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Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer History and Erasure

A limited number of people have heard or even have access to information about LGBTQ+ history. Only two states have standards on the subject and is only within select history courses in college.¹ One of the biggest obstacles to increasing the amount of available information is how much of it has been erased. Oxford Dictionary defines erasure as “the removal of writing, recorded material, or data.”² Erasure has affected the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and those with similar identities within the community (LGBTQ+) for thousands of years. It has kept queer individuals on the edge of society, history, and legality. Erasure even exists within families. When a loved one comes out as LGBTQ+ a family can react a number of ways. Many of these response are stemmed in a desire to protect the individual or the family. Some responses have lasting negative effects on a person. Much of homophobia and transphobia stems from the associations queer people have with being promiscuous. This has led to criminalization of people with these identities. Throughout history, LGBTQ+ individuals have fought against this. The close relationship between colonialism and erasure is also being challenged. Queer history is not being recognized in national landmarks. Historians have intentionally and unintentionally dismissed LGBTQ+ identities in history. What little research

¹ “Illinois State Votes to Teach LGBT History in School.” *Fox 32 Chicago News*, May 2, 2018.

² “Erasure.” *Oxford Dictionary*.

and literature exists has been edited or destroyed. There are still methods available to improve erasure on personal and systemic levels. There are many facets to erasure and there are just as many ways to challenge it.

Family and friends are large parts of erasure. Often when one comes out their families and friends' hearts are in the right place- they want to keep their loved one safe. However, there are many responses that do the opposite. One response is when family and friends encourage- or sometimes force- their loved one to change. The resulting feelings of being wrong are either implied or explicitly laid out. Many try to cut their loved one off from the "negative influence" of a significant other or queer friend. The belief is that this person is "making" their loved one the way they are. This is isolating and invalidating for an individual. Another response is to keep one's identity secret.³ In 1971, the author of *The Letters of A.E. Housman* was able to read some private letters written by and for Mr. Housman, but was permitted from including them in the book. His descendants refuse to let the romantic letters were between Mr. Housman and his lover be published. Mary Anne Evans, whose pen name was George Eliot, wrote eloquent love letters to many women. Eliot referred to herself as the husband of one in 1849. When he was writing her biography, Eliot's husband neglected to mention this part of her life forty years later. In the 1800s, John Addington Symonds filled a journal about his sexual experiences and the "emotional and intellectual growth of 'coming out.'" He asked his wife to approve the journal before his partner published it, and she removed these entries.⁴

Even in our current and more accepting social climate, "sexual minorities report lower levels of parental closeness." Research suggests that a third of coming out experiences regarding

³ "Supportive Families, Healthy Children." Family Acceptance Project, San Francisco State University. 2009.

⁴ Norton, Rictor. "The Suppression of Lesbian and Gay History." *Gay History & Literature*.

sexual orientation receives negative responses and another third receives positive responses. The remaining third choose not to come out to their family at all. Young people who are not supported by their family are often forced become prematurely independent from their parent or guardian. In many cases they often start develop mindset of survival. This is part of what is known as minority stress or the how mental health is affected from constant awareness and fear of oppression because of identity. This can come from external and internal sources.

Experiencing minority stress and its relationship with mental health often leads to low self-esteem.⁵ Queer individuals between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five were interviewed about their experiences when they were teenagers by the Family Acceptance Project. The study found that thirty-five percent of individuals with families that did not accept them at all did not think that they could have a happy future. Overall, LGBTQ+ youth were found to be six times more likely to have severe depression and eight times more likely to have attempted suicide. They were also found to be three times as likely to have used illegal drugs and three times more at risk for sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV.⁶ Forty percent of homeless youth identifies as LGBTQ+.⁷ The side effects of keeping sexual orientation to oneself has no tangible data. There are theories founded on the general knowledge of the burden of carrying a large secret but there are no studies that give statistics. There is even less theories regarding hiding gender identity and expression.⁸

⁵ Kate-Wise, Sabra L., Rosarie, Margaret, Tsappis, Michael. "LGBT Youth and Family Acceptance." US National Library of Medicine, National Center for Biology. 2016.

⁶ "Supportive Families, Healthy Children." Family Acceptance Project, San Francisco State University. 2009.

⁷ "Serving Our Youth: Findings from a National Survey of Service Providers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth Who Are Homeless or At Risk of Being Homeless." *Williams Institute*. 2012.

⁸ Kate-Wise, Sabra L., Rosarie, Margaret, Tsappis, Michael. "LGBT Youth and Family Acceptance." US National Library of Medicine, National Center for Biology. 2016.

While minority stress and statistics detailing the damaging effects of an unsupportive environment are fairly new concepts, the experience is not new. Self-censorship is a common response. In the 1800s, a woman named Anne Lister put a lot of thought into what she wrote to her lover. She phrased most of her letters as if she and the woman she was writing to were just close friends. On top of that, each message was in a code largely inspired by the Greek alphabet. She also asked Mrs. Barlow, her partner, to burn each letter after she read it. On a larger scale, LGBTQ+ people destroyed the records of Europe's sodomy trails in the 1300s. It is uncertain why they burned them but it is theorized it had to do with shame and a desire for safety.⁹

One of the most common reasonings behind censoring LGBTQ+ history is the belief that sharing the existence and experiences of same-gender relationships and gender variant individuals is inappropriate. Dr. Rictor Norton wrote, "Any texts that celebrate this love, despite being utterly devoid of sexual details or innuendo, are subject to suppression." LGBTQ+ rights are often considered a part of "sexual politics."¹⁰ Other issues in this category are prostitution, age of sexual consent, human trafficking, and rape; all of which are considered deviant crimes each wrapped in their own stigma. The mindset that LGBTQ+ identities are inherently obscene not only leads to historical erasure, it inspires oppressive laws and actions.¹¹

For most of history, "evidence of homosexuality is literally evidence of criminal activity."¹² For example, in the 1960s LGBTQ+ individuals could not express any part of their identity. Same-gender couples were not allowed to hold hands, dance, or otherwise fraternize

⁹ Norton, Rictor. "The Suppression of Lesbian and Gay History." *Gay History & Literature*.

¹⁰ Norton, Rictor. "The Suppression of Lesbian and Gay History." *Gay History & Literature*.

¹¹ Carrara, Sergio. "Discrimination, policies, and sexual rights in Brazil." *Cadernos de Saúde Pública Reports in*

Public Health.

¹² Norton, Rictor. "The Suppression of Lesbian and Gay History." *Gay History & Literature*.

together in New York City.¹³ There were laws requiring a person to wear at least three pieces of clothing that matched the sex assigned to one at birth.¹⁴ If an individual was perceived as LGBTQ+, bars would not serve them. They used the unclear post-Prohibition- a time period where alcohol was banned nationwide- law stating there could be no “disorderly premises and moral indecency.”¹⁵ When these laws were broken people faced extreme violence and violation. People who identified as LGBTQ+ had no place to be free legally.¹⁶

The LGBTQ+ community was not the only suffering after the repeal of Prohibition, speakeasies to across the country were losing business. Mafia families were a large portion of those being affected. With alcohol legal, there was no longer a need for them to smuggle the substance in. However, mafia groups soon realized they had a new clientele: queer individuals. “A profitable, if uneasy match” was formed between the two groups. Mafias soon monopolized gay bars and clubs.¹⁷ By 1966, most of LGBTQ+ life in Greenwich Village belonged to the Genovese family- including Stonewall Inn.¹⁸ In the same year the laws disallowing LGBTQ+ people to purchase alcohol were overturned. Despite this, the mafia still had their hold on the business since they could still offer some sort of freedom.¹⁹

Institutions like Stonewall Inn supplied queer individuals with a space to be themselves. Drinking alcohol and public displays of affection were permitted inside of these bars. Stonewall opened its doors to drag queens which was an uncommon practice. For many in the community,

¹³ “Stonewall Riots.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Encyclopedia Britannica, 22 June 2017.

¹⁴ “Stonewall Riots.” *History.com*. A&E Networks, 2017.

¹⁵ Nianis, Helen. “How the Mafia Once Controlled the New York Gay Scene.” *Vice*. N.p., 30 July 2015. Web.

¹⁶ “Stonewall Riots.” *History.com*. A&E Networks, 2017.

¹⁷ Holland, Brynn. “How the Mob Helped Establish NYC’s Gay Bar Scene.” *History.com*. A&E Networks, 22 June 2017.

¹⁸ Nianis, Helen. “How the Mafia Once Controlled the New York Gay Scene.” *Vice*. N.p., 30 July 2015.

¹⁹ “Stonewall Riots.” *History.com*. A&E Networks, 2017.

a bar was a roof over their heads for a night. However, the mafia did not run the bars well since they legally did not have to. There was not a fire escape. Plumbing was a large issue; the bar lacked clean water and the toilets constantly over flowed.²⁰ Many establishments like Stonewall had a minimum drink requirement.²¹ However, patrons at Stonewall were required to bring their own bar- which helped with the legality of not having a liquor license. The bouncers at Stonewall Inn often blackmailed well-known or wealthy patrons.²² One bouncer in particular, Ed “The Skull” Murphy, forced queer youth who frequented the Inn into prostitution.²³ The saving grace from this mistreatment was the payoffs the police received from the Genovese mafia. This agreement meant that officers would generally raid during the day when few patrons were there. Even if they did come during prime hours of the night, there would be a warning for their arrival.

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On June 28, 1969, there was no warning to the police’s arrival. They entered Stonewall Inn after midnight looking for their money along with a warrant. Violence escalated quickly as police started making arrests. Any patron that could fled, however, unlike every other raid before it, the crowd stayed outside the building.²⁵ Inside, Stormé DeLarverie, a forty nine year old lesbian and drag queen, received blows to her face that resulted in fourteen stitches. As she was being escorted into a paddy wagon she called for the crowd to do something.²⁶ “Something just

²⁰ Holland, Brynn. “How the Mob Helped Establish NYC’s Gay Bar Scene.” *History.com*. A&E Networks, 22 June 2017.

²¹ Nianis, Helen. “How the Mafia Once Controlled the New York Gay Scene.” *Vice*. N.p., 30 July 2015.

²² “Stonewall Riots.” *History.com*. A&E Networks, 2017.

²³ Nianis, Helen. “How the Mafia Once Controlled the New York Gay Scene.” *Vice*. N.p., 30 July 2015.

²⁴ Holland, Brynn. “How the Mob Helped Establish NYC’s Gay Bar Scene.” *History.com*. A&E Networks, 22 June 2017.

²⁵ “Stonewall Riots.” *History.com*. A&E Networks, 2017.

²⁶ Chu, Grace. “An Interview With Lesbian Stonewall Veteran Stormé DeLarverie.” *AfterEllen*, Totally Her.

clicked” in Sylvia Rivera, trans woman and long time activist. She started by throwing coins at the police- their payoff. The crowd around her followed suit, and when they ran out coins they started throwing whatever they could find on the sidewalk.²⁷ (Marsha “Pay It No Mind” Johnson is the most well known incitor of this riot, but throughout her life she- and others- gave varying reports about her involvement. One of her statements says she did not arrive until the riot had already started. Whether she was involved or not, she still holds a pivotal role in queer liberation.)²⁸ The police took cover from retaliation inside the building. They brought those they arrested with them. Soon after, the Inn caught on fire- it is still unclear who started it.²⁹ The riot continued for several hours and were followed by several incidents in the following days.³⁰

The Stonewall Riots is the most well known aspect of LGBTQ+ history in the United States. The Riots, “as they became known, made one thing clear- the LGBT movement needed to be louder and more visible.” As a result, hundreds of queer liberation groups were founded across the country. The first pride parades were celebrations of the first anniversary of Stonewall. Christopher Street Liberation Day in New York is the most infamous parade with a fifty one block march. There were also large parades in Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.³¹

As important as the Stonewall Riots are, it is a small portion of LGBTQ+ history. Three years prior to Stonewall, the Compton Cafeteria Riot took place in San Francisco. Drag queens frequented Compton Cafeteria because of its convenience. “It was- centrally located- adjacent to the hair salon, the corner bar and bath house...” The Cafeteria was not a LGBTQ+ venue so the

²⁷ Marcus, Eric. Interview with Sylvia Rivera. 9 Dec. 1989.

²⁸ Hugh, Ryan. “Power to the People: Exploring Marsha P. Johnson’s Queer Liberation.” *Out*. Out Magazine, 24 August 2017.

²⁹ “Stonewall Riots.” *History.com*, A&E Networks, 2017.

³⁰ “Stonewall Riots.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Encyclopedia Britannica, 22 June 2017.

³¹ Holland, Brynn. “How Activists Plotted the First Gay Pride Parades.” *History.com*, A&E Networks. June 9, 2017.

police were called on a regular basis. In August 1966, queer individuals got tired of being arrested for existing in a public restaurant and fought back. The Compton Cafeteria Riot did not receive the same publicity and remains an important aspect of history.³² LGBTQ+ history within the United States is not isolated to large cities such as New York and San Francisco. The Biggest Little City in the World, Reno, Nevada, has queer history as far back as the Gold Rush. This time period is often associated with lawlessness as well as freedom. The communities found across the West were virtually independent civilizations. Some individuals took this opportunity to express their LGBTQ+ identity freely. This lasted until 1882 when cross-dressing was criminalized. The law made headlines in the area. However, drag performances were a common form of entertainment starting in 1935 as part of Reno's evolution into the divorce capital that began twenty years before. Drag performances declined in the 1960s due to laws stating alcohol could not be served during these performances, but made a successful comeback in the 1970s. Another example of Reno's queer culture is Reno Bar which was known as a mixed bar. This means that every night the crowd transitioned to LGBTQ+ individuals only. Reno was still home to two LGBTQ+ bars, bath houses, queer magazines, a hotel known as Dave's VIP Resort, and even the Reno Gay Rodeo throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In 1992, the first known lesbian bar opened called Bad Dolly's.³³ Queer history predates the founding of the United States. It has existed in many places throughout history.³⁴

³² "Ladies In the Streets: Before Stonewall, Transgender Uprising Saved Lives." *National Public Radio*, May 5, 2015.

³³ Auer IV, John Jeffery. "Queerest Little City in the World: LGBTQ Reno." *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer History*", National Park Service. 2016.

³⁴ Meinke, Mike. "Prologue: Why LGBTQ Historic Sites Matter." *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer History*", National Park Service. 2016.

Countries and cultures that are considered behind the Western standard of status are assumed to have an initiate and greater amount of homophobia than more “progressive countries.” This is far from the truth. There are many LGBTQ+ organizations throughout Africa as well as a group that works across the continent called Behind the Mask. There are also groups dedicated to one region or part of the LGBTQ+ community such as the Forum for the Empowerment of Women, TPR, and Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe. Queer activism is present in many countries including- but not limited to- “Bolivia, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Thailand.”³⁵ Another example is Brazil, who made an attempt to create legal rights and protections for their LGBTQ+ citizens when they reconstructed their government. People with a variety of sexual orientations and gender identities exist and are activists in more than just one part of the world.³⁶

There have been examples of gender variance for hundreds of years in the United States of America. The history of Two Spirit people predates the discovery and founding of this country. Most of Native American tribes recognize five different genders; “female, male, Two Spirit female, Two Spirit male, and transgender.” Two Spirit individuals identify as both male and female. The “belief is that some people are born with spirits of both genders and express them so perfectly.” Members of the Siouan tribe believe that the Creator assigned a child’s skills regardless of their sex. Before a child was born the Creator presented them with arrows and a basket and would sometimes change what the child reached towards. Every tribe has different beliefs regarding gender variance however they were always treated with respect. Often, people

³⁵ Currier, Ashley. “Decolonizing the Law: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa.” *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society*, Vol. 54, Emerald Insights, pp. 17-44.

³⁶ Carrara, Sergio. “Discrimination, policies, and sexual rights in Brazil.” *Cadernos de Saúde Pública Reports in Public Health*.

who are Two Spirit are considered to have “a high functioning intellect (possibly from a life of self questioning), keen artistic skills, and an exceptional capacity for compassion.” Therefore, they often hold important roles in their communities such as passing on history and tradition, nurses during war, cooks, jewelry makers, religious leaders, as well as many more revered positions.³⁷

In 1492, when Columbus arrived in North America, the gender variance presented by the indigenous people was something he despised. As well as his countless other violent crimes against Native Americans, Columbus starved the dogs he brought with him and fed Two Spirit people to them. This sentiment was carried by the colonizers who came after him. For example, the Bureau of Indian Affairs forced people to wear clothes that aligned with their sex. Same gender marriages were also discounted in the eyes of the new government. However, the Iroquois fought back by placing Two Spirit people on the front lines during battle. “A warrior woman and man in women’s clothing were just as frightening to European-Americans as they are now.”³⁸

Colonialism has still had a large impact on gender variant indigenous people. By the 1900s, it was widely believed that there were no gender identities outside of the Western binary on the Six Nations “despite documentation and oral histories.” Many Native Americans do not identify as LGBTQ+ since the community is “emphasizing sexuality over spirituality.” It is also “a way to connect with tribal communities.” Using the term Two Spirit is part of this

³⁷ Brayboy, Duane. “Two Spirits, One Heart, Five Genders.” *Indian Country Media Network*, National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Embassy of Tribal Nations. 7 Sept. 2017.

³⁸ Brayboy, Duane. “Two Spirits, One Heart, Five Genders.” *Indian Country Media Network*, National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Embassy of Tribal Nations. 7 Sept. 2017.

movement. Two Spirit is the Ojibwe word for this identity and has become the universal English term for people who identify this way.³⁹

At the end of apartheid, a newly freed country had the opportunity to slowly separate themselves from colonialism and the damage it inflicted. To some this included dismantling of Western ideas of sexuality and gender identity. In South Africa improving the lives of LGBTQ+ people quickly became a part of their decolonization movement. However, the government had been under the sway of homophobia for so long that they believed that “homosexuality is unAfrican” and that these identities did not exist in their country before it was turned into a colony. To them, the lack of legal protection for LGBTQ+ rights was decolonization. South African groups responded with protests. They confronted their leaders in government as well as local institutions.⁴⁰

Decolonization was so embedded in LGBTQ+ activism that the first pride parade in South Africa doubled as an anti-apartheid demonstration. In October 1990, the beginning of the decline of apartheid’s legality in South Africa, eight hundred people attended with a combination of fear and pride.⁴¹ There was a long line of political successes that followed; for example, the laws against sodomy were removed. In 2006 South Africa, nine years before the United States, legalized same-gender marriages.⁴²

The neighboring country of Namibia followed a similar path. Unfortunately, their government did not have any lasting amendments to the law. The protections against

³⁹ Brayboy, Duane. “Two Spirits, One Heart, Five Genders.” *Indian Country Media Network*, National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Embassy of Tribal Nations. 7 Sept. 2017.

⁴⁰ Currier, Ashley. “Decolonizing the Law: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa.” *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society*, Vol. 54, Emerald Insights, pp. 17-44.

⁴¹ “The First Gay Pride March is Held In South Africa.” *South African History Online*. Apr. 10. 2017.

⁴² Currier, Ashley. “Decolonizing the Law: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa.” *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society*, Vol. 54, Emerald Insights, pp. 17-44.

discrimination against sexual orientation were repealed by the recent administration. The rhetoric that these identities are unAfrican, against Namibian culture, and unproductive to society prevailed. Hage Geingob, current President and former Prime Minister of Namibia, stated that persecution against LGBTQ+ individuals does not exist. This has not stopped LGBTQ+ organizations from surfacing. Sister Namibia and The Rainbow Project are the most prominent groups in Namibia.⁴³

The United States has 2,500 National Historic Landmarks (NHL) and 90,000 sites on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The combined total of locations that are honoring LGBTQ+ history on these lists; six.⁴⁴ To become an NHL a place must demonstrate the “broad national patterns of United States history.” These include buildings where events that shaped the nation’s history occurred, a person who is considered “nationally significant” worked, the U.S.’ core values have been upheld, architectural milestones are demonstrated, there is a potential to gain more knowledge, or an area surrounding someplace that would have been added.⁴⁵

Cemeteries, religious structures, birthplaces or grave of a nationally significant person when no other site can be found, relocated sites, reconstructed sites, and places that have held significance for under fifty years are on the NRHP.⁴⁶ For example, Stonewall Inn is registered as an National Historic Landmark as the site of a historic event.⁴⁷

⁴³ Currier, Ashley. “Decolonizing the Law: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa.” *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society*, Vol. 54, Emerald Insights, pp. 17-44.

⁴⁴ Meinke, Mike. “Prologue: Why LGBTQ Historic Sites Matter.” *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer History*, National Park Service. 2016.

⁴⁵ “How to Evaluate and Document National Significance for Potential National Historic Landmarks.” *National Register Bulletin*, U.S. Department of the Interior & National Parks Service.

⁴⁶ “National Register Criteria for Evaluation.” *National Register Bulletin*, U.S. Department of the Interior & National Parks Service.

⁴⁷ “Stonewall National Monument.” *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior.

There are many factors that contribute to the lack of sites that encompass LGBTQ+ history. Gentrification has affected the ability to give locations of significance to any minority a spot on either nationally recognized list. Another issue is that there is not much evidence that individuals with these identities leave behind. Skeletal remains give no indication of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression (SOGIE) and there are not many artifacts that create a clear picture of these identities.⁴⁸ With all of the stigma “it is remarkable that queer-revealing diaries and letters get written at all, much less survive the death of their writer.”⁴⁹ Many LGBTQ+ individuals in the 1960s- the beginning of queer liberation in the United States- did not think they made history. They deemed openly existing and fighting for their rights as survival and justice. While they did these things with the hope of a better future, the notion that the future would remember them was not a component of their struggle.⁵⁰

Those who try to decipher history bring their own biases to the table. Many historians have not reported their findings regarding LGBTQ+ existence. Researchers, like many modern allies to the community, fear that if they published what they found they would be perceived as gay. They also have had to be concerned about their funding when they share history that society did and does not want to exist.⁵¹ Some scholars purposefully hide or destroy this evidence to keep the reputation of the evidence holder intact.⁵² Heteronormativity is another common issue. This assumption of societal roles based on sex regarding romantic and sexual relationships; or

⁴⁸ Springate, Megan E. "LGBTQ Archeological Context." *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, National Parks Service. 2016.

⁴⁹ Norton, Rictor. "The Suppression of Lesbian and Gay History." *Gay History & Literature*.

⁵⁰ Meinke, Mike. "Prologue: Why LGBTQ Historic Sites Matter." *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer History*", National Park Service. 2016.

⁵¹ Springate, Megan E. "LGBTQ Archeological Context." *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, National Parks Service. 2016.

⁵² Norton, Rictor. "The Suppression of Lesbian and Gay History." *Gay History & Literature*.

men and women pairings are the only couples in existence.⁵³ On the other hand, when historians find evidence of these identities, they need to be wary of applying modern and Western ideas of sexual orientation and gender identity/ expression (SOGEI) onto individuals from different eras and cultures. Megan Springate wrote, “As a queer archaeologists it is tempting to look for myself and other LGBTQ and two-spirit people in the past. To legitimize our existence by ‘proving’ we have always existed.”⁵⁴ For example, there is an infamous set of remains formerly known as the Two Maidens of Pompeii. The ash covered skeletons are of two individuals laying in a warm embrace. They recently received a cat scan that both skeletal structures exhibit the osteological sex traits that suggest they were both male. Assumptions have been made that they are a gay couple.⁵⁵ As great as having an indisputable example of LGBTQ+ life would be, it is impossible and improper to declare this as such. Historians must look at the population of Pompeii, Italy before they can consider it a possibility. Were same-sex couples common or accepted? Was touch and intimacy between men not as stigmatized as it is in many cultures today? Even if the answers to these are yes, questions still arise about the people themselves. Was there only one bed in the house? Was it like a cheesy movie where two people are talking and they doze off? The possibilities are truly endless.⁵⁶

Historically, on the rare occasion research regarding SOGEI is published, it has been destroyed or kept under lock and key. Magnus Hirschfeld opened a library in the early nineteen hundreds called Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science. The Institute was dedicated to

⁵³ “Heteronormativity.” *Merriam-Webster*.

⁵⁴ Springate, Megan E. "LGBTQ Archeological Context." *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, National Parks Service. 2016.

⁵⁵ "Embracing figures at Pompeii 'could have been gay lovers,' after scan reveals they are both men." *The Telegraph*, Telegraph Media Group Limited. April 7, 2017.

⁵⁶ Springate, Megan E. "LGBTQ Archeological Context." *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, National Parks Service. 2016.

collecting research on sexuality. The Nazis burned the whole collection; “twelve thousand books, thirty five thousand photographs, plus thousands of irreplaceable original manuscripts” were lost. In 1961, Judy Grahn went to a library in Washington D.C. to conduct personal research about queer identities. She discovered that “only professors, doctors, psychiatrists, and lawyers of the criminally insane could see [the books], check them out, hold them in their hands.” Destruction of writing also extends to literature. Many poems written by the Greek poet Sappho detailing her love of women have disappeared. (However, the word “sapphic,” meaning love between women originated from her name.) Homer’s Iliad is also believed to have been stripped of queer aspects.⁵⁷

Between social movements and the increase in visibility, things are moving forward for the LGBTQ+ community. There is still room for improvement. Further normalization of LGBTQ+ identities is necessary. This can start on the family level. Continuing to tell a child that love is still part of the relationship is crucial. Letting a child getting involved the community- going to pride, making friends with queer identities, or taking them to movies with or about LGBTQ+ characters- can help reduce minority stress. It also lets them know that they are free to be themselves within a home.⁵⁸ On a larger scale, the movement for recognition of LGBTQ+ historic sites has gained support in the last few years. There are many sites that have the potential to be nationally registered. Bayard Rustin was part of Martin Luther King Jr.’s inner circle, organized the March on Washington, and was fairly open about his sexuality. His house remains standing and qualifies to be a National Historic Landmark as the home of someone who is national significant- which he has achieved in many ways. Harvey Milk was the first openly gay

⁵⁷ Norton, Rictor. “The Suppression of Lesbian and Gay History.” *Gay History & Literature*.

⁵⁸ "Supportive Families, Healthy Children." Family Acceptance Project, San Francisco State University. 2009.

man elected into public office and the camera shop he owned holds significance. Even if tour guides at Walt Whitman's house included his sexuality and relationship with his partner along with other tidbits about the author it would be a huge step. The list goes on and on. Continuing on the path of familial and historical inclusion helps "reassure [people] that [they] are not a hateful anomaly" despite the forms of erasure attempting to reinforce that message.⁵⁹

History is seen as definite and unchangeable. That war happened after that revolution because they wanted this or that. However, history is written down by people. People have detailed opinions and biases they have never even considered. Just one word can change the perception of an entire culture or war. These already hazy facts are put into the hands of those who publish history books. They get to choose what they think is important to share. It is impossible for history to be pure fact because it is human history. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and those with similar identities have been labeled as dirty, sinful, criminal, and unnatural throughout history. This mindset has damaged families and swept entire cultural identities under the rug. It has harmed people in ways that could never be calculated. Yet, queer people have fought back as long as they have been challenged. The United States has Compton, Stonewall, and a dozen other ritos. Indigenous cultures are reclaiming their identities. Laws preventing sodomy, homosexuality, and same-gender marriages are being repealed across the globe. Leaps and bounds have been made in the last five years alone. In the novel *1984*, George Orwell wrote that in the dystopia, "The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth."⁶⁰ The damage here is still reversible. Queer history is finally being unburied, reclaimed, and celebrated.

⁵⁹ Meinke, Mike. "Prologue: Why LGBTQ Historic Sites Matter." *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer History*", National Park Service. 2016.

⁶⁰ Orwell, George. *1984*. Signet Classics, 1950. pg. 75.

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