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"Fight bigotry! Fight racism! Smash the backlash!": Grassroots mobilisation, community action, and intersectional activism within the Lesbians and Policing Project, 1984-1990

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Abbreviations

GALOP – Gay London Police Monitoring Group

GLC – Greater London Council

GLF – Gay Liberation Front

GWL – Glasgow Women's Library

LBGC – London Borough Grants Committee

LESPOP – Lesbians and Policing Project

OLGA – Organisation for Gay and Lesbian Action

WLM – Women's Liberation Movement

Introduction

M., a young lesbian, was raped in early January 1988 by a man she did not know. The rapist also stole her bag and in the following days made use of her address book to telephone the bed and breakfast where she lived and worked, conducting a campaign of threats as well as physically following her. After each incident she contacted the police and each time she was rebuffed as "hysterical", denied due process and was even once threatened with a charge of wasting police time. M. was terrified- even in her own home. In the face of this and with nowhere else to turn she reached out to the Lesbians and Policing Project (LESPOP), an activist group established in 1985 to support lesbians subject to police homophobia and discrimination. In response, LESPOP quickly dispatched a worker to stay in her home to ease her anxieties and act as a comforting presence. They also deployed an officer to accompany her on visits to the police station in an effort to establish a more positive working relationship and to avoid M. dropping her case.[1]

Recorded in LESPOP's 1988/89 appeals document compiled for the London Borough Grants Committee (LBGC) this is just one of many examples which displays the essential work that LESPOP carried out. Developed as an internal endeavour of the Gay London Police Monitoring Group (GALOP), LESPOP offered counselling and support services through a phone line as well as a face-to-face drop-in session twice a week. Workers also attended police stations and court and generally functioned as a sounding board and port of call during the trauma of a crime and any negative police interactions which may follow such an incident.[2] On top of this intimate work they were also a research and educational organisation: performing workshops and educational talks and producing publicity material to further their ultimate aim of stimulating thought and discussion of policing amongst queer women.[3]

[1] Glasgow, Glasgow Women's Library, GB1534, LP/1/7/1: 1988/89 appeals document to the LBGC, pp. 7-9.
[2] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/1/1: LESPOP Aims and Objectives, p. 1.
[3] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/1/2: What LESPOP Are Currently Working On, p. 1; GWL, GB1534, LP/1/1/1, p. 1.

Despite this vital work however, LESPOP's existence was brief. The group's autonomy was enabled by funding from Ken Livingstone's Greater London Council (GLC). This allowed them to expand and carry out considerable activist work but it also made them a victim of Thatcher's 1986 decision to abolish the GLC. They appealed to the LBGC, the GLC's replacement, and were granted another year of funding but failed to repeat this in 1988. Thereafter they continued their work through the support of volunteers, other activist groups and donations but by the mid 1990's had been reabsorbed back into GALOP's remit.

This transience however, does not negate the organisation's importance for study. For one, the issues LESPOP highlights are still pertinent today. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, currently passing the House of Lords, gives the police more control over where and when demonstrations take place as well as extended stop and search powers to target people and vehicles.[4] These draconian measures have strong parallels to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act of 1984 and Public Order Act of 1986: Thatcherite legislation that transformed the police into a quasi-military force.[5] These parallels offer us a critical learning opportunity; policy makers could stand to learn from the detrimental effects of such heavy-handed action and activists facing measures of this nature can draw from the dynamic case study LESPOP offers. Understanding the historic relationship between the formal police service and communities can help us better to shape policy, structures and practice today.[6]

Furthermore, LESPOP also works to expose the origins of the queer communities' current, fraught relationship with the police. The 2018 National LGBT Survey revealed that 94% of

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[4] BBC News, 'What is the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill and how would it change protests?' (18 January 2022), https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-56400751, (20 January 2022).
[5] P. Scraton, 'Unreasonable Force: Policing, Punishment and Marginalization', in P. Scraton (eds) *Law, order, and the authoritarian state: Readings in critical criminology.* (Milton Keynes, 1987), p. 158.
[6] N. Davidson, L. Fleming, L. Jackson, D. Smale, & R. Sparks, 'Police and Community in Twentieth-century Scotland: The Uses of Social History'. *British Journal of Criminology*, 57/1 (2017) p. 19.

respondents had not recorded the most serious homophobic incident they had recently experienced. The most common reasons for not reporting incidents were because respondents thought the incident "would not be taken seriously enough" by the police or that "nothing would happen or change". [7] Historical experiences clearly linger on in the endemic fear and mistrust still felt today. This demands exploring if it is to ever be remedied and focussing on LESPOP does this. Judicial procedures have not been designed with thought to the LGBTQ+ community, have failed to protect queer people from discrimination, and have formed a key part in the regulation and marginalisation of LGBTQ+ lives. Queer criminology, a newly emerging area of research to which this study will contribute, will allow us to produce a criminal justice system that in recognising these historic injustices is more open and responsive to such communities.[8]

Beyond its contemporary relevance however, LESPOP is also critical for its historical value. It prompts us to question the idea that the policing of sexuality simply ended with the 1967 Sexual Offences Act as well as the idea that only male same-sex desire was policed. Moreover, it also, and what this study will mainly focus on, challenges the historiographical hegemony of Section 28. A subclause of the 1988 Local Government Act brought in to prohibit the "promotion of homosexuality" by local authorities, Section 28 resulted in the removal of same sex relationships from school curriculums, queer texts being removed from libraries and teachers being silenced around such topics.[9] In reaction to this blatant queer erasure, activist organisations such as the Organisation for Gay and Lesbian Action (OLGA), Stonewall and OutRage! emerged in the largest mass queer mobilisation the country had ever seen. Numbers attending pride events trebled to 30,000 and entire cities were flooded in rainbow as the queer community came

[7] Government Equalities Office, *National LGBT Survey: Summary Report* (London, 2018) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/722314/GEO-LGBT-Survey-Report.pdf, p. 13 (5 August 2021).
[8] M. Ball, *Criminology and queer theory: Dangerous bedfellows?* (London, 2016), pp. 4-6.
[9] A. Lent, *British social movements since 1945: Sex, colour, peace and power* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 199.

together in solidarity; a display which has been positioned as equivalent to America's Stonewall riots.[10]

Whilst it cannot be denied that this was a critical moment in British queer history the issue is that it has dominated considerations of the period. 1988 is positioned as the moment the queer community was awoken from a supposed dormancy- the activist fire of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) revived. This chronology overlooks the work of groups such as LESPOP and in doing so erases an entire generation of activists- yet this is the narrative repeated in works by Jeffrey-Poulter, Weeks, David, Alkarim, Smith and Flynn to name but a few.[11] When pre-Section 28 activism is acknowledged it is written off as piecemeal or ineffective: Femi Otitoju derided the organisations under Livingstone's GLC as "over paid unmotivated so-called activists" that "could no more set up and run a centre or support service than they could run a bath" and Stonewall's Michael Cashman dismissed their work as nothing more than "appalling gesture politics".[12] Possibly motivated by a desire to elevate their own work on Section 28, this angle undermines the efforts of groups such as LESPOP who worked for change in the early 1980's and again contributes to their historiographical silencing. Whilst there is a basis for focussing on Section 28- it was undoubtably the largest coalition of queer solidarity ever seen in British history - the current, whiggish chronology which positions it as a dividing line between queer passivity/mobilisation is simplistic. Acting as a microhistory, LESPOP serves to challenge this.

To begin with I will address the claim that pre-Section 28 activism was non-existent or "gesture politics" by highlighting the extensive work that LESPOP was doing in this period of apparent

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[10] S. Engel, *The unfinished revolution: Social movement theory and the gay and lesbian movement* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 93.
[11] S. Jeffrey-Poulter, *Peers, queers and commons: The struggle for gay law reform from 1950 to the present* (London, 1991), p. 234; J. Weeks, *Coming out: The emergence of LGBT identities in Britain from the nineteenth century to the present*, 3rd edn (London, 2016); H. David. *On queer street: A social history of British homosexuality, 1895-1995* (London, 1997), p. 265; A. Jivani, *It's not unusual: A history of lesbian and gay Britain in the twentieth century*, (London, 1997), pp. 197-198; A.M. Smith, *New Right discourse on race and sexuality: Britain, 1968-1990,* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 22; P. Flynn, *Good as you: From prejudice to pride: 30 years of gay Britain* (London, 2018), pp. 112-114.
[12] S. Reinhold, 'Local Conflict and Ideological Struggle: #positive Images' and Section 28' (PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 1994), p. 39; L. Robinson, *Gay men and the Left in post-war Britain: How the personal got political* (Manchester, 2007), p. 146.

darkness. A showcase of the sheer amount and diversity of their projects at all levels of action, combined with a consideration of the effect on lived experience quickly makes clear that this rendering erases a cohort of activists who were working hard to create effective and long-lasting change.

Further challenging this reductive idea of passivity, chapter two will then go on to consider the question of community. Histories often trace this lack of effective activism to an absence of cross-community cohesion within the queer activist scene but LESPOP again demonstrates that this was not the case. Antecedent to 1988 there was a vast safety net of organisations working, fighting and caring for one another in the face of a hostile and unwelcoming state. This approach also allows us to explore the relationship between LESPOP and related campaigns around issues of gender, race, disability, the environment and peace. In placing their work in the wider community of new social movements, we illuminate interconnections which have largely gone amiss because histories have been artificially confined to discrete conceptualisations of identity. That such work and community was aided by the support of Ken Livingstone's GLC will also speak to the growing historiography working to rescue this often elided or derided period of London's municipal history.[13]

Acknowledging this longer activist history is vital not only for correcting chronologies but also for recovering the work of the most marginalised in the queer community. Chapter three argues that reifying Section 28 as the pivotal moment in queer mobilisation is fundamentally flawed because it is inherently a white, able-bodied, masculine narrative. LESPOP's workforce of women of colour and disabled lesbians demonstrates how these individuals mobilised far earlier

[13] *E.g.* H.A. Atashroo, 'Weaponising peace: The Greater London Council, cultural policy and 'GLC peace year 1983'', *Contemporary British History*, 33/2 (2019), pp. 170-186; G. Khamkar, 'The Greater London Council's Initiatives: A Precursor of British Asian Radio Broadcasting', *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 25/2 (2018), pp. 337-347; P. Patey-Ferguson. 'LIFT and the GLC versus Thatcher: London's Cultural Battleground in 1981', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 36/1 (2020), pp. 4-16; K. Williams, 'A missing municipalist legacy: The GLC and the changing cultural politics of Southbank Centre', *Soundings*, 74/1 (2020), pp. 26-39.

than 1988- both because they had to but also because this period was particularly fertile to their growth and development. In London at least, the early 1980's actually offered a freer space for exploration and intersectional activism than post Section 28 when large and arguably commercial groups formed- relegating and silencing intersectional queer individuals. If we listen to diverse voices we confront the exclusionary and unrepresentative nature of queer chronology and in doing so transform our idea of what the LGBTQ+ community was and who was active in it. This is thus in a similar vein to Natalie Thomlinson's work on women's liberation. In seeking out black women's voices she extended and transformed the ethnocentric chronology of 2nd wave feminism and such an approach is equally as productive when applied to queer activism.[14]

To explore LESPOP and its context I utilised the archival holdings related to the organisation held at the Glasgow Women's Library (GWL), the archives of GALOP and other related groups held at London's Bishopsgate Institute as well as ProQuest's LGBT Magazine Archive. Collectively these offered an insight into the extensive operations that LESPOP directed - the sheer amount of ephemera they produced, let alone the work they carried out, is clear evidence to their significance. Being able to physically handle the material also allowed me to weave in a material culture element to the project which gives an alternative and original avenue of analysis. I also utilised contemporary sociological studies of the police to illuminate the societal climate that LESPOP existed in. This gives the project an interdisciplinary basis- an aim furthered by the use of a 'New Social Movement' theory as a framework to elucidate and explain the phenomenon of activist mobilisation.

I also attempted to pursue oral interviews with some of the organisation's critical members. Working with public facing archival material can only give us part of the story- officiality

[14] N. Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993*, (Basingstoke, 2018), p. 10.

working to bury conflicts and issues behind a veneer of proficiency- and I was conscious of such agendas when drawing my conclusions. Individual testimonies reveal subjectivities, attitudes and lived experiences which could have aided in affirming the deductions I drew from the archives but they could have also disagreed with them- an equally interesting prospect to explore. Unfortunately despite reaching out to four LESPOP workers in July of 2021 none responded until mid-February 2022- regrettably too late to complete the CUREC process and organise interviews. All are willing to work with me however and thus I will be using their testimonies in a postgraduate project which builds on the themes of this thesis. This will allow me to develop my analysis with an alternative source base as well as expand into areas that this project unfortunately could not touch upon.

Chapter One-

"A unique and irreplaceable service"[1]

LESPOP acts as a critical microcosm through which to disrupt narratives of queer passivity because of the sheer vibrancy and virility of its work. Whilst there is no denying that GLC funded groups were on a smaller scale than the assertive organisations of the post Section 28 era such organisations nevertheless existed and were labouring to create effective and lasting change and LESPOP is emblematic of this.

Nowhere is the vibrancy and dynamism of LESPOP clearer than in the sheer amount of work that the group undertook. Studies of sexual regulation have largely been dominated by considerations of queer masculinity. This is perhaps unsurprising considering female same-sex relations have never been illegal but a narrow focus on legal regulation elides the various ways that women's desires have still been policed- a point LESPOP's archival material makes stark. The machismo sub-culture of the police in this period, combined with their self-envisaged role as regulators of deviance, made it difficult to accept non-conformity- of which lesbianism was seen to be a particularly heinous example.[2] This manifested itself through purposeful police inactivity and harassment, overzealous and personal investigation, and arrests for unrelated offences simply because individuals showed affection in public or were seen attending a queer venue.[3] Heightened by a wider societal hostility; the *Pink Paper* regularly reported on anti-lesbian incidents, assaults, attacks on lesbian venues and lesbophobic murders- it was in this climate that LESPOP was established.[4] Initially acting as a port of call for women needing help through police mistreatment but later expanding into dealing with legal issues at large, the group

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[1] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/7/1: Letter From London Lesbian and Gay Voluntary Sector Network

[2] M. E. Burke, 'Homosexuality as deviance: The case of the gay police officer', *British Journal of Criminology*, 34, (1994), p. 192; M.E. Burke, *Coming Out of the Blue,* (London, 1993), p. 91; M. Mcintosh, 'Who needs prostitutes? The ideology of male sexual needs' in C. Smart, and B. Smart (eds) *Women, Sexuality, and Social Control* (London, 1978), p. 62.

[3] London, Bishopsgate Institute, LGBTQ+ Library, LAGNA P690: GALOP: 2nd annual report, pp. 11.

[4] 'Rapist still pursuing pink triangle woman', *The Pink Paper* [London], no. 12 (11 Feb 1988), p. 5, ProQuest (13 Aug. 2020); 'FASCISTS GO FREE', *The Pink Paper,* [London], no. 34 (21 July 1988), p. 1, ProQuest (13 Aug. 2020); 'Witnesses to bus arrest wanted', *The Pink Paper* [London], no. 20, (14 Apr 1988), p. 7, ProQuest (13 Aug. 2020).

supported women through hate crimes, sexual assaults, custody cases, mental health concerns, housing and employment issues as well as immigration cases. Offering drop-in services at their office space in Wesley House as well as a hot-line service, women could find a listening ear, well informed advice and refuge as well as physical support via liaison and chaperoning services. From April to September 1987 alone the organisation dealt with 61 counts of casework, 294 offerings of legal advice, 42 consultations and 224 general referrals from women across the London boroughs.[5]

Alongside such support services LESPOP was also a research and education group.[6] This was primarily realised through workshops and educational seminars. Based off consciousness raising as practiced in the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), these spaces functioned as a forum for discussing changes in the law, as a place for women to share their experiences of the criminal justice system and as a way to find support and form a network; a vital service for many queer women and of key emotional significance- an impact which relegating such work to "gesture politics" entirely overlooks.[7] Attendees of such seminars also included law centres, community centres, local government police committee support units, civil rights units as well as police monitoring groups, trade unions, and student unions.[8] Such an extensive listing indicates the extent to which LESPOP's contributions as a legal advice and support service was recognised by a spectrum of local community organisations. A pillar of the community, such public prominence again hardly connotes queer passivity.

[5] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/7/1: 1988 LBGC report, p. 316.
[6] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/2/2/9: LESPOP Bulletin no. 1, p. 3.
[7] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/4/3: Annual Report 1986-88, p. 9.
[8] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/1/6: Methods of Research and Education Work, pp. 10-12.

To supplement the workshops LESPOP also researched, printed and distributed educational materials, a core set of resources produced including a run of leaflets, a regular bulletin, a police raids briefing paper and illustrated poster and a civil rights 'bust card'.[9] The 'bust card' was an especially integral part of their work with 12,000 produced in their first print- all of which sold out immediately.[10] Handed out at events as well as distributed via mail order, the cards contained the number for LESPOP, Switchboard and other local police monitoring groups as well as key tips for how to behave during an arrest (fig. 1). The use of a cheerful colour scheme to counteract the fear of a police encounter, the concise information arranged to make it quickly readable in a crisis, and its practical, pocket-sized form were all conscious and careful choices to make the card as useful possible. The document is clearly a product of care and attention and as such they are tangible evidence of the effort that LESPOP exerted to improve the lives of their community.

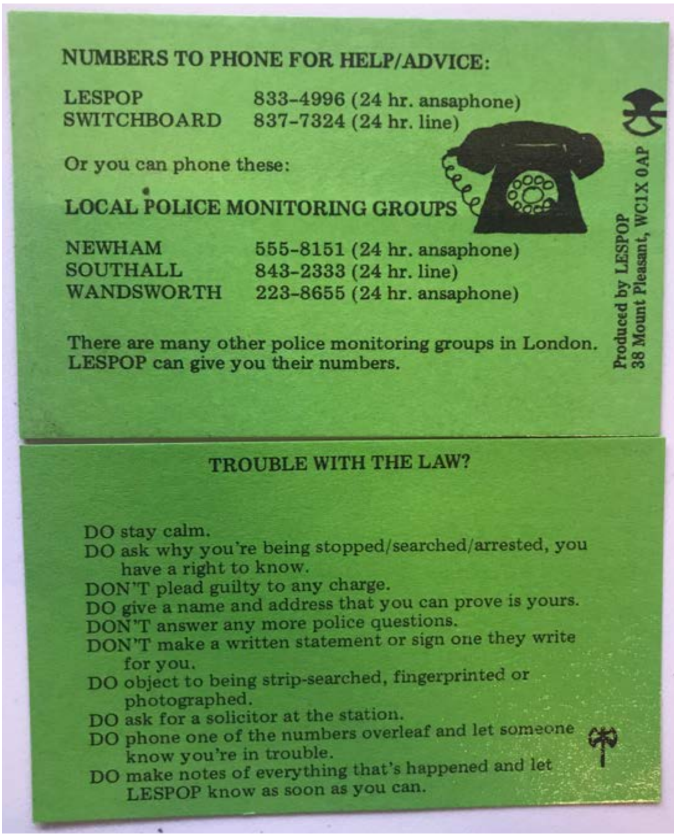

Figure 1: Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/2/4/1: Green 'Bust Card'.

[9] GWL, GB1534, LP/1/4/3, p. 12.
[10] GWL, GB1534, LP/1/1/6, p. 20.

The fact that they later produced another edition of the bust card further demonstrates this clear community engagement (fig. 2). The difference between the documents- the extra information of what to expect during and after an arrest, the new concertina design and layout and the decision to laminate the 2nd edition- are all evidence to an active engagement with their community's wants and needs. Rather than produce one static document for their entire tenure they listened and responded to improve their service- a dynamism that hardly supports the widespread image of listless, pencil pushing activism.

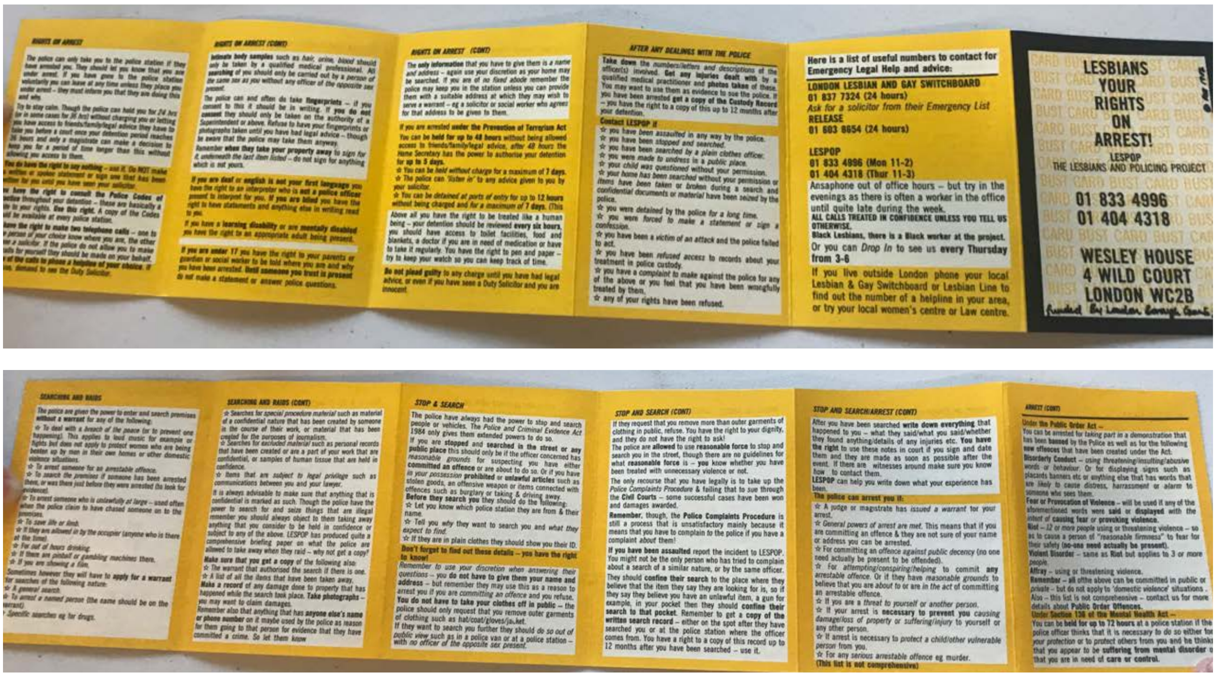

Figure 2: Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/2/4/2: Yellow 'Bust Card'.

When this extensive list of facets is considered alongside the fact that it was the labours of, at most, two full time workers, such scope is staggering. Looking beyond the professionalism that comes across in the archival documents it is clear that the project was a passion-project powered by enthusiastic individuals. Led primarily by Kris Black and later Glenor Roberts, Julia Statman and Marie Gabriel, LESPOP was driven by the commitment and enterprise of individual women. It was these individuals, aided by the help of volunteers, that carried the project: researching the lesbian relationship with the police; designing and collating surveys; writing reports, press materials and publicity materials as well as working as counsellors and caseworkers- all on top of the daily administrative work involved in running an organisation.[11] Motivated by a sense of urgency however- "the police have showed that they will not and do not have an interest in protecting us"- this labour was shouldered.[12] Likely a result of having to obtain and later justify their funding, LESPOP's public facing material presents the group as an effective machine-like outfit and whilst this efficiency was realised it was only done so through sheer individual effort. This people-centred structure is irreconcilable with the queer apathy prevalent in current historiography.

Although this project's aim is to escape the historiographical focus on Section 28, the passion behind LESPOP can be evidenced further by looking at the group's opposition to the legislation. "Gesture politics" carries implications of financial motivation yet when their funding was cut by the LBGC, LESPOP did not evaporate. The Section 28 struggle, as documented in the pages of queer publication *The Pink Paper*, demonstrates this clearly. An 11th February 1988 article publicises a campaign to help those arrested at the January 9th protest and it is clear that LESPOP is the driving force behind this action: "meetings will take place every Tuesday at 7pm at LESPOP, Wesley House, Wild Court London WC2", all forms for sponsored fundraising events were to be acquired from LESPOP and all donations were to be made out to the Lesbian and Gay Campaign Fund at LESPOP.[13] Another article details the release of Rebecca Collerton: a protestor at the January 9th march arrested for bodily harm against a police officer. She was found not guilty and the group highlighted for their work in finding her an empathetic lawyer and supporting her through the ordeal? LESPOP.[14] A *Gay Times* article from February 1988 reiterates this, singling out LESPOP's Kris Black and her workers for their "sterling efforts as

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[11] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534 LP/1/5/2: Application Pack.
[12] GWL, GB1534, LP/1/1/6, p. 5.
[13] "Defence campaign", *The Pink Paper* [London], no. 12 (11 Feb, 1988), p. 5, ProQuest (27 Jan. 2022).
[14] "Last marcher goes free", *The Pink Paper* [London], no. 42 (15 Sep 1988), p. 3, ProQuest (27 Jan. 2022).

stewards and observers" on the OLGA January 9th demonstration.[15] What these extracts collectively show us is that at every level of mobilisation- fundraising, stewarding, protesting, and the legal fight- LESPOP was a critical element in the Section 28 struggle. The idea of a turning point in the late 1980's becomes artificial when this continuity is highlighted. That LESPOP achieved this without municipal funding also demonstrates that their success was not merely the upshot of subsidisation but was again a product of individual drive and determination.

The artificiality of such a turning point is further illuminated by LESPOP's relationship with the major organisations established to protest the injustice of the clause. On the 26th September 1990 Stonewall contacted LESPOP with a draft of the Homosexual Equality Bill prepared by themselves, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) and Liberty. It was distributed to LESPOP because their opinion and feedback was "greatly valued".[16] In a similar vein the archive also holds a letter inviting LESPOP to become part of the Lesbian and Gay Police Monitoring Group chaired by OutRage!.[17] The letter ends by asking LESPOP to send a representative forward to "hammer out the fine details which could take us forward". Together these letters demonstrate that by the early 1990's LESPOP was still a powerful voice in the queer activist scene and more than this, it was a voice that new organisations looked to for guidance and support. Stonewall and OutRage! have been positioned as the groups which finally galvanised the queer community in the fight for equality but they were indebted to older organisations that have gone ignored. These hidden connections further underline the reductive nature of seeing a critical turning point in 1988. These groups clearly did not see a divide between themselves and the activists that went before yet the historiography has erected a false, yet pervasive, barrier.

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[15] "Amazing success for protest march King", *Gay Times* [London], no. 113 (Feb 1988), p. 23, ProQuest (27 Jan. 2022).
[16] Glasgow, GWL GB1534, LP/1/3/1: Letter from Stonewall and ALA.
[17] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/3/2: Letter from OutRage!, p. 2.

Alongside showcasing their labour however, arguably the most powerful place we can evaluate LESPOP's significance is in the tangible impact that they had on their community. "Gesture politics" suggests ineffective, meaningless action but LESPOP was a real and necessary asset to the lesbian community and this is clear in the testimonies of women they helped. In 2009 Clare Summerskill completed a series of interviews with older queer individuals covering their relationship with the police across their lifetimes on behalf of the Met police.[18] She interviewed 20 individuals and one of the women, Val, recalled a vivid interaction with LESPOP at a pride march in the mid 1980's. "The police were pretty heavy handed" and she recounts getting penned in and charged at by mounted officers yet in the midst of this immense panic and fear she also remembered meeting a representative of the LESPOP handing out their 'bust card'. "I remember being really worried that I wouldn't have time to read it if I was arrested" but knowing that she had this "weapon", this safety net, was a powerful reassurance.[19] This is a small memory in a lengthier piece reflecting on her long-term relationship with the police but the fact that she remembered it illustrates the huge mark that the interaction left on her. As she states, "I look back at the time with great affection. It was a time of great change for me".[20] For LESPOP to become a pivotal moment in her queer narrative illustrates the significance of their work.

This sense of emotional importance is compounded by the number of imploring letters written by users to the LBGC in 1988 demanding LESPOP's funding be restored. The service meant so much to them- to their sense of community, identity and safety- and the letters are emotional reading. "Daily, I come into contact with friends, colleagues and people using our advice services who face discrimination, harassment and abuse, they are faced with, losing their job, losing their children, losing their lovers due to immigration law, homelessness- what more can I say! Lesbians need this service and demand that the LBG recognise that need and damn well supply

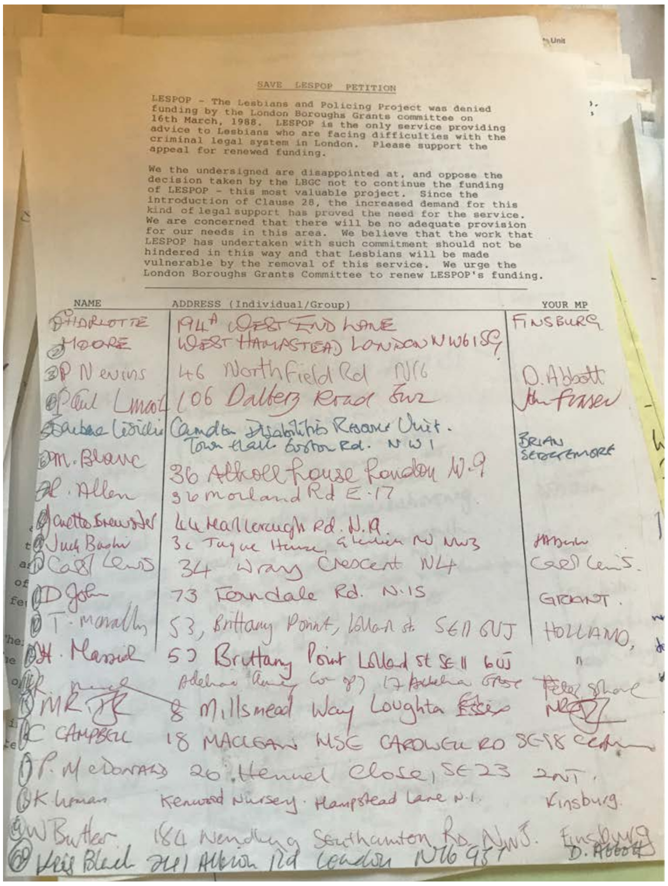
[18] C. Summerskill, *Gateway to heaven: Fifty years of lesbian and gay oral history* (London, 2013), p. 11.
[19] *Ibid,* p. 170.
[20] *Ibid.*

us with a service that we deserve".[21] This assertion of the service as "ours" is a visceral demonstration of the connection that users felt to this organisation. There is a sense of personal ownership- it is both a part of themselves and theirs as a community. It was a lifeline like no other and was critical in the face of a state that as one woman asserted "sanction[ed] hatred and bigotry".[22] These letters were requested by LESPOP specifically for their appeal campaign and thus whilst we have to consider the writers agenda to exaggerate the groups importance, the sheer act of writing a letter in itself suggests that it was more than just performative.[23] The hand-crafted nature of these letters represents an action as well as a sentiment. These individuals felt stimulated enough by the prospect of losing LESPOP's service to physically channel their anger into writing a letter. Such an act takes thought, time and effort yet users went to such lengths because of the group's tangible and critical impact.

We can also see this importance in the sheer numbers of signatures that the 'SAVE LESPOP' petition amassed. Also created for the 1988/89 funding appeal, the petition's aim was to show the sheer number of women LESPOP had supported and to add weight to their claim that there was an increasing need for such a service. Just counting the pages preserved in the archive totals over 1000 signatures- likely a large underestimate considering many signatories denoted whole groups and the fact that many sheets were likely lost due to the ephemeral nature of such materials. The significance to so many is starkly evident- something echoed in the physicality of the documents. Signatures are crammed onto the page and even cover the backs of some of the sheets (fig. 3 and 4). There is almost a sense of the sheet being passed around a group, each individual writing their signature in an act of solidarity. They also hold examples where they have clearly run out of the printed forms and have hastily hand-drawn new ones to accommodate all the names they need to get down- so much support they can't print the paper quick enough (fig.

21 Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/7/1: Letter from Linda Bean.
22 Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/7/1: Letter from Sue McLaney.
23 Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/7/1: LESPOP CUT FUNDING leaflet, p. 2.

5). Deborah Withers has called for more attention to be paid to the role of emotions in social movements.[24] She explored this through oral interviews but, as the petitions show, material culture can offer just as deep an insight into individuals' emotions- something that deserves to be explored further. There is a real urgency and desperation in the petition's physical nature. It is difficult to experience such documents and not get a sense of LESPOP's significance.



SAVE LESPOP PETITION

LESPOP - The Lesbians and Policing Project was denied funding by the London Boroughs Grants committee on 16th March, 1988. LESPOP is the only service providing advice to Lesbians who are facing difficulties with the criminal legal system in London. Please support the appeal for renewed funding.

We the undersigned are disappointed at, and oppose the decision taken by the LBGC not to continue the funding of LESPOP - this most valuable project. Since the introduction of Clause 28, the increased demand for this kind of legal support has proved the need for the service. We are concerned that there will be no adequate provision for our needs in this area. We believe that the work that LESPOP has undertaken with such commitment should not be hindered in this way and that Lesbians will be made vulnerable by the removal of this service. We urge the London Boroughs Grants Committee to renew LESPOP's funding.

NAME | ADDRESS (Individual/Group) | YOUR MP

Figure 3: Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/7/1: A "SAVE LESPOP" petition form.

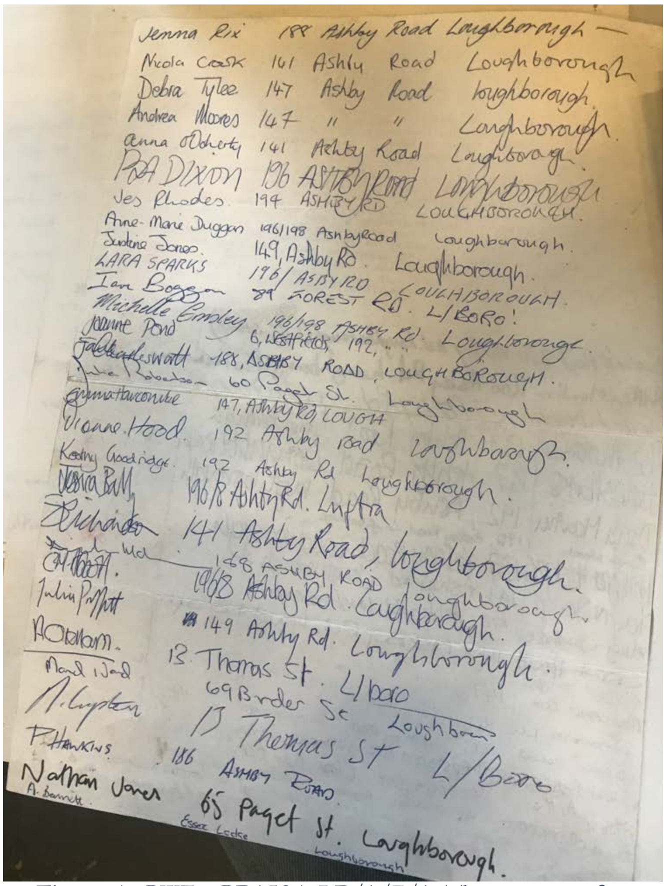


Figure 4: GWL, GB1534, LP/1/7/1: The reverse of a 'SAVE LESPOP' petition form.

[24] D.M. Withers, 'Women's liberation, relationships and the "vicinity of trauma"', *Oral History*, 40/1 (2012), p. 85.

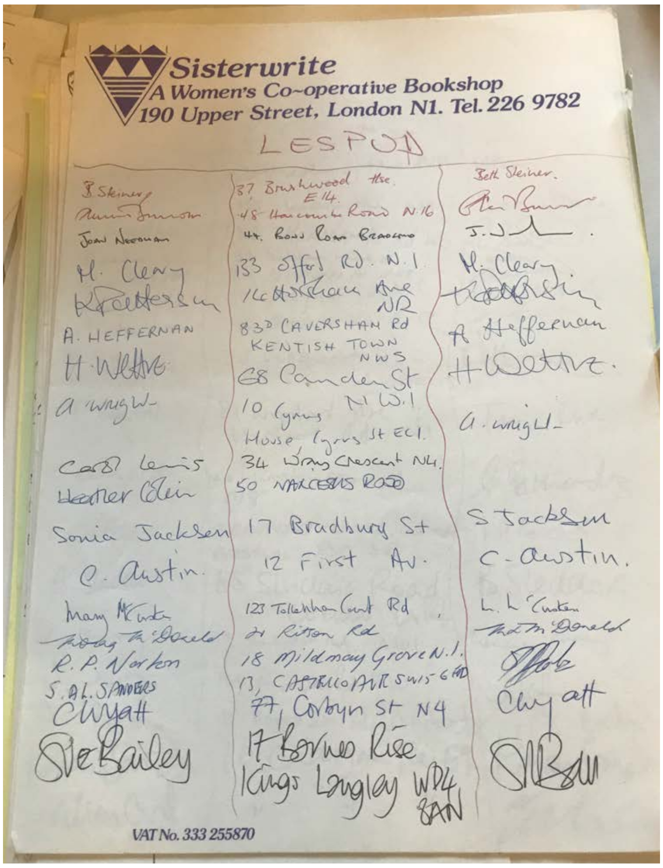


Figure 5: GWL, GB1534, LP/1/7/1: A handwritten "SAVE LESPOP" petition.

Ultimately, considering the sheer wealth of evidence of both LESPOP's work and impact it is difficult to substantiate the view that pre section 28 activism was non-existent or merely pencil pushing. It was small and community-based but this doesn't mean that it should be overlooked and the archival evidence of LESPOP's labours is testament to this- to its strength, its vibrancy and its significance. The Section 28 narrative sets up an artificial dividing line between passivity/mobilisation and such a view propagates a false timeline of queerness. The early 1980's was a time for queer exploration and vibrant and dynamic activism and we need to move our frame of reference backwards to reflect this.

Chapter Two

"There is both strength and safety in numbers"[1]

Chapter 1 showcased the work that LESPOP carried out and the tangible impact of this, breaking down and dismissing the idea of queer passivity. This section builds on this argument and explores it in relation to the idea of community. Queer apathy is often rooted in a lack of unity; queer individuals were disparate, insular and unconnected and as such they failed to make effective change. Section 28 is positioned as the baptism of fire which forged the queer coalition we recognise today.[2] Yet LESPOP once again illuminates the inaccuracies of such an interpretation. Encouraged by generous GLC funding, the years leading up to Section 28 bore witness to a vast safety net of lesbian and gay organisations working together and caring for one another in lieu of institutional support or acceptance. It may have been more amorphous, fluid and overlapping than the group identity which did indeed form under the pressure of Section 28, but a physical and emotional proto-community did exist.[3] Such a network has been largely overlooked in historiography yet it was this community that allowed LESPOP to realise the array of work that chapter 1 detailed and arguably allowed Section 28 activism to take the shape it did.

LESPOP's regular bulletin stands as a vivid and physical display of this queer co-operation. Distributed to subscribers as well as a large number of voluntary and statutory organisations, the Bulletin was a creative space for the community to come together and rally for miscellaneous causes- "if you are a part of a group whose work overlaps at all with that of LESPOP, we may be able to publicise it in our bulletin"- and we can see this symbiosis in the surviving copies.[4] The 3rd edition opens with a diary of upcoming events and demonstrations for various London groups. It then moves into an advertisement for the Camden Lesbian Centre. After this it flows

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1 Glasgow, GWL, GB1534 LP/1/4/2, p. 7.
2 Engel, The Unfinished Revolution, p. 92.
3 S.F. Green, *Urban Amazons: Lesbian Feminism and beyond in the Gender, Sexuality, and Identity Battles of London* (Basingstoke, 1997), p. 120.
4 Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/2/2/9, p. 11.

into a piece from a group formed to protest the police mishandling of a lesbophobic murder, an advert from the Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group, an article about a demonstration against the Haringey Parents Rights Group and then an advert by the London Lesbian Custody Charter Campaign.[5] In between the main announcements there are countless other smaller inserts ranging from a lesbian book club to a lesbian sound system company- the network extending beyond just politics.[6] The space was clearly an active forum, both for individuals to come together in fight but also socially, individuals united through a shared identity, experience and history. The bulletin's physical binding of interests is clear, tangible evidence to an antecedent queer community.

Equally as tangible, community is also reflected in the physical space of LESPOP. Robert Sember has described how queer individuals use space as a way to "know ourselves and become known to others" and LESPOP's offices in Wesley House exemplify this.[7] The building was the headquarters of the London Women's Centre but also had smaller offices which were occupied by LESPOP and other similar groups such as the National Abortion Campaign, WIRES, Women & Transport and Akina Mama Wa Afrika.[8] At any one time there were around 10 to 15 groups inhabiting the 6-story GLC owned building. This shared space allowed collaboration, community and, crucially for a queer women's group, protection.[9] It became a home, "a pocket of resistance… in which women could feel safe, for a time, from the hostility of the outside world".[10] This network extended to the surrounding streets: the local area filled with lesbian spaces, venues and shops- a geography that compounded the feeling of safety and collective identity.[11] Thomas Markus argues that bonds are made concrete through bodies in space:

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[5] London, Bishopsgate Institute, LGBTQ+ Library: 1987 LESPOP Bulletin no. 3, pp. 2-39.
[6] *Ibid*, p. 41.
[7] R. Sember, 'In the Shadow of the Object: Sexual Memory in the AIDS epidemic', *Space and Culture* 6/3 (2003), p. 215.
[8] London, Bishopsgate Institute, FL/EPH/E/81: Wesley House: Information for Visitors.
[9] GWL, GB1534 LP/1/4/2, p. 3.
[10] Green, *Urban Amazons,* p. 42.
[11] *Ibid*, p. 24.

geographies acting as the basis for "community, friendship, and solidarity"- a theorisation reflected in LESPOP.[12]

LESPOP's connections also ranged beyond their immediate locality, a reach enabled by the queer media. Despite LESPOP's short-lived existence as an autonomous group there are sixty-nine mentions of the group in the *Gay Times* and *The Pink Paper* between 1985 and 1989. This included their contact details being included in their respective directories as well as more in-depth pieces such as interviews with workers, mentions in articles and columns and adverts for their events and actions.[13] Overcoming geographic separation, the queer media was crucial in allowing up to date information about organisations and events to circulate rapidly and thus for bonds to form between groups in London but also further afield.[14] Through its ability to act as a common frame of reference, its creation of a common language and the physical union of interests within its pages the media allowed an 'imagined community' to form- a mental affinity which functioned as the foundation of later revolutionary movements.[15] When LESPOP's funding was cut this media network became even more important and *The Pink Paper* especially acted as a way for LESPOP to appeal for funding and ideas and to rally for support.[16] A space to amplify their calls for help, the queer media network arguably helped LESPOP outlive its funding cut- demonstration of the way this imagined network manifested physically.

Theorising community from archival material and spacial theories could be regarded as conjecture but Sarah Green's work illustrates that such ideas were also articulated by the

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12 T. Markus, *Buildings & Power: Freedom and Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types* (London, 1993), p. 25.
13 'Axed lesbian group needs London help', *The Pink Paper* [London], no. 19 (31 Mar 1988), p. 5, ProQuest (22 Sep. 2021); 'LESPOP gathering' *The Pink Paper* [London], no. 24, (12 May 1988), p. 7, ProQuest (22 Sep. 2021); 'Strength appeal', *The Pink Paper* [London], (9 Jun 1988), p. 5, ProQuest (22 Sep. 2021); 'Round Britain Gay Guide' *Gay Times* [London], no. 123 (Dec 1988), p. 92, ProQuest (22 Sep. 2022).
14 Green, *Urban Amazons,* p. 41.
15 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edn, (London, 2006), p. 6.
16 'Lesbians look for strangers', *The Pink Paper* [London], no. 67, (8 Apr 1989), p. 5, ProQuest (25 Aug. 2021); 'In need of your help', *The Pink Paper* [London], no. 42 (1988), p. 19, ProQuest (25 Aug 2021); 'LESPOP emergency', *The Pink Paper* [London], no. 51, (1 Dec 1988), p. 19, ProQuest (25 Aug. 2021); 'Advertisement: Lloyds Bank PLC', *The Pink Paper* [London], no. 85, (12 Aug 1989), p. 3, ProQuest (25 August 2021).

individuals involved. An anthropologist, Green immersed herself in the London based lesbian activist scene for a period of 18 months from late 1987 to 1989, living and working with the women involved. Amongst the groups she worked with, of which LESPOP was one, she came to recognise a deep and emotional collectivity- "most women I spoke to agreed with this understanding of the community- that it was something large, complex, amorphous, involving people you know nothing about, but nevertheless feel connected to".[17] Whilst she found no single ideology or identity that coherently bound all such women together there existed "continual overlaps between women's personal experiences, their interests and their histories" which worked to create a loosely bound collective identity that was powerfully felt by all women involved.[18] Anna Marie Smith argued that Section 28 converted "apathetic individuals" into a "community" but Green's work shows how the emotional foundation for such a union was already in existence.[19]

This emotional bond comes across equally as clearly in the LESPOP archival holdings. The GWL holds over 40 letters from other queer activist collectives, women's groups and centres, legal associations, and local government bodies written to both LESPOP and the LBGC upon hearing of their funding cut. Rather than automated and mass-produced letters of commiserations- expected in a period when such cuts were becoming the norm- each one is intimate and highly personal. They recount individual instances where they have worked with LESPOP and their horror and dread at the thought of such an invaluable relationship being forcibly severed. Writer's detail being "shocked and dismayed" at this "tragedy" and prospective "loss to the community", promising them money, advertisement, and free space to host their events and services.[20] A semantic field of anger and despair runs through each letter and this

[17] Green, *Urban Amazons,* p. 85.
[18] *Ibid*, p. 103.
[19] Smith, *New Right discourse on race and sexuality,* p. 233.
[20] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/7/1: Letter from Camden Council Women's Committee; Letter from Citizens Advice Bureau; Letter from Oxford Student Lesbian and Gay Society.

builds to create a strong feeling of family- an impression compounded further by the physicality of such materials. Even if typed, letter writing is not a passive action. Under the growing pressure of Section 28 these groups took time and effort to put their thoughts into words. Such exertion implies emotional involvement and that over 40 groups went to such lengths is clear evidence of a queer community in action.

There is the possible counter argument that this discussion of an antecedent queer community is a London centric narrative, but LESPOP also had links spanning the entirety of the British Isles. Whilst the group was funded for lesbians in London this was not a hard boundary- something physically demonstrated by archival correspondence from various regional groups asking for LESPOP's help. Ranging from the Wombourne Defend Fund- a group from Wolverhampton looking for publicity for a campaign against their local Conservative MP- to correspondence from the Leeds Women's Defence Campaign asking for support to help cover the costs of an upcoming trial, the geographical range was vast.[21] The 'SAVE LESPOP' petition is another representation of this and when the origins of the signatories are mapped a tangible web of connections is illuminated (fig. 1). That individuals ranging from Inverness to Portsmouth were motivated to support their plight visibly shows that whilst London may have been the nucleus there was a proto queer network that ranged far beyond this- a coverage that has often gone unconsidered in queer studies.

[21] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534 LP/1/3/3: Campaign letter from the Wombourne Defence Fund; Glasgow, GWL, GB1534 LP/1/3/4: Campaign letter from Leeds Women's Defence Campaign.

Figure 6: A map showing the locales of the signatories of the 1988 "SAVE LESPOP" petition (GWL, GB1534, LP/1/7/1)

Also of great historiographical significance, LESPOP's community also extended to men's organisations. Within the historiography there is a powerful narrative which argues that although the GLF brought gay men and women together for a moment of unity in the early 1970's, differing goals and pervasive misogyny caused this to break apart. This bitter division allegedly persisted until Section 28- a common enemy- united them once again.[22] Yet this is not the narrative that emerges from the LESPOP archive. Although LESPOP separated from GALOP, the move was not rooted in gendered infighting. The devolution was a balanced recognition of the difference between their respective communities and thus the necessity for separate, safe spaces- GALOP self-reflecting on its implicitly masculine image.[23] GALOP funded LESPOP's three-month trial and this support continued into its autonomy- clearly demonstrated by the fact GALOP still gave LESPOP a space in their annual reports.[24] Workshops, seminars, hotlines, fundraising, social events and demonstrations were all also jointly run- the groups separate but united.[25] Whilst such civility could be argued to be a necessity of public facing material, the GWL archive also holds private materials which illuminate the authenticity of the relationship. Emblematic of this is a letter written by the head of GALOP, Philip Derbyshire, upon hearing the news of LESPOP's cut. "Dear Friends… we feel some terrible error has been made… it seems inequitable to deprive women of appropriate services, yet grant them to men".[26] He acknowledges the strength of their organisation and their significant import to the community- it is a deeply emotional display of shock, despair, and ultimately respect. Sheila Jeffreys' has spoken of how gay male groups "eroticised" power difference and she wields this to justify separatist lesbian feminism.[27] Yet this, at least in this instance, was simply not the case. This is not to say that the relationship was entirely smooth- there are allusions in the archival material to conflicts over sharing workspaces and oral testimonies may have brought up issues elided in official documentation- but the critical point here is that separation did not mean hostility.[28] GALOP

[22] J. Weeks, *Coming out,* pp. 213-14, p. 242; S. Jeffreys, *The lesbian revolution: Lesbian feminism in the UK, 1970-1990*, (London, 2018), p. 40; E. Hamer, *Britannia's glory: A history of twentieth-century lesbians* (London, 2016), p. 196; R. Jennings, *A lesbian history of Britain: Love and sex between women since 1500* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 169-173.
[23] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534 LP/1/4/1: Interim Report, p. 1.
[24] Bishopsgate Institute, LGBTQ+ Library, LAGNA P690, GALOP: 2nd annual report, pp. 10-13.
[25] London, Bishopsgate Institute, FL/EPH/C/649: GALOP/LESPOP Training For Lesbians And Gay Men; 'Witnesses to bus arrest wanted', *The Pink Paper* [London], no. 20 (14 Apr 1988), p. 7, ProQuest (27 Jan. 2022); 'Defensive disco', *The Pink Paper* [London], no. 16, (10 March 1988), p. 6, ProQuest (27 Jan 2022); Glasgow, GWL, GB1534 LP/1/7/1: Letter from David James to LESPOP.
[26] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534 LP/1/7/1: Letter from Philip Derbyshire to LESPOP.
[27] Jeffreys, *The lesbian revolution,* p. 42.
[28] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534 LP/1/5/2, p. 3.

and LESPOP had a close and healthy working relationship: significant confirmation of community cohesion long before Section 28's "shot in the arm".[29]

GALOP highlights how LESPOP's community extended beyond the lesbian feminist scene and this reach is reflected in their relationship with other social movements also. All funded by the GLC there was a vast community that extended beyond the bounds of identity politics. Rather than as separate groups with separate aims, activists of all motivations in this period were part of a diverse and interconnected community. We see this embodied in LESPOP's bulletin: adverts from miscellaneous groups inserted amongst the queer voices with topics ranging from a report by the Pakistani Workers Association on a racially motivated murder of a 13-year-old boy to the campaign against the deportation of Viraj Mendis, a UK resident for 13 years facing extradition to Sri Lanka.[30] Such range was also reflected in their work, with stewarding help, conferences and workshops given to causes ranging from the Newham 7 Defence Campaign, a group fighting the racist prosecution of 7 southeast Asian youth, to the Maire O'Shea Campaign, lobbying against the 1974 Prevention of Terrorism Act.[31] Sociologist Sidney Tarrow argued that social movements emerge in "clusters" yet this has not been reflected in the histories of such movements- studies confined to discrete identities.[32] This has created a false image of disparate activist action when in fact- as LESPOP demonstrates- there was a complex latticework of organisations and groups living, working and struggling *together*.

The strongest external relationship LESPOP maintained was with the WLM. Most histories of the WLM centre on the animosity between lesbian groups and feminists, often highlighting the

[29] Jeffrey-Poulter, *Peers, queers and commons,* p. 243.
[30] London, Bishopsgate Institute, LGBTQ+ Library: 1987 LESPOP Bulletin no. 3, pp. 40-42.
[31] GWL, GB1534 LP/1/4/2, pp. 10-13.
[32] S. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. 3rd edn (Cambridge, 2011), p. 199.

fatal split at the 1978 national WLM conference as the embodiment of this.[33] This narrative pits lesbian radicals demanding 'political lesbianism' against heterosexual socialist feminists as if these were the only two available stances- yet LESPOP is indication that lesbian moderates did exist. Not all lesbians saw their plight as oppositional to heterosexual women and LESPOP shows this, a clear example of lesbians and heterosexual feminists working closely and amicably with one another. LESPOP recognised the uniqueness of their service for women at large and thus supported any woman in need- regardless of sexual orientation.[34] They advertised WLM events and in turn were given space in *WIRES*, the WLM bulletin. They acted as stewards for the 1985 International Women's Day demonstration and marshalled Reclaim the Night Marches across the country. They attended conferences and workshops on topics ranging from female health issues to women's employment- interests which place them firmly within the world of the WLM.[35] Such synergy and coworking is evidence to a far more nuanced relationship than has been accounted for and is further testament to the existence of an expansive activist network.

It is also worth highlighting the inherent link between LESPOP and its associate groups- the GLC. A fundamental reason LESPOP and other such collectives had the ability to form these links and relationships was the GLC's backing. Active between 1981 and 1986 and committed to funding marginalised individuals, the GLC distributed £1 million to gay and lesbian groups during its short existence and in doing so created a fertile moment of activist possibility.[36] GLC funding allowed LESPOP to pursue meaningful work and engagement; the GLC owned the spaces which allowed LESPOP to carry out their work and build such a community, and the shared identity of being part of the GLC's municipal socialist movement arguably contributed to

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[33] *E.g.* M. Jolly, *Sisterhood and after: An Oral History of the UK Women's Liberation Movement, 1968- present*, (New York, 2021), p. 32; A. Coote and B. Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation.* 2nd edn (Oxford, 1987), p. 242; M. Pugh, Women and the Women's Movement in Britain since 1914. Third ed (Basingstoke, 2015), p. 278.
[34] GWL, GB1534 LP/1/4/2, p. 2.
[35] Ibid, pp. 9- 13.
[36] S. Brooke. *Sexual Politics: Sexuality, Family Planning, and the British Left from the 1880s to the Present Day* (Oxford, 2011), p. 238; J. Curran, I. Gabor, and J. Petley, *Culture Wars: The Media and the British Left.* 2nd edn (Abingdon, 2018), p. 240.

the strong sense of unity that emerges from the archival material. Yet despite this there has been extremely little historical appraisal of the organisation- chiefly a result of it being rendered toxic by the press, the Conservative government and by a large part of the Labour movement at the time.[37] Such a stance privileges the organisations albeit very real issues over a balanced consideration of the benefits that their funding and support enabled. LESPOP's work and their aforementioned community is tangible evidence to this end and thus contributes to a growing body of work aiming to rescue the impact of this unique period of municipal history.

To conclude, whilst Peter Ackroyd and other have argued that Section 28 "created the gay community" LESPOP as a microhistory illuminates the reductive nature of such a narrative.[38] Rather than the historiographical image of fractured and isolated groups working alone this study demonstrates how queer community pre-dated the clause. In the face of strong societal hostility there was a network of activists working together to create protection when no other support system existed. This is not to elide the fractures that did exist- LESPOP and the queer community at large was riven by disputes over separatism, S/M dykes and gay liberation- but to highlight that whilst Section 28 may have had a powerful galvanising effect this did not emerge from a vacuum.[39] The idea of the modern queer community coming of age in 1988 ignores a long history of connection and support – both within and external to the queer community- that accumulated to form the basis for later cohesion.

[37] A. Lent, 'The Labour Left, Local Authorities and New Social Movements in Britain in the Eighties', *Contemporary Politics*, 7/1 (2001), p. 13; D. Cooper, *Sexing the City: Lesbian and Gay Politics within the Activist State* (London, 1994), p. 17; B. Cant and S. Hemmings, *Radical Records: Thirty Years of Lesbian and Gay History, 1957-1987* (London, 2010), p. 155.
[38] P. Ackroyd, *Queer city: Gay London from the Romans to the present day* (London, 2017), p. 225.
[39] Green, *Urban Amazons*, p. 20, 15, 21.

Chapter Three

"Issues are discussed within the context of specific ways that women are policed according to our different and/or multiple oppressions"[1]

As Chapters 1 and 2 showcased, whilst Section 28 was crucial in the queer British narrative it was not, as theorised, the trigger which awoke the queer community from supposed slumber. This section further compounds such an argument by highlighting the implicitly exclusionary nature of the turning point chronology. A narrative which sees 1988 as the seminal moment for queer mobilisation only works for white, able-bodied men and overlooks how other sub-sections of the queer community were mobilised and making effective change in the years prior- a point exemplified in LESPOP's work by, and for, women of colour and women with disabilities. When we malign the activism enabled by the GLC as ineffective or bureaucratic, what we specifically overlook is the way this climate granted marginalised individuals a voice and a platform- a situation the bigger and louder activism surrounding Section 28 arguably ended. Above all else, Section 28 as a turning point fundamentally cannot work because a uniform chronology can never speak to a community whose identities and experiences are intrinsically heterogeneous.

Zald and Ash theorised that as social movements develop they inevitably evolve into 'social movement organisations' or 'SMO's. A formal association of activists, such units are characterised by a roster of professional staff, a bureaucratic structure that leans towards conventional and thus exclusionary participation and in general are marked by a slide towards conservatism.[2] This theoretical trajectory is reflected in the course of gay liberation in the 1980's. Current historiography reifies the large activist organisations of Stonewall and OutRage!, both formed in the aftermath of Section 28, as symbolic of the formation of queer community- now unified under these assemblages queer individuals across the country were united in their identity and modern queerness was born. Yet what appears to be unity was actually, as the SMO model

[1] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534 LP/1/4/2, p. 4.
[2] P. Byrne, *Social Movements in Britain. Theory and Practice in British Politics* (London, 1997), p. 46.

posits, monopolisation. Rather than uniting individuals these groups spoke on behalf of an expansive queer collective whilst not actually representing all. Both OutRage! and Stonewall did not have a democratic hierarchy and both lacked channels for voicing alternative ideas or concerns. Whilst OutRage prided itself on its non-hierarchical structure supposedly independent general meetings conceded power to a governing elite made up of the loudest and assertive activists.[3] This worked to silence those lacking confidence- fundamentally the most marginalised in the queer community- and as such it became a white, male monopoly. Stonewall faced similar issues. Structured around a self-appointed executive committee and a professional staff there was no grassroots structure nor route by which individuals on the ground could influence the decision-making process.[4] Whilst previously several voices had clamoured for change, growth saw this narrowed and individuals silenced.[5]

Building off Weber and Michels, Zald and Ash also argued that SMOs develop narrower, more conservative goals than grassroots movements and we can also see this echoed in queer activism.[6] Both Stonewall and OutRage! propagated the idea that sexuality was a quasi-ethnicity, a people grounded in a shared experience of same sex attraction.[7] This collective identity provided a solid political foundation but it also came at the cost of exclusion- both groups purposefully ignoring how queerness intersected with other facets of self because, as Gamson has argued, "an inclusive queerness threatens to turn identity to nonsense".[8] OutRage's founding principles committed the group to fighting homophobia but little else.[9] As member Stephen Mayes stated "all the other issues which came up around race and class were effectively filtered out. People who came along with all sorts of agendas were faced with the simple question, 'does

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[3] A. Lent, 'The Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Politics in Britain', *British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 5/1 (2003), p. 37.
[4] S. Buckle, *The Way out: A History of Homosexuality in Modern Britain* (London, 2015), p. 113.
[5] M.N. Zald and R. Ash, 'Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay and Change', *Social Forces*, 44/3 (1996), p. 336.
[6] *Ibid*, p. 327.
[7] J. Gamson, 'Must Identity Movements Self-Destruct? A Queer Dilemma', *Social Problems*, 42/3 (1995), p. 391.
[8] *Ibid*, p. 399.
[9] I. Lucas, *OutRage!: An Oral History* (London, 1998), p. 32.

this fight homophobia?' If the answer was 'yes' then we moved on it, if 'no' we skipped it".[10] This was a conscious choice as to not get side tracked into issues that weren't directly queer but in doing so they sacrificed a sophisticated analysis of social oppression and elided difference. As member Alan Jarman stated in his interview for Lucas's oral history, "it wasn't easy for them, me going in, saying 'this is what we can be doing with black people, this is how you can encourage more black members'. It was difficult to be part of this group that didn't want to see you as being different".[11]

Stonewall was similar albeit for different reasons. Aiming to achieve their goals through governmental pressure and arguably tainted by the media backlash against Livingstone's 'loony left' there was a clear emphasis on respectability and as such assimilation- a direction which ignored discussion of other intersections.[12] We see this clearly displayed in the speeches given by Ian McKellan and Michael Cashman, Stonewall's founders, at the 1988 Manchester Stop The Clause demonstration. Albeit inspiring, both speeches appeal for rights derived from an idea of normalcy- "as ordinary men and women we demand the same rights, no more, no less, the same rights as other ordinary, civilised human beings" or as McKellan put it they deserved equality because they were simply "normal homosexuals".[13] As Jane Ward has described, gay activists embrace deviations when they are predictable but as soon as they become volatile "even progressive activists are compelled to revert to instrumental conceptualizations of difference, privileging those forms of difference that have the most currency in a neoliberal world and stifling differences".[14] Stonewall's rhetoric of 'normality' meant anyone that deviated from their assimilated gay norm became unmentionable- queer individuals of colour, gender non-

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[10] Lent, 'The Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Politics in Britain', p. 32.
[11] Lucas, *OutRage!,* p. 128.
[12] D. Rayside, *On the fringe: Gays and lesbians in politics* (London, 1998), p. 37.
[13] Manchester Stop Clause 28/Never Going Underground/Gay Rights Rally, YouTube (recorded 20 Feb. 1988, uploaded 30 March 2013) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbNig5ZNgTE&ab_channel=NickLansley (9 Feb. 2020).
[14] J.E. Ward. *Respectably Queer: Diversity Culture in LGBT Activist Organizations*, (Nashville, 2008), p. 2.

conforming individuals and those with disabilities all considered a threat to their legislative mission.

Repositioning these pre-eminent groups within the SMO framework peels back the triumphalist narratives surrounding the two organisations and in doing so challenges our framing of earlier, less formal activism. Smaller and more personal, the climate encouraged by Livingstone's vision for London provided a fertile space for intersectional and diverse activism. Individual identity groups proliferated, allowing space for focussed understandings of the queer experience that reflected all, introducing a "swathe of new people and structures and ideas" into positions of power.[15] The GLC's 'equal opportunities' policy enshrined inclusivity in local government and their funding of "double disadvantaged groups" gave authority to such experiences.[16] LESPOP is characteristic of this productive and inclusive climate. Rather than simply targeting homophobia they understood that racism, economic exploitation, sexism and ableism were interwoven with the prejudice around sexuality and this intersectionality, rather than to be glossed over, was something to be highlighted and explored.

We can see this in their work for, and as, women of colour. In what Robert Reiner has described as a "vicious cycle of interaction… between police stereotyping and black vulnerability to the situations that attract police attention", the early 1980's saw rapidly deteriorating police race relations.[17] Whilst the chief police target was young black men, black women also came under attack: caricatured as hyper sexual, threatening and morally deviant.[18] This racialised misogyny combined with the inherent homophobia of the police made black lesbians prime yet vulnerable targets- an experience LESPOP recognised. Largely ran by lesbians of colour, most notably Kris

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[15] Green, *Urban Amazons,* p. 141.
[16] *Ibid*, p. 143.
[17] R. Reiner, *The Politics of the Police* (Brighton, 1985), p. 95.
[18] R. Chigwada-Bailey, *Black Women's Experiences of Criminal Justice: A Discourse on Disadvantage* (Winchester, 1997), p. 47.

Black and Glenor Roberts, LESPOP listened, understood, and organised to support women in the face of such abuse, appreciating the difficulties that the tandem "daily problems of poverty, homophobia and racism" created.[19] The group ran workshops led by, and exclusively for, women of colour- "because Black women sometimes need to find space to discuss these issues in an atmosphere free from racism".[20] Such an understanding was also reflected in their publishing of educational material specifically pertaining to the Black experience and their release of all such materials in 9 different minority languages in an effort to make their service as accessible as possible.[21] Such focussed services when considered alongside their minimal budget demonstrates the importance the group ascribed to giving a platform to women of colour.

This is also reflected in their close relationship to other minority ethnic women's groups: advertising their services, giving and receiving education from other organisations and a symbiotic system whereby LESPOP would refer women to other groups services and vice versa.[22] Expanding out of women's groups they also gave their time to anti-racist movements at large: working as stewards at the Black People's Day of Action March and the Brixton protests, attending race conferences and workshops and writing articles for the Black media as well as giving space to black voices in their own publications.[23] This deference is exemplified by LESPOP's later expansion into immigration rights. The early 1980's saw the tightening of internal immigration controls with passport raids and deportations proliferating to the extent it resembled a "witch hunt" against the black community.[24] Although not part of their initial remit, LESPOP responded: designing workshops on immigration and nationality laws, hosting and

[19] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/7/1: 1987 Oral representation to the LBGC.
[20] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/4/3, p. 9; Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/1/4: LESPOP's work with Black and Minority Ethnic Lesbians.
[21] Glasgow, GWL GB1534, LP/2/1/1: Black Lesbians and the Police; Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/2/1/2: Black Lesbians in London up against the Law; Glasgow, GWL GB1534 LP/1/3/5: Order form.
[22] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/7/1: Short self-description of LESPOP's functions, p. 2.
[23] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/4/2, p. 10, 12; London, Bishopsgate Institute, LGBTQ+ Library: 1987 LESPOP Bulletin no. 3, pp. 36-42.
[24] P. Gordon, *White Law: Racism in the Police, Courts, and Prisons* (London, 1983), p. 37.

attending conferences on such topics, compiling a database of sympathetic lawyers working in the field and giving time to immigration issues in their various publications.[25] This adaptation shows an active and empathetic engagement with their users of colour, listening to their concerns and implementing solutions. There are obvious issues with taking public facing material as unquestioned proof of LESPOP's anti-racist credentials but such an adaptation illuminates the way in which LESPOP's stance was more than performative rhetoric.

It also makes it clear that prior to the moment when traditional histories have seen queer activism come to life black lesbians were already mobilised and working to alleviate the pressures on their community. The framework of mobilisation in 1988 does not speak to such an identity- a stance further compounded by the fact that black women actually found the period of 'community' post Section 28 restrictive and silencing. Women found OutRage! meetings loud, thuggish and exclusionary. As Lisa Power described: "it was almost always white men, mostly middle class. It was a fucking intimidating atmosphere in those meetings at times. I was in tears once, and I'm pretty tough".[26] When combined with an inherent racism, it was a particularly unwelcoming space to be a woman of colour- that Ian Lucas's oral history of OutRage! contains no interviews with black queer women is clear evidence to this end.[27] Comparing this hostility to LESPOP's workforce and approach starkly reveals the reductive nature of a narrative which positions 1988 as a moment of universal gay liberation.

This is mirrored in LESPOP's workforce of, and work for, women with disabilities. Perceived as soft targets, disabled lesbians were particularly vulnerable to mistreatment yet as the victim of a crime such individuals also often found it hard to get support from the criminal justice system.

[25] GWL, GB1534, LP/2/1/1; Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/6/2: Lawyer Use Survey; London, Bishopsgate Institute, LGBTQ+ Library: 1987 LESPOP Bulletin no. 3, p. 5, p. 42.
[26] Lucas, *OutRage!,* p. 42.
[27] *Ibid*, p. 95.

Infantilised, they were seen as unreliable witnesses and treated with condescension and neglect by the police.[28] Combined with a state at large that refused to see disabled individuals as a minority and approached social care with a policy of "cost containment and service rationing", to be a disabled queer woman in the early 1980's was to face both discrimination and silencing.[29]

LESPOP again, recognised this experience. Staffed by a group of disabled women, LESPOP researched how police practice specifically impacted disabled individuals through data collection and community research. They then attempted to ameliorate this disadvantage through casework with disabled lesbians and lesbian carers of disabled individuals: acting as a supportive listening ear, accompanying them to meetings and finding sympathetic sign language interpreters or solicitors.[30] Accessing such services was made as simple as possible with fully wheelchair accessible facilities and detailed instructions of how to access them in all LESPOP promotional materials.[31] All of their information was also available in large print, braille or on tape and they had signers at all workshops and events and refused to advertise or work with groups which did not provide such accessibility.[32] Although LESPOP's head leadership were all able-bodied they recognised their non-representative management as a deficiency and were consciously recruiting to remedy the imbalance. They were also in close contact with disability groups such as Gemma and Sisters Against Disablement to make sure that disabled voices were not displaced by able-bodied individuals speaking on their behalf.[33]

Again if we compare this to the understanding of disability that later, larger queer groups displayed the disparity is stark. Although OutRage! established LINK, an internal working group

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[28] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/1/5: LESPOP's work with people with disabilities.
[29] J. Campbell and M. Oliver, *Disability Politics: Understanding Our Past, Changing Our Future.* (London, 1996), p. 227; G. Van Toorn, *The New Political Economy of Disability: Transnational Networks and Individualised Funding in the Age of Neoliberalism* (London, 2021), p. 63.
[30] GWL, GB1534, LP/1/1/5.
[31] GWL, GB1534, LP/2/2/9, p. 11.
[32] GWL, GB1534, LP/1/1/5; Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/2/1/8: Public Order - An Issue of Concern for Lesbians, p. 2.
[33] Glasgow, GWL, GB1534, LP/1/5/2: Recruitment pack.

focused on disability rights, the individuals running it had no concept of what it meant to be both disabled and queer. In Ian Lucas's oral history, Graham Knight recalled one illustrative incident where they tried to produce a pamphlet detailing disability concerns- "the disability group was a disaster… we took Tim's guidance for the wording, which got us into trouble because it used the word 'handicapped'. We didn't know any of the issues at all".[34] In 1992 they later went on to scrap all of their minority focus groups- a clear display of the attention they were willing to give to diversity.[35] Stonewall was similarly marred by ableism, typified by the groups 1995 claim that homophobia would be eradicated in 5 years- a statement which displayed a distinct ignorance of the non-white, non-able-bodied experience.[36] It is again difficult to position Section 28 as the trigger for queer mobilisation when, as LESPOP demonstrates, for disabled individuals this came earlier and the clause arguably brought regression.

In conclusion, a focus on LESPOP illustrates the earlier mobilisation of disabled and multi-racial queer women- intersectionality that the current Section 28 narrative ignores. The period prior to the 1988 'mobilisation' was fertile for intersectional, exploratory activism and as such allowed disabled women and women of colour to find their voice. This is not to reify the era under the GLC's tenure as utopianly free of racism and ableism- Sarah Greens' work shows that lesbian feminist groups could be equally as exclusionary- but it is to argue that within this period there also existed the opportunity for intersectional activism; something the formalisation and monopolisation of activism effaced.[37] Queer histories often only consider queerness as an isolated facet of the self when sexual identity is actually in direct conversation with a range of diverse components.[38] When this intersectionality is recognised it quickly becomes clear how

[34] Lucas, *OutRage!,* p. 95.
[35] 'OutRage to concentrate on campaigns', *The Pink Paper* [London], no. 234 (12 July 1992), p. 2, LGBT Magazine Archive (9 Jan. 2020).
[36] 'Legal equality is not the same as real freedom', *Gay Times* [London], no. 194, (Nov 1994), p. 87, ProQuest, (9 Jan. 2020).
[37] Green, *Urban Amazons,* p. 20.
[38] C. Cohen, 'Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?' *GLQ,* 3/4 (1996), p. 442.

many of the categories, hegemonic narratives and theorisations within the historiography of sexuality at large rely on a tacitly white, able-bodied norm.

Conclusion

Restricted as the dissertation is, there are various unexplored avenues raised by this project. This thesis argues that the queer experience cannot be homogenised and regionality is another factor to consider here.[1] Guided by the archival material, the project's focus was London but what did provincial identity and action look like, in what ways did this differ from a metropolitan experience and thus how far does my conclusion mirror what was commencing elsewhere? Was this a London phenomenon enabled by the GLC? Did other progressive councils such as Manchester or Nottingham provide as productive climates? Was mobilisation happening outside of this socialist municipal phenomenon regardless? Daisy Paylings' work on socialist Sheffield has delved into this but it is a largely unexplored and fertile area.[2]

Also of interest, this thesis often utilised the umbrella label of 'queer' but implicitly the conclusions reified a cis body- the trans experience of the police and legal system something I could not do justice to in the scope of this project. To do so would also have been challenging because of the simple fact that none of LESPOP's archival material mentions trans women- an extremely loud silence which raises important questions over the dynamics of community. Oral testimony would have been enlightening here and thus this is a question I will take into postgraduate study.

The sheer range of different avenues yet to be investigated is emblematic of what this project set out to highlight- the diversity and plurality of queerness. Section 28's mass kiss-ins, lesbians abseiling into the House of Commons and activists chaining themselves to the 6 o'clock news presenters' desks are images deeply ingrained in queer British cultural memory. They are

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[1] H. Smith, 'Working-Class Ideas and Experiences of Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Britain: Regionalism as a Category of Analysis', *20th Century British History*, 29/1 (2018), p. 58.
[2] D.C.E Payling, "Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire': activism in Sheffield in the 1970s and 1980s' (PhD. thesis, University of Birmingham, 2016).

emotive, powerful acts and represent queer activism at its most theatrical yet such performances should not eclipse earlier activism. Both integral to aforementioned later protests but also stand-alone in their own right, the activism of the early 1980's represented a time for action; for community; for support and for exploration. And LESPOP is emblematic of this.

It is also symbolic of the intersectionality that such a period promoted. The narrative of Section 28 as the "shot in the arm" only works for a select few and elides the labours of the most marginalised who had to, and did, galvanise far earlier- actually working to reify a moment when such voices were essentially silenced. As Matt Cook has argued, the queer community is multifaceted and one narrative can never claim to speak for all. The complex ways desire interacts with economic, social and cultural circumstances produces a diverse array of experiences.[3] To elevate one is always going to be unrepresentative- something our chronologies, histories more broadly and arguably the queer community today need to reflect moving forward.

[3] M. Cook, 'Local Lives in Queer London', in J. V. Evans and M. Cook (eds) *Queer Cities, Queer Cultures: Europe since 1945* (London, 2014), p. 38.

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