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### **Abstract**

This article considers the “liminality” of the psychologist Charlotte Wolff, MD (1897–1986). Always living openly as a lesbian since her school days in Danzig, Wolff trained as a doctor—also pursuing a parallel interest in poetry and in philosophy. As a Jewish person, she was forced to leave the Berlin Health Service and flee Germany when the Nazi regime came to power. Having moved to Great Britain in 1936 after three years in France, Wolff reconfigured “exile” beyond the literal experience of emigration and immigration, as a form of “marginality” or “liminality” always involved in artistic and scientific endeavors. In her life and work she negotiated several liminal areas—from her gender presentation to her standing in the academic and scientific community (she was a Fellow of the British Psychological Society, to which she bequeathed her papers and the copyright to her work, but at the same time she was not an eminent psychologist), to her membership of sexual minority organizations (she conducted pioneering research on lesbianism and bisexuality, but some resented her connection with the psy-professions). In the spirit of Wolff’s “liminality” as a strategy and creative zone, and along the lines indicated by Morawski (1994) as regards the transformative possibilities of feminist psychology as a liminal science, we argue for a reappraisal of Wolff’s life and work that, in negotiating the borderlands between lesbian history and history of psychology, could enrich both disciplines.

### **KEYWORDS**

Charlotte Wolff, liminality, lesbian history, history of psychology, threatened identities, exile

I have always loved border-lands, be they geographical, national or scientific. They represent the small field where the unknown hits the familiar with an equal impact on the mind and on the emotions. The regions of discovery in everything have always been the goal of my aspirations and desires. (Wolff, 1969, p. 63)

Hermann Broch, who narrowly escaped Nazi persecution after Austria was “annexed” to Germany in 1938 and he was briefly interned in a camp, described in the novel *The Guiltless* (1950) tableaux of ennui and indifference (as opposed to easily condemnable active “guilt”) that like somnolent rivulets of still water fed—from World War I to Hitler’s ascent to power in 1933—into what was to become the Holocaust. The everyday (the banality of apathy) coalesced into (or contributed to) the momentous, and the momentous, as it is known, destroyed or transformed forever the everyday of millions of people.

One of these people, a contemporary of Broch’s characters, so-to-speak, was a young Berlin doctor who had studied philosophy as well as medicine and participated fully in the city’s cultural life, including its thriving lesbian subculture: Charlotte Wolff. As a Jewish person, she faced (and only fortuitously escaped) annihilation; as a lesbian, she faced another type of elision, the perhaps low-key, even banal but constant denial of her existence during her lifetime and beyond—in other words, the denial of (a) history. But History as a discipline, like Broch’s work, has shown that the role of banality is not to be underestimated in the process of erasure (cf. Arendt, 1963).

In the documentary *Not Just Passing Through* (Carlomusto, P´erez, Gund Saalfield, & Thistlethwaite, 1994), which celebrates the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) that Joan Nestle co-founded in her apartment in 1974, Nestle says that “every lesbian is worthy of inclusion in history. If you have the courage to touch another woman, then you are a very famous person.” This statement, like the LHA’s *raison d’être*, is a challenge to the routine elision of lesbian lives. At micro-level, this has meant the

destruction of letters and diaries (“compromising” material?) by “concerned” close relatives before distribution of personal effects to the wider family or transfer of bequests to official repositories of memory, or even by the women themselves during their lifetime for fear of the consequences of exposure (Cruikshank, 1982; Faderman, 1979/1982; Freedman, 1998; Lesbian History Group, 1989). At a wider—institutional and cultural—level, the unquestioned assumption that “lesbian” and “history” cannot but be an oxymoron, as highlighted by Cook (1979), has ensured that the legacy of lesbian lives has been denied “storage space”—literally and figuratively—in archives, museums, and academia (Duberman, Vicinus, & Chauncey, 1989; Katz, 1976/1992; Lesbian History Group, 1989). The same goes for the institution of the (mainstream) press, namely the barometer and guardian of “community standards,” as well as record of the “here and now” of any given time. The exclusion from the mainstream press of anything not conforming to White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) and heterosexist values with attendant conservative and heteronormative conceptualization of “family” has been widely chronicled (e.g., Bronski, 2002). When Mabel Hampton, one of the heroines of lesbian history portrayed and honored in *Not Just Passing Through*, died in 1989, the *New York Times* published a brief obituary that stated, “there are no immediate survivors.” In the documentary, the writer Jewelle Gomez is shown addressing the crowd present at Hampton’s memorial service—people who had known her and/or had been inspired by her example—with the words, “we are Mabel’s immediate survivors” (Carlomusto et al. 1994; Cvetkovich, 2002).

It is not surprising then that this systematic erasure has produced a situation whereby, in the public imagination, prominent lesbian figures in history are Sappho (who, incidentally, also wrote love poems dedicated to men), Virginia Woolf and (perhaps) Vita Sackville-West, and then it is fastforward to the glossiness of *The L Word* and model citizen Ellen in the present.

With these premises, it seems a miracle that Charlotte Wolff survived elision both as a Jewish person and as a lesbian. In 1933, when the Nazi regime came to power, she left Germany for Paris and eventually settled in London at the end of 1936. As an independent scholar, she conducted academic research in chirolgy—a method of assessing health and personality traits by examining the hand—and comparative psychology, and in 1943 she was made a Fellow of the British Psychological Society (BPS).<sup>1</sup> She also engaged in psychotherapy, and her later work focused on affirmative research with sexual minorities (*Love Between Women*, 1971; *Bisexuality*, 1977/1979). She published two autobiographies (Wolff, 1969, 1980), in which she described and celebrated her love of women, a novel, *An Older Love* (1976), which not only dealt with a “love triangle” between women, but its protagonists were quite mature and defying ageist stereotypes. In 1978, at the invitation of German feminist and lesbian activist Ilse Kokula, Wolff returned to Berlin for the first time after 45 years to give lectures and readings, and was acclaimed as a pioneer in the feminist and lesbian movement. Her last book, published in 1986, a few months before she died, close to her 89th birthday, was an extremely well-researched biography of the sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, the founder of the first “gay” rights organization.

Wolff bequeathed her papers, as well as copyright of her work, to the BPS, and in the process, it is argued in the present article, “queering” the archive (broadly understood as “cultural memory space”). The Charlotte Wolff Archive is a “queer archive” not just because it documents a lesbian’s life (Wolff) and Wolff’s engagement to foster a better understanding of sexual minorities, but also because it is not specifically a lesbian archive, “queering” the historical (in every sense of the word!) segregation of “mainstream”/“institutional” and “lesbian.” Poised between the prestige of a hallowed professional institution such as the BPS and the “marginal”—Wolff was not a major, “big-name” psychologist—with arguably at least part of the bequest equally suitable for “literary archives” (thereby also “queering” the scientific/literary divide), Wolff’s archive reflects the liminality that characterized her life and work. As Rappold (2005) notes in her short biography of Wolff, echoing the thoughts expressed with almost identical words in the foreword by the writer Christa Wolf (2005) (who

had corresponded at length with Charlotte Wolff<sup>2</sup>), “she was always an outsider: as a Jewish person, as a woman in an academic occupation, as an immigrant far from her homeland, and as a lesbian” (p. 11).

It could be argued that Wolff is not so widely known as her many achievements would warrant and the reasons ascribed to her liminal position—for example, she was too marginal (she never held a tenured position) for the mainstream, and, at the same time, too enmeshed with the orthodoxy of the psych-professions for some sections of the lesbian community. This is illustrated by her relationship with the lesbian group Sappho, of which she had been a member since its beginnings in 1972, being eventually asked to be a patron of its eponymous magazine: “a few years later they apparently did not want my patronage any longer, as many members were hostile towards psychiatrists” (Wolff, 1980, pp. 219–220).

However, while one of the aims of this article is “to put Wolff on the map of (lesbian) history,” so-to-speak, it is equally important to consider her liminality not only as an obstacle to wider recognition, but also as a strategy. Wolff used liminality to negotiate or facilitate access to the “mainstream,” thereby giving rise to an interplay between the “mainstream” and the “margins” that, as Bourdieu (1988, 1992) has noted, is a two-way traffic, and, in the process, “queering” unquestioned dichotomies and received wisdom and expectations.

Wolff’s querying and queering of boundaries through her negotiation of “borderlands” speaks across decades to contemporary social science in general—and to lesbian history in particular—about survival and resistance strategies for threatened identities, and (re)configures liminality into positive narratives of creative (and not only or not necessarily geographical) “exile.” The concept of “liminality” (from “limen,” the Latin word for “threshold”) was developed in anthropology by Turner (1967, 1974, 1977), building on earlier work by van Gennep (1909) in the context of rites, as that in-between time and space occupied by the initiand during ritual and involving separation from their community before being reinstated with a transformed status. Turner (1967) also draws on Douglas’ (1966) notions of “purity” and “pollution” to highlight the disruptive potential of the “betwixt and between”: the social order needs clear principles and categories, therefore “the unclear is unclean” (Turner, 1967, p. 97). Thus, liminal personae present a danger, they are “polluting,” and so they are removed from the community until they have completed the approved, codified path to reinstatement. According to Turner (1974), liminality always has the community as a starting/departure point and always carries the possibility of resolution/reassimilation. He makes a distinction between liminality and marginality—for which there is no “cultural assurance of a final stable resolution of . . . ambiguity,” citing “migrant foreigners” and “women in a changed, non-traditional role” (as well as parvenus and d’éclausées) among the examples of marginals (p. 233). Turner sees marginals as “betwixt between” two social groups of (usually) unequal standing, with “the higher status” group being “the structural reference group” aspired to (p. 233). In his conceptualization, it seems implicit that marginal individuals are “caught” between the two worlds, with the possible lack of resolution of ambiguity being outside their agency, and somehow falling short of the ideal (reassimilation). It could be argued that in this view there is a whiff of “conditional membership in the higher status group,” although Turner acknowledges that negotiating two social worlds heightens marginal individuals’ (self)awareness “and may produce from their ranks a disproportionately high number of writers, artists, and philosophers” (p. 233), thereby generating an interesting exchange of cultural production between the margins and the mainstream.

Morawski (1994) emphasizes the most transformative aspects of Turner’s conceptualization of liminality to (re)configure feminist psychology as “liminal science,” to move beyond the stereotype of the oxymoron (psychology informed by a feminist agenda cannot be “real/objective science”) or the sometimes unwarranted positioning of feminist psychology as “critical,” which also casts it in a merely “reactive,” fringe role, thereby confirming the norm-

giving power of the “traditional” paradigm. Morawski (1994) also draws on the work of feminist epistemologists such as Haraway (1988) and Harding (1986) who have shown that so-called objectivity has been conflated with only one kind of “subjectivity” and “situated knowledge”—the affluent, male, White, heterosexual perspective—while the “situated knowledge” of “marginal” people not belonging to these privileged social groups has consistently been ignored or actively elided by the “traditional” scientific paradigm. Morawski (1994) does not seem to follow Turner’s (1974) distinction between “marginality” and “liminality” but focuses on the “betwixt between” quality common to both and on its transformative potential:

If feminist psychology is a liminal science and if its marginality is conjectured as betwixt and between—as occupying a space/time of potential transformation—then the typical conversations about impasse, conflicting models, and contestation are at least partially in error. To occupy a liminal zone is not necessarily to be stuck in or stuck by something, but rather to be not so encumbered or detained. Likewise, the paradoxes of that position need not be read as debilitating contradictions. (Morawski, 1994, pp. 55–56, emphasis in the original)

Thus, for Morawski, the next stage would not be a straightforward reassimilation into the fold “without making waves,” so-to-speak, but rather taking the unencumbered, creative vision of the liminal zone into the community to shape “newer social relations and practices” (p. 56).

It could be argued—as will be shown in more detail in this article—that these words could describe, at least partially, the striving of that liminal figure in the history of (feminist) psychology, Charlotte Wolff, in her life and work. It is interesting that “migrant foreigner” and “woman in a changed, non-traditional role”—two of the marginality examples listed by Turner (1974)—also seem to apply to Wolff. However, as noted, Turner’s conceptualization of marginality as “liminality with no guaranteed resolution of ambiguity,” has overtones that imply loss of agency, being somewhat stuck in a situation. By contrast, Wolff embraced non-resolution as a creative force, for example using the idea of “exile” beyond its literality, as a metaphor to describe the “living in another world” impression at the root of creative endeavours in the arts and sciences (Steakley & Wolff, 1981). Furthermore, the possibility of maintaining this “threshold” state indefinitely, is—at least to our avowedly postmodernism attuned mindset—strikingly similar to the concept of “queer”—always “at an angle” by definition,<sup>3</sup> alive with the possibilities of “becoming” and unrelenting/unresolved liminality, as opposed to static crystallization and absorption into the mainstream—and creatively disruptive for it.

In her autobiographies, Wolff (1969, 1980), looking back on her life, reported that she knew very early that she was attracted to women, but her family never imposed restrictions or prohibitions on her:

Love for women has been my natural inclination ever since I can remember. I did not think of myself as someone on the sidelines because nobody ever questioned me about my erotic preference. It was taken for granted by my parents, relatives and the circle in which I moved. There was no need for me to pretend, hide or seek subterfuge. The Jewish middle class was, as a rule, ignorant about such things as unorthodox sex, but my parents and relatives were not. I was pleasantly surprised when my Aunt Bertha once remarked: “I think you are in love with Mrs X.” I answered: “Not in love, but very attracted.” She smiled. My uncle had always looked on me as a boy, and never expected that I would fall in with the conventional pattern. (Wolff, 1980, p. 73)

Indeed, when Charlotte Wolff was born, in 1897, three years after her elder sister Thea, the family had expected and perhaps wished for a boy, and, in what she called a “comedy of errors” (Wolff, 1980, p. 2) about which she was told in her teens, her father had announced by telephone to his only brother that his “little boy” had arrived, although the midwife had

declared the newborn “to be female” (p. 2). She pointed out, however, that, “whatever the wish of [her] parents, sex made no difference to their love and devotion. They took great pride in their children” (p. 3) and she remembered being particularly close to her father. She credited this early acceptance for providing the basis of her future self-confidence:

The prejudiced attitudes of society didn't affect me because I was unaware of them. I was accepted as myself in my private and [later] professional circle, and I suppose that I naively assumed that the whole wide world would do the same. In any event, being oneself carries conviction, and is the best weapon against persecution of any kind. (p. 73)

In her hometown of Riesenburg, not far from Danzig, even as a child she perceived tension between the German and the Polish population, but a few families of “German citizens of Jewish religion” (p. 2)—as they were officially described—lived peacefully with the Christian majority and did not experience discrimination. They celebrated the Emperor's birthday, decorated Christmas trees, and sang carols. This was also the case when first Thea and Charlotte moved to Danzig to complete their secondary education, and were later joined by their parents. However, the family seemed to socialize exclusively with other Jewish families—“did there perhaps exist around us Jews a kind of ghetto with invisible walls?” she would later comment (1969, p. 60). Furthermore, Wolff tended to make friends at school—and later form emotional attachments—mainly with other Jewish girls, which in retrospect she ascribed to “the wider context—a natural compatibility of minds” (1980, p. 25). When she was about thirteen, in Danzig, she developed a strong attachment for Ida, who was three years older, and whose Russian Jewish family, with its warmth and idealism, fascinated Wolff.

Neither Ida nor I had ever heard of the term homosexuality, nor did we know anything about love between people of the same sex. We experienced our attraction without fear or label, and had no model for love-making. We just loved. Kissing produced the greatest excitement, and we kissed at any hour. When we slept together our legs entwined, while our two mouths moulded into one. These were the happiest nights of all my days. (p. 26)

After some time, when Ida showed Charlotte the photograph of Lisa, who had been “a schoolfriend she had known in Kiev” (Wolff, 1969, p. 52), Charlotte decided to meet the young woman in the photo at all costs.<sup>4</sup> In both autobiographies, Wolff stated that she fell in love with Lisa the moment she saw her photograph, and that she saw her as the embodiment of Dostoyevsky's Nastasia Filipovna, the heroine of *The Idiot* and her ideal woman. Lisa lived in Berlin with her mother and her brother, and about three years after first seeing the photograph, Wolff used the pretext of seeing a medical specialist in the capital to arrange a meeting with Lisa in January 1917, shortly before the Russian New Year and “in the middle of the First World War” (Wolff, 1969, p. 50). About that encounter, she wrote that

I knew that the world had changed for me and that any town would be a different town if Lisa was in it. She had the body and the movements of a dancer. Her head was too large for her small stature and it appropriated all one's attention. The soft brown hair was brushed away from a high forehead with twofold protuberances, above the eyes and half-way up the brow. Her eyes were as arresting as the protruding mouth with the deep-red lips. She was the most striking human being I had ever seen: a Russian Jewess with a “South Seas” appeal. . . . Of course it was love at first sight for me. She must also have been drawn to me, because after an hour's meeting she spoke of a kinship between us. (pp. 52–53)

Wolff exchanged many letters with Lisa and then visited her in July with the blessing of her parents, and once again during the Christmas holidays, after Lisa notified her that she would go back to Russia in the spring of 1918. In order to fund this additional trip, she resorted to stealing small amounts of money from her mother every day, and her sister helped with her own savings to finance the “fugue” (p. 58). When Wolff, who had effectively run away from home, eventually contacted her family, her parents forgave her immediately on hearing that

she was well. Through Lisa, who was a sculptress and had a brother who was a musician, Wolff was introduced to the bohemian artistic milieu of Berlin. She accompanied Lisa many times to the expressionist painter Willi Jaeckel's studio where Lisa was sitting for a portrait, and she visited the Café des Westens where artists and poets, inter alia Else Lasker-Schüler, held court. After celebrating the New Year with Lisa at Willi Jaeckel's home, Wolff had already travelled half the distance of her journey home to Danzig when, on the spur of the moment, while the train was at a station, she decided to go back to Berlin for three additional "stolen" days.

This bold move was nothing compared to the great lengths Wolff went to about five years later to obtain a visa to visit Lisa in Russia. Lisa, who had married a Russian lawyer and had become a mother, in spring 1923 had returned with her daughter to Berlin for three months to settle some (unspecified and possibly unpleasant) matters. At the time, Wolff lived in Berlin, where she studied medicine, wrote poems and was a friend of Walter and Dora Benjamin and other intellectuals. With Lisa's arrival,

for three months I saw no more of the lecture rooms of the Charité [Note 5] nor did I study at home. I was the enchanted prisoner of an emotion perhaps stronger on its return than on its first arrival. . . . Three months went by in a trance. Then her husband arrived and took her back to Kharkov. (pp. 195–196)

Wolff was so despondent after Lisa's departure that, while visiting a friend, she said aloud, to no one in particular, that if she could not see Lisa again, she would throw herself into the Spree. A young woman who heard her was so struck by her resolve that she vowed to help her visit Lisa in impenetrable Soviet Russia, then in the aftermath of the Civil War that had followed the Revolution. From that day in November 1923 Charlotte and the young woman, Katherine, began to share their lives as well as to make plans for a journey to Russia. Katherine called on her "friends in high places" to finance the trip for both, with the ostensible purpose of showing an avant garde film, *Symphonie Diagonale*, by the Swedish painter Viking Eggeling, about which Wolff had written an essay. Eggeling himself endorsed the project, but, to present the strongest possible case so that the authorities would issue a visa (then almost impossible to obtain), Wolff enlisted the help of Lisa's brother, who was then working for the Russian government. Furthermore, she requested a letter of recommendation from the artist Käthe Kollwitz, who was famous internationally, and particularly popular in Russia, for the social realism of her work, but Wolff did not hide from her the real reason behind the "cultural mission" (Wolff, 1969).

Wolff's account of how she meticulously schemed to be granted the visa to visit Russia can be seen as an early illustration of a pattern in her life: liminality as strategic positioning between the marginal (or the proscribed) and the mainstream: in order to further the interests of the former (to see the woman she loved), she made full use of her "foothold" in the latter—presenting herself as a bona fide intellectual with a cultural mission that might be read as being in line with Soviet interests. The book in which this account was first published, Wolff's first autobiography, can arguably be considered itself a product of this strategy: a non-sensationalized personal lesbian narrative running like a thread through a "commercially viable," relatively mainstream book that offered the reader at the end of the 1960s a first person narrative about the "Roaring Twenties" in Berlin, about the émigré and intellectual circles of the Thirties in Paris and subsequently in London, and featured many famous individuals.

Having obtained a visa to travel to Russia, Wolff, with Katherine, left Berlin in June 1924. They stopped briefly in Moscow and then took a train to Crimea, to visit Lisa at a sanatorium in the resort of Alupka, where she was staying with her daughter. Lisa had not received the letter and telegram from Berlin with the details of the journey and, given that foreigners were granted visas only in exceptional circumstances, she had assumed that Wolff's journey had

remained a vague wish, and so the visit “had been both a joy and a shock to her . . . Lisa and Katherine had made friends without a particle of jealousy or possessiveness” (Wolff, 1969, p. 208). Lisa found a rented room for Wolff and Katherine and “the happy trio” spent about four weeks enjoying one another’s company and the warm climate, never lacking food although they saw extreme poverty around them. When Lisa’s husband arrived unexpectedly, he “played the role of the polished, charming gentleman who had joined his wife and her foreign friends on a holiday” (p. 209) but in private he told Lisa that he would initiate divorce proceedings and take sole custody of the child if her friends did not leave. Lisa’s husband invited the two women to stay in his own house in Kharkov, the city where Wolff was to show *Symphonie Diagonale* and give a lecture. After bidding farewell to Lisa, during the journey to Kharkov, Wolff fell ill, probably with dysentery, although she was misdiagnosed with malaria by a local doctor, and Katherine nursed her for six weeks and even exchanged sexual favors for food. Wolff received a letter from Lisa asking her not to contact her ever again, but very probably it had been written under duress. The lecture at the university, which had been postponed until September, was received with enthusiasm, considering the language barrier; it was the last engagement before Wolff returned with Katherine to Berlin—via Danzig and her parents’ home.

In the Wolff Archive, nothing but a letter dated “17.07.34” (ten years after that injunction to break all contact) and signed “L.” that could be attributed to Lisa remains of Wolff’s correspondence with her. [Note 6]. An old photograph dated 1915, printed as a postcard and marked in Wolff’s handwriting, “L. my great love,” almost certainly depicts Lisa—a young woman with dark hair and large, dark eyes (fitting Wolff’s description of her) and who poses reclining on a *chaise longue*. [Note 7].

It may be argued that autobiographies are not only retrospective accounts, but they give—by definition—a subjective view, potentially showing the author in the best possible light/in the light that he or she intends [Note 8]. The details of Wolff’s fascination with Lisa from the moment she saw her photo, Wolff’s sudden return to Berlin on the spur of the moment, and especially the journey into Russia, including its preparation, read like adventures in a novel. Exactly this—that autobiographies tend to have “too many ‘romanhafte Bestandteile’ [novel-like passages] to be trustworthy sources” (Glagau, 1903, in Dekker, 2002, p. 10) was one of the criticisms that at the beginning of the last century was levelled at autobiography or, more precisely, at its place in “doing history.” [Note 9] However, in considering Wolff’s autobiographies, the question of whether “facts” are made to fit an “ideal(ized)” narrative, implicitly at the expense of “truth,” is a “non-question”: as Hayden White (1987) has argued, history qua history must conform to narrative, seen as “far from being merely a form of discourse that can be filled with different contents, real or imaginary as the case may be, but already possess[ing] a content prior to any actualization of it in speech or writing” (xi). In other words, not only it is impossible to disentangle “form” from “content,” but the very mindset that produces this dichotomous thinking (and the attendant necessity to (rhetorically?) justify the inseparability of “form” and “content”) is problematized.

Thus, the question shifts, for biography as well as for autobiography— from “historical truth” to the function that narratives may perform. That a narrative, a voice, exists at all when exclusion and silence are “naturalized” by the dominant culture is itself remarkable, a performative act that stakes a presence, stories an identity into being. Any positive, non-“otherizing,” non-sensationalizing account of (a) lesbian life resists the routine silencing and clamors for “inclusion in history.” In this sense, autobiography, for marginalized or endangered identities, can be, as pointed out by Nolte Temple (1994), “action . . . or what Audre Lorde (1982) calls in *Zami* ‘biomythography’” (p. 179), a weaving of the self from dreams and fantasy as well as from remembered events, themselves a phenomenologically layered texture rather than “objective facts.” For identities threatened with extinction, as was the case with Jewish people under the Nazi regime, autobiography is “action” with a particular sense of urgency.

For example, when considering the widely reported anecdote that an ailing 82-year-old Sigmund Freud, on being forced by the Gestapo to sign a statement to the effect that he had not been mistreated, requested to add “I can most highly recommend the Gestapo to everyone” (Behling, 2002; Brenner, 2002; Gay, 1988, p. 628), it would be restrictive to stop at bemoaning the impossibility to ascertain the historical “facticity” of the anecdote instead of taking into account its performative function as instantiating, albeit posthoc, first for the hearer, and then for generations of readers, the possibility of defiance.

In both her autobiographies, Wolff emphasized her defiance when reporting how she miraculously escaped arrest by the Gestapo in the spring of 1933. Having received notice to leave the Health Service like all Jewish doctors, Wolff was travelling by underground to her former workplace in the Berlin district of Neukölln with the intention of saying goodbye to her colleagues, when a plain clothes member of the Gestapo approached and arrested her. “This outrage revived my spirits rather than paralysing them,” she remembered. After seeing the warrant and hearing that she was charged with being “a woman dressed as a man and a spy . . . [she] laughed in his face, sternly telling him to leave [her] alone” (Wolff, 1980, p. 110). The officer forced Wolff to leave the train with him at the station before Neukölln and took her to the station guard’s office. She shouted that her “ancestors had lived in Germany for 300 years and that one of them had been a soldier in the Seven Years War of Frederick the Great” (Wolff, 1969, p. 227). This had no effect on the officer, but, when the station guard recognized Wolff as the doctor who had treated his wife at the Neukölln Health Service surgery, she was immediately released, to her utter surprise. After a subsequent encounter with Gestapo officers who searched her flat for bombs, Wolff decided to emigrate, and at the end of May she left on a Paris bound train. [Note 10]

While the rise of the Nazi regime operated a crushing form of marginalization— at best (for those who escaped annihilation) loss of profession, livelihood, property and language in order to survive in exile, as was Wolff’s case—the process it set in motion was described as dialogical by Wolff (writing at the end of the Sixties, when she was relatively secure personally and professionally), as “an interaction.” It “called forth creative acts which in their turn, by a still inexplicable mechanism, attracted situations, friendships and events which enhanced and developed them” (1969, pp. 9–10, emphasis in the original). Wolff would eventually describe herself as “an Exile,” but “a very happy Exile” (Steakley & Wolff, 1981, p. 73, capitals and emphasis in the original), reinscribing the word “Exile” with connotations beyond the literal “emigrant/immigrant” experience, to include a form of “positive selfmarginalization” [Note 11] or “liminality” inherent in creative endeavors: “I would be an exile wherever I live. I am delighted to be one because . . . anyone who has to do either with the arts or with the sciences, as I do, lives in another world. We have to look at the world from a different angle. We are always an outsider” (p. 73). Thus, this position or vantage point negotiating the space between insider (working in the arts or sciences, so with arguably at least a modicum of recognition by the mainstream) and outsider (looking at the world from a different angle) intrinsic in creative work was made even more cogent by (geographical) exile.

In retrospect, Wolff considered being forced to leave Germany a “blessing” because, finding herself in Paris with her medical qualifications not recognized, she had to become a “pioneer” (Steakley & Wolff, 1981, p. 73) in order to survive. She turned to chiromancy, a subject that she had begun to study in Berlin under Julius Spier, a pupil of Jung. French bureaucracy, which listed her occupation as “journalist” in her *carte d’identité*, allowed her “to take up hand-interpretation in conjunction with some kind of psychotherapy” (Wolff, 1969, p. 71), and her main contacts—the German fashion journalist Helen Hessel [Note 12] and Maria and Aldous Huxley (whom Wolff had met through the writer Sybille Bedford, an acquaintance of Hessel’s) found her several high profile clients, including many surrealist artists and Thomas Mann and his family.

The relatively famous series of black and white photographic portraits of Wolff taken in 1935 by Man Ray in his distinctive style document this time when Wolff was a refugee in Paris and moved in surrealist circles. In these profile poses that are perhaps the most widely known images of Wolff—even to observers not acquainted with her work—her hair is short and slicked back, and she appears to wear a suit jacket and shirt and there is the “hint” of a tie, an item of clothing she is often seen sporting in other photographs. Wolff’s appearance, self-presentation and “look”—not just in the Man Ray photographs—were very androgynous. Such assertion comes with a caveat—the danger of more or less explicitly holding individuals “accountable” to conform to a “look” in keeping with their “biological sex” (understood as categorically male or female) and the cultural markers thereof, such as dress style. Yet one cannot but notice that, perhaps with the exception of some photographs taken during the last decade of her life, in nearly all available images of Wolff—including those unpublished but part of the Wolff Archive, the viewer can easily read the subject as being “male” or hesitate in assigning “gender.”

Wolff (1980), looking back on her childhood, stated that it was happy and carefree, but one frustration was that her parents would not buy her boys’ clothes, which held for her a special fascination. In adulthood she dressed in unisex clothes. In the bohemian atmosphere of her student days this would not have stood out particularly. In the Twenties, the “flapper” or “garçonne” style, which was very popular in Berlin as in the rest of Europe and North America, had already made acceptable shorter hair and a relatively “boyish” look for women. Wolff’s style would have made a nonverbal statement about her identity not only in the most obvious site, the lesbian subculture, but also to anyone outside this milieu but sufficiently attuned to its sartorial indicators to enable (mutual?) recognition. As Rolley (1990) notes, “clothing, with its ability to speak without the commitment of words, can be a vital resource” (p. 54); for sexual minorities, self-presentation style can be crucial to negotiate concurrent membership of the “subculture” and of the “mainstream” (cf. Katz, 1976/1992)—namely, a liminal position.

In Wolff’s case, the sartorial indicators of membership of the lesbian subculture—the “severity” of lines of her jackets and skirts and the lack of jewellery and other adornments—could be read, in her professional life as a doctor, as appropriate, “professional” and “business-like,” free of the frivolous accoutrements of “femininity” (or, more accurately, “normative constructions of femininity”). However, as noted, one of the grounds given for her arrest by the Gestapo, along with “being a spy,” was “dressing in men’s clothes,” which suggests that Wolff’s “look” departed from the norm to the extent that the repressive Nazi machinery would make it the basis or excuse for arrest. [Note 13]

Even in simple head shots, in which dress style is very peripheral if visible at all, Wolff has a distinctly “masculine” look. This is the case both for the passport-size photograph on her 1935 French *carte d’identité* in which she wears a patterned bow-tie, and in the photograph of her 1939 certificate of identity issued in London, in which she appears to wear a blouse under a suit-type jacket. [Note 14]

Five years before she died, a propos of Magnus Hirschfeld’s recognition of the role of endocrine glands in sexual preference, Wolff commented:

If you look at me, I am a wonderful example of what he [Hirschfeld] called the intermediary stage. My adrenals are obviously overworking, and I have a very strong male potential due to my hormone balance, which has predisposed me certainly in one direction, towards women. [Note 15] (Steakley & Wolff, 1981, p. 78)

She further argued that if someone has “certain hormones” in excess, it is not only their sexuality that will be influenced, but they are also bound to have excess willpower energy

that can be used to fight oppression, and especially the pressure to conform to the prescriptive heterosexual norms of society. While this assertion can be easily challenged as lacking evidence, it is noteworthy in that it illustrates Wolff's strategic rhetorical use of scientific discourse to equate excess/difference/liminality with breakdown of boundaries and creative force.

At the time of Wolff's Paris exile, however, the prohibition to practise medicine was a constant reminder that she had been stripped of any "ownership" of scientific discourse and membership of the scientific community; this was in spite of (and perhaps thrown into relief by) her success with drawing up personality profiles by examining the hands of clients. Eventually, chiology—arguably a liminal space between "science" and "nonscience"—enabled Wolff to approach "official" science: still in Paris, she obtained a meeting with the psychiatrist and developmental psychologist Henri Wallon, [Note 16] and convinced him that chiology had the potential to develop as a bona fide psychological assessment free from any association with palmistry. Wallon gave her access to his patients to carry out this research and when Wolff moved to London in 1936 with the help of Maria and Aldous Huxley, Wallon recommended her to Caterham Hospital in Surrey, which housed patients of all ages with developmental disorders, and she was able to continue her work studying the hands of the residents. Further connections with the world of official science were established through the biologist Julian Huxley, Aldous' brother, who was then the director of the Zoological Society: Wolff was granted permission to take prints of the extremities of primates in the London Zoo to study their patterns. Scholarly papers arising from both types of chiological research were published in prestigious scientific journals like the *Journal of Mental Science* (Wolff & Rollin, 1942), the *British Journal of Medical Psychology* (e.g., Wolff, 1944), and the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society* (Wolff, 1937, 1938), securing Wolff a foothold in the scientific community. In addition, she enrolled as a research student at University College London, investigating the links between hand-patterns and personality under the supervision of the eminent psychologist William Stephenson, who would write a glowing preface to Wolff's book *The Human Hand* (1942).

Wolff's life in Britain before and during World War II highlights a complex, multilayered experience of exile. In November 1937, just over one year after immigrating to England, Wolff was granted "permanent resident" status but she remained—in the formal language of bureaucracy—an "alien" in the United Kingdom until after the war, when she obtained her naturalization certificate (Wolff, 1969, 1980).

During the war, in everyday interactions, in the street, Wolff was often berated for being, as a "German," an "enemy" (although she was technically stateless, with a Nansen refugee passport) and for looking/being Jewish:

I had not thought it possible that I would experience anti-Semitism and subtle persecution in this country. Well, I did. Not only was I singled out for anti-Semitic remarks and grim looks in shops and streets, I was also despised for being German. I had never identified with Germany after the Nazis had come to power and I found the unthinking attitude of English people very odd and very hurtful. (Wolff, 1969, p. 143)

This is also reiterated in *Hindsight* (1980) but the ostracism is contrasted with many small acts of kindness that Wolff received in her everyday life as a refugee: "The butcher, the grocer, the baker showed me a special courtesy, if not favor, during the war. How often did I get the best pieces of meat without asking, just a bit more of the butter that was due to me, and a double ration of bread?" (p. 174).

It is likely that the experience of double ostracism—on the one hand, having an unwanted and painful identity, "German," forced on oneself and, on the other hand, anti-Semitic prejudice—contributed to develop Wolff's perception of herself as "a citizen of the world, an

international Jew with a British passport” (Wolff, 1969, p. 130; 1980, p. 181). However, if this definition implies a sense of unrelenting dislocation, it is also far from denoting being “caught”/trapped, and whenever Wolff used it, she underlined the broadened perspective that such position could offer (cf. Turner’s (1974) marginality).

Wolff’s engagement with Jewish identity, a threatened identity, had changed dramatically from the years of her youth. She reported that, before anti-Semitism became the order of the day in Germany, and was eventually institutionalized and ratified by law when the Nazi party came into power in January 1933, she had not personally experienced prejudice—perhaps only once, when she was a student at Tübingen University in the early Twenties, and a waitress in one of the cheap restaurants frequented by students had refused to take her order and to provide an explanation for the refusal. While this behavior could have been due to different reasons, Wolff was shaken by the incident and left with the impression that perhaps it was due to anti-Semitism. However, this was an isolated incident and Wolff revelled in her participation in German cultural life—not just (at the time) as a student of medicine and philosophy (she had been a pupil of Husserl and taken seminars with a young Heidegger), but also as a poet who had no reason to doubt that her destiny and her certainties were bound up with the German language and people. As she would later remember, “I did not know then that there was a difference between German Gentiles and German Jews” (Wolff, 1980, p. 59). An echo of this conviction arguably underlies Wolff’s outburst to the Gestapo officer who arrested her on the Berlin underground: as noted, she reported in both autobiographies that she shouted that her ancestors had lived in Germany for 300 years and had fought for the country. [Note 17] With these words, Wolff staked a claim to membership in German society for her family, but it is formulated as a conditional claim, being predicated on the great number of years that they had been in Germany. It can be argued that “unmarked” (Aryan) Germans would not be called upon to justify their membership in German society, and so this discourse would be available only to “outsiders” by definition, to stake their position as “virtually insiders.” Furthermore, any argument based on the number of years of settlement has the implicit corollary that fewer years or generations of settlement in Germany may entail exclusion/outsiderdom, thereby sustaining, at least indirectly, the exclusionary discourse ostensibly challenged. [Note 18]

Later, in England, Wolff experienced the implications of this discourse in the discomfort she perceived in the demeanor of some assimilated English Jews vis-à-vis refugees (Wolff, 1969). By contrast, she felt that she “was received with Jewish warmth” (p. 135) by Orthodox Jews. Wolff remembered that, perhaps due to negotiating these different interactions, she “was very conscious” of her Jewishness at this time. Did she put too much emphasis in “correcting” the illustrious professor of psychology (later Sir) Cyril Burt, she wondered—when he asked her if she was Austrian or German, and she said, “I’m Jewish” perhaps a bit too loudly, with “the ring of a protest” (p. 137).

It could be argued that Jewish identity is the liminal identity par excellence— the outsider/insider participating in (and often shaping) the culture of the country of birth and upbringing—and, in the case of assimilated Jews in Western societies, indistinguishable from the majority until their difference is highlighted as a negative “other” and such “otherness” made the defining characteristic of their identity. To Wolff, the parallel between lesbians and Jews was obvious. In *Love Between Women*, she wrote:

The fact that homosexual women are persecuted by the majority, even though it is done in a subtle way, forges a link between them and other minority groups, with whom they have otherwise nothing in common. I cannot resist pointing out . . . a certain resemblance in the fate of Jews and lesbians. Both are found in all parts of the world, and both are made to feel, in either a ruthless or a subtle way, that they are out of place. Although the physical persecution of Jews has been dropped in most civilised countries, a tenuous form of anti-Semitism persists everywhere. The latter holds good for the lesbian minority also. (Wolff, 1971, p. 155) Wolff

hastened to add the caveat that, while comparing the lesbian and the Jewish situation may be useful to illustrate a point (about prejudice and discrimination)—there are severe limitations in attempting to pursue the comparison beyond that point (p. 155).

Such reflections on the similarity between these two threatened and liminal identities—lesbian and Jewish—were written at a time when Wolff had amply reconfigured exile to wrest pioneering work out of her persecution as a Jew, and as part of a book-length study on lesbianism which was an important stage in her later work focused on the psychology of sexualities and on the eradication of sexism and heterosexism. In many ways, at that point in time she had triumphed over the odds that could have erased her existence as a Jewish person and as a lesbian. With her books and lectures she was reclaiming a history for these identities, for example when eventually Wolff returned to Berlin in 1978 to the city she was forced to flee forty-five years before, to give readings in venues packed with young feminists, some of whom identified as lesbian. These young people, with other readers of Wolff's books, and all the individuals she inspired would become, after Wolff's death in 1986, the keepers of her legacy. To echo Jewelle Gomez's words about the people inspired by Mabel Hampton, they would be Wolff's "(immediate) survivors" in the face of the routine elision of lesbian lives by the mainstream. Yet, as seen, Wolff, with her liminal position, also belonged to the mainstream as a Fellow of the BPS and her papers constitute one of the collections of the Society's History of Psychology Centre, thereby partially locating her legacy (both literally and figuratively) within the "institutional." We contend that, in the spirit of Wolff's liminality and creativity, and with a nod to the new practices envisaged by Morawski (1994) for a psychology informed by feminist principles, it would be beneficial for both lesbian history and history of psychology to join forces, so-to-speak, not just as keepers of Wolff's legacy, but also to consider how potentially transformative could be to negotiate their "betwixt and between" areas, drawing inspiration from how they intertwined in Wolff's life and work.

## NOTES

1. Wolff (1980, p. 170) reported that she was made a Fellow in 1941, but the BPS minutes show that the precise date was January 9, 1943 (BPS Council Minutes June 1936–July 1943, BPS 001//3/05, Wellcome Library, London). In the Charlotte Wolff Archive there is no correspondence or any other document pertaining to this appointment.
2. The nearly 3 ½-year-long correspondence (from April 1983 until Wolff's death in September 1986) was later published as *Ja, unsere Kreise berühren sich* (2004) [Yes, Our Circles Do Touch].
3. Sedgwick (1993) traces the etymology of the word queer: ". . . it means across—it comes from the Indo-European root—*twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (traverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*. . . Keenly, it is relational and strange" (p. xii). The common use of "queer" as synonymous with "strange" or, as verb, as synonymous with "to disrupt" is in keeping with the "always at an angle" quality enshrined in the etymology of the word, as well as with Douglas' (1966) notion of danger and "pollution" associated with the (unresolved) "betwixt and between."
4. However, Wolff's second autobiography described Lisa as Ida's best friend in her hometown of Odessa (1980, p. 27).
5. Berlin's University Hospital. In *Hindsight* (1980) Wolff wrote that she would go to lectures during the day and meet Lisa late at night; she also stated that Lisa was in Berlin for four (not three) months.
6. It is worth bearing in mind that the main part of the letters would have been exchanged before 1923, and the only item of correspondence in the archive that pre-dates Wolff's flight from Berlin in May 1933 is a 1932 letter from Julius Spier, whose lectures on hand

characteristics and personality assessment introduced Wolff to chirolgy (Charlotte Wolff Archive, Wol/001/01/03/03, History of Psychology Centre, British Psychological Society, London).

7. Charlotte Wolff Archive, Wol/001/05/04, History of Psychology Centre, British Psychological Society, London.

8. Potentially, but not necessarily, as there could be ample room for unwitting disclosure. It is worth noting that Presser, who in the 1950s coined the word “egodocument,” the hypernym that includes published autobiography as well as diaries, memoirs, letters—eventually defined the term as “those documents in which an ego intentionally or unintentionally discloses or hides itself” (Presser, 1969, p. 286, as cited in Dekker, 2002, p. 7).

9. Previously—since the word “‘autobiography’ . . . was introduced in various European languages around 1800—it was even considered to be the most reliable form of biography, because the text was written by its protagonist, the person who knew the story best” (Dekker, 2002, p. 10).

10. There is some uncertainty as to the precise date of Wolff’s departure from Berlin/arrival in Paris: in her first autobiography Wolff (1969) wrote, “On the 24th of May, 1933 I arrived in Paris after a panic-stricken journey from Berlin” (p. 69), but in *Hindsight* (1980) she asserted, “On 26 May 1933, I stood at the Bahnhof Zoologischer Garten. . .” [in Berlin] (p. 111).

11. See Bos and Groenendijk (2007) on the creative potential of self-marginalization (using the case of Wilhelm Stekel vis-à-vis Freud and orthodox psychoanalysis). They challenge the view of the marginal as “the inadequate or lesser version of the dominant position (the marginal as the dominant manqùe)” (p. 4).

12. Wolff had met Helen Hessel in Berlin; she was the (Gentile) wife of the (Jewish) writer Franz Hessel, who was a friend of both Wolff and Walter Benjamin. Franz Hessel was the editor of *Vers und Prosa*, a Berlin literary review that published poetry and prose, as the title indicated, and had published poems by Wolff. The Wolff Archive includes a 1924 issue of *Vers und Prosa* that bears three pages of “Lotte” Wolff’s poems (Charlotte Wolff Archive, Wol/001/07, History of Psychology Centre, British Psychological Society, London). The Hessels had lived in France at various times and also lived apart as Franz Hessel worked in Berlin and Helen Hessel was based in Paris as a fashion correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. They were also the models for the characters of “Jules” and “Kathe” in Henri-Pierre Roché’s 1953 semi-autobiographical novel *Jules and Jim* and in François Truffaut’s 1962 film based on it.

13. The harassment of women for wearing “men’s clothes” was not confined to the Nazi regime; Faderman and Timmons (2006) report that in the 1950s Los Angeles police would arrest women for “masquerading”—namely wearing clothes deemed appropriate only for men. Furthermore, lesbians with a butch self-presentation still faced various forms of police harassment well into the Sixties.

14. Charlotte Wolff Archive, Wol/001/05/03, History of Psychology Centre, British Psychological Society, London.

15. However, Wolff goes on to express a more interactionist position on sexual preference than this quote out of context would seem to indicate. A few lines later she states, “the impact of society is also enormous” (p. 78).

16. Henri Wallon (1879–1962) was also well-known as a Marxist politician and became a key

figure in the French Resistance movement during World War II.

17. Long before it was even Germany, so-to-speak, given that, following Prussian expansion and annexation of neighboring territories, the “new” federation was unified as “Germany” only in 1871.

18. It has been widely noted (e.g., Aschheim, 1982; Frosh, 2005) that this argument not only prevented assimilated Jews from seeing the magnitude of the danger of rising anti-Semitism, but in some cases it was also used as a strategy by assimilated Jews to distance themselves from newly arrived Jews—especially from Poland and Russia. Some German-speaking Jewish merchants and professionals saw themselves as very different from the stereotype of the Yiddish-speaking, uncouth Ostjude.

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