

“Say ‘hi’ from Gaia”: women’s travel guides and lesbian feminist community formation in the pre-internet era (1975-1992)

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ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with the question of how American women, particularly those who identified as lesbian, questioning, or queer found information about where to locate other lesbian, questioning, or queer women in a pre-internet era. The women’s travel guide, *Gaia’s Guide*, communicated information about “safe” and women friendly spaces during the early to mid years of American women’s and lesbian and gay liberation movements (1975–1992). The creation of lesbian feminist communities was bolstered by the production of these guides and other women’s guidebooks; however, the guides promoted a lesbian feminist community that centered whiteness and middle-class identity. Sandy Horn’s role as editor of *Gaia’s Guide* influenced the representations of what was “safe,” desirable, and enticing to readers. The guides also reflected prevailing structural inequalities during the period. This article shows that the technology of the travel guides shaped lesbian feminist communities through intentional and unintentional exclusion.

KEYWORDS

Travel guides; guidebooks; feminist; lesbian; community

Where are all the lesbians?

How did American women who wanted to spend time in the company of other women for romantic, sexual, or social reasons find each other? This article is concerned with the question of how women, particularly those who identified as lesbian, questioning, nonheterosexual, or queer found information about where to locate other lesbian, questioning, or queer women, in the pre-internet era of the 1970s until the early 1990s.

For \$5, in 1977, a woman could buy the 4th edition of Gaia's Guide and read listings of feminist and lesbian businesses across the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. By 1981, in its seventh edition, the price increased to \$7.50, but so too did the number of entries.² In the 1970s, lesbian feminists began to produce a variety of travel and informational guides for the women's community. The women's travel guide, Gaia's Guide, aimed to communicate information about what the editors deemed to be "safe" and "women friendly" spaces. Women's travel guides additionally were useful tools for discussing and promoting women owned and women centered businesses. Through their role in information sharing, these guides contributed to the formation of particular lesbian feminist communities. Due to editorial and production choices, the guides promoted a lesbian feminist community that centered whiteness and middle-class identity. Sandy Horn's role as editor of Gaia's Guide influenced the representations of what was "safe," desirable, and enticing. These depictions reflected the experiences of Horn and readers with similar identities, while simultaneously excluding others whose notions of safety may have differed due to their race, class, or gender presentation. As a result, while travel guides are worthy of study in order to understand how lesbians and questioning women found one another during a pre-internet era, this article shows that the technology of the women's guidebook shaped lesbian communities through intentional and unintentional exclusion during the early to mid years of the American women's and lesbian and gay liberation movements (1975–1992).

Literature review

While scholars have previously acknowledged the importance of communication technologies in the development of women's, feminist, and lesbian communities in North America, certain technologies, such as periodicals, have received a disproportionate amount of attention. Communications scholar Cait McKinney argues that research on feminist intellectual history needs to explore beyond bookstores and periodicals because "though it is much less exciting and less sweaty than the collective din of consciousness-raising circles and other embodied forms of activism, information has been just as critical to late 20th century feminism" (2015). McKinney's work investigates the creation of newsletters as well as bibliography and index projects by feminists in order to document and affect the histories and knowledges of their communities. McKinney is not alone in this assertion. Communications scholar Carrie Rentschler, for example, argues that feminist activism is a "communicative labor" that occurs out of sight of its final representational forms; thus, she encourages researchers to analyze the media of feminist social movements at "the midlevel scale of their communication" by looking at memos, reports, newsletters, and other movement texts (Carrie Rentschler 2011, 17–18). This is not to say that the work on feminist periodicals produced in the 20th centuries is not significant, however other midlevel technologies can provide new historical insights.

Although researchers have looked at gay travel since the rise of the internet, fewer writers have focused on the use of travel guides for marginalized people in the United States from the 1960s –1990s. Historian Martin Meeker, in *Contacts Desired*, argues, "the emergence of gay male and lesbian communities in 20th century United States was in very large part the result of massive changes in the way that individuals could connect to knowledge about homosexuality." Meeker's work focuses more on the gay male travel guides, despite claims that his work looks at both groups. He argues that unlike their gay counterparts, lesbians in the 1970s networked through feminist communities rather than

just through lesbian communities. This fact of course impacts the ways that guides were marketed: as women's travel guides rather than lesbian travel guides. Apart from Martin Meeker's study, gay and lesbian travel guides have received little attention; however, other researchers have looked at the importance of travel guides for networking and promoting businesses within under-represented and oppressed communities. Though much of the previous literature on guide books and travel guides focuses on their relationship to the making of the British empire or the bolstering of a sense of national identity,³ the New York Public Library's digital map project "Navigating the Green Book," on the history of The Green Book travel guide for Black Americans published from 1937 to 1966, shows the ways that Victor Green, a Black American mail carrier from New York, helped African American travelers find "friendly" restaurants, auto shops and accommodations, especially in segregated and openly racist areas, and navigate a pre-internet world (NYPL Labs 2016). The Green Book was less about finding community space, but rather about safety and practical matters such as where it was safe to buy gas, where to find a public restroom that Black travelers could use, and which restaurants would serve those travelers. The guides furthermore helped to protect Black travelers from beatings and the threat of lynching. Meanwhile, ideas of "safety" were also emphasized in women's travel guides. The main users of the lesbian and feminist travel guides searched for places in which they could dine without harassment, openly attend events with female lovers, and have a space to organize without men interrupting their efforts. So while it is not new to show how guidebooks can foster community, support businesses owned by minorities, and promote safer travel, this study of Gaia's Guides is the first to look at how guidebooks were specifically useful for lesbians, feminists, and lesbian feminists.

Methods

Travel guides were not the only midlevel communication to promote women's spaces in the 1970s and 1980s that aided in the formation of feminist politics and theory. While there were other communication technologies such as bulletin boards and periodicals that aided in connecting lesbians, this article focuses particularly on guidebooks due to the paucity of information already available about them.⁴ In narrowing the study to women's guidebooks, it is possible to think about lesbian information sharing in the preinternet era. In doing so, we can better understand the role these technologies had in shaping communities. This article is not concerned with evaluating what kinds of technologies are better than others. I focus primarily on the San Francisco-published, Gaia's Guide, edited by Sandy Horn. While it was not the only guide on the market telling women where they could gather, Gaia's Guide was the most popular travel guide in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵ For this piece, I tracked every annual edition of the Gaia's Guides from 1975 to 1992, with the exception of the 1980, 1986, and 1987 editions as I could not locate a copy through any libraries, archives, booksellers, or private collections. Terminology is challenging. Despite Sandy Horn's editorial influence and personal preferences, the idea of "women's travel guides" speaks to the difficulty of defining whom the guides truly served. Although Horn was a lesbian, the callers hired to check business locations were lesbians (Sarah Schulman 2016), and while the word "woman" during the initial production of these guides in the late 70s and early 80s was often code for "lesbian," straight or questioning women travelers also used the guide. Even the name Gaia's Guide, pronounced "gay-ah," suggests multiple levels of meaning, simultaneously coding the word "gay" but also speaking to ideas of Mother Earth and the idea of global travel. The words "women" or "women's" were fluid, like the sexualities they

were speaking about. The terms were employed as a coded way to protect lesbian patrons, but also allowed questioning women to attend events and visit establishments without feeling like they had to be out as a lesbian. Furthermore, the guides did not exclusively list lesbian or even feminist venues. The guides also listed women-friendly spaces that the publishers believed that women could frequent without as much fear of harassment. Their experiences with these spaces, which included businesses owned by gay men or even spots that gay people or feminists just happened to gather, were inevitably shaped by their own identities as white women. The theme of intended audience and how that impacts whether or not a location would be “safe” for only certain women recurs throughout this piece. This article will focus primarily on the role the guides played in shaping the lesbian feminist communities in America and whom the guides included and excluded.

Discussion

If the door is locked, shout “wow” at the fourth floor window. If Lois Weaver shouts back, you shout “Hi from Gaia” and then report back (if she doesn’t remember me, it’s ok- I probably wouldn’t recognize her with her clothes on, anyways).

- Gaia’s Guide, 1991 Edition

This seemingly very intimate aside is but one of hundreds of personal comments that fill the pages of Gaia’s Guide. In 1974, American lesbian activist Sandy Horn produced the first edition of Gaia’s Guide. Each edition produced over the next 18 years, organized geographically, listed lesbian organizations, bars, coffeehouses, restaurants, feminist bookstores, rape crisis centers, and women’s centers in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe, with personal notes from Horn spread throughout the pages. Through these production choices, the guides chronicled the rise of lesbian and feminist businesses and resources while rooting their legitimacy in social connections between operators, readers, and editor. Horn’s position as a community insider, as an out lesbian feminist, rendered her better able to gather and share information about “safe” or desirable places to gather in a way that was accessible and relatable. Aided by their colloquial tone and trading of insider knowledge, such as the description of a naked New York City feminist theatre company founder, Lois Weaver, in the quote above, the guides themselves also fostered a sense of insider knowledge and relied on social ties through which to build community.

In 1973, editor Sandy Horn’s own experiences of traveling and networking led her to create the first travel guide focused on women’s establishments, *The Girl’s Guide*, later to become *Gaia’s Guide*. For seventeen years she published the guides herself and did most of the distribution, producing the guides until the year before her death in 1993. She produced the books independently from gay male guidebook or mainstream travel guides, which enabled her to focus on women.⁶ According to Australian radical lesbian feminist writer Sheila Jeffreys, Sandy Horn played a large role in promoting lesbian community, and the guides serve as part of her legacy (Jeffreys Interview 2015). Jeffreys dedicated her book *The Lesbian Heresey* to Sandy Horn, stating that Horn “represents the humour, the creativity and the sheer guts that the lesbian community has needed for its survival” (1993). Jeffreys knew Horn was dying when she wrote the dedication and wanted to honor her life (Jeffreys 2015). Horn apparently learned about the importance of community in San Francisco in the late 1950s, before moving to London, England in 1965. In both the United States and Britain, she was involved in the lesbian advocacy

groups, Daughters of Bilitis and the Minorities Research Group. She produced Gaia's Guide in order to provide women and lesbian travelers with information on "safe" places to stay and socialize, accomplishing "a remarkable feat in international lesbian networking," dedicated to "the welfare of lesbians and the building of lesbian culture with an acute feminist consciousness, particularly around violence against women and the sexual abuse of girls" (Jeffreys 2015). Horn was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1987 and became actively involved in the lesbian network at Cancerlink. Determined to keep up her voluntary work, she nearly achieved her vow to complete the organization of the Lesbian Archive collection of magazines and periodicals, which dated back to the 1920s. She was described as "a fighter, campaigner and survivor to the last" (Helen Bishop 1994). Horn's personal life and social ties were integral in the creation of the guide. From edition to edition, despite adapting to expanded offerings and inflation, the guides maintained relative consistency. The guides began as a quarter page fold (4.25 by 5.5 inches) and had many blank spaces in the initial publications. As Horn was able to gather more information and as lesbian and feminist businesses and services proliferated, the guides became thicker. For example, not only did the number of establishments increase throughout the 1970s and into the 80s, but as the guides themselves became known there was also a greater economic incentive for businesses to want to be listed in them. Businesses would take out ad-space in order to draw more attention to their establishment, usually placing the ad just above their official listing. These advertisements helped to fund the guides' production. In the back pages of the 1977 edition, readers were informed that a quarter page advertisement cost \$15, a half page \$25, and a full page \$50 (Horn 1977, 296–297). The information was arranged geographically, in alphabetic order, with subheadings for restaurants, bars, clubs, bookstores, and women's centers. Most entries contained information about the address, the function of the space, and some review. If Horn had visited the location, she would often denote that by writing "Say Hi from Gaia." If women had sent in feedback about the location, she would include it. If she was unsure about the makeup of the space, she would print comments regarding her uncertainty. A star system guided readers through the listings. A four-star bar, club, or coffeehouse had a clientele that was "at least 90 percent gay women" and was especially recommended for having one or all of the following: "feminist consciousness, good entertainment, good vibes, or good sounds for dancing," whereas one star meant simply that gay people went there (Horn 1984). The production quality of the binding and covers improved over time as the market for the guides expanded. The number of personalized and reader anecdotes included in the guides likewise grew. However, while the physical production quality improved over time, the actual quality of the content of the books varied. Regardless of changes in quality, the general formatting of the guides was consistent.

Despite following the general format of the travel guide genre in listing resources under location headers, the guides defied the tradition of maintaining a false sense of neutrality; this choice also reflected Horn's politics. In order to create the guides, Horn relied upon feedback from readers themselves. Unlike guides such as the Lonely Planet books, which both send travel writers to locations and also solicit reader feedback, Gaia's Guide relied primarily on reader feedback. Throughout the various editions, Horn asked for more information from lesbians who were locals in the region, as well as from female tourists, including comments under entries, asking readers, "tell me more." Horn included readers' opinions of the business after providing the location and operating hours, acting like a modern day travel website. Such tactics were not merely artifice but

strategic. Readers would be more invested in the guides if they sensed that their needs and opinions would be heeded encouraging further purchases of the guide. Furthermore, such tactics lowered operating costs by eliminating the need to send travel writers to each location. By including readers' own descriptions, the guide felt like more of a community-based effort, reflecting the viewpoints of many with a resounding sense of cohesion.

Constructing the guide was a community effort, but Horn also allotted substantial space for her own anecdotes. The majority of her comments focused on food or atmosphere, but at times they were far more personalized, such as when she noted that, "the research phone call that I made to '3772' [club in Pasadena, California] was the best thing that happened to me all day" (Horn 1990) or, when she mentioned seeing a nude Lois Weaver, as revealed in the quote that opened this section. These personal anecdotes were present from the guide's earliest editions and remained throughout. Horn's insertion of herself into the volume served to defy the boundaries of public and private, as the feminist businesses listed in the guide had done themselves. No travel guide interface, whether in hard copy or digital form, is neutral and purporting to be so renders invisible economic, gender, and racial power structures that affected the lives of the purchasers of the guides. Thus, Gaia's Guide was significant not only because it was the first series dedicated to helping lesbians find community at home and abroad, but because it created a form of text-based lesbian feminist community through the joint production effort that also called attention to problems of representation in mainstream publishing practices. However, these editorial choices provoke the question: was including personal asides, such as the description of Weaver's nakedness, just an editorial choice or was it in part a marketing ploy?

Horn's personalization of the reviews may not have been wholly sincere. Novelist and playwright Sarah Schulman's account of her experience working as a caller for Gaia's Guide in 1979 challenges Horn's narrative. She said that she and two French drug dealers that had moved from Hawaii, all of them lesbians, worked in New York City for \$4.00 an hour to compile the listings (Schulman 1998, 118–119). Their lesbian boss, who was suffering from liver cancer, gave them a sheet to fill in the information garnered during the phone calls, by hand. Oftentimes they had very little information about the establishment or even the town. She remembers calling bars and restaurants while trying to collect information for the 1979 Gaia's Guide and owners being fearful, wondering how she had gotten their contact information (Schulman 2016). The desire to protect both owners and clientele in regions with smaller lesbian and gay populations made some of the earlier establishments initially want to hide their existence. Schulman would call telephone operators of the town and follow up on a lead. If she had no prior information, she would ask to be transferred to the nearby Metropolitan Community Church, known as the "gay church" (Matthew Stewart 2008). Another technique was to ask the telephone operator for the contact information for the local chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) which, according to Schulman, was straight in New York City in 1979, but was often the only place lesbians could first meet in places such as Texas. She remembered calling operators who did not know the word "gay" was linked to sexuality. Furthermore, she remembered that once she asked for an organizational name like the National Gay Taskforce, and the operator being uptight but giving it to her in a strained voice (Schulman 2016). Schulman quit working for Gaia's Guide after a little more than a year, due to the death of her employer at the call center. She claims that

the information gathered from these calls was compiled and utilized for a rating system in the guides. Even in this account, information was still gathered by lesbians for lesbians, relying on the ability to connect with others in the community. The methods employed in researching the guide, particularly the callers' own choices of whom to call for information, impacted what information was included in it. Contacting organizations such as NOW and the Metropolitan Community Church, meant that the collected information was mediated by the members of those organizations, which did not represent the entire lesbian or feminist population of an area. While community centers and rap groups were included in the guides, the particular attention that the guides placed on businesses, too, shaped the idea of who was part of the community. Marginalized groups within the already marginalized group of lesbian women were even less likely to get a loan to start a business (Alex Ketchum, *Journal of Business History*). Lesbians of color did not necessarily socialize in spaces explicitly labeled as lesbian feminist spaces when white women dominated those spaces (Benita Roth 2004). This meant that even if efforts were made to be inclusive of the entire lesbian community, the methods employed by the guidebook makers shaped who was included in the guidebook. By showcasing certain aspects of the lesbian feminist community above others, the guides influenced who would see themselves, their friends, and lovers within the book. These methods could result in the promotion of whiter and more middle-class lesbian communities than actually existed.

What kind of women?

The intended audience of Gaia's Guide was ambiguous. Was it a "women's," "gay women's," "lesbian," "feminist," or some other kind of travel guide? Horn's choice to name the United States section of the 1977 edition "Lesbianamerica" (Horn 1977, 6) and to provide the explanation that there was less information about countries "where homosexuality and/or lesbianism is illegal and life for people like ourselves is usually an isolated or dangerous business" (emphasis added [Horn 1981, ii]), hinted that the guides were for "lesbians." However, Horn never wrote in the guides that they were only for lesbians. Such ambiguity made the guides accessible for questioning women and for women who did not feel comfortable with a particular label but were interested in finding resources related to feminism, lesbians, and "non-straight" people. The coding of terms in the guides also had practical reasons: safety and pragmatism. While the Comstock laws, passed by the United States Congress on March 3 1873 as the Act for the "Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use," ended in full by 1972, according to Sarah Schulman who worked for Gaia's Guide, unofficially sending content relating to sexuality through the mail still posed a risk as late as 1979, if not later.⁷ Since the Gaia's Guides were distributed through mail order, in addition to being sold at Metropolitan Community Churches, bookstores, bars, restaurants, and women's studies centers, having a coded name helped protect both the publisher and the buyers. The title, "Gaia's Guide" was inconspicuous on a bookshelf. Unfortunately this title could also make the guide difficult to find. Stumbling upon the guide was not impossible, yet acquiring the guide and more information about women's spaces and women's community still required that most of its users had some contact with feminist, women's, or lesbian communities in order to obtain it. When customers looked to buy next year's guide, the information about which businesses sold it was listed in the guide itself.

While the guides mostly served to build a lesbian and lesbian feminist community, the guides had other uses. The entries in the guides were not limited to lesbian,

feminist, and women-run businesses, but included businesses run by straight people as well, without an explicitly feminist or lesbian dimension. When the business was woman- owned, gay-owned, or lesbian owned, this information, if known, was noted. On the other hand, some spaces listed were unofficially lesbian social spots despite having no formalized arrangement with the management—like the Denny’s at 102 Parker Street in Tampa, Florida that had “mostly gay clientele at night” in the 1977 and 1981 editions. Other listed businesses had owners that wanted it known that women would be welcome to stay there with their girlfriends and that they would not be harassed by management for publicly displaying affection. Horn also listed gay male owned businesses that welcomed lesbians. The resources within the guides were likewise useful to straight women, as they marked spaces that were safe to women (and mentioned if traveling to such locations were “safe” or not).⁸ Fluidity around using the terms “lesbian,” “gay women,” “women,” and “feminist” in guides enabled the guides’ multi-functionality; however, this ambiguity could gloss over important differences within this purported larger women’s community. Not every space would feel safe or welcoming to every reader based on her other identities. The idea of “safety” is itself a gendered, classed, and racialized concept. The problematic nature of “safety” has been articulated by researchers Stephen Gatz (2004), Sheila Scraton, and Beccy Watson (1998). Labeling a place as “safe” without qualifying “for whom” prioritized certain readers’ comfort above others.

Although the guides allowed for some ambiguity, gender is discussed in binary terms of “men” and “women” and sexuality is described as gay/straight or as lesbian. Notes about gender and sexual orientation appear frequently next to guide entries. The men that are mentioned in entries are primarily gay men. For example, the entry for Boise, Idaho’s Shuckey’s Bar contains a common note: “mostly gay men but there’s always very good vibes for gay women” (Horn 1977, 81). While the language would differ slightly per entry, when possible Horn noted the orientation and gender of the establishment’s regular clientele, using descriptors such as “mostly gay men” (Horn 1977, 61) or “community minded all lesbian bar.”⁹ It is common for an entry to include specific percentages such as “50% gay women.”¹⁰ In areas with fewer listings, such as Honolulu, Hawaii, gay male bars are the only resources suggested; The Blowhole Bar is described as “mostly gay men.”¹¹ Entries would note if the business had a “Ladies’ Night” like “Tuesday Ladies Night” at Cherry Creek Mining Company of Denver (Horn 1984, 136). The presence of straight people was mentioned to give readers a sense of the clientele, but also to indicate safety. The entry, “gay men and women. Some straights do frequent the Night Owl (bar of Miami, Florida) but no hassles,” (Horn 1981, 89) speaks to these concerns. Knowing the typical clientele of a business could prepare readers for whether or not they might feel comfortable in a space, especially regarding publicly embracing partners, cruising, or dressing in certain ways. These assumptions around “safety” speak to Horn’s imagined audience.

Apart from sexual orientation, the guides rarely explicitly specified any acknowledgement of differences in identity between women. Marie’s Golden Cue of Chicago, Illinois was described as “a pool hall open to women only” (Horn 1979, 108). No other information, including the address, was given for this entry—just a note to “obtain the address locally.” The information contained in most entries was sparse. In part, as the creator of the guide Horn was limited by the information available to her and could not include facts that she did not have. However, the information she included in the guide

also spoke to her own priorities as a white lesbian. Descriptions such as “women only” speak to larger issues within the lesbian and lesbian feminist communities at large. As scholars and activists such as Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor (2017), Barbara Smith (2000), and the Black lesbian feminist collective, The Combahee River Collective (1977), have shown, white women’s interests dominated lesbian feminist communities and racism and exclusion were significant problems. If readers and business owners did not provide information about the racial dynamics in their spaces when they had specified details such as “35% gay women, 5% straight,” (Horn 1979, 77) this spoke to the priorities of the women whose voices were most dominant in the community. As Horn emphasizes in the introduction, “Gaia’s Guides is basically a dialogue and without your co-operation and assistance, it would not be possible at all.”¹² Since the guides relied on information from readers, the supplied information reflected larger community dynamics, particularly around race.

Race is very rarely mentioned in the guides. In the 1977 edition, out of over two thousand entries in 300 pages, the word “race” is only mentioned twice: the first is in a description of the Amherst, Massachusetts newsletter which is “concerned with the struggle of women in a sexist, racist society” and an advertisement for The Common Woman Bookstore of Austin, Texas which sells “non-racist” books (Horn 1977, 99 and 186). Furthermore, while the 1977 advertisement for Common Woman Books mentions race, the entry in the 1981 edition does not. This silence indicates the priorities of Horn as an editor: race was either unimportant, of secondary importance, or an issue to be dealt with apart from lesbian feminist socializing. In fact, the 1981 edition still only has six references to race, despite containing hundreds more entries than the 1977 edition. Race is mentioned again primarily in advertisements for feminist and/or alternative bookstores that sold “black literature” or “black studies” texts (Horn 1981, 91 and 95). The only other references are for three gay and lesbian organizations for people of color: Lesbians of Color in Pasadena, California, the Coalition of Black and Gay Women of Baltimore, Maryland, and the National Coalition of Black Gays (Horn 1981, 20). These organizations are listed under the subheading “Third World Group,” which literally segregated racialized lesbian organizations from the rest of the text and treated American lesbians of color as non-American. By the 1989 edition, “Third World Group” is replaced by “Special Interest Groups” (Horn 1989, 315) which also included information for lesbian mothers and older lesbians. The experiences of lesbians of color, especially regarding bigotry and racism, continued to be treated as a lesser concern or one to be ignored.

The silence regarding different experiences based on a woman’s race was apparent throughout the guides. The entry for the Las Hermanas Coffeehouse of San Diego, California was described as being “open to ALL Women.” While it is true that Las Hermanas was open to women of all races, this entry erases how the founders’ experiences as Chicana and Latina women was integral in their decision to create the coffeehouse (Horn 1981, 59). As is evident from reading through all available editions of the Las Hermanas newsletter, *Feminist Communications*, and pouring through the organization’s business records and interviews, race and ethnicity were central concerns in the coffeehouse.¹³ However, this information is missing in the guidebook. Even more rare was the indication of racism that occurred within lesbian spaces from 1975–1992—a phenomenon that has been documented numerous times elsewhere by activists and scholars (Leslie Bow et al. 2017). The entry, “Blackwomen have faced problems here” does appear in one entry, but this acknowledgement of discrimination is rare

in the guides. The guides' authors could brush aside evidence of racial bigotry because they did not suffer from it.¹⁴ In the 1984 edition, Philadelphia's Mahogany Club was described as a "private Black women's club. Very highly recommended" (Horn 1984). This recommendation speaks to the fact that Black women were reading the guide and submitting feedback, however the concerns of white women were prioritized. Thus, while the guides alleged to provide information about safe places for their readers to frequent, the concerns of lesbians of color, who "would likely define safety as including freedom from bigotry and racism," were excluded.¹⁵

While Gaia's Guides typically do not specifically mention class, much of this information is evident within the subtext. Unlike sexual orientation and gender, which is usually explicitly listed when describing the owners or the clientele, class is far more subtly denoted, under guised terms such as "rough" (Horn 1977, 89). Class difference was primarily hinted at in descriptions of a business's prices. Horn would note if the fare was expensive or not, or if visits to this establishment might be restricted to special occasions. For example, in the entry for the Valencia Rose of San Francisco, California, Horn said that on top of it having lots of recommendations because of its proximity to the women's building, and providing lots of entertainment and benefits for gay and lesbian causes, it was "very, very inexpensive" (Horn 1984 and 1985). The judgment of price speaks to an assumed audience of readers of a certain class. As suggested by comments about particular spaces being appropriate for a "special treat," the guides were aimed mostly at a middle-class audience that had the resources to travel but did not have access to a significant amount of capital. Working class lesbians would have had less money to spend on travel and the guides themselves.

Otherwise, differences in identity between women readers were largely disregarded in the guides. Occasionally bars are described as "a younger crowd" or "slightly older crowd" and in the editions produced in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there are a handful of special interest groups for "older lesbians" (Horn 1989, 315). However, generational differences are not generally remarked upon. While intersecting identities such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability impacted individuals' experiences within these establishments, and some disagreement occurred about whether or not certain spaces were in fact feminist or women friendly, the guidebooks and travel guides that referenced these spaces glossed over these differences.

Although the guides included readers' comments about experiences in particular spaces, preference for spaces promoting certain visions of feminism and lesbian identity was mediated through Horn's editing. Pulling together information of every possible woman's space that she could find that met her criteria, Horn blurred some of these boundaries that existed in the local communities themselves. As editor, she had the final power to decide the limitations of what information would and would not be included. This is not to ignore the ways in which discrimination is structural. However it is important to note how, Horn's own identity played an integral role in shaping who and what was able to be included in the lesbian feminist community nexus.

Horn's legacy

Towards the end of Gaia's Guides' publication, Horn's fatigue became noticeable. In the notes, she would comment on how sick she was of staring at the screen and typing information or how she really needed help finding out about a particular area. For

example, on page 304 of the 1989 edition under the NYC archives section for Lesbian Herstory archives, she noted that it held a:

Truly impressive collection of Lesbian Memorabilia/books/photographs. Housed in someone's New York apartment and well worth a visit. Say "hi" from GAIA who is just sitting here trying to eroticize her own eyes which are turning square and green from gazing into this goddammed screen . . . it does not work . . . haven't time to try eroticizing my achin' back . . . not even time to look up the spelling of eroticize . . . well, it's back into harness for moi . . . (Horn 1989, 304)

In describing the condition in which she was writing, Horn drew attention to the emotional labor behind producing the guide. Her candidness with the reader made her appear as a more trustworthy narrator. However, while she shared her own personal experiences with the reader, there was a limit to her openness. She did not reveal that her fatigue was worsened by the cancer that would eventually end her life. She attributed the cause of her tiredness to the production of the guides and omitted any mention of her terminal illness. Her comments about her fatigue tended to be humorous, noting in the 1991 edition under the entry about chartered sailings in Florida and an island beach cabin vacation company, "I wish I could right now . . ." (Horn 1991, 220). Horn's guide reflected feminist values by valuing the voices of the community, not rendering her own physical and emotional labor invisible, and promoting women-owned and run businesses.

Sandy Horn's books were a collective venture with collective impact, though Horn shaped the books in ways that pertain to her life circumstances. As the information shared in guides was filtered through her own lens, her personal quirks and particularities demonstrate how one lesbian's contribution to lesbian print culture impacted the broader lesbian community. In particular, while the guides purported to promote shared interests of the women's community, Horn's role as editor influenced the representations of what was safe, desirable, and enticing to readers as she had the final word.

However Horn's influence was not unique in the sense that individuals or small groups can have disproportionate impact in larger communities.

Travel guides managed by a single editor like Horn had a certain kind of impact on the lesbian feminist community but other technologies carry the flavor of their creators, managers, and handlers both online and offline. Importantly, while the guides show one picture of the lesbian feminist communities of her era, they are only one representation in which Horn's strong social ties impacted shared interests of the larger community.

In the most literal sense, guides functioned to strengthen social ties and granted certain readers a sense of membership. Horn would note if a particular establishment sold her guide under the listing. The guides even at times functioned as a ticket or a pass into a women's club, as owning it designated you as a member of the community. Under some listings, the guide said that if you had a copy you would either get a discount or be granted entrance. In a larger sense, the guides provided a window into opportunities for lesbian feminists to network. Institutional racism, structural inequality, and Horn's preferences may have shaped the guides, but these books still maintained an important role in community formation for certain lesbian feminists, but not all.

Lesbian memories and futures

Despite their limitations, the importance of the guides in the history of lesbian feminist community creation cannot be overlooked—neither can their role in serving at times as the only record of the existence of a business or center. Guidebooks are, in a sense, ephemeral objects, often becoming outdated moments after they are published. As

literature scholar and author of *The Lesbian Index: Pragmatism and Lesbian Subjectivity in the Twentieth Century*, Kim Emery (2001) notes:

Gaia's Guide and others like it are organized around a structuralist conceit- they attend to neither the material specificity nor the temporal dimension of the reality that they purport to describe. The representation of queer cultures that they offer—useful as it is—is an atemporal abstraction, a system of understanding unattached to actual time and actual space.

This conceit does not render guidebooks useless; however, it is important to recognize the fluidity of the conditions that guidebooks sought to represent. Each edition serves to provide a cropped snapshot of a moment, never fully whole as the guidebooks remained filtered through Sandy Horn's editorial lens. Yet, while guidebooks from decades past are no longer useful for travelers of today, these guidebooks continue to further contribute to lesbian feminist community creation in present times by both contributing to a shared memory and acting as a resource for historians. As both Benedict Anderson (2006) and Kathleen MacQueen (2001) stress, communities exist because people believe in them; members see themselves as part of a group with a shared history, shared present, and shared future. By providing a snapshot of the past, Gaia's Guides and other women's travel guides continue to build community, but this community memory is again mediated through the editorial choices of Horn and the racial, gender, and class dynamics of society.

Conclusion

This article addresses the important contribution that women's guidebooks, particularly Gaia's Guide made to the lesbian and feminist communities. The concerns, exclusions, and tensions in determining who and what were included in these communities live into the present. These travel guides documented location of businesses and places for lesbians and questioning women to socialize in the 1970s through early 1990s.

Women's travel guidebooks produced by primarily lesbian feminists, were and are a treasure trove for finding lesbian and feminist communities of the past; however, that understanding of community was not inclusive of everyone as the biases and identities of the producers of these guides impacted their content. Contemporaries could track down venues and they could contribute to and recommend (or not) sites they had visited or hoped to visit. These material exchanges have analogs in the digital world but the nature of specific technologies influences user accessibility and experience.¹⁶

In their day, the guides helped individual lesbians find other lesbians as well as community venues and businesses to patronize. Business owners advertised their establishments to attract lesbian clientele who might appreciate their offerings. The authors, editors, and publishers contributed to circulating information about spaces where women and lesbians might gather comfortably, but these determinations of safety and comfort were mediated through their own identities and experiences. Examining past technologies of lesbian communication alters our historical grasp of lesbian community formation; it is not that one source was better than the other but that the form of the communication technology impacts who is included and excluded. Particular charismatic individuals, such as Sandy Horn, could have a disproportionate impact on communities. The guides also reflected prevailing structural inequalities during the period. Women's travel guides provide windows into the lesbian and women's communities and helped document their existence. For posterity, as researchers using these

guides, we have a record of locations that we can map with new digital tools.¹⁷ The guides thus serve a final contribution to the creation of a community: flawed, shared histories.

Notes

1. A definitional problem comes from the use of the terms “women,” “lesbian,” and “feminist” and how these words do not allow for all the multiplicity of identities within those categories. Intersecting factors like race, class, age, religion, and geographic region impacted whether women chose to identify themselves and their business establishments as “women,” “lesbian,” “feminist,” “womyn,” “wimmen,” “womin,” “womban,” “womenloving-women,” “wom*n,” and other terms such as “real woman,” and later “cis-women,” and “transwomen.” I am using the terms that the makers of the guide employed. For more on this issue, see: Peter M. Nardi and Beth E. Schneider, *Social Perspectives in Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 366–7.

2. Prices were listed on the covers. Sandy Horn, *Gaia’s Guide* (Palo Alto: Women’s UP Press, 1977 and 1981).

3. John M. MacKenzie, “Empires of Travel: British Guidebooks and Cultural Imperialism in the 19th and 20th Centuries,” *Histories of Tourism: Representation, Identity and Conflict* 6 (2005): 19 and Rudy Koshar, “‘What Ought to Be Seen’: Tourists’ Guidebooks and National Identities in Modern Germany and Europe,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 3 (1998): 323–340.

4. Other travel guides and resource guides from the 1970s and 1980s also listed feminist and lesbian restaurants, cafés, bookstores, and similar establishments, yet their listings did not contribute a coherent identity aligned with bolstering the women’s community. Alternative lifestyle telephone books such as *The People’s Yellow Pages* (1971) and *The Philadelphia FEMINIST MEDIA STUDIES* 13

Whole City Catalogue (1973) listed some of these spaces. However, I do not focus on them as they were not controlled by women. As these books were produced by outsiders to the community, the political and social motivation was different for producing them than the guides by and for women; one type of guide was for building the “alternative community” and the other for the women’s community. Nonetheless, they do still provide researchers with a useful resource through which to study spaces in which feminists and lesbians gathered, collaborated, socialized, and did activism.

5. Although exact publication numbers are unknown, Gina Gatta, publisher of *Gaia’s Guides*’ main competitor beginning in 1989, *Damron’s Women’s Traveller*, thinks it is doubtful that *Gaia’s Guides* published more than 20,000 copies a year, a similar circulation to her own publication. To put that number in perspective, *Damron’s Men’s Guide* (formerly called *Damron’s Address Book*) peaked with the 1999 edition at 60,000 copies that year, competing against *Spartacus*. The third major publisher of women’s guides was Ferrari Publications, which released four women’s guide series mostly containing domestic listings: *Places for Women* (1984), *Places of Interest for Women* (1985, 1986) and later expanding to the international market, from the mid-1990s until Ferrari went out of business in the early 2000s, *Women’s Travel in Your Pocket* and *Ferrari for Women: Worldwide Women’s Guide* (1995). *Gaia’s Guide*, from its inception, included international listings. Unlike *Gaia’s Guides*, which just focused on women’s guides, both Ferrari and Damron began as publishers of gay male guides and expanded into the women’s and lesbian travel market. Other independent national guides included the *Canada Women’s Guide*, *The Guide to Women’s Resources*, and *The New Woman’s Survival Catalogue* (1973).

6. While Guy Straight published the earliest North American gay guide in 1963 in his *Lavender Baedeker*, followed shortly after by Bob Damron’s *Address Book* in 1964, travel guides

particularly focused on women's establishments were not available until the release of *The Gay Girl's Guide* in 1974. *Gaia's Guide* (1975–1992) and *Places of Interest for Women* (1988) soon followed, alongside more local guides. Although some lesbian establishments were listed in earlier gay travel guides like *Damron's*, *The Gay Yellow Pages*, *In Scene*, and *Spartan*, the gay guides mostly focused on male establishments. In response to allegations of misogynistic publishing practices, gay-guide author Bob Ross of *Damron's*, claimed that he actually researched lesbian establishments but excluded them from his guide at the request of lesbian business owners who feared harassment (He actually started out as a chef at one of *Damron's* restaurants before the production of the guides). Missouri History Museum, "Safe Travels for the LGBTQ Community on Route 66," *History Happens Here*, September 23, 2016, <http://www.historyhappenshere.org/node/7814>. And Michael Flanagan, "P.S. They Loved You: Remembering an Iconic Pol Street Bar and Restaurant," *Bay Area Reporter*, November 26, 2015, <http://ebar.com/bartab/bartabcolumns.php?sec=barchive&id=71>.

7. An Act for the Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use., Ch. 258, § 2, 17 Stat. 599. (March 3 1873) and Sarah Schulman, "Gaia's Guides Interview," interview by author, August 10, 2016. This act criminalized the usage of the U.S. Postal Service to send erotica, contraceptives, abortifacients, sex toys, or personal letters alluding to any sexual content or information regarding the above items.

8. Gina Gatta, "On Travel Guides," private email to author. August 18, 2014. "I think my largest run of the *Damron's Women's Traveller* was 20,000 in the late 90's."

9. Horn, *Gaia's Guide* (1984), 136. This was the description of Denver, Colorado's Three Sisters.

10. Horn, *Gaia's Guide* (1981), 1951. This was the description for the Camden, New Jersey bar, *The Lamplighter*.

11. In earlier editions, when Horn had little information about an area, she utilized gay men's travel guides and advertisements in other gay, lesbian, and feminist periodicals, noting "these are in this book simply because they've been advertising in the *Gay and/or Feminist Press*. So.. suppose you tell us who actually goes there." Horn, *Gaia's Guide* (1977), 152 and 196.

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12. Horn, *Gaia's Guide* (1981), ii. and Horn, *Gaia's Guide* (1977), 22 and 294. There was an ad, repeated twice, asking for more information from readers. "Want! Valid information leading to a bigger and better 1978 edition of *Gaia's Guide*. Reward: a complimentary copy of that bigger and better 1978 edition."

13. These documents are available at LAMBDA Archives of San Diego. *Las Hermanas Coffeehouse*, *Feminist Communications*, various editions, LAMBDA Archives of San Diego, *Las Hermanas Box*.

14. This point was articulated by one of the reviewers of the article.

15. This point was articulated by one of the reviewers of the article.

16. For more on the legacy of lesbian feminist communities and how they endure through online communities and a new generation of feminist businesses, see: "Memory has added seasoning. The legacy of feminist restaurants and cafes in the United-States" (Ketchum 2019). <http://journals.openedition.org/aof/9904>.

17. I used *Gaia's Guides* and other travel guides, including the *Gay Yellow Pages*, *Pink Pages*, and *Lavender Pages*, as well as information from feminist periodicals, business cards, and event flyers to map out the locations of feminist restaurants and cafés within the United States and Canada from 1972 to 1989. Each time the location of a feminist restaurant, café, or coffeehouse was noted, I entered the name of the business, address (if it was known), and any other elements of description into an Excel spreadsheet entitled the

“Master Database.” I, then, cleaned the data from the “Master Database” in order to create homogenized data sets, which could be utilized by Geographic Information Systems mapping programs.

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