

Wanderground: Archiving Lesbian Legacies, Words, Creativity in Rhode Island

Research Summary – Installment #1

Blog Post – February 4, 2022

Research Participation

By the numbers, this is a snap shot summary of those who responded to the research activities.

Since April of 2021, with a grant from the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, Lesbrarian Mev Miller has been researching the viability of creating Wanderground – a Lesbian Archive/Library located in Rhode Island. The research primarily focused on this goal:

To assess the specific interest and enthusiasm of RI Lesbians to contribute to and use a locally-based archive of Lesbian publications and memorabilia. This research will guide the long-term development of Wanderground as collaborative and welcoming Lesbian-centered community-archive space welcoming to diverse communities.

Research Activities

An interest survey of 27 questions was developed and released on April 29, 2021 via Survey Monkey and made available in both English and Spanish. [Survey questions attached in pdf.] Invitations and Press Releases advertising the survey were sent to 132 individuals (predominately Lesbians) and 108 community organizations, universities, and publications to share with their networks across Rhode Island. Community organizations included LGBTQ social, political, health, and support venues in Rhode Island. In an effort to reach Lesbians who no longer live in Rhode Island, a notice was sent to *Lesbian Connections*, a national publication known to many. Between May through October, several reminders were sent to encourage participation. In August, a shorter version (21 questions) was released to attract more responses. Surveys closed Nov. 30.

Information about the survey and the research project were also shared through these local venues:

- Article in *Options* [<https://www.optionsri.org/post/survey-released-for-wanderground-lesbian-research-project>] and a regional notice in *Boston Spirit Magazine* (July/Aug).
- Newport Out Website Resources [<https://www.newportout.com/lgbtq-resources>]
- Down Time Podcast from the Cranston Public Library [<https://anchor.fm/down-time-cpl/episodes/63---The-Wanderground-Archive-e13jfi2>]
- [Boston Spirit Magazine – regional notes – July/August 2021](#)
- Flyers on tables at various June Pride events
- And presentations made through SAGE-RI and OLOC-RI

In-person interactions would have created better opportunities to reach more Lesbians and gain more survey results and/or detailed information. Active COVID restrictions, cancellation of Providence Pride activities in June, and additional precautions placed limitations on the ability to make those contacts. As a result, other creative measures were made available:

- two open discussion forums via Zoom
- one-on-one interviews (in-person socially distanced, phone, and via Zoom), and
- email correspondence

Numbers of Research Participants and some Demographics

Survey Responses

Total # of Responses: 57

- Long Survey in English 52
 - 44 complete / 6 partial
- Long Survey in Spanish 0
- Short Survey (English only) 5
 - 4 complete / 1 partial

The following data aggregated by 57 responses, though not everyone completed all questions.

I prefer to call myself:

- Lesbian 56% (32)
- Gay woman 11% (6)
- Dyke < 1% (1)
- Queer < 1% (3)
- None of the above < 1% (2)
- Other < 1% (5)
 - All of the above :)
 - _____ (her name!)
 - Lesbian, Dyke, Queer.... Not just one label
 - Mostly I don't really care. I use all but "gay woman" depending on the circumstances, audience, my feelings of the day.
 - Nonbinary, trans, grey ace, queer.

Age Group

- 80+ 0
- 60-79 60% (34)
- 35-59 26% (15)
- 20-34 < 1% (2)

I "Came Out"

- Prior to 1970 < 1% (4)
- Between 1970-1995 56% (32)
- After 1995 23% (13)

Race/Ethnicity

This was an open-ended question so that respondents could self-identify. These numbers reflect groupings for summary purposes.

- Caucasian / White 81% (46) **in RI, white population is 84%*
 - Anglo-American
 - European- Italian/German
 - Irish-American
 - Irish, Scandinavian
 - Italian
 - Italian-American
 - White, Irish Italian ethnic
 - white, secular Jew
 - White/American

- Black < 1% (1) **in RI, Black population is 9%*

- Jewish (*Ethnicity, not race*) < 1% (3)
 - American
 - Ashkenazi
 - Secular

Residence

- Currently live in RI 80% (45)
- Currently live in MA or CT < 1% (1)
- Lived in RI between 1970s-1990s 25% (14)

Agreed to be Added to the Mailing List 80% (45)

On-going Participation / Volunteering

Nearly 90 % of all respondents expressed interest in some form of on-going participation or volunteering with Wanderground, either as a user or as an active volunteer (39%) in some capacity.

Additional Input (*No demographics but responses included in data information*)

- Two open discussion forums via Zoom
 - 5 attendees from 15 pre-registrations
- One-on-one interviews and correspondence
 - 15 interviews with individuals
 - 8 email exchanges
 - 5 interviews (with 3 visits) to Lesbian, Feminist, or LGBTQ archive collections