians undeniably being a part of these community building efforts and movements, their personal collections have yet to make it into the archival spaces of Birmingham Public Library or the University of Alabama.

Lastly, even though these collections faced their own obstacles getting into archival spaces, the women that originally curated these documents had some level of status or public awareness that helped them do so. Sandi Strong was a leading activist that coordinated a group

174. Richardson, Matt. *Queer Limit of Black Memory: Black Lesbian Literature and Irresolution*. Ohio State Univ Press, 2016.

of Alabamians to the 1987 March on Washington. Rose Gladney, the woman who kept and donated T.L.C.'s documents, worked at the University of Alabama as a professor. Reverend Marjorie Ragona was a Christian leader, academic, and outspoken AIDS activist in the south alongside her partner. These women were prominent in their communities, allowing them to even be thought about when archival institutions or community organizations were seeking LGBTQ+ artifacts. Their lesbian identity was their biggest obstacle in being remembered, even with their status. Due to this, we must consider the LGBTQ+ people that do not even have that opportunity. As we continue working to construct a more clear picture of the queer South and the community that continues to be built, we must find ways in archival theory and practice to document and remember those without any public "status" at all. Those living unhoused, closeted, and without resources such as academics or online access to tell their stories, and get them into an archive.

Putting It All Together

The findings from the collections also further justify the importance of a lesbian specific lens, as the lesbians within the collections utilized rhetoric that proved to be just as concerned about empathy, emotion, trauma, love, and sexuality as much as this lens was going into the archives. The documents within the collections could have been utilized as scholarly sources on their own as many of the manuals, newsletters, or workshops allowed me as the archival reader to better understand what I was researching and understanding about lesbian experiences. Previous research enabled me to understand that these distinct characteristics would make up the noteworthy aspects of the collections, what had been traditionally kept out of institutional archives. The collections themselves allowed me to understand how these characteristics were thought of by lesbians throughout time, and how they utilized these to build community. As the

collections can and should be read through lenses of empathy, radicalism, and other lesbian specific memory traits, the researcher can also see these same lenses that lesbians were applying to their present day activism, engagement and communication.

The value of focusing on community building amongst lesbians in the collections allowed me to construct a community between these collections. Utilizing research from archival scholars that acknowledged my role as the archival reader also allowed and validated me to do so – as I felt I had the knowledge and justification to analyze these collections in a way that took into account *all* factors in finding this community. Strong’s collection had no relation to Ragona or TLC’s collection, and yet, by reading through the contents in Ragona’s collection, I could make better sense of some of the rhetoric within Strong’s scrapbook. I could get a better feel for how lesbians were feeling towards the world and each other. I could also make sense of why they chose some of the rhetoric they chose in their activism or community building efforts. For example, in Ragona’s artifacts *Sex Play* and *The Woman Identified Woman*, the articles discuss the ways women have been categorized and defined by their relationship to men, their abilities to be mothers, and their abilities to uphold and maintain capitalism and patriarchy. They discuss how a lesbian rejects the hegemonic patriarchy through her identity alone, making lesbian the ultimate “insult” to women. In this manual, be a lesbian, in a man’s eye, is to not be a woman at all – because you do not bear his children, you do not provide him with sex, you do not fulfil your role in the system, paralleling previous analyses on lesbian identity.¹⁷⁵ However, in Strong’s collection, lesbians are seen frequently parading and celebrating both their lesbian identity and their motherhood. We already analyzed how this celebration subverts norms by forcing

175. Rubin, Gayle S. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." *Culture, Society and Sexuality*, 2007, 166. doi:10.4324/9780203966105-21

previously private sphere identities to the public sphere, but Ragona's collection adds another twist to their rhetoric. These women are reclaiming their motherhood as something that can coexist with their lesbian identity, not something that must exist within patriarchy or men at their side. By reclaiming their motherhood loudly and in public, they seek to motivate other women to do the same – to know that nothing apart of their identity has to be defined, categorized, or policed by men.

Although many of the artifacts within these cases fit the emotional archive rhetoric described by Cvetkovich as uniquely lesbian, or the private sphere rhetoric discussed by Beck, there were also differences in my own observations. These differences highlight the complexities of lesbian archival collections, and the dire need to continue reading and writing about them. Initially, in addition to the emotional or intimate rhetoric specific to lesbians present within these collections, there were also artifacts that showcased the mundane, academic, or public governmental artifacts that had been traditionally kept in institutional archives. The only thing then putting these documents in a lesbian specific archive collection is they belonged to women who were not deemed institutionally relevant due to their lesbian identity.¹⁷⁶ Despite Ragona, Strong, and the founding members of T.L.C. (Gladney and Winter), being prominent activists within their communities, their collections were not being sought by any institutional archive. And yet, they held onto them. Each of these collections would have never made it into an archival space if these women didn't feel it was necessary to document their lives when no one else was documenting lesbian history and memories. None of these collections would be in an

176. Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Duke University Press, 2019.

archive if it were not for queer archivist and activist didn't find these women and fight for their collections to be put into archival spaces.

As members of the counter-publics that existed through being ignored and erased in public memory, anything that related to a lesbian was not fit for an archive. Academic papers, tax forms, mail, notes, and other non-intimate items were present within these collections. This suggests that lesbians were holding on to every piece of their lives, the mundane, the boring, the sexy, the interesting, all of it, for dear life. All of it- no matter how ordinary- was deviant. They were grabbing onto every part of their experiences, just hoping there might be someone to pass it down to one day. Desperately trying to be remembered, but not in a panicked way. They had hope that holding onto these documents would matter. Grasping at anything that would keep their name, their memory, their legacy, within some kind of public memory. Perhaps they were building community simply so there would be someone to remember them at all. Maybe they were building community for their own safety, support, and care. Or, maybe they were wanting a community and public for the lesbians that would come after them. Maybe it was all of these.

Through this realization, it is crucial archival institutions begin to utilize the practices and values of not only community archives, but community archives that actively strive to include the voices of marginalized groups in the ways that group would have liked to be remembered. Archival research and theory still battles the conversations surrounding what makes an archive an archive, and these questions are certainly still important to discuss thoroughly.¹⁷⁷ As certainly not just anything can be an archive, because then nothing is. However, these discussions must think about who is being included within these conversations, who is being listened to, and who

177. Bastian, Jeannette A. "The Records of Memory, the Archives of Identity: Celebrations, Texts and Archival Sensibilities." *Archival Science* 13, no. 2-3 (2012): 121-31. doi:10.1007/s10502-012-9184-3.

is taken seriously. Additionally, archival theory would benefit deeply from turning to rhetorical theory and research for some of these conversations. Archives, in every step of their process, are rhetorical.¹⁷⁸ But even beyond that, rhetoric of public memory and public spheres is still fleshing out the various publics and therefore memories that exist within a society, as well as the rhetoric that goes behind determining these.¹⁷⁹ If an archive's purpose is to represent the values and memory of a given society, it must adequately understand what that public does or does not look like, and who is or is not being documented as a result. How can we make decisions on what represents a community, society, or public sphere values, if even our ideas of publics is still needing to be critiqued?

Including rhetorical work into archival practices would also help even the community archives that are aiming to be more inclusive and encompassing of a given group. Through Squires research of the Black public sphere, Richardson's research into Black queer memory, and Johnsons' research into the Black queer south, this analysis was able to more clearly understand the voices that were and were not being represented. Squires and Richardson detail the ways Black queer people, and especially Black lesbians, are consistently left behind in interventions of public memory or archival spaces.¹⁸⁰ Queer archivists and community archival organizations can and should take into account Black queer research that investigates how these

178. Enoch, Jessica, and Pamela VanHaitsma. "Archival Literacy: Reading the Rhetoric of Digital Archives in the Undergraduate Classroom." *College Composition and Communication* (2015): 218

179. Squires, Catherine R. "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres." *Communication Theory* 12, no. 4 (2002): 446-68. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00278.x.

180. Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere," 446-468 | Johnson, E. Patrick. *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. 5.

exclusions happen in public spheres, archival spaces, and memory so that they can ensure their archive does not allow that to happen. Researchers must continue utilizing this research when analyzing archives or archival artifacts in order to get the full picture of what is missing in the archival gaps.¹⁸¹ Community archives are a substantial response to the exclusion within institutional archives and institutionalized memory, but they are only truly combatting this exclusion if they too are actively fighting against their own exclusions and biases. Community archives should analyze their own collections and collection demographics to understand whose memories are still underrepresented.

The differences between institutional and community archives were apparent in these collections, corroborating the need for institutional archives to become more accessible and self-reflective. Although each of them were technically housed in institutional settings, Birmingham Public Library's archive department was partnered with Invisible Histories Project to keep this collection alive. The public nature of the library also made this institutional setting much more welcoming and accessible. Alongside utilizing rhetorical research for more inclusive archival practices in what the archives include, institutional archives must consider how and why they gatekeep certain artifacts and information.¹⁸² Beyond what the institution considers valuable to remember, it is crucial to ask what keeping these records of the public is for, if not to educate and inform that same public of their past?

181. Jimerson, Randall C. "Archives and Memory." *OCLC Systems & Services: International Digital Library Perspectives* 19, no. 3 (2003): 89-95. doi:10.1108/10650750310490289.

182. Schwartz, Joan M., and Terry Cook. "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory." *Archival Science* 2, no. 1-2 (2002): 1-19. doi:10.1007/bf02435628.

Remembering Strong, T.L.C., and Ragona

As the stories, memories, and lives of lesbians continue to work their way into spaces that have shut them out, we as scholars and community members can continue using their same methods of community building and advocacy to make that process easier. One tangible step is to continue the community building process that these collections started, by cementing them into public memory spaces for others to access. The personalities, identities, and lives of Sandi Strong, Rose Gladney and Marcia Winter (founders of T.L.C.), and Reverend Marjorie Ragona are noticeably missing from their collections. As women who made such an impact on the lesbian community around them in Alabama in the 1970s to early 2000's (and still today), they are unrecognized in how we remember Southern queer history. Their archival directories provide a brief, small paragraph explaining why their collection exists, but not much else. BPL doesn't have a list of its LGBTQ collections it comes up a nothing found page. Even web-based searching doesn't produce helpful information on these lesbian community leaders. Presumably their memory lives on amid lesbian communities throughout the Southeast but these dedicated community-builders are surprisingly absent in the archival records they helped to create. Despite none of the women showing up adequately in any Google search, Wikipedia page, or even the archival directories they are a part of, they undoubtedly made an impact on countless lesbians throughout the South.

In order to increase visibility, accessibility, and knowledge about these women and the communities they built (and continue to build), I am putting together a Wikipedia page that will describe these women, their contributions to the South and LGBTQ+ people, and where people can learn more about them. This last and momentous step of this project allows these collections to continue building community even outside of the archives, and is another effort to push

lesbian memories into the public where they deserve. In research, Wikipedia is often credited for how it is “democratizing knowledge,” while also being critiqued for promoting an often “dominant” narrative of the “Global North.”¹⁸³ However, research has also found the subversive benefits of utilizing Wikipedia and creating Wikipedia pages in order to subvert dominant narratives.¹⁸⁴ Doing this allows typically marginalized stories or voices to be heard without barriers to access, while also disrupting dominant narratives that have excluded them, and then allowing others to learn from and about those stories. Due to this, including these collections could have a valuable impact in dominant conversations surrounding LGBTQ+ rights, feminism, public memory, and history. Wikipedia is accessible to all, an archive in the internet that strives to get information out to the masses, by the masses. We can use this as an opportunity to remember these women, and spread the knowledge and community that was so important to them.

There will always be more work that needs to be done in theory, practice, and research. The community definitions and building strategies found within these archival collections are just a starting point – these are just three of the countless lesbians who made an impact on their community through this same time period. It can be easy to dwell on the erasures and continued lack of acknowledgement of lesbians especially in the south, but there is also meaningful, extensive work being done right now that we can and need to focus on and uplift. Thankfully, organizations such as the Black Lesbian Archives exist that archival researchers and activists must support, engage with, and understand. The Black Lesbian Archives are still growing, and

183. Timperley, Claire. “The Subversive Potential of Wikipedia: A Resource for Diversifying Political Science Content Online.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 53, no. 3 (2020): 556–60. doi:10.1017/S1049096520000013.

184. Timperley, “The Subversive Potential of Wikipedia,” 556-560.

only cover the West Coast right now, but they offer a wide range of digitized collections to promote accessibility. Invisible Histories Project, which I would have never known about the collections within this thesis if it were not for their work, is continuing to expand to not only include more memories the south, but is sharing these stories across the country. Likewise, scholarly research is diving into the special elements of lesbian archival works and practices, giving us hope for a future of public memory that acknowledges and celebrates all of the remarkable and noteworthy details of lesbian existence. Through each analysis, memory intervention, archival showcase, or mere conversation surrounding these collections and others like them, we continue to the community building efforts these women were so optimistically focused on. Affirming that indeed we are everywhere.

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