

Award for Undergraduate Research Essay

I wrote my research paper, *Lesbian Newsletters, Pulps, and Manuals: A Primary Source Analysis*, for my History Honors course, preparing to write an undergraduate thesis. I found my research topic after reading the lesbian pulp guide, *We Walk Alone* by Ann Aldrich. I was immediately entranced by this book, as it provided details on every aspect of lesbian life in Greenwich Village, New York in the 1950s. From parties to outfits, and marriage laws to coming out, if a lesbian experienced it, Aldrich discussed it. From this source, I knew I had to write my paper on lesbian-written texts shaping their community in the 1950s.

I discovered *We Walk Alone* by Ann Aldrich simply by looking for lesbian-themed books, and then I learned the term “lesbian pulp novel,” so I began searching for those. I read *The Price of Salt* by Claire Morgan because I already loved its movie adaptation, *Carol*. Aldrich’s novel also mentioned *The Ladder*, a lesbian publication published by the Daughters of Bilitis, an early lesbian activist group.. While searching the UMD Libraries website, I used many key terms to find books about lesbians, utilizing phrases like “LGBTQ+,” “queer,” and “lesbian,” along with “New York City,” and “Greenwich Village.”

I also utilized the LGBTQ+ specific resources the UMD Libraries have to offer like LGBT Studies Research Guide, and asking librarians for help borrowing more pulp novels through ILL. The librarians were helpful in pushing me through the process of attaining more books, which was great because without them I would have given up and just chosen books that were easier to access. In this way, the librarians pushed me to keep my goals on track, and to have the resources I wanted, to write the best paper I could.

Professor Woods encouraged me to choose lesbian history for my Honors Thesis, and ensured I would stay on that topic by supporting me through writing this essay first. When I first

pitched the idea I was unsure about it, as the topic felt taboo and not as “historical” compared to my classmates’. But Professor Woods assured me that I would enjoy the project much more if I researched a topic that my heart and mind were in. It was also amazing to get this guidance from a lesbian professor, who is out and proud in the workplace. Professor Woods and I actually are smiling next to each other in the first annual Big Queer Photo, hosted by the LGBT Equity Center, which was taken in front of our beloved McKeldin Library. She inspired me so much to be unapologetically myself, especially in academia where queer representation is currently lacking.

To select my sources I read through many issues of *The Ladder* and every issue of *Vice Versa*, and then pulled specifics from there. Aldrich and Morgan’s books were both mentioned several times in these publications, which was how I knew I needed to discuss them in the paper. It was so fun to read through all of the things that the lesbian women submitted to these publications, and find pieces that best explained how the women not only survived, but enjoyed life in the 1950s. My favorite understanding that came from comparing all of the lesbian primary sources, was that at the time the texts were treated as guides to finding other queer people. Lesbian women would scour the newsletters and pulps for traces of which bars were popular and which neighborhoods would have the most queer people. This allowed for communities to form, and helped the gay hubs in New York City expand as much as they did.

From the research process of my primary source analysis paper, I learned a lot about what I would be spending the next year on: my Undergraduate Honors Thesis. Looking back, I am using skills proficiently that I began to develop while working on this paper. I learned how to find newsletters, a primary source option I had not previously considered in my educational research. I utilized the library’s Archives Unbound “Selected Gay and Lesbian Periodicals and

Newsletters” to find great copies of the lesbian publications. I learned how to understand abstracts and use them to decide if I wanted to read a longer research paper for my secondary source research. I learned to be confident in researching topics that are important to me, and to not just choose a topic that I think would be academic or impressive to others.

For my professional career, I plan on being a museum educator. I will be studying museums in graduate school, and I have been working at the Air and Space Museum in DC for the last two years. Museums, and their archives, have always been my favorite learning institutions. From writing *Lesbian Newsletters, Pulps, and Manuals: A Primary Source Analysis*, I discovered the Lesbian Herstory Archive. I had never imagined that there would be an entire archive dedicated to lesbian lives, so to discover LHA, and find they are so involved in the community, was greatly reassuring for me. I now know there are other researchers and historians with the same values and interests as I do, and I will have a future choice of museums and archives that I would feel welcome to work at.

Looking back on my research experience for this paper, I would have read even more lesbian newsletters to have a wider sample of texts to cite. I really loved researching and writing this paper, so I wouldn’t change much of my experience, except doing more of it! I’d love it if the library did more for LGBTQ+ history month in October, or Pride Month in June. Perhaps displaying some lesbian pulp novels, as I know McKeldin has some in their stacks! A workshop on locating LGBTQ+ resources like periodicals, databases, or community clubs would be great as well. I look forward to seeing what else the UMD Libraries can do to engage our campus community in LGBTQ+ related research.