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Harold, They're Lesbians!: Interrogating and Understanding the Histories of "Lesbians"¹

Chloe Sheraden

December 8, 2018

Dr. Brodie and Dr. Daggar

¹ "Explained: Harold, they're lesbians meme," *Meme Documentation*, accessed November 26, 2018, <https://memedocumentation.tumblr.com/post/136322720365/explained-harold-theyre-lesbians-meme>.

Sexual intercourse between humans who share similar genitalia has been happening throughout the existence of humankind. One's perception of a gender identity, sexual identity, romantic identity have been evolving for just as long, hiding in sexually segregated institutions, heterosexual marriages, and even in plain sight. The advent of sexology and the construction of sexuality in the late 20th century allowed for a public discourse on sexuality using terms crafted by these sexologists.² As more intersections of identity are introduced into the social, cultural, and historical understandings of sexuality, more nuanced conceptualizations of LGBTQ populations are given space within today's society. I believe this directly influences the LGBTQ community's desire to assert the historical presence of LGBTQ individuals with these current understandings of identity and thus is the fascination of examining the past to liberate historical characters from the "closet." Perhaps, for the LGBTQ community, this establishes a queer continuity throughout culture and time, or perhaps they wish to out individuals who were enacting abuses and traumas against other "LGBTQ" populations.³ I believe this is problematic for a number of reasons; first, identifying individuals posthumously as a part of the LGBTQ community is anachronistic. Second, in most cases, historians and others are reading in between the lines of records left behind by their token "queer" historical figure looking for a "smoking gun" with a 21st century sexual vocabulary. Third and finally, we are stripping these individuals of their consent and outing them unethically without thinking of the descendants of these individuals who may be shocked, traumatized, and threatened by the outing of their ancestors. Throughout this research, I aim to engage with and present the history of sexuality, specifically

² Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 76-77.

³ GLSEN believes that providing LGBTQ individuals with the support of their predecessors allows for a better understanding of today's LGBTQ population and the nuances present throughout the world. GLSEN, "Positively representing LGBTQ topics in the history curriculum improves student experiences," *LGBTQ History*, accessed December 10, 2018, <https://www.glsen.org/article/lgbtq-history-1>.

lesbians and women who loved women from 1880-1950 in the US, and determine the extent to which we can attempt to understand their sexualities, if at all. By engaging in sexological research, popular culture, present historical research on lesbians, popular understandings of lesbians during 1880-1950, and specific case studies of two women participating in same-sex relationships, Angelina Weld Grimke and Edythe Eyde, I aim to present a way to engage in the desired historical narrative of the “lesbian,” without making the three faux-pas’ I have identified above. I hope that by using this breadth of sources, I will be able to present new suggestions and methodologies for researching and interpreting the histories of the homosexual woman in the US from 1880 through 1950.

Review of Sexological Research

Sexologists found themselves tasked by their societies and themselves with answering questions, mostly from individuals who did not understand this phenomenon or have same sex sexual partners. These questions included how to identify inverted women, what makes them lesbians, and how they can become lesbians. Three well-known sexologists include Havelock Ellis, Richard Freiherr Krafft-Ebing, and later Sigmund Freud, who mostly focused on the psychological aspects of inversion. These three men came up with a variety of theories relevant to the research I am pursuing.⁴

Ellis’ theorizes that some women *become* homosexual through exposure to other dominant and imposing lesbians, “-homosexuality, while fairly distinct, is only slightly marked, is formed by the women to whom the actively inverted woman is most attracted...they are not

⁴ Richard Freiherr Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (New York: Rebman Company, 1906).
Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 1903).
Sigmund Freud, “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Female Homosexuality,” in *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 1 (1920).

repelled or disgusted by lover-like advances from persons of their own sex."⁵ For other women, however, this homosexual behavior is already innate in their being because they are born inverted.⁶ Ellis would examine his inverted patients or use other physicians' case studies to determine the physical characteristics of sexual inverts. In some cases, there would be a focus completely on a woman's genitals, but in other cases, there would merely be observations of a sexually or congenitally inverted body.⁷ Ellis supplements his claims regarding the physical and mental states of adult homosexual and inverted women by discussing young women's experiences within same-sex institutions, where they temporarily grow into a homosexual mindset. The homosexual woman develops a strong friendship with one woman and she will never be without her, or at least not thinking about her; she becomes devoted, but there is no sexual fulfillment or satisfaction.⁸ However, homosexual tendencies presented solely during schooling is different from inversion presented later in life, "While there is an unquestionable sexual element in the "flame" relationship, this cannot be regarded as an absolute expression of real congenital perversion...on leaving college to enter social life, the girl usually ceases to feel

⁵ Ellis, 133

⁶ "The muscles are everywhere firm, with a comparative absence of soft connective tissue; so that an inverted woman may give an unfeminine impression to the sense of touch. Not only is the tone of the voice often different, but there is reason to suppose that this rests on a basis of anatomical modification... Flatau examined the larynx in a large number of inverted woman, and found in several a very decidedly masculine type of larynx, or an approach to it, especially in cases of distinctly congenital origin." Ellis, 144

⁷ One of Ellis' main case studies is "Case XL" of Miss M. aged 29. He utilized her entire history, from birth: romantic, sexual, mental health, physical health. She was small at birth, wore boys' clothing, did not care for dolls or sewing, and always felt different. Around the age of 8 or 9, she remembers being strongly attracted to a teacher's face, although she never had a chance to interact with her. She does not seem to be in a current relationship but she does seem very guarded when she reveals her feelings to friends. This study is in extreme depth and even includes a detailed physical examination of Miss M.'s entire body and genitalia by an obstetrician.

Havelock Ellis, "Case XL," in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 1903), 134-137.

His other case study, which seems to be supplementary, is from Albert Moll's observations in his 1899 *Konträre Sexualempfindung*. Moll reports a woman, 26, who has been in a relationship with a woman for the past 7 years and had been practicing mutual cunnilingus since she was young and recognized her attraction to the same sex at the age of six.

Ellis, 145-146.

⁸ Ellis, 131-132.

these emotions.”⁹ These relationships are convenient, brief, and mostly inspired by the excitement of seeing one’s flame.¹⁰ Ellis acknowledges that there is little space devoted to the research of sexual inversion in women, which he attributes to the lack of punishment for women’s sexual inversion, society’s acceptance of intimate friendships between women, the conditioning of women to be quiet about all sex, and women’s bodies are less likely to be affected by extreme variations of inversion.¹¹ Ellis fails to elaborate on this last conclusion, which is the most scientific theory he provides, thus poking holes through his argument. Additionally, he does not provide a strong formula wherein one can understand the reasoning behind sexual inversion or homosexuality.¹²

Krafft-Ebing, similarly, believes that he must research the existence of the homosexual behavior within women because there is little research to support the existence of homosexual women. He introduces similar reasons for the lack of representation of homosexual women within their society. First, sexual intercourse between women is not a crime; second, it is harder to gain the confidence of women who engage in deviant sexualities; third, one cannot determine a woman’s inversion based on impotency like one can with men; and fourth, women are passive in their attempt to find other inverts. When an inverted woman finds another woman she can

⁹ Havelock Ellis, “The School-Friendships of Girls,” in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 1903), 249-250.

¹⁰ The relationships start out as brief sightings, turning into courtships, and finally a relationship. The girls exchange romantic letters, which are mostly romantic and not sexual. They are formed out of convenience for the school-girls’ sexual satisfaction. One of Ellis’ collaborators believes that college girls would be engaging in sexual and romantic relationships no matter the gender; these relationships occupy time, keep the girls from loneliness, and provide happiness. I would also argue that they provide a level of social capital that a school-girl could not obtain in authoritarian, confining environments such as boarding schools.

Ellis, “The School-Friendships of Girls,” 246.

¹¹ Ellis, 121-122.

¹² Another interesting aspect to Ellis’ research, is his wife, Edith, was openly homosexual and engaged in affairs with women while married to Ellis. Perhaps this gives Ellis a greater motivation to understand the causes of inversion within women to find “a cure” or to establish a greater understanding of his wife and her sexuality. “Edith Mary Oldham Lees Ellis,” *Art and Popular Culture*, accessed December 10, 2018, http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Edith_Ellis.

have a romantic and sexual relationship with, it is assumed they are just close friends.¹³ Krafft-Ebing outlines different scenarios wherein homosexuality can occur. Constitutional hypersexuality leads to masturbation, situational hypersexuality leads to masturbation and homosexual sex, wives of impotent men, and prostitutes who are tired of engaging in sex with repugnant men attempt to gain restitution by engaging in homosexual sex.¹⁴ Krafft-Ebing claims that most homosexual women did not have physical sexual characteristics of men, nor did they have the desire to present as men. However, homosexual women who did have masculine physical characteristics, such as the larynx, preferred to dress and perform as men.¹⁵ He categorizes the variety of women who fit into congenital sexual inversion: psychohermaphroditic, homosexualist, viraginity, and hermaphroditism.¹⁶ Krafft-Ebing's theories of congenital sexual inversion do not allow for the femme lesbian, which can be factored into Ellis' theory.¹⁷

Sigmund Freud also focuses on the lack of representation of women within psychoanalytic research, as well as the law. He asserts that physical hermaphroditism is completely independent of psychological hermaphroditism, which leads him into his case study of a young woman, whose inversion incorporates these separate identities.¹⁸ However, when she was

¹³ Krafft-Ebing, 262.

¹⁴ Krafft-Ebing, 263.

¹⁵ Krafft-Ebing, 263-264.

¹⁶ While Krafft-Ebing fails to implicitly define stages 3 and 4, he states that these stages are the later stages (viraginity, and hermaphroditism) of opposite-gender performativity and homosexuality, wherein an artificial penis is utilized during sex.

Krafft-Ebing, 263-264.

¹⁷ Krafft-Ebing claims that homosexuals, for the most part, do not have masculine physical characteristics, nor do they have the desire to dress as the opposite sex. However, he also includes the research of Flautau (who's research is also referenced in Ellis' research on page 144) who claims that several women of a sample of 23 homosexual women had masculine larynx's, which he claims is the transition to male presentation and dress.

Krafft-Ebing, 263-264.

¹⁸ In examining his subject, Freud searches for contributing factors that caused her inversion, while also discounting other common theories including the Oedipus complex, sexual trauma, and the birth of her second brother, which did not affect her inversion. Sigmund Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Female Homosexuality," in *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 1 (1920), 132-133.

five, she compared her genitalia with that of her brother.¹⁹ Freud believes his analysis of her could have gone deeper, which presents an issue, because he is already finding that his patient is only just slightly presenting with onanism.²⁰ She continued to perform and exist in the ways girls were expected until her mother had another pregnancy resulting in the birth of her third brother. Freud claims she lost her libido inspired by motherhood and became a homosexual attracted to mature women.²¹ She becomes the man in her own life and searches for a mother love-object to replace her rejection of her father love-object. She later faces the rejection of her father again once he shows his disapproval of her heterosexually homosexual relationship; here she attempts suicide, which Freud believes is the final action of her revenge on her parents. By killing herself, Freud presupposes that she is killing her father, but more likely her mother.²² She survives and Freud continues his analysis of sexuality using her examples further, but he has several holes throughout his argument including his inability to get a complete analysis out of his subject, therefore all of his presuppositions about his subject's sexuality might be faulty.

Sexology in Popular Culture

Women who have (or may have) engaged in same sex sexual relationships are not represented because not much is known about them. There is no uniform way to look at women's sex lives, especially with other women, because before the advent of sexuality by sexologists,

¹⁹ Freud, 133.

²⁰ Freud, 133

²¹ Freud asserts that the subject replaced her mother and her first love-object, her brother, with women she met on vacations. She replaced the mother love-fixation with a more sensible and compatible love interest, who looked like her brother; she fulfilled her homosexual interests with her infatuation of the masculine, thus allowing her to combine her heterosexuality with her homosexuality. An important facet of Freud's analysis is his request for others not to simplify the general bisexuality present within humans by creating a streamlined genesis of inversion and with this reminder, he questions how one would go about determining whether the birth of the subject's third brother caused her inversion. His response to this is that she actually began to compete with her mother for the love and impregnation of her own father, reliving her Oedipus complex once she started her period. Once her mother gave birth to her father's child, she exhibits male performativity by rejecting her family, her desire to bear a child, her love of men, and her feminine identity.

Freud 133-136.

²² 139-140.

there was no discourse on women in that capacity. Women then, and still are, able to hide under the pretense of strong friendships and other seemingly platonic interactions.²³ By engaging in a survey of sexological analyses, sexual histories, and art created throughout the period of this research, I believe I will be able to better understand and represent these women by discussing their lives, in addition to the potential romantic and/or sexual relationships they had. By entering into a discourse on the history of women's sexuality in the US from 1880-1950, I hope to be able to discuss the ways in which women engaged in sexual relations, how they were discussed, how they were outed, and how we discuss them today. The goal of this research is to discuss and engage in new and various methods of discussing about queer women's sexuality.

This research bases itself in the notion that the United States of America has failed its lesbian population by failing to insert, properly, lesbians in a variety of ways into a proper discourse.²⁴ Through examining the perception, actions, and existences of lesbians from 1880 through the early 1950s, this research aims to acknowledge the ways in which women with different sexualities have been ostracized and forgotten by society and its historical memory, even when there has been a real attempt to remember lesbians throughout their history. Our society attempts to lay claim to women who have been rumored or are even known to have loved other women as lesbians. This is factually inaccurate as they never identified as lesbians while

²³ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in 20th Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 4-6.

²⁴ Americans were much less willing to discuss sexual matters in public, which was furthered by the creation of the Comstock Laws, preventing distribution of vulgar material. Amy Stone and Jamie Cantrell also discuss the necessity for LGBT archives that represent LGBT history. There is an issue of the LGBT community being hidden from history, as well as the issue that presents itself upon entering an archives: there are commonly records of suppression and violence against the community. They claim that in order for the archives to properly represent the community, one must use these stories of suppression and violence and turn them into a process of recovery and justice, recognizing the concept of the cultural memory within the archive.

Amy L. Stone and Jaime Cantrell, "Introduction," in *Out of the Closet, into the Archives* eds. Amy L. Stone and Jaime Cantrell (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), 1-4.

Susan Ferentinos, *Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 56-57.

they existed and they cannot identify with the lesbian experience, as it is understood today or even twenty years ago. The late 19th century into the early 20th century sees the advent of sexology, wherein men tasked themselves with understanding why women became lesbians and how one could identify the “warning signs” and physical markers of a lesbian.²⁵ For the first time, women finally have a concrete term to identify themselves and their communities and thus a proliferation of media focused on bringing women who loved women into a public discourse, making their identities even more accessible.

This new terminology initiates changes throughout the seventy-year period this research covers, ending in the 1950s. It is at this time that McCarthyism is introduced into the social and political spheres wherein all gay and lesbian individuals were targeted for their failure to remain within the heterosexual norm, thus making the gay and lesbian populations threats to the government.²⁶ The unjust targeting of the gay and lesbian population prompted large public discourses on gays and lesbians, thus allowing the population to form communities unlike ever before and actively resist against their governing body. This eventually led to massive and widespread fights for civil rights, culminating in the Stonewall Riots, thus providing lesbians and gays with venues to meet, form communities, and protest. This allowed the gay and lesbian community to introduce themselves into a public discourse, coming out of hiding more so than ever before, as lesbians.²⁷ This research is within the period of the 1880s through the 1950s

²⁵ Richard Freiherr Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (New York: Rebman Company, 1906).
Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 1903).

²⁶ James Darsey, "A Vision of the Apocalypse: Joe McCarthy's Rhetoric of the Fantastic," in *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*, 128-50 (New York; London: NYU Press, 1997)
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfckh.10>, 139.

²⁷ "Stonewall Riots," *History*, accessed November 17, 2018, <https://www.history.com/topics/gay-rights/the-stonewall-riots>.

because women could no longer disguise sexual and romantic relationships as merely friendships but as inverted women, without large communities bonding and resisting over a shared identity.

Sexology in Public Discourse

These sexologists established cases and reasons for the inversion of women, and although, in most cases, it appears as if they view women's sexualities as being innate in origin, that is, they are born as lesbians. However, there is the stipulation that in certain cases, as discussed by all three men, lesbianism can be prevented when one sees a young girl becoming susceptible to an older, more powerful lesbian.²⁸ These sexological notions were incorporated into the quotidian life, leading to the incorporation of sexology becoming present in popular culture and wider popular discourses.

For instance, in Edouard Bourdet's 1926 play *The Captive*, Irene, the protagonist, attempts to become strictly heterosexual in nature during her marriage to her fiancé then husband, Jacques. However, she ultimately fails and continues to return to a woman who draws her into an ongoing sexual relationship before and during her marriage. Although this play can be interpreted in many ways, one can observe the ways in which Bourdet reflected upon the revelations and research done by the sexologists, and perhaps relationships he had seen throughout his life between women.²⁹ The play was shut down and taken off Broadway, because the entire cast was arrested for being immoral.³⁰ The treatment of these works as immoral fails to

²⁸ Havelock Ellis, "The School-Friendships of Girls," *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 1903), 246-248.

Richard Freiherr Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (New York: Rebman Company, 1906), 262-264.

²⁹ Édouard Bourdet, *The Captive*, translated by Arthur Hornblow Jr, 1926, in *Forbidden Acts: Pioneering Gay and Lesbian Plays of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Ben Hodges (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp, 2003).

³⁰ Michael Abernethy, "Edouard Bourdet's Lesbian Play, 'The Captive', Was Certainly Captive of its Time," October 5, 2015, <https://www.popmatters.com/edouard-bourdet-s-lesbian-play-the-captive-was-certainly-captive-of-its-time-2495490331.html>.

give those who identify as Irene or Madame D'Aiguines representation, which will perpetuate the self-hatred shown in these works.

Further evidence of this is in Leontine Sagan's 1931 film, *Mädchen in Uniform*; this film follows Manuela, a young teen entering a new environment at a boarding school run by an authoritarian headmistress. Manuela develops love for one of her teachers, Fräulein von Bernburg. This love for von Bernburg grows and Manuela eventually confesses her love, which is met with the ostracizing of Manuela from her peers and indefinitely from Fräulein von Bernburg. Overcome with grief, Manuela tries to kill herself, but is ultimately saved by von Bernburg. This divide between the authoritarian and the lesbian has a myriad of implications, mostly stating that there are and have been small revolutions against power for the freedom for women to love other women, although from the basis of the film, it appears as if they have never been overwhelmingly successful.³¹ However, this also ties into Ellis' theory of schoolgirls focusing all their passions on one woman, an older and powerful one.³²

Finally, is Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. This text covers the life of Steven Gordon, a woman who is dressed as a man throughout her life, because her parents wanted a boy. Throughout her life, she fell in love with women, including a maid for the household, Collins, and their neighbor, Angela Crossby. Her father did research on this, consulting a text from sexologist Karl Ulrich, understanding that Steven is an invert. Throughout the rest of her life, Steven is in relationships that do not work because of her internalized hatred for herself and that which is projected from sexological discourses. The use of the invert in *The Well of Loneliness* is made to echo the same findings the sexologists mentioned above discuss, such as sexual

³¹ *Mädchen in Uniform*, directed by Leontine Sagan, 1931.

³² Havelock Ellis, "The School-Friendships of Girls," *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 1903), 254-257.

inversion and hermaphroditism, which affects the ways in which one chooses sexual partners, dresses, acts, and even thinks. Most of the patients and subjects for the sexologists outlined similar issues that Steven faces; women were always leaving them for men, the relationships were not long or good, and they usually expressed an intense feeling of discomfort and otherness.³³ *The Well of Loneliness* also faced criticism which led to the book being banned in Great Britain, due to fears of “experimentation,” which could have led to a “national disaster.”³⁴ This is, once again, a tragedy for the communities of individuals who identified as homosexuals during the release and subsequent banning of the book because they are not seeing representation, but demonization of their sexuality. However, for both *The Captive* and *The Well of Loneliness*, there were public discourses surrounding these events wherein homosexuals could hear information, and perhaps consume the literary works.

Popular and Intellectual Conceptualizations of the Lesbian

These three examples are unfortunate circumstances wherein lesbians, inverted women, and other women who pursued same-sex relationships ultimately failed, feeling and becoming a captive to their feelings, returning to loneliness, or becoming one uniformed girl, who cannot stray from the heterosexual norm without severe punishment. The added public discourse, which claimed these works were indecent individuals made by depraved individuals, drove lesbians and other women to consume these media and see, for the first time, people who identified and loved the way they did. Unfortunately, this representation was negative and obviously resulted in the concept of the failed lesbian. However, these representations, unlike the sexologists, allowed for and showed representations of a myriad of lesbians including feminine lesbians, lesbians who

³³ Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2014).

³⁴ David Smith, “Lesbian novel was 'danger to nation',” *The Guardian*, January 1, 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/jan/02/books.gayrights>.

had (potentially) not realized their lesbian existence, and lesbians who were masculine. This section will aim to address and understand the popular and intellectual comprehension of the lesbian throughout the scope of this research. Obviously, there are many more kinds of lesbians, just as there are many kinds of humans, but this is important for girls and women alike, who are given, for the first time, a tangible and accessible portrait of lesbians. This was the 1920s and 1930s, and this is the first time lesbians are truly seen as who they are throughout popular culture and this is extremely important for the realization of entire communities of women who identify within the spectrum of lesbianism.

This concept of the spectrum of lesbianism is important, as there are a myriad of ways that women have identified and have been identified throughout their existence. Before the advent of sexology, however, there was virtually no work to label or identify lesbians. The terminology in this research is important. Firstly, because there is often a reliance to claim women as lesbians, no matter what period in which they lived. The term lesbian was first used along with another term for women who engage in same sex sexual acts, tribades, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, in 1732, but was not used again until after the advent of sexuality, in 1895.³⁵ There are, as I have already discussed, many words to describe lesbians and their sex acts. This includes tribadism, the act of a woman rubbing her genitals on another woman's body as a means to achieve sexual satisfaction.³⁶ As stated above, there are the different classifications of a woman who is sexually attracted to another woman. Women's sexuality is well forgotten because women could, prior to the advent of sexology and sexuality,

³⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, c.v. *lesbian*, accessed November 20, 2018, <http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/107453>.

Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1998), 59-65.

³⁶ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1998), 59-60.

disguise their relationships under the guise of strong female friendships.³⁷ They engaged in strong female friendships, wherein they could hide their relationships without further questions. There is a strong history of women, including Charity Bryant and Sylvia Drake, who, according to Rachel Hope Cleves, existed in an “open closet.” This is a phenomenon coined by Cleves, wherein individuals of one’s society did not look into the relationship further than just a strong friendship.³⁸ Another phenomenon is the Boston marriage; if women were abandoned by their husbands or were unable to exist as a heterosexual, they would live together, reliant on the support of each other to remain stable and secure. It is unclear how many cases existed where lesbians configured Boston marriages for sexual relationships; however, for most women in Boston marriages, there was an emotional and romantic component to the living situation.³⁹

As referenced throughout this research, the ways that women loved each other changed throughout the progression of sex, sexology, and sexuality. This was also different from region to region. For instance, during the Harlem Renaissance the United States halted immigration after World War I and factories required a labor force; many people of color chose to migrate en masse to the North to participate in this burgeoning labor force. Many cities were the site of the Great Migration, but Harlem was unique and fostered a stronger sense of community and allowed for a blend of various racial, cultural, ethnic, and sexual identities. As it was harder to be a black homosexual, black homosexuals established their own community as the “New Negroes” in Harlem. Through looking at media produced, from literary works to songs, Eric Garber was able to contextualize this community and the ways in which lesbian and gay black men in

³⁷ This sentiment is present in the sexological research seen earlier in the research.

³⁸ Charity and Sylvia well-respected women in their small Vermont community in the late 18th century into the early 20th century. Through reading their letters and documents in Middlebury College’s archives, Cleves concludes that they were married in every way except legally. Rachel Hope Cleves, *Charity and Sylvia: A Same-Sex Marriage in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), xii-xiii.

³⁹ Susan Ferentinos, *Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 53-54.

Harlem turned their self-image and perception of their sexuality into art and forms of resistance. This, in turn, became a white-populated space as well, in both the physical place and people consuming the media. While white gays and lesbians were referred to as merely homosexuals, black gays and lesbians struggled with monikers such as bull dyke and faggot.⁴⁰ Perhaps this is why black individuals like Angelina Weld Grimke hid their identities and wove them into their works. For Grimke, a noted poet, her potential lesbian identity is hidden within her sparse poetry. Of the 173 poems she wrote throughout her life, only 31 were published.⁴¹ Her musings, notes, and other papers can be found in the Angelina Weld Grimké Collection at the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center of Howard University, but these notes are not very legible, according to Carolivia Herron.⁴²

Case Studies of Lesbianism, 1880-1950

Thus far, this research has investigated the ways in which research and history is written about female sexual inverts, female homosexuals, and lesbians, in addition to these same themes in popular culture. By applying this wealth of information into actual women who may have been sexual inverts and lesbians, I will be suggesting within this next section ways to analyze and interpret their histories and sexualities, while going through their archives, documents, papers, and musings. Sally Newman recognizes the concept of the “smoking gun,” which I believe to be a relevant means to interpreting and understanding “lesbian” history-- we are looking for juicy details of one’s sex life, intimate encounters, and grand gestures of romantic

⁴⁰ Eric Garber, “A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem,” in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, edited by Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr. (New York: The Penguin Group, 1989).

⁴¹ “Angelina Weld Grimké (1880 -1958), African-American poet, writer and teacher,” *Queers in History*, accessed November 21, 2018, <http://queerhistory.blogspot.com/2011/02/angelina-weld-grimke-1880-1958-african.html>.

⁴² Carolivia Herron, “The Introduction to The Selected Works of Angelina Weld Grimké,” *Modern American Poetry*, accessed November 21, 2018, http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/grimke/herron.htm.

love.⁴³ This does not look the same for every person and neither does the application of one's sexuality. I argue that every aspect of the lesbian, the invert, the tribade, or the romantic friendship is merely a perhaps and that is how it should be presented. These case studies are remarkably different histories of the lives of "lesbian" women and thus there are different ways "lesbian" history can be handled by those who are tasked with telling their stories.

Angelina Weld Grimke, not to be confused with Angelina Grimke Weld, her great aunt, was born in 1880 into a black family with a long history of activism, tracing back to abolitionists in the early 19th century. After her father, Archibald, gained full custody of Angelina upon her abandonment from her mother, he had high expectations for Angelina. He threatened to pull her out of school multiple times and refused to see anything less than perfection from her.⁴⁴ He was her only support system, so perhaps this is why she was so clandestine with her sexuality, among other reasons, such as the fear and policing of black individuals, even straight black individuals, as is discussed in Garber's work, "A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem."⁴⁵

Grimke is known to have two relationships/friendships with women during her schooling years, one with Mary "Mamie" Edith Karn. She wrote Mamie Karn two letters on the back of some of her class notes.⁴⁶ Another potential relationship she engaged in was with Mamie Burrill.

⁴³ Sally Newman, "The Archival Traces of Desire: Vernon Lee's Failed Sexuality and the Interpretation of Letters in Lesbian History," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. 1/2 (2005): 51-75. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3704709>.

⁴⁴ Carolivia Herron, "The Introduction to The Selected Works of Angelina Weld Grimké," *Modern American Poetry*, accessed November 21, 2018, http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/grimke/herron.htm.

⁴⁵ Eric Garber, "A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, edited by Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr. (New York: The Penguin Group, 1989).

⁴⁶ Brett Genny Beemyn, "Grimké, Angelina Weld (1880-1958)," *gbtq*, accessed November 21, 2018, http://www.gbtqarchive.com/literature/grimke_aw_L.pdf.

Not much is known about either of these relationships, besides what can be *speculated* from the poems published by Grimke and the one found letter that has been released to the public.⁴⁷

“My own darling Mamie, If you will allow me to be so familiar to call you such. I hope my darling you will not be offended if your ardent lover calls you such familiar names. . . . Oh Mamie if you only knew how my heart beats when I think of you and it yearns and pants to gaze, if only for one second upon your lovely face. If there were any trouble in this wide and wicked world from which I might shield you how gladly would I do it if it were even so great a thing as to lay down my life for you. I know you are too young now to become my wife, but I hope, darling, that in a few years you will come to me and be my love, my wife! How my brain whirls how my pulse leaps with joy and madness when I think of these two words, ‘my wife.’”⁴⁸

Her poems, with hints at same sex sexual relations, include “Caprichosa,”: “Little lady coyly shy/With deep shadows in each eye/Cast by lashes soft and long,/Tender lips just bowed for song./And I oft have dreamed the bliss/Of the nectar in one kiss. . . .”⁴⁹ Through exploring the poem, it can be better understood the ways in which Grimke viewed herself and her lovers. In

⁴⁷ Grimke does have a collection in the archives at Howard University’s Moorland-Spingarn Research Center with her manuscripts, letters, and journals, but only the finding aid is accessible online. [MSRC Staff, “Grimke Angelina.” Howard University, accessed December 7, 2018, https://dh.howard.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1082&context=finaid_manu_.](https://dh.howard.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1082&context=finaid_manu_)

⁴⁸ Carolivia Herron, “The Introduction to The Selected Works of Angelina Weld Grimké,” *Modern American Poetry*, accessed November 21, 2018, http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/grimke/herron.htm.

⁴⁹ Angelina Weld Grimke, “Caprichosa,” *Angelina Weld Grimke*, accessed November 22, 2018, http://users.telenet.be/gaston.d.haese/angelina_weld_grimke.html#Poem10.

other poems, such as “Give me your eyes,” Grimke presents a window into her life of her potential affection for women. In this poem, she uses the phrase “soft and sweet and fragrant” in relation to a person’s eyes, mouth, and hands. “Give me your eyes./I do not ask to touch/The hands of you, the mouth of you,/Soft and sweet and fragrant though they be... .”⁵⁰ Finally, in “A Triolet:” Molly raised shy eyes to me,/On an April day;/Close we stood beneath a tree,/Molly raised shy eyes to me,/Shining sweet and wistfully,/Wet and yet quite gay;/Molly raised shy eyes to me,/On an April day.”⁵¹ These poems, among a myriad of others, discuss the ways in which Grimke found love within and potentially from women.

In her play, *Rachel*, used by the NAACP, Grimke describes the life of an educated young teacher who wishes to have children. After learning about the lynching of her father and her brother, as well as the mistreatment of her young students of color, she resolves never to have children and refuses the affections of a man she loved.⁵² Throughout the reading of this play, the political and racial influences on the play are very apparent. However, there are other aspects of the play that can be brought into a discourse with other information from this research. When Freud discusses his case of a sexually inverted woman, he claims that she has two separate experiences with the Oedipus complex, first being when she is younger and the second once she reaches puberty. This second experience with the complex causes her to lose all of her interest in children, men, and she begins to perform in masculine terms, in order to reject her family, as other men did. In *Rachel*, She then refuses the man with whom she was in love because she knew

⁵⁰ Angelina Weld Grimke, “Give me your eyes,” *Angelina Weld Grimke*, accessed November 22, 2018, http://users.telenet.be/gaston.d.haese/angelina_weld_grimke.html#Poem3.

⁵¹ Angelina Weld Grimke, “A Triolet,” *Angelina Weld Grimke*, accessed November 22, 2018, http://users.telenet.be/gaston.d.haese/angelina_weld_grimke.html#Poem11.

⁵² Angelina Weld Grimke, *Rachel: A Play in Three Acts* (Boston: The Cornhill Company, 1920), accessed November 21, 2018, https://archive.org/stream/rachelplayinthre00grimrich/rachelplayinthre00grimrich_djvu.txt.

it would be too much to bear for her to be married to him and not provide him with children. This step also mirrors what Freud observes in his patient and thus Rachel (and perhaps Grimke) is showing her disgust for society and the ways in which her sexuality may not have been accepted.⁵³

Now flipping this Freudian reading completely onto Grimke, perhaps Grimke was experiencing the Oedipus complex described in Freud's patient. Perhaps this desire to never disappoint him came from her desire for his romantic love. What could be more likely, however, is this Oedipal complex began to Grimke starting with her mother abandoning her. Perhaps she did not want to disappoint her father because she felt as if she had already disappointed her mother, thus causing her to abandon her. In this case, one could read Grimke and Rachel similarly to Freud's subject. Freud outlines the rejection by the love-object of the Oedipus complex as the start for inversion. In this case, I argue that the loss of one's family is a type of pseudo-rejection. Rachel loses her family, her love-object, when her father and brother are lynched.⁵⁴ Grimke's loss of family is her abandonment by her mother. Next, according to Freud and his subject's case-study, is the abandoning the love and desire for children. Rachel literally abandons the idea of having children once she realizes the extent to which society has destroyed her family and would continue to destroy her family. In Freudian terms, her libido inspired by motherhood is destroyed by the loss of her love-object. In Grimke, this is not present, but she never has children, so perhaps *Rachel* was a way for her to publicize this abandonment. The last factor in the trauma endured by the rejection of the love-object, according to Freud, is the

⁵³ Angelina Weld Grimke, *Rachel: A Play in Three Acts* (Boston: The Cornhill Company, 1920), accessed November 21, 2018, https://archive.org/stream/rachelplayinthre00grimrich/rachelplayinthre00grimrich_djvu.txt. Sigmund Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Female Homosexuality," in *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 1 (1920).

⁵⁴ Specifically, when she *learns* they were lynched.

rejection of men. Freud's subject rejects men upon the heartbreak of her father's rejection, Rachel rejects the man she loves because her complete lack of desire to bring more black children into the world, and for Grimke, this part of the rejection process is unclear. Based on photographs and information on Grimke, she seemed to perform her femininity. Perhaps she did this in order to satisfy her father, thus replacing her rejected love-object, her mother. However, on her father's 55th birthday she wrote him a poem that described everything he had done for her, how well he had raised her, while acknowledging it should have been her mother. In the end, she claims that her father was her mother.⁵⁵

“-What were I, father dear, without thy help?/I turn my eyes away
before the figure and/Rejoice; and yet your loving hands have
moulded me;/No credit, father dear, is due to me; 'twas you/Alone,
within my life. This is not all you are/And were to me,—not nearly
all. Within the years,/When I was still a child, whose was the eye,
that watched/Me night and day? Whose ear was ever ready,
kind,/Unto my plaints, and ever ready too, to share my
joys?/Whose hand was ever stretched to me, to lead my
feet?/Whose voice the last I heard before I closed my eyes/In sleep,
and whose the first I heard when I awoke?/It should have been my
mother, but it was not so;/And, father dear, the sweetest tribute,

⁵⁵ Angelina Weld Grimke, *Rachel: A Play in Three Acts* (Boston: The Cornhill Company, 1920), accessed November 21, 2018, https://archive.org/stream/rachelplayinthre00grimrich/rachelplayinthre00grimrich_djvu.txt.

that my hand/Can find to lay before your feet this day, is this,/That
you have been a gentle mother to your child.”⁵⁶

Perhaps one could also spin Freud’s Oedipus complex theory once more; if Grimke thought her father was like a mother, she had to replace her and her father’s lost love-object. Similarly to Freud’s subject where she found a means to engage in a homosexual relationship while still fulfilling the heteronormative (masculine/feminine) desire within society, she felt like she was succeeding after her rejection. Grimke, in this case, became the husband for her father, who was acting as a mother for Grimke. This might be a plausible scenario for Freudian sexual inversion, and I believe it also explains her devotion and attachment to her father. She used him as a means to replace her love-object. I believe that by applying Freudian sexology into Grimke’s world, we can better understand the reasons why she performed to satisfy her father. Once he passed in 1930, however, she abruptly stopped her writing and never fully engaged in the Harlem Renaissance, besides being an inspiration for the artists who did.⁵⁷ For a woman who is believed to have engaged in sexual relationships with women, like Angelina Weld Grimke, it is obviously much harder to discuss their sexual practices and preferences, let alone identify them within a sexuality that was not available to them at the time. One must also factor in other aspects of their identity, such as location, race, religion, and economic background. Grimke, for instance, was a black woman raised in the North by a father, who did not allow much less than perfection during the advent of sexuality. Black lesbians, after the advent of sexuality frequently socialized only in their own communities, which Grimke would have been a part of, if she were a lesbian. This provided her with three levels of safety due to her blackness, her womanhood, and her lesbian

⁵⁶ Angelina Weld Grimke, “To My Father Upon His Fifty-Fifth Birthday,” *Poetry Nook*, accessed December 8, 2018, <https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/my-father-upon-his-fifty-fifth-birthday>.

⁵⁷ “Grimke, Angelina Weld (1880-1958),” *Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed*, accessed November 21, 2018, <https://blackpast.org/aah/grimke-angelina-weld-1880-1958>.

identity.⁵⁸ Her poems hint at the fact that she might have taken a lesbian lover, or a few of them, but this term was not used at the time. I claim that using the term lesbian is anachronistic and therefore does not apply to her. She was not a lesbian. She perhaps was on the spectrum of inversion, but even then, we cannot tell. Sally Newman discusses this issue when she investigates Vernon Lee's sexuality within her archives. What is an inverted existence like for Grimke? Is it possible she thinks she is an invert? A tribade? We also only have one of her letters and a handful of poems, notes, and various musings from Grimke. We *cannot* determine one's sexuality merely based on scraps of one's life. We must present what we know, how we know, and place women like Grimke into a context and a discourse of what it was like to act as an invert from the 1880s through the 1950s. Perhaps we can look at the ways in which Grimke expressed love; she wrote a poem for her father on his 55th birthday, she wrote poems about individuals eyes, hands, faces, and fingers, all very intimate observations.⁵⁹ Perhaps her poems were her love letters. This cannot be proven, so it will not be.

Edythe Eyde, better known by her pen name, Lisa Ben (an anagram for lesbian) was born in 1921 to overbearing parents who were rangers in northern California. They wished for her to go to business school to learn secretarial skills and become ready for marriage, perhaps even meet a man. What her parents did not know was that by the age of fourteen, Eyde had become acquainted with a woman. This friendship blossomed while the two girls studied hard and played violin in their high school's orchestra. Soon, Edythe got permission from her mother to invite her over to play and then Eyde later spent the night at her house. According to Eyde, there was music

⁵⁸ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 72-76.

⁵⁹ Angelina Weld Grimke, *Angelina Weld Grimke*, accessed November 22, 2018, http://users.telenet.be/gaston.d.haese/angelina_weld_grimke.html.

Carolivia Herron, "The Introduction to The Selected Works of Angelina Weld Grimké," *Modern American Poetry*, accessed November 21, 2018, http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/grimke/herron.htm.

playing from the radio and her friend, a year older than she, asked her to dance. They danced again that night and Edythe, who believed she could not dance, danced with her friend, who was apparently a good leader. Later that night and moving forward, Eyde stated how much they realized they loved to kiss each other. She stated that she was not masculine whatsoever; she had long hair and her body was well developed. This excited Eyde because she was not developed whatsoever. They would continue to kiss and hug throughout their acquaintance. Eyde cites one time, when they were hugging behind the curtains in the theater and other children found them hugging. They did not know terminology, and they did not know it was wrong, but they did know that this was a social taboo. When her friend left her for another girl, she continuously cried to her mother about being forgotten and being unloved. It was then when her mother asked her if she had done anything wrong with her friend. This was the first time that she realized this was inappropriate; given they never “did anything below the belt,” she still realized that this was incorrect. She never regained her romantic friendship with her friend and she felt alone. This isolation continued and she developed into a sad and passive girl.⁶⁰

Her mother sent her away to college and she felt undeserving of the education. She always held a torch for her friend from high school and never really forgot about her. Eyde never observed gay gals or special friendships at the school. She states that she did not know at that point about gay love. It was at this point, someone suggested she was a lesbian, a term she did not know, and she thought it was derogatory, upon researching it. He explained the definition

⁶⁰ Manuela Soares, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Edith Eyde, Tape 1 of 2, October 25, 1988,” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*, accessed November 26, 2018, <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/document/MV-54>.

further and she realized that this was how she identified. She spoke about feeling like the only lesbian, hoping to travel and meet other lesbians.⁶¹

Eyde had no community; she felt lonely and decided to create, clandestinely, her magazine, *Vice Versa*. This was a magazine for lesbians; ironically, she did not even know the word, ‘lesbian’ until she moved to Los Angeles. There she worked as a secretary, a job she hated, at RKO Studios. Her boss, an RKO executive who was rarely in the office, told her to look busy, so instead of performing mundane and/or feminine tasks like knitting, she would work on her magazine, at work using her employer’s typewriter. She would use carbon paper to make carbon copies, making around 10 copies for the issue. Eyde planned to disseminate them once she made lesbian friends. The term lesbian, according to Eyde, was not used much by those within the community; they would mostly use the phrase “gay gal.” Perhaps this was to maintain safety within her society; earlier in her interview, she discusses her unfamiliarity with the term lesbian, prior to moving to Los Angeles and meeting a group of women who were not talking about men or relationships with men. They asked her if she was gay and she replied that she was not always the happiest, but she tries to be very often. Just perhaps, this is why they used the term “gay gal” and not lesbian. Lesbian was a known term as Eyde herself used an anagram for lesbian to publish her magazine, *Vice Versa*, Lisa Ben. According to the pre-interview remarks, Eyde was so good about disguising herself and keeping her pen name completely disassociated from her real name, it took a hefty amount of effort to identify and locate Edythe Eyde.⁶² It is interesting to note the various names used colloquially for lesbians, specifically looking here,

⁶¹ Manuela Soares, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Edith Eyde, Tape 1 of 2, October 25, 1988,” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*, accessed November 26, 2018, <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/document/MV-54>.

⁶² Manuela Soares, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Edith Eyde, Tape 1 of 2, October 25, 1988,” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*, accessed November 26, 2018, <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/document/MV-54>.

wherein lesbian and gay gal are the two terms used for the community at this time. When discussing the uses of terminology in other sections of this paper, there is usually only one major term (i.e. sexual invert, homosexual, or lesbian), but here there are two and that might present an issue when attempting to unify a community. In addition to these two terms, there is an entire community of women, like Ben before she became aware of either term, who are still unable to identify themselves within either community.

Her *Vice Versa* magazine, which ran from June of 1947 through February of 1948 discussed issues within the community of gay gals, reviewed films, plays, books, and other media that, according to Eyde, had even a hint of girls loving girls.⁶³ In her first issue, Lisa Ben states that there are a multitude of publications for different races, genders, creeds, and hobbies, but there were none about the unspoken and tabooed topic because of its vulgarity within society.⁶⁴ She tasked herself with creating a magazine of sorts for these populations, specifically women.

These reviews consisted of a variety of media, including plays, both written and performed on stage, films, and books. She gives a summary of the piece with *great* detail, ranging from single page reviews through reviews taking up almost half the magazine. The magazine, although it has a short history with only nine issues, had, in every issue, a greeting, a book review, a film review, a poem and/or song, and a letter from the editor in response to a letter to the editor. However, there were unique facets of this, including a reading list of other

⁶³ Manuela Soares, "LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Edith Eyde, Tape 1 of 2, October 25, 1988," *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*, accessed November 26, 2018, <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/document/MV-54>.

⁶⁴ Lisa Ben, *Vice Versa* Volume 1, Issue 1, May 20, 1947, accessed November 23, 2018, <http://queermusicheritage.com/viceversa1.html>, 1.

texts concerning the topic at hand, after reviewing Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*.⁶⁵ Throughout the issues, she would request for submissions from her readers to submit reviews, letters, and questions. She would lament, issue after issue that she did not have much besides a letter to the editor or a brief submission. She claimed to be disheartened because most women claimed to not have enough time or the ability to write into the magazine.⁶⁶ In issue 4, however, she gained someone in charge of the literary aspect of the magazine, so there were consistent poems and parodied songs in the tune of other popular songs of the time. The last time the magazine was published was issue 9 in February of 1948. There is no reference in the magazine to it being the last issue, and she seems excited to publish the next issue.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, she reveals in an interview that Howard Hughes purchased the studio at which she was working as a secretary and she had no means to continue to publication after she lost her job. This was the last issue of *Vice Versa*.⁶⁸

Throughout her interview she reveals many interesting facets of her life and the publication of *Vice Versa*. She discusses how most women were more interested in living the lesbian life than learning further about the lesbian experience throughout history and media and thus were not interested in the magazine in many capacities. Perhaps if there was more interest in

⁶⁵ Lisa Ben, *Vice Versa* Volume 1, Issue 2, July 1947, accessed November 23, 2018, <http://queermusicheritage.com/viceversa2.html>, 9-11.

⁶⁶ Lisa Ben, *Vice Versa* Volume 1, Issue 3, August 1947, accessed November 23, 2018, <http://queermusicheritage.com/viceversa3.html>, 3.

⁶⁷ Lisa Ben, *Vice Versa* Volume 1, Issue 9, February 1948, accessed November 23, 2018, <http://queermusicheritage.com/viceversa9.html>.

⁶⁸ Manuela Soares, "LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Edith Eyde, Tape 1 of 2, October 25, 1988," *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*, accessed November 26, 2018, <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/document/MV-54>.

the magazine, it would not have ended after Ben lost her job. She did state that her magazines, which she only distributed around 16 copies per issue, continued to circulate for years to come.⁶⁹

Once she moved to Los Angeles, away from her psychologically and emotionally manipulative and abusive parents, she realized there was a community of lesbians that she had never really encountered prior to her life in Los Angeles. She met women who taught her what “gay” meant, women who took her to lesbian clubs, and soon she had a community of lesbians who helped her thrive as a lesbian in the 1940s and 1950s. Through this, she learned to subvert the lesbian/gay spectacle of the heterosexual in these lesbian clubs by creating gay parodies to famous songs at the time, without making them crude or inappropriate. She wrote her own songs to protest the demeaning jokes gay entertainers commonly made during their performances to entertain straights and to make them palatable within a larger predominantly heterosexual society. Two of her more popular songs, according to her interview, were “I’m Gonna Sit Right Down and Write My Butch a Letter,” which riffed off “I’m Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter,” as well as “Frankie and Johnnie.”⁷⁰ This song, Eyde turned into a song about two gay men, claiming in her lyrics that the popular song was “the censored version.”⁷¹ These songs became popular, still written and performed under her pseudonym, Lisa Ben. She stated this was to protect her identity, her job, and from giving family any credit for having a famous daughter. She was an only child and visited her parents, but made sure that she protected herself; she got a car so she was not at their mercy when she visited and even when she had no real food

⁶⁹ Manuela Soares, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Edith Eyde, Tape 1 of 2, October 25, 1988,” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*, accessed November 26, 2018, <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/document/MV-54>.

⁷⁰ Julia Carpenter, “Decades before ‘The L Word,’ she risked jail to create a magazine for lesbians,” *Washington Post*, July 12, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2017/07/10/a-magazine-for-lesbians-was-illegal-70-years-ago-she-created-one-anyway/?utm_term=.d496e540e93d.

⁷¹ Lisa Ben, “Frankie & Johnny,” 1960, <http://queermusicheritage.com/viceversa.html>.

to eat and could not afford things, she never requested help from her family. She died in 2015, without any notice to the public after her death.⁷²

Lisa Ben claims to be a femme lesbian through and through in her interview. I find this to be an intriguing aspect of Ben, as she vehemently stated that she was a femme lesbian. Perhaps her safety and comfort was reliant on her ability to move through society and “pass” as a straight woman. As stated above, in her interview, Edye claimed that being out at the time was enjoyable, she went to clubs and bars, specifically for lesbians and gays and she felt the sense of community. However, most of the venues for the gays and lesbians were bars and clubs, and thus most of the gays and lesbians spent their time drinking, as opposed to fostering educational discourses with Edye. She lived with strict parents, so perhaps her gender identity is rooted in her upbringing and her socialization more so than it ever could have been with her sexuality. Through interviews, songs, and magazines, we understand how Lisa Ben viewed herself and how she viewed her gayness and her lesbianism. She was out, not widespread as Edythe Eyde, but as Lisa Ben. Lisa Ben disseminated information through *Vice Versa*, educating masses of women, and allowing them to see even shreds of the lesbian community in their daily lives. It is likely that Ben’s fostering of a larger lesbian discourse, education, and entertainment had various levels of success. *Vice Versa* had many lesbians reading about popular culture and literature, but few women chose to respond to *Vice Versa*, thus limiting the discourse in the community. Her songs were accessible and allowed gays and lesbians to feel included in communities and clubs, which I believe was her largest success. By producing and recording songs that would provide

⁷² Manuela Soares, “LHA Daughters of Bilitis Video Project: Edith Eyde, Tape 1 of 2, October 25, 1988,” *Herstories: Audio/Visual Collections of the LHA*, accessed November 26, 2018, <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/document/MV-54>.
Eric Marcus, interview with Edythe Eyde, “Edythe Eyde a.k.a. Lisa Ben,” *Making Gay History*, podcast audio, Spotify, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/0CVyo7pPEnywuc6SXoAWJs?si=6hPs2l5DSeC-7lyRceOrYg>.

terminology and provide a sense of community, the gay and lesbian communities were able to feel comfortable within their society, thus allowing them too to be out, to varying degrees. Ben was able to promote discourses in varying degrees of success, due to her pen name and perhaps her palatable gender performance. When interpreting the history of Lisa Ben and other semi-closeted figures, we must be conscious of the ways in which she identified throughout her life. There must be a line drawn between Edythe and Lisa at certain points, both for clarity and to further present the discourse surrounding her sexuality.

Theresa Harrington discusses these issues presented on a national basis. With the introduction of LGBT history into textbooks, there were a myriad of issues the publishers, editors, and authors had with stating that certain historical figures were definitively lesbian or gay or transgender. This is interesting, as their finalized approach included merely relating these figures like Walt Whitman, Sally Ride, and Charley Parkhurst to broader LGBT themes.⁷³ A Huffington Post article discusses the ethics of outing celebrities and the basis for doing so. In this article, the question was whether or not one can out a public figure speaking hypocritically, for instance, a politician who is actually gay condemning gay individuals in a myriad of capacities.⁷⁴ However, when we interpret the histories of deceased historical figures, whether or not they are powerful and celebrated, can we out the posthumously? Following the death of Whitney Houston, a larger discourse became evident surrounding outing individuals after they pass.⁷⁵

⁷³ Theresa Harrington, "Teaching LGBT history complicated by historical figures who didn't 'out' themselves," *EdSource*, accessed November 26, 2018, <https://edsource.org/2017/teaching-lgbt-history-complicated-by-historical-figures-who-didnt-out-themselves/590542>.

⁷⁴ Allison Hope, "Is It OK to Out Someone?," *Huffington Post*, January 5, 2014, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/is-it-ok-to-out-someone_b_4543058.

⁷⁵ The article is mainly discussing the outing of Whitney Houston by her ex husband because he is now releasing a book, and is thus hoping to profit from outing someone. There is also the discussion of whether or not it is okay to out anyone. Ed Koch's posthumous outing was done as a means to criticize him for letting thousands of gay men die from AIDS because he feared his actions would out him. Other gay politicians have also been outed, and thus sparks the debate about to what extent LGBTQ representation is owed to the public.

When is it okay to out people? Who decides if it is okay? When someone is outed publicly, some believe their true sexuality is owed to those who identify within that sexuality, and some believe it is a breach of confidentiality. Does this give less autonomy to currently closeted individuals?⁷⁶ I believe so. We must strive to establish ways to interpret the histories of sexuality without outing deceased individuals and using anachronistic terminology.

Although research like this is constantly evolving, we need to find a way to interpret the histories and lives of potentially, what we would consider today as LGBTQ, individuals without taking their autonomy, their dignity, their privacy, and without exploiting them. Sex between individuals of the same sex has a long and troubled history. We need to show current and future generations that these individuals existed and engaged in same sex relationships, romantic and/or sexual, but we need to do it ethically.

Yezmin Villarreal, "Whitney Houston and the Ethics of Posthumous Outing," *Advocate*, June 11, 2016, <https://www.advocate.com/coming-out/2016/6/11/whitney-houston-and-ethics-posthumous-outing>.

⁷⁶ Yezmin Villarreal, "Whitney Houston and the Ethics of Posthumous Outing," *Advocate*, June 11, 2016, <https://www.advocate.com/coming-out/2016/6/11/whitney-houston-and-ethics-posthumous-outing>.

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