
Guide to the Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective Collection

Collection number: 1999-44

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society
San Francisco, California

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Date Completed:

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Guide to the Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective Collection

Dates: 1976-1999

Collection number: 1999-44

Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

Collection Size: 6 linear feet 11 boxes, 1 oversize folder

Repository: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society
San Francisco, California 94105

Abstract: The Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective collection is composed of scripts, "Extra Pieces" (writing not included in scripts), newsletters, flyers, administrative files, photographs, and various audio-visual materials that reflect the activities of this women's theater group that began in 1976, and were still active when they donated the collection in 1999. Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective performed to promote feminist education and addressed such topics as women's roles in society, lesbianism, motherhood, and religion.

Physical location: Stored at the Archives of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society of San Francisco, California

Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access

Collection open for research.

Publication Rights

Mothertongue retains copyright on all scripts, GLBTHS holds copyright on the balance of the collection.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], [Name of Series], Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective Collection, 1999-44, The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

Acquisition Information

Ida VSW Red and Corinne Sue Wick donated the Mothertongue collection to the GLBTHS in July of 1999.

Biography / Administrative History

The Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective began out of the Women's Speaker's Bureau (now the Women's Speaker's Network). Lani Silver of the WSB spoke at a WSB-sponsored Women and Violence Conference in the fall of 1976; four other women performed a reader's theatre script at the event. Here, the women met and shared material; after the conference they began to develop other scripts to perform independently at women's coffee houses. The goals of the group (originally called Mothertongue Reader's Theatre) were feminist education

and consciousness-raising. The group addressed such topics as sex roles, body image, lesbianism, motherhood, and spirituality. Over the next decade, the theater group grew, taking on public speaking engagements and performing at benefits. Despite the growing size of the collective (75 members by the mid-eighties), the group still remained non-hierarchical, developing scripts collectively and administering through consensus. Disagreements were worked out through conflict resolution; the group was consistently committed to equality between members as opposed to hierarchical rank. A complete history of Mothertongue is included in the collection: "Me, You, Them," by Judy Sanders, is a 200 page text documenting the collective from its inception in 1976 through the late eighties, when the text was written (file 5/4). It includes detailed history and political goals of the group, as well as extensive interviews with group members. Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective was still meeting and performing when the founding members donated this collection in 1999.

Scope and Content of Collection

The Mothertongue collection has 2 main parts. The first section in boxes 1 through 4 is comprised of original scripts; the scripts are compilations of short pieces, poems, monologues, and dialogues written both by women in the collective and by non-members in the community. The scripts document the personal lives and concerns of the writers, especially as relating to 1970s feminist politics; many pieces are deeply emotional, reflecting anger and personal pain, while others are humorous or erotic. Most scripts contain handwritten production notes. The scripts are filed in alphabetical order, with the date of production noted. Also included are "Extra Pieces," drafts of writing not included in any script. These pieces are organized alphabetically by the first word of the piece, although they are not alphabetized within each letter.

The remainder of the collection is comprised of the Mothertongue administrative files, flyers and newsletters, photographs of shows, and videotapes. The administrative files include contracts and funding sources, records of specific performance venues, and correspondence relating to the group. The correspondence section contains mostly business letters, but also letters from the community responding to Mothertongue's politics; the files contain both positive feedback and disapproval over lesbian content performed in public places. Also of interest in the administrative files is the detailed record of a conflict resolution meeting in 1990; as part of its commitment to non-hierarchy, the group hired a professional mediator to resolve a dispute between members. Because Ida VSW RED had already organized the collection before donating it to GLHS, the collection remains in nearly the same order as when donated; file headings and titles have been kept.

The collection also contains one oversize box of posters and paper props, as well as five display boards decorated with a collage of photographs, programs, and colorful flyers documenting the group's production history. There is one t-shirt with Mothertongue logo in the t-shirt collection.

Arrangement

This collection is organized in 11 series:

- Series 1. Scripts
- Series 2. Extra Pieces
- Series 3. Newsletters and Flyers
- Series 4. Notes
- Series 5. Administrative Files
- Series 6. Performance
- Series 7. Other Political/Theater Groups
- Series 8. Audio-Visual Items
- Series 9. Photographs
- Series 10. Posters (Oversize Materials)
- Series 11. Artifacts

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Lesbian feminism

Lesbian theater

Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

Women's Speaker's Network

Related Material

Box 1, 2, 3 **Series 1. Scripts**

Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

Box/ Folder 1/1 **Adoption and Surrender 1991**
Box/ Folder 1/2 **Anger and Still Anger 1977, 1987-1994**
Box/ Folder 1/3 **Body Image/Body Talk**
Box/ Folder 1/4 **Breast and Roses 1976**
Box/ Folder 1/5 **Celebrating Women 1985**
Box/ Folder 1/6 **Did You Come Or Fake It? 1985**
Box/ Folder 1/7 **Did You Say 'Mirth'? No! I Said Yashkerkajs! Women's Humor 1991**
Box/ Folder 1/8 **A Dozen Years Of Mothertongue 1986**
Box/ Folder 1/9 **Endangered Species**
Box/ Folder 1/10 **Endangered Voices? Dangerous Lives**
Box/ Folder 2/1 **Food**
Box/ Folder 2/2 **Grandma Never Earned A Nickel**
Box/ Folder 2/3 **Jewish Women and Friends 1992**
Box/ Folder 2/4 **Lesbian Erotica 1992**
Box/ Folder 2/5 **Lesbian Erotica 1993**
Box/ Folder 2/6 **Lesbian Games 1991**
Box/ Folder 2/7 **Loving Women 1983-1985**
Box/ Folder 2/8 **Maggie Burke 1996**
Box/ Folder 2/9 **Mary Flick 1994**
Box/ Folder 2/10 **Mothers and Daughters 1986**
Box/ Folder 2/11 **Mothertongue Witches 1977**
Box/ Folder 3/1 **Passing 1983**
Box/ Folder 3/2 **Retrospective for 10th Anniversary 1986**
Box/ Folder 3/3 **Speaking of Aging**
Box/ Folder 3/4 **Survival 1984-1986**
Box/ Folder 3/5 **This Tattered Cloth 1986**
Box/ Folder 3/6 **Transits 1981**
Box/ Folder 3/7 **Woman Is (early script) 1976**
Box/ Folder 3/8 **Women and HIV: Eat Rice Have Faith In Women 1990**
Box/ Folder 3/9 **Women and Work**
Box/ Folder 3/10 **Women and Men**
Box/ Folder 3/11 **Women and Peace 1991**

Box 4, 5

Series 2. Extra Pieces

Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

Box/ Folder 4/1 **Extra Pieces (A-E)**
Box/ Folder 4/2 **Extra Pieces (F-H)**
Box/ Folder 4/3 **Extra Pieces (I)**
Box/ Folder 4/4 **Extra Pieces (J-M)**
Box/ Folder 5/1 **Extra Pieces (N-T)**
Box/ Folder 5/2 **Extra Pieces (U-Z)**
Box/ Folder 5/3 **Journal and Early Scripts**
Box/ Folder 5/4 **You, Me, Them (Judy Sanders)**
Box/ Folder 5/5 **MT Feminist Theater Collective: The First Twenty Years An Index by Ida VSW Red 1976-1996 1996**
Box/ Folder 5/6 **Mothertongue Handbook 1993**

Box 6 **Series 3. Newsletters and Flyers**

Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

Box/ Folder 6/1 **Newsletters 1978-1983**
Box/Folder 6/2 **Newsletters 1984-1990**
Box/ Folder 6/3 **Newsletters 1991-1998**
Box/ Folder 6/4 **Flyers 1976-1981**
Box/ Folder 6/5 **Flyers 1982-1988**
Box/ Folder 6/6 **Flyers 1996-1999**

Box 7

Series 4. Notes

Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

Box/Folder 7/1 **Notes 1976-1979**
Box/ Folder 7/2 **Notes 1979-1980**
Box/ Folder 7/3 **Notes 1981-1989**
Box/ Folder 7/4 **Notes 1990-1991**
Box/ Folder 7/5 **Notes 1992-1994**

Box 7, 8

Series 5. Administrative Files

Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

Box/ Folder 7/6	Correspondence 1988-1996
Box/ Folder 7/8	Letters to MT 1982-1996
Box/ Folder 7/9	Mailing List 1986
Box/ Folder 7/10	National Woman's Mailing List 1986
Box/ Folder 7/11	Survey
Box/ Folder 7/12	Press Releases 1986-1991
Box/ Folder 7/13	Contracts 1986-1991
Box/ Folder 7/14	Copyright
Box/ Folder 7/15	Donations 1987-1991
Box/ Folder 7/16	Stationary (new)
Box/ Folder 7/17	Stationary (old)
Box/ Folder 7/18	Permission Form
Box/ Folder 7/19	Money Form
Box/ Folder 7/20	PR 1978, 1990
Box/ Folder 7/21	Funding Sources 1986-1987
Box/ Folder 7/22	Organizational Resources 1987
Box/ Folder 7/23	Women's Building 1990-1996
Box/ Folder 7/24	Gay and Lesbian Historical Society 1990
Box/ Folder 8/1	Policy Circle 1977-1992
Box/ Folder 8/2	Proposals 1971-1992
Box/ Folder 8/3	Reviews and Articles 1986-1992
Box/ Folder 8/4	Brochures 1986-1990
Box/ Folder 8/5	Mediation 1982-1992
Box/ Folder 8/6	History

Box 8 **Series 6. Performance**

Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

Box/ Folder 8/7	Blocking
Box/ Folder 8/8	Performance Technique 1985
Box/ Folder 8/9	Performance Venues
Box/ Folder 8/10	Benefits 1991
Box/ Folder 8/11	Retrospective 1991
Box/ Folder 8/12	Workshops 1984-1990
Box/ Folder 8/13	Gay Games 1990
Box/ Folder 8/14	Lilith 1984
Box/ Folder 8/15	SF Lesbian and Gay Freedom Day 1990-1992
Box/ Folder 8/16	National Festival of Women's Theater 1993-1994
Box/ Folder 8/17	National Lesbian Conference 1991
Box/ Folder 8/18	Out Write Conference 1990
Box/ Folder 8/19	Theater Bay Area 1988, 1991
Box/ Folder 8/20	West Coast Lesbians Festival 1992
Box/ Folder 8/21	West Coast Women and Theater Conference 1984-1988
Box/ Folder 8/22	West Coast Women's Music and Comedy 1980-1981

Box 9 **Series 7. Other Political/Theater Groups**

Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

Box/ Folder 9/1 **Women Against Imperialism 1991**
Box/ Folder 9/2 **Wry Crips 1991**
Box/ Folder 9/3 **Fat Lip 1985, 1991**
Box/ Folder 9/4 **People's Theater Coalition 1980**
Box/ Folder 9/5 **Brown Bag 1985**
Box/ Folder 9/6 **American Theater Association: The Women's Program 1984, 1988**
Box/ Folder 9/7 **AIDS, Female Circumcision, and African Women**
Box/ Folder 9/8 **Access**
Box/ Folder 9/9 **Raging Canaries**
Box/ Folder 9/10 **Adoption 1987**

Box 9 **Series 8. Audio-Visual Items**

Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

Box/ Folder 9/11 **Video: Benefit for Sealed Records/Sealed Lives 1988**
Box/ Folder 9/12 **Video: History 1988**
Box/ Folder 9/13 **Video: 20th Anniversary 1996**
Box/ Folder 9/14 **Video: Virginia's Play 1999**
Box/ Folder 9/15 **Video: Pot Pourri**
Box/ Folder 9/16 **Video: Sampler From Four Scripts**
Box/ Folder 9/17 **Video: Mothertongue on Electric City**
Box/ Folder 9/18 **Audio: Lesbian Erotica 1993**

Box 10 **Series 9. Photographs**

Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

Box/ Folder 10/1 **Performance at Women's Building (color snapshots)**
Box/ Folder 10/2 **Performance at Women's Building (color snapshots)**
Box/ Folder 10/3 **Formal Performance at La Pena**
Box/ Folder 10/4 **Informal Performance at La Pena (color snapshots)**
Box/ Folder 10/5 **Negatives**
Box/ Folder 10/6 **Black and White Snapshots**
Box/ Folder 10/7 **Duplicate Prints**

Series 10. Posters (Oversize Materials)

Box 11 **Series 10. Posters (Oversize Materials)**

Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

Box/ Folder 11/1 **Publicity posters, paper cut outs**

Box/ Folder 11/2 **Five display boards 1982-1996**

Box Carton 4 **Series 11. Artifacts**

Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

Box/ Carton 4 **One t-shirt**