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History, Erasure, Activism: Archival Paradox as Institutional Practice

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Abstract: This essay connects the reparative assemblages of queer archiving practice to growing conversations in university studies. Tracing the fraught legal history of Penn State University’s first “Homophile” association in the 1970s, this essay theorizes how university records—and the processes of recording they index—participate in the creation of institutional identity and help establish institutional relations with their communities. Ultimately, it suggests that archivists and librarians act as mediators, unintentionally or purposefully, of the relations between vulnerable communities and the structures of power in which they are embedded.

Keywords: queer history, student activism, archival studies, university studies

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When those who have power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you. . . . when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as of you looked into a mirror and saw nothing. Yet you know you exist and others like you—that this is a game with mirrors. It takes some strength of soul—and not just individual strength, but collective understanding—to resist this void, this nonbeing, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard.

—Adrienne Rich, “Invisibility in Academe”

Adrienne Rich’s (1994) description of social invisibility, which she details as “the attempt to fragment you” (263), graces the opening pages of a long report commissioned by The Pennsylvania State University in 1991 and filed in January of 1992. *Enhancing Diversity: Toward a Better Campus Climate; A Report of the Committee on Lesbian and Gay Concerns* was developed “to consider how one group that has long been silenced and invisible at Penn State might become equal participants in our community” (Tierney 1992, 6). On May 17, 1991, the year the *Enhancing Diversity* report was researched and written, Penn State’s Board of Trustees voted to amend the university’s nondiscrimination policy to include protection for “personal characteristics” including “sex, or sexual orientation.” In the state of Pennsylvania, discrimination in “public employment on the basis of sexual orientation” had been banned, per Executive Order 75-5, since 1975 (Hunt 2012, 69). For almost twenty years, then, the university had neglected, refused, or otherwise treated as invisible the necessity of non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ identifying staff, faculty, and students.

This specific institutional lag, the long-term lack of legal protection for members of queer communities,¹ is doubly unfortunate—which is to say, excessively egregious—because the university was successfully sued by a student organization and by a student teacher in 1972 for discrimination related to sexual orientation and personal identity.² The organization, known locally as HOPS, was Penn State’s first “Homophile” association, dedicated to community building and education that countered heterosexism and heteronormativity.³ The student, Joseph Acanfora, an early and active member.

In this essay, I bring to light a hidden history of institutional repression and administrative interference on Penn State's University Park campus. It illuminates specific and interconnected administrative malfeasance to reconstruct and refract the conditions of Penn State's institutional identity. A story of institutional relations with and among individuals, the HOPS narrative is at once a visible and an unseen part of Penn State University life. The campus's current Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity does not include this history on their website; though cited as the impetus for the Center's founding, the 1992 *Enhancing Diversity* report is not part of its lending library. Yet Penn State's campus publications and even Wikipedia entries offer overviews of the university's original "Homophile" association.⁴ The closer story unfolded here, however, has been pieced together from original archival documents filed in one of the more obscure University Archives collections.

In 2020, the national nonprofit organization Campus Pride ranked Penn State as one of its Top 40 "Best of the Best LGBTQ-Friendly Colleges and Universities." Celebrating the university with a photograph of the ubiquitous "Nittany Lion"⁵ draped in a rainbow flag, the award page (2020) highlights "the strides that have been made with regards to the LGBTQ+ climate at University Park and all of our commonwealth campuses." Descending into university collections, we can better survey the nadir from which those strides have been taken, with amazing rapidity. As recently as 2006, notorious homophobe and bully Rene Portland was still a university employee, one of the winningest coaches in Penn State female basketball history, her history of discrimination less important than results on the court.⁶ That's not even archival. The mismatch between public perception or broader institutional identity and archival history at Penn State prompts the questions to which this essay responds: where do we locate the identity of an institution? How can we understand the development of that identity as a relation between historical records and lived experience? And finally, who shapes our understanding of—and thus relation to—an educational institution as a "social entity"?

I. Archiving, in Relation

Archives are relational spaces. Understanding the narrative arc of this particular archival story entails shaping a mass of documents into meaningful relation. Documents relate to each other, to their context, and, retroactively, to the changes that occur after their official accession or storage. As Ciaran B. Trace (2002) describes, "Archives provide evidence of their creator because they are *interrelated* as to meaning: each archival document is contingent on its functional relations to other documents both within and outside the fonds of which it forms a part, and its understanding depends, therefore, on knowledge of those relations. . . . records [are] social entities" (138; 152). These particular archival documents also record a history of relation: the student activists and plaintiffs of this story are concerned, deeply, with the relation of their queer communities to university, town, and ultimately, "society." Furthermore, the capacity of these students to access or leverage the power of relation, of numbers and group identity, is deliberately constrained by administrators at the university and in the school district. Despite much local handwringing about borough and campus politics, in University Park, the relation of "town and gown" is hand and glove. Students, staff, and faculty members unable or unwilling to disappear into those overlaid local spaces are routinely endangered.

As a project elevating the labors of queer-identifying student activists and their allies in the mid-twentieth century, this essay suggests that reading for lost stories in institutional archives requires what Sara Ahmed (2021) calls "a feminist ear." In her history of institutional complaint, she describes this as "not only hearing the students' complaints; [having a feminist ear] meant sharing the work . . . a combining of forces" (6-7). Reading across the "combined forces" of legal and local documents, this

institutional narrative illustrates how archival practice might both facilitate historical erasure and offer its antidote. I propose that archivists and librarians can act as mediators—unintentionally or purposefully—of the relations between vulnerable communities and the structures of power in which they are embedded. I intend this work as an affirmation of Rich’s (1994) call for the “strength of . . . collective understanding—to resist this void, this nonbeing” (262).

In recent years, scholars, students, and other university participants have increasingly turned analytical and historical attention to the formations and operations of universities. The critical turn to university studies has given robust language for describing the overlaps between university and corporate experiences, for historicizing academic disciplines and their institutional precarities, and for theorizing the relations or expectations for interpersonal support and connection in the neoliberal university.⁷ Both Ahmed (2021) and Jennifer Doyle (2015) have advanced a critical tradition of institutional “case studies” that slip between history and theoretical implication. In *Complaint!* and *Campus Sex, Campus Security*, Ahmed and Doyle, respectively, attend to the relations between institutionally powerful figures or groups (upper administration, faculty, police and security forces) and individual students or university personnel. Related scholarship has also described the robust traditions of active and activist student involvement in spurring campus change. The histories of Ethnic Studies, Black Studies, and Women’s and Gender Studies departments all over the United States highlight the power of student participation in academic programming.

Following in Ahmed and Doyle’s methodological tradition, I unfold two connected narratives of student activism and institutional critique to make visible one university’s long culture of repression and discrimination. Not an exception, then, this history clarifies how discrimination—often deployed in informal, ad hoc, and clandestine ways—is a powerful facet of the university’s identity. The history of Penn State’s first “Homophile” association, told through the archive’s documentary assemblage, emerges as fundamentally a history of relation. At its heart is a student group invested in changing their community’s relation to the world, and the institutionally powerful men who used their internal relations with one another to thwart those goals. If a story of triumph, it is triumph both hard-won and obscure. If the “moral” of the story remains unclear, winners and losers ambiguous, it nevertheless shows us a process of institutional meaning-making (as absence), institutional identity as a projection of an institutional desire (for erasure), and institutional records as that desire’s permutations.

Of course, a contemporary reader has no way to access collective moments or personal experiences directly from the registers of history. As scholars have long argued, lamented, and addressed, we have only the record remaining, as it has been preserved, stored, and made visible for users.⁸ To be usable and comprehensible, archival holdings are subject to standardized classification systems that reproduce powerful unmarked norms. In the United States at least, these include the reproduction of heterosexist historical progressivism and white supremacy.⁹ Those normative structures, in turn, have made practices of “queer archiving” especially complex and fragmentary.¹⁰ Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz (2002) argue that the work of making an archive and the work of being in a body—the work of gender—are both conditioned by the unreflexive reproduction of performance: “the practice of archives is the ritualized implementation of theory, the acting out of a script . . . formed by the ‘social magic’ of now-unquestioned, ‘naturalized’ norms” (173). The most dangerous of these scripts, for Cook and Schwartz, is the presumption of “invisibility” or transparency.

The danger of the invisibility script is glaringly obvious for an institutional record like the University Archives of a major public university. Because, of course, the process of record-keeping is already a record of the keeper. This truism shapes more and more of the practical work and theoretical orientation of archivists and librarians. Beginning in the early twenty-first century, perceptions about archivists as neutral recorders have undergone a “critical paradigm shift” away from the naturalized script

of invisibility to a more careful accounting of archiving as “inherently political and interventionist” (Lapp 2019, 216). This shift presents a paradox for university-sanctioned university records, which are at once a place to sustain institutional memory and a place to consign history to a few boxes, accessible through the library’s cataloguing record (if you’re lucky, there’s a specialized finding aid) available only by request, stored “off-site,” with a three-day wait time.¹¹

The public description of the University Archive mission is, on its face, generative and generous. On the library website, the scope of Penn State University Archives includes “Student and campus life, with a particular interest in student organization records. . . . Of specific interest are those involved in political and social activism and students representing historically marginalized communities.” Thus does the university trumpet its investment in the documentary record of student activism, protest, and community engagement. Yet the University Archives, as archives, are also a space of institutional control and unarticulated local norms around publicity, history, and tradition.

In a queer history of invisibility (Rich’s “void of nonbeing,” what *Enhancing Diversity* calls the “gay, lesbian, and bisexual history of oppression and invisibility” at Penn State), the normalized assumption that the record makers are themselves invisible is a complex layering of institutional oppression in multiple official forms. That fantasy can shelter archivists and preservations from the repercussions of cataloging choices, while simultaneously abstracting the community-building value of queer archiving into the vast vagueness of a university archives system. Sometimes, the official contours of an archival holding hides its content and its relation to larger institutional identities and histories. For example, the records used here require advance request, and are described in the online collection listing as “newsletters, magazines, and pamphlets dealing with the events surrounding the club’s endeavor to achieve official club status at Penn State University.”¹² Those events include two lawsuits brought against the university that the university lost; among the “newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets” are filing documents, affidavits, and rumors recorded as evidence. To find, access, and parse the relational history detailed in the story of Penn State’s first “Homophile” association requires institutionally specific knowledge and research experience.¹³ By understanding how this material fills out something bigger about the university’s identity, we understand how an institution itself operates as legible “social entity,” reproducing its greatest character flaws in ways both small and large, in actions unseen, yet overheard. In Rich’s terms, the archive can be both void and mirror.

II. The Other Vision – Speaking for Students

In 1971, students at The Pennsylvania State University chartered the campus’s first organization dedicated to community-building and education about non-heterosexual/non-heterosexist identity. According to the original constitution and by-laws, “The name of this organization shall be The Other Vision: Homophiles of Penn State.”¹⁴ The Homophiles of Penn State, or HOPS, articulated four objectives for their organization:

Explaining the alternative life styles available to all individuals. . . . Providing as many opportunities for meaningful social interaction among homosexuals in the University community as are permissible under existing State, Federal, or local laws. . . . Creating greater harmony and understanding between homosexuals and the community at large. . . . Encouraging members to engage in political activities for the purpose of reforming statutes concerning homosexual behavior.¹⁵

Even this short list suggests the delicacy with which the HOPS students had to manage their *proposed* entry into university life. Their first objective affirms they will make no “attempt to convert any

individuals nor advocate any particular sexual direction” and they go on to carefully situate themselves within the circle of “existing State, Federal, or local laws” (ibid.).

For all the legalistic disavowals, though, HOPS also deployed the radical spirit suffusing many of the campus’s student populations at the start of the 1970s. While HOPS was proposing their constitution and applying for official status, students in Penn State’s Black community were writing and publishing *The Black Eye* newspaper.¹⁶ Others were joining the Students for a Democratic Society organization (founded 1966) and protesting the ongoing Vietnam War.¹⁷ It is clear from their constitution that HOPS’s “Other Vision” included deliberate rejoinders against sexism and homophobia on campus. There, the students assert as their mission: “To expose the inequities existing in the heterosexual . . . male-dominated society, and in doing so to dispel ignorance, hostility, and prejudice against homosexuals. . . who have chosen varieties of sexual expression at variance with the majority; To dispel as fraud the concept of Homosexuality as a sickness.”¹⁸ Despite other forms of student protest and community organizing on campus, HOPS’ proposed intervention must have seemed too targeted at direct lines of institutional force. Indeed, Penn State’s upper administration at this time was, to put it bluntly, “male-dominated” and, as we will see, actively homophobic. If Vietnam was far away and the proportion of Black students seemed too small to pose much perceived risk to militaristic commitments and the masculinist white majorities on campus, the specter of queer collectivity proved a bit too close, and too locally embedded, for comfort.¹⁹

From the start, the university exploited layers of institutional policy to make public life for HOPS as difficult as possible. Submitted to the University Student Government for approval on March 15, 1971, the HOPS charter was initially approved on April 22, 1971.²⁰ It was unceremoniously revoked less than a month later. But before their official notice, university administrators sent a more symbolic message. On May 6, 1971, the University Manager of Student Activities—William Fuller—ordered the removal of posters advertising HOPS-sponsored campus speakers from the Student Union bulletin boards.²¹ They gave HOPS no notice of this irregular interference, nor do remaining records indicate that the advertised event would be rescheduled. According to records from one of the two lawsuits to emerge from the pending HOPS controversy, the student group, which had official university approval at the time, had organized an educational event for spring 1971.²² This seems to have been something of an organizational triumph for the nascent “Homophile” community in Central Pennsylvania: it would feature famous gay activist and politician Frank Kameny, then running for a non-voting Congressional seat in the District of Columbia; Tina Mandel, one of the leaders of the Daughters of Bilitis’s “Caucus” faction in New York City; and Wayne Stein, member of the Gay and Lesbian Activist Alliance of Washington D.C.²³ These speakers represented a prominent network of activists and mentors for Penn State’s HOPS collective, and the abrupt, unpublicized cancellation of their community gathering was not only distressing for local students, but also an affront to the widely valued and highly effective community organizers who had agreed to travel to State College in support of the student’s educational mission. The effects of Penn State’s sanctioned discrimination began, in this cancellation, to seep outside the “Happy Valley” and affect the larger communities of activism and collectivity that Penn State’s Homophiles were eager to include.

A week later on May 10, 1971, Raymond O. Murphy, the current Vice-President for Student Affairs, sent a letter to HOPS’s senior officers. Addressed directly to Diane Whitney, the letter warned Whitney (HOPS Vice-President) and, by extension, Bruce Miller (then HOPS President, returning student, and US military veteran) that the HOPS charter had been put on hold: “This is to notify you that the facilities of the University will not be available to your organization until such time as there has been a complete review of the legality of this organization by University Legal Counsel. Beyond the legal matter, there may also be a question of educational policy with respect to this charter.”²⁴

The antagonistic and blatantly homophobic position held the university had only hardened by the fall. In a letter dated September 1, 1971, Murphy used dangerously misdirective institutional language to categorically reject HOPS's application:

I am writing to inform you of the decision of the University to deny approval for the charter of The Other Vision—The Homophiles of Penn State. . . . We are advised that, based upon sound psychological and psychiatric opinion, the chartering of your organization would create a substantial conflict with the counseling and psychiatric services the University provides As a matter of educational policy, the University cannot condone or officially sanction any organization whose stated purposes would create such a conflict in this sensitive problem area.²⁵

Lost to the record is a reply by Diane Whitney, the Vice-President of HOPS. Presumably, Whitney requested clarification for the discriminatory fear-mongering evidenced in Murphy's couched references to "conflict" and "problem areas." If Whitney's brave reply—from an undergraduate student to upper administration—is lost to history, the cowardice of Murphy remains, saved in the University Archives. Two weeks after the abrupt dismissal of HOPS's student-organization ambitions, Murphy sent another letter: "Dear Miss Whitney: I wish to acknowledge receipt of your letter. . . in which you raised several questions pertaining to my correspondence. . . . It is not my intention to become involved in prolonged discussion of that decision."²⁶

Murphy's letter, short as it is at two sentence long, raises some complicated questions about archival absence specific to the history of this collection. Not only has Whitney's letter not been preserved in this record, neither has any HOPS-specific information about Whitney's apparent ascent in the organization. While, on September 1, Whitney is cc'ed as "Vice-President," by 16 September, Whitney is Murphy's direct addressee: "Miss Diane M. Whitney, Acting President, Homophiles of Penn State." Moreover, both letters include an "Exhibit" notation at the bottom ("B" and "C," respectively). This suggests that these documents have been entered into this collection as part and parcel of the lawsuit's documentary record, not as distinct elements of HOPS's own organizational history. This detail prompts a larger observation about the collection *as* a collection: what is collected in these files and stored in these archival boxes are mostly professional records from the law firm rather than a paper trail created by the student themselves.

And here we run up against the practical limits of the archive as a revelatory space. The inclusion of Murphy's letters as legal evidence—and the internal shifts and communications they elide—invite an interpretation about how the collection was built: after the lawsuits had ended and in the absence of more systemic records kept by HOPS themselves. For Diane Whitney or Bruce Miller, their experiences as vulnerable students trying to navigate a discriminatory campus emerge through the legally retained administrative communication that helped power their lawsuit. Raymond Murphy's correspondence refusing to correspond with Whitney is one example among many of how "Old Main" evaded open debate and limited institutional access for the students it was ostensibly tasked with protecting and educating.²⁷ Even in this mostly hidden history, the stories of HOPS students are told through other participants, other voices, offering an "Other Vision" than one directly internal to the student community.

In addition to explicitly dismissive communications, the "Homophiles of Penn State" collection effectively records the culture of informal conversations between powerful campus officials that clearly set responses and policies in this moment; effectively, that is, if you know where to look and how to connect those dots you can see. Most obvious when returning to the historical moment of May 1971 is that the emerging overlaps between student activism, community engagement, and administrative discrimination gave the students of HOPS an opportunity to bring official cruelty and cowardice into the forefront of a public debate about the culture and purpose of Penn State's educational apparatus.

III. Rumor Entered as Fact

The story of HOPS did not end with Murphy's refusal to "become involved in prolonged discussion" with the group's officers. Without question, the backhanded cancellation of HOPS's signature activist event was an early blow to the group's community-building intentions. But the university's decision to interfere directly in the professional life of one of its students, a student teacher and member of HOPS, illustrates the university's commitment to excising and punishing queer visibility in the larger social and professional networks of State College.

The original HOPS lawsuit coincided with Joseph Acanfora's final semester as a student teacher of biology and earth science in the Park Forest Jr. High School in State College. Acanfora's notice of termination from his student teaching position, which he held in good standing for 6 weeks (more than halfway through the university's 10-week requirement), was announced at a press conference held on Valentine's Day 1972.²⁸ His suspension takes this story from the distressingly homophobic to the grossly interventionist. As a counterpart to the legalistic stance of Murphy's on-the-record dismissal of HOPS's charter, the overt oppression of Acanfora invited the very "prolonged [and public] discussion" that Murphy strove to avoid.

Acanfora's story, appended to and then eclipsing the original drama of HOPS's institutional rejection, illustrates the level of personal cruelty to which Penn State's administrative officials were willing to sink. The university's deliberate decision to actively impede the professional development of a student in its own educational program remains frankly shocking, even in light of further decades of institutionally sanctioned homophobia and the racialized and professional discrimination that persists today at Penn State. Ahmed (2021) describes how the structure of institutional complaint creates more work for the wronged: "making a complaint is never completed by a single action: it often requires you do more and more work. It is exhausting, especially given that what you complain about is already exhausting" (5). This tendency of institutional critique to boomerang, returning back to further ensnare the wronged party, was amplified in this case because of the unexpected—yet entirely predictable—ways that the original complaint reverberated from Student Affairs to the College of Education and outward into the larger State College Area School District.

In February of 1972, after the university has rescinded HOPS's student organization approval, after HOPS had unsuccessfully applied for redress from the Undergraduate Student Organization, and after Murphy refused, in Sept of 1971, to engage in "prolonged discussion" about the fate and future of HOPS, the student organization sued Penn State University in the Centre County Civil Division.²⁹ The original HOPS compliant filing names these defendants: "The Pennsylvania State University; John W. Oswald, individually and as President of [PSU]; Raymond O. Murphy, individually and as Vice President for Student Affairs; M. Lee Upcraft, individually and as Dean of Student Affairs; William Fuller, individually and as Manager of Associated Student Activities; the Board of Trustees of [PSU]; Albert Shoemaker, individually and as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of [PSU]."³⁰

The HOPS filing documents themselves offer a study in archival disappearance and official insularity. At one point, the suit refers to "a memorandum" circulated by Murphy "then and now inaccessible to Plaintiff," in which the Vice President of Student Affairs "correspond[ed] to Defendants Upcraft and Fuller that Plaintiff HOPS, regardless of its bona-fide existence as a student-recognized group, was to be extended none of the privileges of other recognized groups. . . .The basis for such immediate action was Defendant Murphy's total antipathy toward and fear of gay people and their problems."³¹ In September 1971, Murphy's letter had described his objections in strikingly similar

language: “the University cannot condone or officially sanction any organization whose stated purposes would create such a conflict in this sensitive problem area.”³²

As with the Whitney/Miller letters, this detail raises not only historical but also theoretical questions. If “then and now inaccessible,” how does this memorandum make it into the lawsuit at all? As a rumor of an official document that ducks citation beyond “information and belief,” the memorandum takes on a life of its own, a rumor as an exposé of the very worst that HOPS students could expect from their university administrators.³³ But entered as legal evidence, the rumor becomes its own fact; we will see this happen again in the reported record of the Acanfora press conference.³⁴ In this process, the importance of this story as an archive of *complaint* becomes clearer. Ahmed (2021) reminds us how “complaints are made even harder because of what follows . . . what surrounds complaint: informal conversations, gossip, rumors that circulate to pathologize the complainer or anyone deemed the origin of a complaint” (127). Yet that process isn’t quite recorded here. Instead, we have rumor, “information and belief,” that bounces back on the official, not the complainant. But this rumor has become official record, not just historically in the lawsuit, but archivally in the collection. The memo’s status as a rumor—and the knowledge or suspicion of its particularly prejudicial content—is reframed by the archive into fact. In a different context, Stephen Best (2018) describes this process as something akin to an archival epistemology: “once a rumor makes it into the archive,” he writes, “it becomes hard to believe it was ever a rumor at all” (115). As a fact, *né* rumor, the detail of Murphy’s bigotry fits snugly into what we already know we now know about Penn State administration, which will go to great lengths to preserve cruel, abusive, homophobic officials in the name of public successes and at the expense of vulnerable students or other minors.

As a part of the court’s April 3 Term, 1972, Acanfora filed suit separately from HOPS. It must have seemed like a carnival-mirror version of the already-pending lawsuit: heterosexual repression and retribution had mutated into direct invasion upon professional experience and opportunity beyond campus confines. This time, the ranks of rank officials swelled to include the State College Area School District, William E. Babcock (Superintendent), Robert C. Campbell (Assistant Superintendent), Oliver C. Goodman (Director of Personnel), Donald L. Cameron (Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel Services), Lewis Rodrick (Principal of Park Forest Jr High School), Robert Hillis (Science Co-ordinator of State College Area School District). In addition to repeat appearances for the University itself, the Board of Trustees, and Albert Shoemaker (Chairman of the BoT), defendants from Penn State’s College of Education included Abram W. Van Der Meer (Dean of Education at PSU), George Weigand (Student Teaching Co-ordinator at PSU), Madison Brewer (Head of Student Teaching at PSU).³⁵

The filing documents, which includes Acanfora’s statement taken under oath, are damning. They reveal the retributive nature of Acanfora’s termination as a result of his participation in the original HOPS suit. The State College School District covered this rebuke in the veneer of moral panic and the pressure of larger “social entities:” “it was stated that at this time society recognizes the heterosexual as the society and the homosexual is not recognized in such a manner.”³⁶ Yet Acanfora included as part of his original statement that he “made Defendant Van Der Meer aware of this membership in HOPS and the general objectives of said organization in the Spring of 1971. . . yet no action concerning Plaintiff’s Acanfora’s status as a student teacher was taken prior to the filing of the forementioned Complaint in Equity [filed 02/11/1972 by HOPS against Penn State].”³⁷

As with the revelation that HOPS’s charter was revoked due to Murphy’s “total antipathy toward and fear of gay people,” the telling moment in Acanfora’s suit is both rumor and, by virtue of its inclusion in the lawsuit and the university’s archival record, very much official.³⁸ Much like the unavailable memorandum that indexes a clearly identifiable homophobic official, Acanfora’s suit rests, in part, on a revelation about the public press conference on Feb 14, 1972: “At the meeting. . . it was stated by a person

or persons at this time unknown to Plaintiff, who spoke on behalf of Defendant School District, that Plaintiffs' removal was based on Plaintiffs' membership in HOPS and because the publicly announced objectives of HOPS (as set forth in the Complaint in Equity . . . were not compatible with the educational policies of the public schools" [sic].³⁹

Here Trace's (2002) claim about archives as relational spaces becomes most pressing for our narrative. Only by understanding how this second filing document articulates "its functional relations to other documents" (138) can we see what is being described here. Specifically, someone at the press conference referred out loud to the initial HOPS lawsuit, filed and publicized as of Feb 11, 1972, and used that reference to enter into the record information about HOPS as an educational entity. Presumably, this information would not have been officially available to the State College Area School District without their seeking it out on campus. Named in that first suit was Joseph Acanfora. Like the legal record of a heard and believed story (Murphy's homophobic memo), this description of a known statement by unknown "person or persons" unintentionally clarifies how bigotry and intimidation operated in a professional web of semi-formal documents, overheard statements, and personal networks across multiple institutions in State College.

Whatever the original status of the rumors and overheard references that found their way into the legal archive of Acanfora's and HOPS's complaints, both the University and the School District quickly lost control of the larger narrative. Acanfora's story went the equivalent of viral in 1972 State College. By February 18, Penn State's *The Daily Collegian* newspaper was running the story of Acanfora's dispute and requested injunction; a Mathematics professor and the faculty advisor of HOPS resigned from the Math Department; Acanfora's biology and earth science students supplied appropriately adorable quotes for this small-town heterosexist controversy.⁴⁰ Across the next few weeks, *The Collegian* and the town's two newspapers, *The Centre Daily Times* and *The Pennsylvania Mirror* published several articles and many community letters about the ongoing drama. Sample headlines from *The Center Daily Times* include: "Concerns for All Rights" (2/24/72); "Forgiveness For Wrong Person?" (2/26/72); "Punished For Truth" (3/1/72); "Another View From the Bible" (3/2/72).⁴¹ A poem from early in the newspaper deluge illustrates the degree to which people in State College internalized and invested in the fallout from Penn State's strategy of isolating Acanfora from the rest of the HOPS community in public perception. Published in the now-defunct *Pennsylvania Mirror*, Bev Mamett's "A Sad Mistake, RE: Acanfora" reads: "PSU/ Witch-hunts are taboo/ We're not all the same/ Who's to blame/ So he belongs to HOPS/ Why pull out all the stops/ His career is at stake/ This is a sad mistake/ It offends my sensitivity/ Let him get his degree."⁴² Another used the controversy for personalized political catharsis, asking in a Letter to the Editor: "Why should I care. . . living in a university town with practically no female professors, in a place where many talented and highly educated women are forced into lives of useless boredom?"⁴³ Far from avoiding discussion, the university had become a vector for broad frustration. The town's newspaper conversation with itself revealed that it wasn't just radical college kids who chafed against the "male-dominated society" structuring life in State College.

Much like the tiny bugs and creeping mildew that threaten document integrity, the cruelty and personal animus of the Penn State administration and the State College School Board proved vulnerable to the bright light—and the public spectacle—that exposed their institutionally sanctioned bullying. After almost a year of legal back-and-forth, HOPS's Pittsburgh lawyers sent a memo to Toni Silvestri, a local HOPS representative, asserting that the university had arrived at a settlement offer: "the end is near!"⁴⁴ As per the University Archive records, "After the case had exhausted its legal recourse, HOPS was formally recognized by the University as an official school-sanctioned organization in 1973."⁴⁵ Although the story of HOPS continued for another decade, and the story of Acanfora would later involve an appeal to the US Supreme Court,⁴⁶ the present assemblage ends here, with the (fleeting) triumph of the university's

reinstatement of HOPS as a student organization. More than two years after initial recognition, and two years and two months after Murphy refused to “become involved in prolonged discussion,” HOPS was back on campus as an official student group.

IV: Official Fragments

And yet, it would be twenty years before Penn State included “sexual orientation” as a category in its official non-discrimination clause. Indeed, the *Enhancing Diversity* report includes a majority of survey respondents who lament this erasure of “lesbian, gay, and bisexual” identity through the deliberate exclusion of sexual orientation as a protected identity category. One makes the historical argument explicitly: “It boggles me that twenty years ago I was in graduate school at a place that had a clause, and we still don’t have one here.” Another respondent offers a cutting summary of how that prominent lack affects the university’s institutional viability: “The absence of a sexual orientation clause made me determined that I would only apply for admission to universities that have it” (Tierney et al. 1992, 47; 56). Overall, the report is a brutal assessment of the campus’s climate of unspoken disapproval, active intimidation, and broadly circulating disinterest in countering heterosexism or supporting queer community members.

In what might be the clearest—and most unintentional—expression of Penn State’s de facto policy of unofficial statements as active administrative policy, the *Enhancing Diversity* report ends with a photocopy of the university’s freshly adopted non-discrimination policy, undated and decontextualized. “The Pennsylvania State University is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to programs, facilities, admission, and employment without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal authorities. The Pennsylvania State University does not discriminate against any person because of age, ancestry, color, disability or handicap, national origin, race, religious creed, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status” (Tierney et al. 1992, 58).

Of all the fragments, newspaper collages, mimeographs, legal documents, institutional and personal communications in this unexpectedly messy archival record, the appended updated non-discrimination clause might be the most troubling, the most insidious, because it is the most institutionally opaque. Imagine: *Enhancing Diversity* was commissioned by the university in the early 1990s for the express purpose of learning about and making recommendations for the climate of harassment and enforced invisibility on Penn State’s campus. In addition to the study’s proposed administrative, curricular, and resource changes, the most prominent and pressing response from community members was the need for legal protection against harassment and discrimination, in the form of an official non-discrimination statement. Yet the report does not mention that the statement has been updated during the survey or writing period; the authors of the report do not offer even lukewarm praise to the administration for adopting something that had been state law for twenty years already. Instead, someone else who saw and handled the report presumably inserted the new language (undated, unintroduced) into the report before it was filed.

The purpose of such an odd and oxymoronic documentary intrusion is also opaque, though I can propose a few guesses. Perhaps someone wanted to undercut the commissioned report by implying the ignorance or delirium of the dozens who voiced concern; perhaps, as with HOPS, an unofficial action by an unnamed person was the institutionally approved way to assert all manner of public policy through submerged and hyper-specific communications; perhaps someone wanted to affirm the university’s commitment to sexual diversity by including the statement without a date, suggesting that sexual

orientation was a protected category all along. But maybe the answer is the recuperative opposite: what if this inclusion comes from the hand of an archivist? Perhaps its purpose is to offer hope to later readers of the report, to confirm that their voices can be heard, that their vision can be reflected back at them, that the institution can respond to vulnerability with consideration and support.

In 2020, the same year that Penn State made Campus Pride's Top 40 list of LGBTQ-Friendly Colleges and Universities, the University Archives processed complete details for another collection in the catalogue. The Anthony R. D'Augelli collection was donated to the library in 2016, the year I began archival research for what would become this essay. In that collection, assembled by a named professor from the university (D'Augelli) is a different version of the story unfolded here. The online library guide describes how "This collection also documents discrimination, homophobia, LGBTQ student activism, and Penn State's internal response to LGBTQ activism in the 1970s- early 1990s."⁴⁷ In its complete record, a much more comprehensive one than the original HOPS collection, we can see shifting norms about archival invisibility and information access. Not only does the collection have a detailed finding aid, it lists the name of the accessioning librarian and describes her choices: "Lexy deGraffenreid processed this collection in August 2020. She reviewed the materials and decided to retain the original order and folder titles" (ibid.). If deGraffenreid could act as visible steward of this institutionally critical collection in 2020, perhaps the librarians of earlier times didn't have that privilege. After all, they too were employees in an institution determined to deny protection, even pursue disclosure and sanction, for critics of its status quo. Perhaps archivists and librarians in Penn State's University Archives were all along creating their own record, their own institutional history, their own historical collages saved as collections, boxes, and photocopied fragments. Archivists stand up above the void and try to save lost histories, queer histories, endangered and thwarted histories. That we don't always know their names doesn't mean they are invisible or inert: someone saved the files from the HOPS office when it shuttered in the early 1980s. Someone protected the vigorous gay liberation newspapers alongside the institutionally explosive legal documents. Someone called that collection "Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975," and waited for another to find what was there.

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The things I know about critical cataloguing and library studies, I learned with and from Joshua Ortiz Baco, Jim Casey, Molly Hardy, and Ben Lee. I want to thank all the library professionals at Penn State who made it possible to tell this story, and the editors at the *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* for their care with complex archival citation.

This essay is dedicated to Doris Malkmus, retired Outreach Archivist, Paterno Library and Robert Lawrence Caserio, Professor Emeritus of English, Comparative Literature, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at The Pennsylvania State University. It is also for the many colleagues and friends who recognize the institution depicted here. As a very wise and very dear friend describes this feeling of recognition: "I belong to this thing, but I fucking hate it." If this essay makes you feel that way, it is dedicated to you.

Notes

1. In the *Enhancing Diversity* report (1992) and other contemporaneous and historical records referenced in this article, relevant "sexuality communities" are referred to using various historically situated terms, including "homosexual," "heterosexual," "gay, lesbian, and bisexual," "gay men and lesbians," "allies," and the like. There is no

mention of transgender identity or experience, nor use of the term “queer” to identify non-heterosexual/non-heterosexist collectives.

2. For a useful survey of Joseph Acanfora’s lawsuit(s) and professional history, especially related to queer visibility and “outness,” see Bobbi Bernstein (1995).

3. Beginning in the 1950s and into the 1970s, “Homophile” associations worked to increase political visibility and access for gay and lesbian identifying people through the politics of sexual respectability; the homophile movement has often been perceived as “homogeneously homonormative” (Stein 2014, 54). For an excellent overview of this perspective, and the archival and historical misunderstandings that have flourished in its wake, see Marc Stein (2014).

4. The Penn State *Daily Collegian* features occasional coverage/retrospective history about these events. The most recent, published in 2021, details the university and school board lawsuits and related controversies, to claim a dramatic break with past discrimination. The opening paragraphs, which describe this history as “expansive—and often elusive,” also quote the current director of the Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity proclaiming “If you go back and understand. . . the strides that have been made and the investment in students—I think that’s very telling” (Lucas 2021, n.pg).

5. The Nittany Lion is an invented species that acts as the university’s mascot. Actually “an ordinary mountain lion (also known as a cougar, puma, or panther),” the mythology of Penn State has created—apparently from whole cloth—a special species of mountain lion to represent the uniqueness of the Valley’s geography. See “All Things Nittany: Joe Mason and the Mascot” (n.d).

6. Portland’s reign of homophobic bigotry overlapped with Jerry Sandusky’s ongoing sexual abuse of minors at Penn State. Both were shielded from personal accountability and professional/legal repercussions for decades by university administrators and other coaches. Although this essay does not take up the Sandusky scandal in detail, that scandal should be understood as part of a long history of sexual exploitation and sexualized cruelty endemic to Penn State sports in both male and female D1 athletics.

7. For useful overviews of the framing and development of university studies, especially with regard to neoliberalism and feminist orientation, see Marta Maria Maldonado and Katja M. Guenther (2019), Abigail Boggs and Nick Mitchell (2018). On histories of campus protest and response, see Roderick A. Ferguson (2017), Jennifer Doyle (2015). For histories of specific academic disciplines and their precarities, see Jason Maxwell (2019), Noliwe M. Rooks (2006), Robyn Wiegman (2002).

8. Theoretical accounts of archives that shaped this essay include Dorothy Berry (2021), Saidiya Hartman (2019), Carmen Maria Machado (2019), Arlette Farge (2015), Ann Cvetkovich (2003), and Jacques Derrida (1996). See also Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici (2014) and two *Radical History Review* special issues: Queering Archives: Historical Unravelings (no. 120 & 122).

9. For a bravura exploration of “the ways in which library subject cataloguing standards inform the history of sexuality” (xi), see Melissa Adler (2017b); on white supremacy in cataloguing, see Adler (2017a). On the invisibility of classification systems as historicized creations, see Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star (1999).

10. For a case study of local archiving outside of institutional control, see Danielle Cooper (2016).

11. Library records are highly standardized and include the cataloguing systems described by Adler (2017a, 2017b), such as Library of Congress Subject Heading and call numbers. For a useful overview that emphasizes the nationalist context of these records, see Betty Furrie (2009). For a recent example of archival remediation and personally situated university archival work at The University of Texas, see Briana Marie Davis (2021). Thank you to Joshua Ortiz Baco for bringing Davis’s work to my attention.

12. “Summary: Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975.” PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special

Collections Library at Penn State–University Park. <https://catalog.libraries.psu.edu/catalog/6191705>. Accessed Nov. 27, 2021.

13. In addition to Collection Number PSUA 450, “Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975,” relevant Penn State University Archive Collections for this study include: Collection Number PSUA 9796, “Anthony R. D’Augelli collection on lesbian, gay and bisexual activism,” and Collection Number PSUA 568, “Pennsylvania State University Commission on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Equity Records, 1970-2001.” Because this essay was written during 2021, COVID-19 pandemic restrictions limited further access to archival materials.

14. Although the community-specific language used in these founding materials is now outdated in our contemporary sexuality discourses, I include direct quotes from the documents that employ terms such as “homosexual.” Homophiles of Penn State. “Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975.” PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

15. Constitution and By-Laws of The Other Vision: Homophiles of Penn State. “Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975.” Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

16. The history of Black student support, Black faculty and staff, and Black Studies on Penn State’s University Park campus and throughout the Commonwealth campuses is an important and ongoing story, one beyond the scope of the current essay. For an oral history of Black student experience at Penn State, see Robyn Passante and Ryan Jones (2020).

17. For a heavily editorialized overview of campus “growing pains” during its long history, see Michael Bezilla (1985), especially Chapter 11 (“Year of Crises: the 1960s”) and Chapter 13 (“Growth and Financial Stress: the 1970s”). On the history of the SDS “in the conservative town of State College,” see Mary C. Miles (1996).

18. “Complaint in Equity” Filing, entered In the Court of Common Pleas of Centre Country, Pennsylvania, Civil Division. HOPS v. Penn State. No 2, April 1972, pp. 4. “Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975.” Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

19. Penn State has had an active ROTC program “since the university’s founding in 1855.” (army.psu.edu/history). In 1968, as the Student Democratic Society and other student groups protested the ongoing war in Vietnam and the ongoing negligence of President Eric Walker’s university policies, Penn State hosted the Army football team and Walker welcomed Chief of Staff General William C. Westmoreland to his home for a “social call” (Bezilla 1985, 299). In the mid-1960s and 1970s, any threat to Penn State’s status as a militaristic masculinist sanctuary was fundamentally minor. However, the interrelation between queer representation, campus discrimination, and the ROTC Program at Penn State warrants further exploration and explication. Likewise, although Black students—under the auspices of the Frederick Douglass Association—arranged several notable and important protests against institutional discrimination and outright racism on campus, the “number of black undergraduates at University Park during the 1960s probably never exceeded 200 in any term” (Bezilla, 299). Specifically during the heyday of Douglass Association protests, “there were about 200 Black students, and just one Black faculty member” (Passante 2020, 49). With enrollment shifting between 22,000-27,000 in 1965-1970, Black students were less than 1% of the campus population.

20. “Complaint in Equity” Filing, entered In the Court of Common Pleas of Centre Country, Pennsylvania, Civil Division. HOPS v. Penn State. No 2, April 1972, pp. 5-6. “Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975.” Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

21. “Complaint in Equity” Filing, entered In the Court of Common Pleas of Centre Country, Pennsylvania, Civil Division. HOPS v. Penn State. No. 2 April 1972, pp. 7. “Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975.” Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

22. Ibid.

23. On Frank Kameny's long history of legal activism and political collation-building, see Eric Cervini 2020; on early lesbian organizing in the US, including the Daughters of Bilitis, see Chelsea Del Rio 2016. My thanks to an anonymous reader for pointing out how these speakers tread a widening divide between institutional recognition and radical spirit in this era. Though beyond the scope of this narrative, the original HOPS collection evinces a compelling overlap of conservative leaning public events and collective policies and the more radical periodicals and other reading materials that comprised the organization's library.

24. Raymond O. Murphy to Diane M. Whitney. May 10, 1971. "Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975." Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

25. Raymond O. Murphy to Bruce Miller. Sept 1, 1971. "Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975." Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

26. Raymond Murphy to Diane Whitney. Sept 16, 1971. "Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975." Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

27. At Penn State's University Park campus, the office of the President and other upper administrative officers are housed in the iconic Old Main building. In Penn State community discourse, "Old Main" is often used as a metonymy for the most official, corporatized, distant administrative officers and operations. For a hagiographic history of the building and its meaning, see Elsie Stevens 2012; she claims Old Main "symbolizes the roots, legacy, hard work, and undying pride of the institution" (n.pg). Student protests during the mid-twentieth-century were most likely to occur at Old Main as the locus of institutional power. For example, in 1968 the Douglass Association built a brick wall in Old Main outside Walker's office to protest the lack of recruitment and support for Black students, faculty, and staff on campus (Passante 2020, 49).

28. "Compliant in Equity," Injunction Filing, entered In the Court of Common Pleas of Centre Country, Pennsylvania, Civil Division." *Acanfora v. The State College Area School District*. No. 3 April term of 1972, pp. 4. "Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975." Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

29. "Lawsuit Filed Against Pennsylvania State University," Press Release. February 11, 1971 [sic].

30. "Compliant in Equity," entered "In the Court of Common Pleas of Centre Country, Pennsylvania, Civil Division." *HOPS v. Penn State*. No. 2 April 1972, pp. 1. "Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975." Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

31. "Compliant in Equity," entered "In the Court of Common Pleas of Centre Country, Pennsylvania, Civil Division." *HOPS v. Penn State*. No. 2 April 1972, pp. 6. "Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975." Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

32. Raymond Murphy to Bruce Miller. Sept 1, 1971. "Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975." Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

33. "Compliant in Equity," Injunction Filing, entered "In the Court of Common Pleas of Centre Country, Pennsylvania, Civil Division." *Acanfora v. The State College Area School District*. No. 3 April 1972, pp. 6. "Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975." Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 7.

35. If this seems exceedingly long and detailed, it is included for the explicit purpose of bringing to light the long list of adult male professionals who perpetuated heterosexism and bullied, harassed, and endangered LGBTQ+ students at Penn State and in State College during the 1970s. Naming these offenders is one way to counter the archival silence and historical erasure that this essay is intended to address. This specific list is from the original

injunction documents, *Acanfora v. The State College Area School District*, No. 3 April term of 1972, pp. 3, “Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975.” Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

36. “Compliant in Equity,” Injunction Filing, entered “In the Court of Common Pleas of Centre Country, Pennsylvania, Civil Division,” *Acanfora v. The State College Area School District*. No. 3 April term of 1972, pp. 7, “Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975.” Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

37. *Ibid.*, 4. A February media release announcement of the lawsuit includes contact information for Diane Whitney and names all the relevant Penn State defendants.

38. Stephen Best (2018) further describes how the sanctioned archive, an official space, can shift the truth-value of rumor and also reshape its historical meaning: “Once a rumor makes it into an archive, it evidences not the accuracy of its claims but the necessary and melancholy recognition of its own failure—a failure to remain illicit utterance” (115). On searching the archive for “emblematic” figures and speculative histories, see also Saidiya Hartman (2008).

39. “Compliant in Equity,” Injunction Filing, entered “In the Court of Common Pleas of Centre Country, Pennsylvania, Civil Division.” *Acanfora v. The State College Area School District*. No. 3 April term of 1972, pp. 7. “Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975.” Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

40. Lee Ann Shuster, a 7th grader, is quoted as saying, “most of the people. . . are sort of mad that he left because he was a good teacher.” Barb Synder, “Acanfora wants job back: HOPS Seeks Injunction,” *The Daily Collegian*, 18 February 1972. “Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975.” Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

41. “Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975.” Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

42. Bev. Mamett “A Sad Mistake,” *The Pennsylvania Mirror*, February 1972. “Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975.” Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

43. Barbara Raphael. “Tears For Plight of All Women” *The Center Daily Times*, 22 February 1972. “Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975.” Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

44. “To: Toni Silvestri/ From: Law Office, Richard R. Isaacson and Leonard I Sharon/ Subject: HOPS.” Nov 9, 1972. “Homophiles of Penn State records, circa 1965-1975.” Box 2 PSUA 450. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park.

45. “Biographical or Historical Note. Homophiles of Penn State records, 1965-1975,” PSUA 450, Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University. libraries.psu.edu/findingaids/450.htm.

46. Acanfora was publicly outed by another press conference following his eventual certification as a teacher in Pennsylvania. The certification process had also been held up because of questions about his “moral character” given his very visible HOPS affiliation. When the Pennsylvania State Commissioner chose a public press conference to announce Acanfora’s certification, the exposure resulted in Acanfora being fired from another teaching position in Montgomery County, Maryland. By 1975, Acanfora had tried to take his discrimination case all the way to the Supreme Court, which refused to hear it. This latter iteration of Acanfora’s seemingly endless cycle of professional harassment, and the legal complaints it necessitated, was covered extensively by Los Angeles’s *The Advocate* between 1973-1975.

47. "Guide to the Anthony R. D'Augelli Collection on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Activism." PSUA 9796. Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Penn State–University Park. <https://libraries.psu.edu/findingaids/9796.htm>.

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