

Lesbian Knowledge Production and Exchange:
Pedagogical Possibilities and Archival Potential

A thesis submitted by

Kailah R. Carden

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Education

Tufts University

May 2016

Adviser: Sabina E. Vaught, Ph.D.

Abstract

Chapter one of this thesis is the story of a critical archival pedagogy that emerged through the undergraduate course Radical Lesbian Thought. We employed archives throughout the course as theory, site, and pedagogy. We identify three archival frameworks and detail how these frameworks informed three course activities. We argue that archives provide theoretical and practical opportunities, in the tradition of critical pedagogy, to challenge and rearrange powered classroom structures and practices of thought.

Chapter two puts forward a methodological approach to ethnographic archival research that centers knowledge production. Drawing on Stoler's (2002) archival methodology of reading along the grain, this chapter describes how this methodology operates on the ground, as applied to Lesbian archives. I propose a methodology of compiling an archive of archival research. I describe the process of producing my own archive and reading along its grain to identify the knowledge-producing features of archival inclusions and repetitions.

Acknowledgements

This project would not be possible without the generous support of the Tufts Education Department and the Tufts Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. The course development grant from the Education Department allowed me to be involved in developing the Radical Lesbian Thought course. The Graduate Student Research Award from Graduate School of Arts and Sciences funded my California research trip. Finally, both the Education Department and the Graduate School supported a presentation of my research at the Curriculum & Pedagogy conference in October 2015.

I could not have completed this project without the support of my thesis committee. Shameka Powell, thank you for agreeing to be part of this project during your job interview and for your encouragement of my interests from beginning to end. Nino Testa, thank you for driving us through Los Angeles, and all the way to San Francisco. Thank you for your archival enthusiasm, your love of Lesbian cultures, and encouraging me to read *Archive Fever* and *The History of Sexuality*. I certainly could not have found those archives, or finished those books, without you. To my advisor, Sabina Vaught, thank you for inviting me to join you in the project of Radical Lesbian Thought. This thesis is the outcome of the highly rigorous and supportive environment you created for me and your other students. Thank you for the opportunity to collaborate with you, and allowing me to learn from your scholarship and teaching. Your trust in me has been invaluable.

To the Rad Lez Kidz, Arturo Muñoz, Vanessa Pinto, Cecilia Vaught, and Maya Ziegler, and all the students of Radical Lesbian Thought, your creativity and enthusiasm inspire me every day. Thank you for cheering me on through my thesis and continuing the important work we began in our class. James Mulder, thank you for working with me this year, for reading multiple

drafts, for your endless patience for my questions. Nandi Bynoe, thank you for your help with everything from the academic to the sartorial. Nick Whitney, thank you for sending me Hamilton-themed encouragement at all the right moments. To my writing group and my classmates, thank you for sharing in this process with me.

To all my friends, thank you for listening to me discuss my thesis and thank you for the necessary moments of distraction. To my parents Joan and Doug, thank you for your unwavering support of my scholarship and making sure I had a nourishing meal every Sunday night. To my wife Kerrie, you have my eternal gratitude. Thank you for seeing me through the good, the bad and the ugly, for honoring my dreams and sharing in this adventure with me.

Lastly, I am forever grateful to every person who contributed to the archives I visited. To every person that donated their belongings, money, and time to build these organizations to collect, preserve, and teach the past, I appreciate your contribution to my, and so many others, learning. Thank you to Deborah Edel, Angela Brinskele, and Alex Barrows for welcoming me, and helping me navigate your archives. To everyone who accompanied me on my archival trips and everyone I met in the archives, thank you for sharing your stories. Because of you, I began this project as a student and complete it as an archival heir.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter One	4
Chapter Two	27
References	58

Introduction

This project began over an iced tea in Tower café. I was in my very first course of the Educational Studies master's program and I was meeting with my Professor and advisor, Sabina Vaught. "I'm thinking about teaching a course called something like 'Radical Lesbian Thought'" she mentioned casually as I was selecting classes for the upcoming fall. My eyes lit up. Despite having an undergraduate degree in Women's Studies, I had never taken a class solely about Lesbians. "I would love to take that class," I said, and then promptly forgot about it and moved on to crafting my schedule for the next semester. Looking back, Sabina had already invited me into my thesis at the very beginning of my graduate program.

In the fall of 2014, with the generous support of a course development grant from the Tufts Education Department, I began to compile an annotated bibliography of scholarly works, as well as artifacts such as letters, pamphlets, newsletters, and other self-published works circulated by Lesbian counterpublics in the mid-to-late 20th century United States. Working with Sabina, we color-coded and streamlined this sprawling document, and then proceeded to develop an 18-page syllabus, for the new course offering: Radical Lesbian Thought. I did end up taking the course, but as a Teaching Assistant, not a student. As TA, I not only assisted in the day-to-day operations of the course, but helped to organize a class trip to the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA). This trip was my first archival experience, and it left a lasting intellectual and affective impression. The project expanded through another conversation with Sabina, which in the moment felt commonplace. Together we imagined my research potential with funding from the Graduate Student Research Award. When, to my surprise, I received funding to travel to Lesbian and LGBTQ archives in California, this thesis began to take shape.

All told, I collected data at six archives in Massachusetts, New York, and California. My experiences in each archive, including the process of traveling to the archival sites, as well as the people I met, and artifacts I saw, together make up my compiled archive of my research process. Additionally, I compiled an archive, complete with a finding guide, of the Radical Lesbian Thought course. This archive included the course development process, lesson plans, student produced work, the field trip to the LHA, and a student driven project that spanned the following academic year. These two archives were overlapping and complimentary. Each archive is the basis for one chapter of my thesis.

This is a thesis in two parts and the chapters are able to stand alone. There are also intentional overlaps and resonances between the two chapters. Importantly, the lines of inquiry for both emerged from the course Radical Lesbian Thought. I traveled to the LHA with the other students and teacher of the course, and their presence impacted the way I experienced and interpreted the archive. I also used the same methodology for both papers: situating archives as knowledge-producing subjects and identifying the themes and narratives that rose to the top. So, while each chapter can be independent, the process of collecting and analyzing data was singular.

The first paper uses the archive of the course Radical Lesbian Thought to ask the questions: What are the salient themes, praxes, and methodologies in this archive? What is a critical, Lesbian, archival pedagogy, and how does it locate, employ and rearrange power? I read along the grain of this archive to identify three key theories, each with a corresponding praxis (Stoler, 2002). In this paper, co-authored with Sabina and with contributions from four of the students from the course, we argue that: subject matter and praxes were co-constructed; that we rearranged classroom power dynamics, while also acknowledging differences in power; that we collectively produced inquiry and knowledge; and finally, that archives are generative, producing

new and ongoing inquiry and potential. This paper provides multiple models for educators to center Lesbian thought and cultures, collaborate with archives, and utilize classroom power to co-construct knowledge and pedagogy. This article has been accepted to the journal *Radical Teacher* and will appear in an upcoming issue on teaching and archives.

My second paper is a methodological exploration of ethnographic archival research. Using the same methodology as the first paper, I describe my research experience at the Lesbian Herstory Archives and the June Mazer Lesbian Archives (Stoler, 2002). I outline my methodological decisions and their implications. Specifically I pay attention to the role of archival repetition, subjectivity, presences and absences, and Lesbian archivists in Lesbian archives. I apply and adapt Stoler's (2002) methodology to identify, explore, and analyze the knowledge producing features of Lesbian archives. I argue that an archive is more than the sum of its artifacts, and that Lesbian archives operate under distinct epistemologies and logics rooted in cultural, intellectual, and political traditions. This paper provides a methodological model for further critical analyses of Lesbian archives as sites of knowledge exchange and production.

Although this thesis marks the conclusion of one project, my archives are not closed, finished, or complete. These archives, which now include this "finished" product as well as the numerous drafts, will continue to exist, grow, and shift as others interact with and make meaning of my work.

A critical archival pedagogy:

The Lesbian Herstory Archives and a course in Radical Lesbian Thought

by Kailah R. Carden and Sabina E. Vaught

with Arturo Muñoz, Vanessa Pinto, Cecilia Vaught, & Maya Ziegler

“[T]he archive” has a capital “A,” is figurative, and leads elsewhere. It may represent neither material site nor a set of documents. Rather, it may serve as a strong metaphor for any corpus of selective forgettings and collections...

— Ann Laura Stoler

I have learned that the goals of an archivist and of a storyteller are not so different. We keep stories alive, we create stories, and (*most of all*) we create potential.

— Arturo Muñoz

Introduction

Archives are variously understood as institutions, repositories, concepts, and even subjects. Here, we describe how we have taken up Lesbian archives as both radical sites of knowledge production and exchange, and as pedagogy. In the spring of 2015 we piloted an undergraduate seminar entitled, “Radical Lesbian Thought,” nicknamed “RadLez” by the students. In this course we centered the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) as institution, repository, concept, subject, and as pedagogy. For their final project, the six students in this course developed their own archives in relation to their learning through and at the LHA. These student archives extended the radical intergenerational knowledge producing function of the LHA. Additionally, Arturo, Cecilia, Maya, and Pinto, or The Rad Lez Kidz as they named themselves, expanded their archival inquiry through a self-directed independent study the following academic year, forging cross-institutional collaborations and shifting the location of pedagogical power. These archival projects radically co-produced inquiry and knowledge. Specifically, they pivoted on the dialogic praxes of critical pedagogy to both study and produce

thought. In other words, the subject matter of the course — radical Lesbian thought — was also the practice of learning.

As Cecilia (who in addition to her role as student in the class is also Sabina's daughter) wrote at the end of the semester,

I have learned an immense amount not just about the histories of Radical Lesbian thought but also of a practice of thinking and knowledge production that we have both studied and endeavored in. This class has been so interesting in part because, as we're studying the production of Radical Lesbian thought, we are also producing Radical Lesbian thought. I've so appreciated the collective way our class has been able to do that this semester and I think, in large part, this is why the course has so mirrored a Radical Lesbian thought method of knowledge production.

We learned Radical Lesbian Thought through the practice of Radical Lesbian Thought. The dialogic interplay between content and praxis was unending and ongoing so that the subject matter dynamically changed as we learned and produced herstory. This paper is the story of how we collectively forged a critical, Lesbian archival pedagogy through dialogic praxes. In section one we revisit three theoretical framings of archives (Gopinath, 2010; Halberstam, 2005; Stoler, 2002) paired with three pedagogical praxes: dialogue and difference, collaborative knowledge production, and archival methodology. In section two, we illustrate these critical archival praxes through three course activities: writing and reading archival letters, conducting research at the LHA, and creating final archives.

Background

Radical Lesbian Thought: Centering the Archives

The syllabus for the course Radical Lesbian Thought emerged through dialogue between Kailah (graduate student and TA in Educational Studies) and Sabina (advisor and professor in Educational Studies). This dialogue was a practice of intergenerational Lesbian knowledge exchange that would be repeated throughout the course development, implementation, and the ensuing intellectual communities and projects. Significantly, the Department of Education at Tufts University supported this radical course idea through a course development grant awarded to Kailah. The program in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Tufts was also eager to co-list the course. So, in the fall of 2014, Kailah began the work of compiling letters, poems, news articles, manifestos, academic articles, short stories, biographies, novels, and images produced by and for radical Lesbian counterpublics during the second half of the twentieth century United States. Although we had already identified the LHA as essential to the course, Kailah's research clarified the centrality of archives to the production, exchange, and preservation of radical Lesbian thought. As such, archives became a primary theoretical and pedagogical framework for the course.

Our initial course description, on the front page of the syllabus, communicated the parameters of our exploration of radical Lesbian thought and situated it as archivally contextualized:

Course Description: This course will consider radical Lesbian knowledge production during the second half of the twentieth century in the United States. Radical Lesbian thought encompasses dynamic, complex, and at times contradictory bodies of knowledge. Specifically, we will pay attention to the emergence of educational and activist knowledge movements by tracing early

epistolary and news-making endeavors as they gave way to the formation of collective knowledge production across literary, historical, and other disciplinary areas. This course will contextualize the history of radical Lesbian thought both inside the academy — as connected to and in conflict with feminist theory and queer theory — and outside the academy in relation to feminist and queer knowledge movements. Course readings, assignments, and seminar discussions will provide an in-depth focus on critical questions of power in relation to choice, essentialism, and shifting spheres of knowledge and education along tense lines of race, class, and gender. The course will be organized as an archival research process, drawing on archival materials, and including research at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, other Lesbian archives, and the student production of archives.

In addition to introducing archival theoretical frameworks in the course description, we also communicated our interest in interrogating power as it cuts across multiple planes of time, identity, location, and institutions.

Disciplinary Context: Knowledge Production and Erasure

Questions of power are central to the critical theoretical traditions of Educational Studies and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) within which we developed this course. However, even in these traditions, we found Lesbian thought and knowledge production to be relegated to de-contextualized considerations or simply absent from scholarly discussions. Students brought this same perspective through their own academic experiences. In her final course reflection, Pinto wrote,

Lesbian history and existence have been erased in many courses I have previously taken regarding gender and sexuality, often in the name of queer theory and moving beyond the concept of fixed or labeled identities.

In a typical WGSS or Educational Studies class, Lesbians may or may not be included when critical power structures are rigorously interrogated. Maya echoed Pinto, writing “I realized that I didn’t really have a true understanding of any sort of ‘Lesbian history.’ Who would be included in such a history, anyway?” In a course where Lesbian herstory, culture, politics and thought were not only explicitly centered, but made up the entire content of the course, different questions of power arose. Instead of being used rhetorically as an exception, compressed into one monolithic entity, or ignored entirely, we engaged Lesbians and Lesbian thought in this course through exploring power contestations within and between Lesbian communities and movements. Students explored past and present Lesbian debates over separatism, race, porn, S/M, and trans inclusion, and produced specific and complex lines of inquiry that traditional Education and WGSS classrooms often do not support. However, this was only possible because we extended our classroom and pedagogy outside the knowledge-producing walls of the university and engaged dialogically with the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives

Our pedagogical and curricular assumption, then — that radical Lesbian thought and practice needed to be centralized — matched the foundational claims of the LHA; namely that Lesbian herstories are especially vulnerable to erasure and so necessitate preservation through intergenerational Lesbian knowledge exchange (Carden, 2016). We understand the LHA as an archive organized around Lesbians as a cultural, political, and intellectual category. Founded in

the 1970s by New York City Lesbians, the LHA is a volunteer-run, community-based archive, housed in a brownstone in the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. Its early Statement of Purpose, as conveyed in an LHA newsletter, read as follows:

The Lesbian Herstory Archives exists to gather and preserve records of Lesbian lives and activities so that future generations of Lesbians will have ready access to materials relevant to their lives. The process of gathering this material will also serve to uncover and collect our herstory denied to us previously by patriarchal historians in the interests of the culture which they serve. The existence of these Archives will enable us to analyze and reevaluate the Lesbian experience. We anticipate that the existence of these Archives will encourage Lesbians to record their experiences in order to formulate our living Herstory (Edel, Nestle, Schwarz, Penelope, & Itnyre, 1979, p. 1).

This statement, which remains relatively unchanged today, resonates with the scholarly importance of Lesbian knowledge production in the academy (“History and mission,” 2015). The archive is a site of herstory collections *and also* a “process” of knowledge production and exchange through dialogic praxes — a pedagogy. In following on her reflections about the “erasure” of Lesbians in her WGSS courses, Pinto wrote, “I had also never critically considered the significance of knowledge as something produced *by* people, who come with their own subjectivities, or even archives as a manifestation of this knowledge production” (emphasis original).

Throughout the semester we came to understand the LHA as a site of knowledge production and exchange, containing artifacts and people, that preserves a constellation of pasts. This was brought to life on our class field trip to the LHA. On walking through the doors to the

brownstone, we were greeted by LHA co-founder, Deborah Edel. She welcomed us into a purple living room overflowing with books by and about Lesbians, arranged on the floor-to-ceiling shelves non-patriarchally by first name. Deb gave us a short history of her work with the LHA and other Lesbians as she took us through the multiple rooms in the house-turned-archive. She began to tell the story of the founding of the LHA, and explained to this group of young people, ages 18 - 21, that the 1970's were an exciting time. Halfway through her sentence, she paused, smiled, and exclaimed, "It's *always* an exciting time to be a Lesbian!" Standing in the filtered-light of a dusty second-floor room filled with filing cabinets, boxes of letters, sci-fi novels, and the collection of Audre Lorde, the six students, Kailah, and Sabina recognized the significance of this invitation into a Lesbian herstory. A year later, we all continue to appreciate our fortune to have been included in Deb's narrative of an exciting herstorical time and as collaborators in the ongoing production and exchange of Lesbian knowledge.

We all came to understand ourselves as archivists and pedagogues, as heirs of the LHA. Writes Fritzsche (2005),

Archives are not comprehensive collections of things, the effects left behind by the dead, nor are they arbitrary accumulations of remnants and leftovers. The archive is the production of the heirs, who must work to find connections from one generation to the next...The heirs also distinguish themselves as such: a cultural group that knows itself by cultivating a particular historical trajectory.

(p. 16).

As heirs, we were simultaneously students and teachers, stewards and producers of knowledge. We understood radical archives to necessarily be intergenerationally peopled. However, unlike the prevailing notion of sterile archives and staid scholarly practices, the production and

exchange of knowledge was neither fixed nor uni-directional. By centering the LHA, we offered students intellectual and herstorical affordances for understanding possibilities for resistance to erasure through collective archival knowledge production.

I. Archive as Pedagogy: Theoretical Foundations

Dialogue and Difference

What is critical pedagogy? What is critical archival pedagogy? What is a critical, Lesbian archival pedagogy? These are the questions we asked before and during the course, and even now. For us, critical pedagogy is fundamentally a dialogue that centers questions of power production, reproduction, and disruption (Freire, 2000; McLaren, 2008). Dialogue is the heart of critical pedagogy, in large part because it is exercised through attention to difference. Britzman (2012) suggests that queer pedagogy is “a technique for acknowledging difference *as the only condition of possibility for community*” (p. 297, emphasis original). We argue that this pedagogical technique is grounded in dialogue, and that Lesbian archival dialogue is rooted in the ongoing establishment, as we quoted above, of a “cultural group that knows itself by cultivating a particular historical trajectory”— in other words, an intergenerational, knowledge-producing “community” (Fritzsche, 2005, p. 16).

In developing dialogic praxis in the service of difference, we had to land on a specific set of methodologies for critical Lesbian archival dialogue. We conceptualized archives as sites where powers collide and are resisted, and where knowledge-based collectivity is developed (Cvetkovich, 2003; Derrida, 1995; Foucault, 1982). While we theoretically engaged archives as not necessarily physical sites, we also understood archives as actual locations. These theoretical engagements helped us to approach the brick-and-mortar LHA as contextualized and organized

by socio-political knowledge traditions, movements, groups of people, and historically framed eras. Mirroring this conceptualization of Lesbian archives, we collectively developed our Lesbian archival dialogic praxis over the course of the semester.

As jumping off points, we incorporated three central readings on archives into the syllabus: “The Brandon Archive” by Judith Jack Halberstam; “Archive, Affect and the Everyday: Queer Diasporic Re-visions” by Gayatri Gopinath; and “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance” by Ann Laura Stoler. We e-mailed “The Brandon Archive” to students as an advance course reading with the assignment to write a response to the ideas in the chapter. We wrote to the students, “In crafting this response, be thinking about the role and meaning of archives, particularly for non-dominant people. Please do not summarize the chapter, but detail your own thinking in relation to it.” This was the start of two things: our archival dialogic processes situating students as knowledge producers; and, our conceptualizations of archives as complex, contradictory, and open-ended.

“The Brandon Archive” facilitated this two-pronged approach to critical Lesbian archival dialogic praxes. Halberstam (2005) describes the archive produced in response to the 1993 murder of Brandon Teena — “a young female-bodied person who had been passing as a man” in Falls City, Nebraska (p. 22) — as not bounded by a physical site. Rather, this archive includes two films, news media narrations, and activist engagements with Brandon’s murder, among countless other artifacts produced in relation to both Brandon and a cluster of associated, powered, sites of difference. Among these, is Halberstam’s narration of his experience of collective, dialogic engagement with this archive. A moment of public dialogue challenged him to shift from reproducing to upending repressive urban/rural binaries around queerness. Halberstam’s scholarly analysis of dialogue across specific differences (and lack thereof)

between rural and urban emphasized the meaning-making potential of an archive's content, form, and process. As Halberstam (2005) writes, archives are "simultaneously a resource, a productive narrative, a set of representations, a history, a memorial, and a time capsule," (p.23) as well as "a discursive field and a structure of thinking" (p. 33). So, with this first archival framework, we began to construct our own conceptualization of archives as sites where content and process are linked through ongoing and unending dialogue.

Collaborative Knowledge Production

In developing our own archival frameworks we found we had to shift entrenched power dynamics of our classroom to foster collective knowledge production. To continue the work of creating shared archival theories, we jumped right into our second framing of archives the second week of class: Gayatri Gopinath's (2010) "Archive, Affect and the Everyday." This article works to attend to queer inflections of loss in commonplace artifacts and daily acts. Due to no shortcomings of this article, as can happen, we did not find ourselves returning to this conceptual framework as a class. In spite of the fact that we offered the class opportunities to connect this framework to our dialogue, it simply never gained traction. Instead of rigidly insisting students engage this work, we participated dialogically with students to cultivate a shared archival praxis. This meant letting go of this particular framing.

The absence of Gopinath's framework in our understanding of archives illustrates the ground-up construction of our critical archival pedagogy. Using the syllabus as a guide, not as mandate, fostered student understanding of their role as co-producers of course inquiry, content, and pedagogy. The *process* of collaborative decision-making remained integral. To let go of Gopinath's theoretical framework based on student reception afforded space for students'

narrative license and conceptual authority in relation to the archive of our class and their understanding of Radical Lesbian Thought writ large. Students collectively determined their own conceptualization of archives through the theories they took up as well as those they did not.

Students had to grapple with these shifting, powered dynamics of collective decision-making and the implications of co-producing thought. As Maya said, capturing the shared sentiments of her classmates:

I grew to more enjoy the freedom (and also responsibility) required by such a setup. In essence, I saw this as putting the onus of drawing meaning from our own work onto students rather than have a formulaic (linear) structure that more easily affords/feeds meaning and understanding to students. I felt much more comfortable going where my research and work led me, rather than driving toward a rigid goal that didn't allow for real exploration of my topic/ideas as the course went on.

In allowing students to decide in which ideas they found interest, immediate value, and purpose, academic rigor was expanded, not diminished.

While many students were initially uncomfortable in the role of knowledge producer, Arturo expressed what they all came to experience — he began to see it as a welcome change from his previous coursework:

Up to this point in my academic career, I have tried to steal whatever ontological sovereignty that I could. In other courses, I felt uncomfortable moving beyond or departing from the theories and frameworks that were provided by the professor for fear of it costing my grade.

In this course, not only did we pedagogically position students as knowledge producers, we gave students the option to grade themselves to further remove real or perceived restrictions to their learning. As Arturo adeptly stated: “The most crucial part of self-grading is finding value in one’s own work.”

Collaborative knowledge production was central to both the pedagogy and content of the course. It was through the praxis of dialogue across different institutional locations of the classroom that we co-created our own knowledge producing community. Britzman (2000) posits that for dialogue between students and teachers “to occur, both educators and students have to learn to see knowledge as something that is made in and altered by relationships” (p. 49). Britzman (2000) goes on to state that “learning is the work of making interpretations, experimenting with the potential force or power of what knowledge can do, and with *marking* knowledge with new significance” (p. 49, emphasis original). As instructors, we explicitly marked the power in the process of knowledge production. Allowing students the option to select which articles to engage or disengage, grade themselves, develop their own assignments, and choose the subject of their final projects shifted the power dynamics of the classroom to foster unfettered knowledge production. Importantly we did not relinquish the power of the teacher, but instead used that power to introduce these radical praxes. By marking the collective and systemic processes of knowledge we provided the foundation for the class to collaboratively build a critical Lesbian archival pedagogy.

Archival Methodology

Archival content does not guarantee an archival pedagogy, just as Lesbian content does not assure a Lesbian pedagogy. As hooks (1994) cautions, “different, more radical subject matter does not create a liberatory pedagogy” (p. 148). Instead pedagogy, and the methodology of

knowledge production, must deliberately support the content taught. In our course we both studied archival methodologies *and* employed them as pedagogy. Students learned radical thought through a radical pedagogy that positioned them as producers of knowledge, and then afforded them the agency to reposition themselves repeatedly. They were in charge of creating their own Lesbian archival methodologies.

Our collective methodological processes really took flight beginning week five of the semester, when we read Ann Laura Stoler's (2002) "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance." Drawing from Anthropological and Post-colonial disciplinary practices, Stoler advances a methodology of reading along the archival grain. Stoler suggests that while it is relevant to examine what is missing from archives, it also necessary to consider what is present and highlighted. Stoler (2002) argues that scholars "need to read [an archive] for its regularities, for its logic of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies of misinformation, omission, and mistake — *along* the archival grain" (p. 100, emphasis original). This archival methodology involves identifying the salient content and organizing principles of knowledge production and exchange. Reading along the grain is methodologically necessary to identify and analyze flows of power in the archive.

As a class and knowledge producing community, we used Stoler's (2002) archival methodology to ask of this specific terrain of power: what rises to the top in radical Lesbian archives? What rises to the top at the LHA? And, what rises to the top in each archivist's reading of the LHA? Because the LHA is a radical "grassroots Lesbian archives," it is already reading *against* the grain of hetero-patriarchal histories ("History and mission," 2015). Thus, it was especially important for us to read *along* the LHA's grain to identify practices of Radical

Lesbian Thought. By examining the preserved stories, artifacts, and ephemera, we began to make sense of the salient narratives, epistemologies, and methodologies of the LHA.

Moreover, Stoler suggests that reading along the grain is a methodology that positions the archive as an ethnographic subject. Stoler (2002) argues that the shift from the “archive-as-source to the archive-as-subject” creates a corresponding reframing of “archives not as sites of knowledge retrieval, but knowledge production” (p. 87). As such, archives are defined not only by what they contain, but also by their dynamic processes of meaning making. This archival methodological framework allowed us to consider the LHA as a complex, knowledge-producing subject. So in returning to hooks’ (1994) claim that radical content does not guarantee radical pedagogy, we borrow from Stoler to argue that radical content does not necessarily produce a radical archive. Rather, by approaching the archive-as-subject we examined the practices of Lesbian archives to understand the totality of their radicality.

In the spirit of the pedagogical charge to collaboratively experiment with power and knowledge via radical archival methodologies, Arturo wrote that through the course he, “aimed to harness the potential of archives; I further aimed to exploit the power attached to the term ‘archive.’” Echoing Stoler, he located that in contesting “archives, as structures and moderators of power, [that] can create a static image of history” he sought new meanings and new archival methodologies. This radical methodology used to “harness the potential” and “exploit the power” of archives facilitated our radical course content and our work with and at the LHA.

II. Archive as Process: Critical Archival Praxes

In the second part of this paper we move from archival theoretical frameworks of the course to three examples of activities we collectively undertook: reading and writing letters,

conducting research at the LHA, and creating final archives. These three activities were informed by our archival frameworks of dialogue and difference, collaborative knowledge production, and archival methodology.

Letters as a Practice of Dialogue and Difference

In the spirit of Halberstam's (2005) framework of dialogue across difference, we used letters as both artifact and practice. We were specifically interested in letters that were publicly circulated to build and maintain intellectual communities. As a class we read selected letters to *ONE*, a Gay and Lesbian newsletter, from the 1950's and 60's, an open letter from Audre Lorde to Mary Daly, as well as an anonymous letter later attributed to playwright Lorraine Hansberry, written to *The Ladder*, the first known U.S. Lesbian newsletter (Hansberry Nemiroff, 1957; Loftin, 2012; Lorde, 2007). The corresponding assignment was to "write an open letter to a current Lesbian/Gay/Queer media outlet." The letters we assigned and the letters the students wrote pivoted on difference across vectors of socioeconomics, race, sexuality, gender, and ideology.

We scaffolded this epistolary activity by placing students in dialogue pairs to discuss these questions in class:

What are the concerns and issues in the letters you read?

What are the concerns and issues in the letters you wrote?

Where do you see echoes, overlaps, and Lesbian knowledge disposition?

By identifying the "echoes" and "overlaps," the students' own letters entered into the ever-expanding archives of Radical Lesbian Thought.

These activities shaped our collective understanding of the potential of archives for teaching, learning, and creation. As Pinto stated halfway through the semester, “this class isn’t about just discussing the readings, but, rather, using them as frames of reference to dig deeper into concepts to deconstruct them and then reconstruct them entirely.” We read these letters, as Pinto articulated, not just for their content and concepts, but also for the opportunity to create, through deconstruction and reconstruction, our own radical archive of Lesbian thought.

Further, this activity anchored us in a generational and intergenerational Lesbian knowledge producing practice. In Cecilia’s final project, a letter to Sabina and Kailah, she reflected on the collective generational and intergenerational features of epistolary practices in radical Lesbian knowledge-producing communities. She wrote,

Using the letter as a means to transfer separatist Lesbian thought is important to me because of the way in which it has been used to create uncensored separatist conversations, which are able to remain within Lesbian spheres without being subjected to hetero-patriarchal exploitation. It also marks a collaborative Lesbian conversation, which I have participated in while endeavoring to produce the knowledge that has informed this archival letter. The practice of letter writing itself has been passed on intergenerationally as it was born out of a fugitive desire and means to produce knowledge (of kinship, of love, of politics, of life) along with sisters, lovers, fighters, etc.

The physical artifact of the letter, too, is an inter-generational space and practice.

In her final project, Cecilia circled back to one of the first activities of the course to analyze the importance of writing and reading letters as a way to exchange and produce knowledge in and across Lesbian communities. She marked this process, and her letter, as “archival.” In doing so, she circulated this letter beyond its named recipients, and entered into a larger dialogic

conversation with Lesbian separatist knowledge producing communities, as an heir, author, and intergenerational kinship member. These roles, for all of us, were shaped and strengthened at our trip to the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

Field Trip as a Practice of Collaborative Knowledge Production

After ten weeks of preparation and anticipation, our class made the trip from Boston to New York to conduct student-directed research at the Lesbian Herstory Archives. This trip afforded us the chance to, as Arturo said, “develop various conversations with Lesbians” herstorically and contemporarily in a shared space. We traveled by bus, train, and car, met in Brooklyn for lunch, and connected as a reconfigured collective to enter the LHA. Part of our radical teaching was this journey itself because it disrupted all of our authorities. We were all first-time travelers on this intellectual pilgrimage to the LHA.

Despite researching the LHA before our visit, we were all surprised by the affective impact of this trip. Pinto recorded these feelings in her reflection on our visit.

Despite a whole semester in Radical Lesbian Thought, my expectations before visiting the Lesbian Herstory Archives were humble. I was sure we had learned just about everything there was to learn about Lesbian history and the LHA would simply be a supplement to this learning journey. I could literally *feel* how wrong I was the minute I walked in. I was standing in the epicenter of Lesbian history, existence, and knowledge production, whether it was the books, magazine, flyers, buttons, jackets, or shoes that lined every inch of the space — a space that validated my (and so many other women’s) existence. (emphasis original).

This “epicenter of Lesbian history” provided a depth and richness to our inquiry that was not possible at our university. While simply leaving the university transformed our class, our experience of conducting research at the LHA shifted us from students, teacher, and TA, to a group engaged collectively in Lesbian knowledge production. We were not of the archive, the same way we were of the university, so the LHA superseded the structures, assumptions, and practices we had adopted in our classroom. This field trip, an act of radical pedagogy created by each of us, rearranged our class boundaries as the formal structures of the university fell away.

At the LHA, we conducted self-directed and co-constructed research to support our lines of inquiry. Pinto described this dynamic collaborative knowledge production in her reflection on our research at the LHA:

I would have to say that the most incredible part of visiting the LHA was sharing that intellectual and personal yet, ultimately, collective experience with everyone. The process of reflecting on our experiences of the LHA extended beyond the space of the archives, though. I came to understand that this space does not simply inhabit an address in Brooklyn; rather, its very existence and survival as an archive has worked to inform how we related ourselves to both the class and understood our realities. How can one single place do that?

Collectively, we understood the LHA as both a site and a subject, and to therefore have its own agency and disposition (Stoler, 2002). As a subject, the LHA became both a teacher and a student of the class, a new member of the RadLez community.

Even with scholarly dialogue and engagement with Radical Lesbian Thought throughout the semester, nowhere was intergenerational Lesbian dialogue more evident than at the LHA. As both a physical site and a member of the class, the LHA allowed us all to participate in an

intergenerational Lesbian dialogue, with people and artifacts, both in resistance to and outside of dominant discourse. After interviewing Deb in the LHA's working kitchen, Cecilia reflected on the praxis and "intense importance of intergenerational knowledge exchange particularly in Lesbian thought." She detailed the multiple instances and sites of intergenerational knowledge exchange throughout the course:

This occurred both through my work with you both [Sabina and Kailah] but also through our visiting the archive and the actual readings of older Lesbians. In my future work I wish to acknowledge the historical importance of all Lesbians and the way in which that informs my own archival readings now.

Just as our learning took place outside of the boundaries of the university classroom, the research conducted at the LHA had an impact beyond the official end date of the semester. Arturo shared,

The research I conducted and the artifacts I was able to interact with at the LHA have left a lasting impression on me. The work I do will remain informed by the Lesbian materialities, preserved in this archive, that I was able to interact with.

For that, I'm grateful.

In the end, the field trip was not simply an activity to support class assignments, it also inspired future projects of thought and action. Through students' creation of their own archives, in addition to their continued work with Lesbian archives and the LHA, we were all reminded that learning is not confined to one classroom or one semester. For us, producing and exchanging knowledge was a tool to enter into, and create, ongoing radical Lesbian community.

"Finals" as a Practice of Archival Methodology

For the final project of the semester, students used the research they conducted at the LHA to create their own archives. Arturo created a video archive of his spiritual relationship to Audre Lorde, Ntombi Howell, and Florynce Kennedy; Pinto wrote a Lesbian separatist science fiction novella; Cecilia produced a Lesbian separatist letter; and Maya created, curated, and contextualized a herstory of Lesbian buttons. Other students conducted similarly unique and creative archival projects.

We came to realize that, while labeled a “final,” there was nothing finished or complete about these archives. In reflecting on her final project Maya wrote: “now that I’m realizing how messy and unrefined and raw and far-reaching Lesbian history is, I feel comfortable saying that this archive is similarly unrefined.” Unlike a traditional final, which is often a performance of knowledge to signify the completion of learning, these finals opened up new lines of inquiry. Pinto articulated the ongoing process of archival knowledge production in reflecting on the methodology she employed to create her own final archive:

I fully understood questions needed to be raised and that many would not have definite and conclusive answers, too many also created internal contradictions and was something with which I struggled to wrap my head around... This project granted me an imaginative freedom to do two things: 1) further explore another form of knowledge and archival production regarding radical Lesbian thought; and 2) create my own platform upon which I could address and tease out my tensions and conflicts, while still be able to critically interact with the material from class.

What students variously described as “imaginative freedom” (Pinto), “autonomy,” (Cecilia) and “vast amount of conceptual space,” (Arturo) in RadLez was a radical departure

from their other coursework and, perhaps more importantly, their sense of themselves as knowledge producers. Cecilia noted at the end of the semester that her “ability to design my own assignments, research focus, and project has made me greatly more invested in this class than I could have ever been without this type of academic independence.”

While our pedagogy calls for a shifting of classroom power dynamics, we explicitly and continually addressed the powered dynamics present throughout the semester. We did not presume that as teacher and TA, we had equal power to students, but maintained our difference and made it explicit. The process of sharing power itself, providing the option of self-grading for example, illustrates our ongoing power as teachers. This power differential is not un-radical. Radical Lesbian pedagogy to us meant heeding Audre Lorde’s (1990) call to bring power to the fore and work within and across it.

To both shift power and make it transparent, we attended to multiple and contradictory stories simultaneously. We collectively explored the “problem of how knowledge of bodies and bodies of knowledge become a site of normalization” through our archival research and production (Britzman, 2012, p. 293). Throughout the semester we complicated and critiqued singular narratives of Lesbian existence, those same narratives many of us had experienced in other coursework, when Lesbians were included at all. Through their final projects, students challenged the systems and institutions that construct a singular, normalized Lesbian body and body of thought. For example, Cecilia incorporated archival collections into her final that complicated dominant narratives of separatist Lesbians because they were produced *by* separatist Lesbians. Cecilia wrote:

One of the parts of the Separatist community I most appreciated in this research was the multitude of voices that came out of it. This is interesting to me since the

idea of “Lesbian Separatism” is often framed as a very individualist one, with a one-woman mold. At the LHA during this trip, though, I found archived profiles women in the Lesbian Separatist movement had written of themselves.

Cecilia located knowledge creation as a *collective* act, grounded in Lesbian community. “Ultimately,” Cecilia argued, “the Lesbian Separatist movement was creating a *community* (not an individual united identity), and in so doing was creating new visions of thought and knowledge for Lesbians, about Lesbians, by Lesbians and with Lesbians” (emphasis original). In order to produce their own archives, students read along the grain of the LHA to identify Lesbian communities created through dialogue and difference. In capturing the complexity and multiplicity of these communities in their archives, students resisted the “normalization” and simplification of Lesbian thought.

One Year Later: “Open[ing] Out of the Future”

As Derrida (1995) states, “the archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future” (p. 45). As we write, four of the RadLez students carry forward the potential we all co-created in the course. These students, under the collective, self-chosen name the Rad Lez Kidz, facilitated a showing of the LHA’s Audre Lorde exhibit at Tufts University. This required fundraising, returning to the LHA to conduct research, collaborating with Deborah Edel and the LHA volunteers, and producing their own companion archive, events, and exhibit. Due to the deteriorating physical condition of the exhibit, this is the final showing before the Audre Lorde Exhibit is permanently archived at LHA. Not only are these students continuing to be collective knowledge producers, but they are doing so well beyond the confines of the semester, classroom, and direction of Professor and TA. As Arturo

said, “I developed a sort of ‘Radical Lesbian consciousness.’ That is, I have become more aware of the potential that continues to exist for radical Lesbian thinkers/organizers/-identified people.” The Rad Lez Kidz have clearly demonstrated the potential of a critical archival pedagogy, which is autonomous, collective, and atemporal.

We collaboratively developed a radical Lesbian archival pedagogy through dialogue that spanned the classroom and the Lesbian Herstory Archives. In this paper we detail the ways we framed and did not frame archives, and shared illustrations of how our archival frameworks became student and teacher practice in the classroom, in the Lesbian Herstory Archives, and in between. Letters, the trip to the LHA, and student-produced finals are three activities that exemplify the salient frameworks of dialogue across difference and power, collaborative knowledge, and archival methodologies including reading along the grain and conceptualizing the archive-as-subject. Our praxes informed our engagement with archival content, while the content continuously challenged and refined our praxes. As Maya noted, “I have had few classes that have given me no choice but to stretch and challenge my manner of thinking about theory, and theory-in-practice/as reality.” Our critical archival pedagogy, a pedagogy we applied to Lesbian archives, positions students as knowledge producers and ultimately creates “potential.” As Arturo argued:

I have learned that the goals of an archivist and of a storyteller are not so different. We keep stories alive, we create stories, and (*most of all*) we create potential. We sustain (in the case of this course) the Radical Lesbian Imaginary. This course creates potential, as each student in the course has created their own story.

Locating the Lesbian archival grain:
Methodological considerations of knowledge production

By Kailah R. Carden

If we ask decorous questions of history, we will get a genteel history. If we assume that because sex was a secret it did not exist, we will get a sexless history. If we assume that in periods of oppression, Lesbians lost their autonomy and acted as victims only, we destroy not only history but lives. For many years the psychologists told us we were both emotionally and physically deviant; they measured our nipples and clitorises to chart our queerness, they talked about how we wanted to be men and how our sexual styles were pathetic imitations of the real thing and all along under this barrage of hatred and fear, we loved. They told us that we should hate ourselves and sometimes we did but we were also angry, resilient and creative. We were part of a community that took care of itself. And most of all we were Lesbian women, revolutionizing each of these terms. We create history as much as we discover it.

— Joan Nestle

Introduction

I first encountered this writing by Joan Nestle as words floating decontextualized on a single piece of paper under the heading “Ending” in the GLBT Historical Society’s collection on their early years as an archive. Sitting in San Francisco, California at the Historical Society’s reading room, at a communal table with two strangers immersed in their own research, I looked through the window to my left into the indecipherable bowels of the archive. To my right was

another Plexiglas window facing onto the nondescript entryway and waiting room. The room was decorated with a Psalm 23:1 sign, a phone sex ad, and a copy of the reading room rules. *The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. Find the man you need by listening to hot ads. We are responsible for preserving these materials for generations to come. Therefore we must ask that researchers must agree to abide by the reading room rules.* Before I was allowed access to this very public room, hidden away in a non-descript third-floor office space, behind an unmarked door and on-the-fritz intercom, I had to surrender all my personal items, except my laptop, and sign a research agreement. By affixing my signature to a white sheet of paper I promised not to consume food or drinks, talk on my cell phone, take notes with pen, or re-order the artifacts. I was welcomed into an intergenerational knowledge producing community under specific conditions.

Before reading a single word of any artifact, my experience in the reading room was filled with ethnographic information on the knowledge-producing features of this archive. My struggle to locate the archive, my miscommunications with the archivist on the other side of the intercom, my surroundings in the reading room, and the text of the research agreement all raised new lines of inquiry. Who was able to find this archive and who persisted to make it past the barriers to entry? Was this a religious space or was the Psalm 23:1 sign an act of decorating camp? Were my male research companions and the phone sex ad an indication of a male dominated space? Or, was this an accident, the happenstance of the small sample size of one day in the archive? Who are the “generations to come” I was being asked to preserve these artifacts for? Can I see myself in these unknown future generations? In addition to the information and questions generated from my experiences and surroundings in the archive, I also made specific methodological decisions in order to understand archives as sites of learning.

My methodological choices were intended to appropriately utilize my limited time at each archive I visited. These choices included: requesting collections on the archive I was visiting; identifying repetitions in artifacts, themes, people, and places; and locating guides to the archive. I then compiled my own archive of my experiences conducting archival research, cataloging and organizing my field notes, observations, experiences, and photographs. I read along the archival grain to identify the stories, themes, and knowledge practices that rose to the top of my archive (Stoler, 2002). This paper puts forward an archival ethnographic methodology, applied to Lesbian archives, ideal for a critical analysis of archives as sites of knowledge production.

In this paper, I apply and adapt Ann Laura Stoler's (2002, 2010) archival methodology to Lesbian archives. I describe my experiences and choices conducting research on Lesbian archival knowledge production in two Lesbian archives: first, the June Mazer Lesbian Archives (JMLA), and then Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA). I include my methodological choices in my interactions with each sites neighborhood, archivists, artifacts, and the archive itself, as a knowledge producing subject.

Background

The first time I saw Nestle's words from this paper's epigraph, I was sitting at the large desk in the Historical Society's fish bowl of a reading room, visible to everyone in the archive. I paused over the page because I recognized her name as one of the co-founders of the LHA. I took a picture with my cell phone, made a note to come back to this "random piece of paper" and then promptly forgot it as I moved on to the next artifact. It was months later, in the comfort of my own home that I rediscovered Nestle's words. I was perusing the electronic archive of LHA

newsletters when I read on page seven of the 1981 newsletter: “we create history as much as we discover it” (Nestle, 1981, p. 7). I searched back through my own growing archive to unearth the “random piece of paper” dated June 1981 that I had seen in San Francisco. I compared it to the LHA newsletter published in December of the same year, the text barely changed.

Searching for patterns and repetitions in archives doubly marked this artifact, and warranted its inclusion in my own compiled archive of my research. The only reason I stopped over this piece of paper to begin with was because I recognized Joan Nestle’s name, from its repetition not only in Lesbian archives, but also in published scholarship. As one of the co-founders of the LHA, as well as a prolific writer, Nestle is often cited and discussed in this literature. My inclusion of this artifact in my own archive allowed me to make a connection across archives months later when I saw the same writing repeated in an LHA newsletter. As Deborah Britzman (2000) writes, “learning is the work of making interpretations, experimenting with the potential force of power of what knowledge can do, and with *marking* knowledge with new significance” (p. 49, emphasis original). I could not make sense of this writing the first time I saw it, but knew to include it in my archive because it was a piece of Joan Nestle’s thought production on Lesbian communities and archive. The archival repetition I discovered later, marked this writing with new significance, and allowed me to understand this particular artifact, in a landscape of seemingly unending artifacts, as particularly important. Duplication across archives caused this artifact to rise to the top of my own compiled archive.

I describe my experience with this artifact in detail not only to explicate my methodological attention to repetitions in archives, but also to center the content of Nestle’s quote as a key Lesbian archival understanding of Lesbian communities and their role in the project of Lesbian archives. In her writings, repeated across archives, Nestle (1981a, 1981b)

defined Lesbians as a community of women bound by sex, love, resistance, and knowledge production. Both because and despite of oppression, Lesbians have a vested interest in authoring our own herstories¹. This practice of herstorical authorship is the heart of Lesbian archival knowledge production. The discovery and creation of herstory makes visible Lesbian lives and cultures as well as their historical erasure and marginalization. Knowledge preserved and produced in Lesbian archives both counteracts the narratives of psychologists, doctors, and historians who pathologize Lesbians and also documents Lesbian resistance, resilience, creativity, and love. Lesbian archives, then, are a manifestation of Nestle's definition of Lesbian: a community that both preserves and produces herstory.

In this paper, I define Lesbian archives as both material sites that self-identify as such, as well as the pervading logics, practices, and assumptions that exist within and outside their physical boundaries. The brownstone that houses the LHA in Park Slope, Brooklyn is a Lesbian archive, as is the LHA website, available to anyone with an Internet connection regardless of location. The physical space of the "Lesbian Lounge" at the JMLA is part of a Lesbian archive, as is the neighborhood of West Hollywood one must navigate to get to the archives. The physical spaces of Lesbian archives, both their buildings and their neighborhoods, are central to archival knowledge production, but not restrictive.

I follow the conventions of Lesbian archives for my own definition of Lesbian in this paper. The JMLA and LHA do not have fixed rules or restrictions on who or what qualifies as Lesbian. Their policies allow for a dynamic, inclusive, and community-constructed definition of Lesbians that has included Women-Identified-Women, Political Lesbians, Bisexual Women,

¹ I use the term herstory to signify Lesbian controlled narratives of the past, and the term history to identify narratives that are not controlled by Lesbian communities. Despite the Lesbian archival precedence for this term, it is not used consistently in the artifacts quoted in this paper.

Queer Women, and individuals of all genders who have identified as a Lesbian at any point in their life (A. Brinskele, personal communication, July 7th, 2015; D. Edel, personal communication, April 18th, 2015; Giesecking, 2015; Nestle, 1990). Notably, diverse sexual, gender, and political identities are included in the term Lesbian at these archives. The only restriction to donation, and by extension who is included in these archival projects, is that artifacts must be made public to researchers. For the JMLA this has meant some collections of separatist Lesbians, who do not want their materials viewed by men and non-Lesbians, have been excluded from the archive. This largely inclusive process of communal definition is especially significant in a time period when the word Lesbian is understood, by some, to be restrictive, limiting, and anachronistic. Lesbian archives employ a broad and inclusive definition of Lesbian identity in part to counteract historical erasure of Lesbians, and to connect past, present, and future generations around a common term. I use the word Lesbian in this paper, instead of the term Queer, not to restrict or bound sexual and gender identities, but to locate my analysis as a continuation of herstorical Lesbian archival projects.

Theoretical Framework

While archives are often “mined” for facts, Stoler (2002) argues that archival “scholars should view archives not as sites of knowledge retrieval, but *knowledge production*” (p. 87, emphasis added). For this project, I follow Stoler’s call to conceptualize archives as subjects that operate under distinct epistemologies. To understand an archive as a subject is to expand analysis outside of the individual artifacts contained in an archive. In other words, Archives are more than the sum of their archival parts. Archives contain both records of the past as well as structures of knowing. Like Stoler (2002), I understand archives to be knowledge-producing subjects. Lesbian

archives, specifically, are sites of knowledge production that are collective, intergenerational, and organized around a commitment to control Lesbian herstories (Cvetkovich, 2003; Eichhorn, 2014; Giesecking, 2015; Klinger, 2005; Kumbier, 2014; McKinney, 2015; Newman, 2010). The theoretical framework of Lesbian archives as knowledge producing subjects is the foundation for my archival methodology.

Methodology

Building on the foundation of Stoler's (2002, 2010) archival theories, I utilize her methodology of ethnographically reading along the archival grain. Stoler (2002) argues that scholars must read an archive "for its regularities, for its logic of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies of misinformation, omission, and mistake – *along* the archival grain" (p. 100, emphasis original). This methodology of reading along, instead of against, the archival grain, supports analyses of power and knowledge production through what is present. In order to distinguish the central narratives and epistemologies of Lesbian archives I compiled an archive of my research at Lesbian, LGBTQ, and Women's archives. I then read along the grain of my compiled archive to identify the similarities, patterns, and repetitions in and across archives. My compiled archive was a methodological tool to counteract the limitations of my on-site research. It was impossible for me to see Lesbian archives in their entirety, and therefore could not systematically identify or analyze the exclusions or absences.

Lesbian archives are counter-archives, themselves reading *against* the historical grain by identifying and including "what stories could *not* be told, and what could *not* be said" (Stoler, 2002, p. 95, emphasis added). By reading *against* the grain, Lesbian archives aim to make visible the powered forces that have erased Lesbians from historical narratives. The Lesbian archival

grain includes counternarratives to patriarchal histories. So while I attempted to locate and compile the inclusions and repetitions of Lesbian archives, the themes of absence, invisibility, and erasure also rose to the top of my compiled archive.

To assemble my own archive of Lesbian archival knowledge practices I had to make methodological decisions to maximize my time on-site at archives. For my on-site research, I was guided by the following questions: How do Lesbian archives record their own herstories? What is deemed valuable enough to save despite limited space and resources? I collected materials produced by Lesbian archives, about Lesbian archives, and featured in Lesbian archives. I requested archival collections about the archive I was visiting. I then looked for the artifacts, collections, and narratives that rose to the top of my own compiled archive of my research: the same handful of names repeated across multiple collections and the stories that continued to reappear after my on-site research concluded. The practice of reading along the grain of my compiled archive produces a record of the interaction between archival knowledge producing processes and my own subjective experience of each archive.

Data

To collect data for this paper I traveled to two self-defined Lesbian archives, the June Mazer Lesbian Archives in West Hollywood, California and the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn, New York. I also engaged with these and other Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ), and Women's archives outside of location-bound sites, through electronic correspondence with archivists as well as Internet-based research. I used my time at Lesbian archives to compile my own archive of my subjective experience conducting research. While I sought to identify the archival grain at each archive, ultimately I read along the archival grain of

my own compiled archive. While expansive, I have access to the totality of my compiled archive: the artifacts I saw, the feelings I experienced, the neighborhoods of the archive, and the conversations I had in the archives. I do not read along the grain of the LHA or JMLA themselves, because it was impossible for me to experience these archives in their totality.

In all of the archives I visited, I was never alone. Partly this is because I traveled to archives with friends, students, and teachers, and also because I interacted with staff, volunteers, and other researchers. At each archival site I spoke with archivists, both to gain access to collections, and also to learn the written and unwritten rules and practices. These archivists provided me with invaluable information that I was not able to locate in the archive, information that perhaps has never been written down. I learned about the founding of the archives, the structure of their volunteer labor, previous policies and initiatives, and current collaborations. Archivists also provided me access to collections I requested, as well as suggested collections and artifacts I would not have known to ask for. Conversations with Lesbian archivists are some of my most valuable pieces of data. So while my entire compiled archive is mediated through my own subjectivity, the subjectivity of my research companions and guides are also recorded in my archive.

The June Mazer Lesbian Archives

On a summer morning, the Los Angeles smog already burnt off in the bright sun, I rang the June Mazer Lesbian Archives (JMLA) buzzer for the third time to no response. Despite the sign for the archive on the side door of the building, I walked around the corner, wondering if I had failed to locate the main entrance. I entered two open doors at the address of my intended destination with my friend and research companion for this trip. We found ourselves in an empty

room filled with plastic chairs, empty coffee cups, and posters for upcoming community events. While it was immediately clear that this was not a Lesbian archive, it took me a moment too long to realize we had entered a yet-to-be-convened AA meeting. As we rushed to leave, I noted the sign above the entrance read: West Hollywood Recovery Center.

After avoiding compromising the anonymity of West Hollywood residents, we returned to the side of the building, the locked doors, and the non-responsive intercom. I called my contact at the JMLA, Angela, who informed me she was out saving a Betamax player from the trash and would be an hour late. As we waited for her to unlock the doors, we surveyed the neighborhood. The JMLA is in the shabbiest building on its block. Its neighbors include a juice bar, a coffee shop devoid of food, and a monumental tanning studio advertising 20 tans for \$30. We strolled the streets we had already traversed on our search for breakfast earlier that morning, hoping to locate an inviting location to wait for Angela.

Our visit was on the heels of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the 2015 Supreme Court decision federally legalizing same-sex marriage. Almost all of the establishments around the corner from the JMLA on Santa Monica Boulevard, the central artery of the gayborhood, boasted professionally produced rainbow-emblazoned signs thanking the Supreme Court, congratulating the residents, and implicitly or explicitly encouraging consumption of their wares. As we walked the blocks, killing time at 11 in the morning, we passed cavernous, empty Gay bars. Shirtless torsos and the painted faces of drag queens stared out at us as we peeked in to see chairs on tables and vacant dance floors. Despite the near absence of people, the rainbow display of flags, men, and queens was almost blindingly bright in comparison to the JMLA's barely marked, locked gray doors. It was as if this Lesbian archive had been swallowed up and incorporated into a male-centric celebration of gay marriage.

As we waited for Angela, I realized that the JMLA overlooks one of the restaurants owned by a Real Housewife and featured on her spin-off reality television show. I had seen countless fights between the heterosexual models-slash-servers filmed in the very same lot we used to park our neon blue rental car. Because no out Lesbians are included in the show, I watched this entertainment not to see recognizable representations of myself, but to view a simultaneously mysterious and all-too-familiar heterosexual Other. The show does not ignore its Gay neighborhood, but rather features straight employees who interact with a Gay male community by advertising their boss's restaurant on and with their bodies at West Hollywood Pride. Just as I did not see a reflection of myself on this show, I also did not see a reflection of myself in the consumer-centric celebration of Gay marriage in West Hollywood and across the country.

My trip to the JMLA both confirmed and counteracted its invisibility in my television-informed image of West Hollywood. I recognized the graphic Shepard Fairy mural of a larger-than-life elephant and dove on the building to our left, but I had never imagined a physical site of Lesbian cultural and intellectual community was also part of the televised scene, forever out of frame. Like all the archives I visited, the JMLA was hidden in plain sight, legible only to those searching for Lesbian herstory. My new knowledge of this show's physical proximity to a Lesbian archive tickled me. Forevermore, the JMLA cast a shadow onto this straight show that only I could see. Now, when watching televised narratives of hyper-visible heterosexuality and male homosexuality, I know there is another subject off-screen: a Lesbian archive.

When Angela arrived to unlock the doors, salvaged Betamax in tow, she confirmed the apparent absence of Lesbians from this Gay neighborhood as she matter-of-factly informed us that most of the Lesbians of West Hollywood had relocated. She described a recent past when

West Hollywood was home to Women's organizations, bars, coffee shops, and bookstores. Now, she said, Lesbians make up only 4% of the city's residents. She went on to tell us that the JMLA is the only Lesbian establishment left in the neighborhood after The Palms, an almost 50 year-old Lesbian bar, was recently bulldozed. Angela did not mention who these Lesbians may have displaced in both their current and former homes. Non-Lesbian displaced populations remained invisible in this counterarchive of Lesbian erasure.

I had traveled across the country to discover Lesbian archival herstory, but I began to wonder if I was in the right place. The JMLA used to have house parties to raise money, but because the former community of West Hollywood Lesbians has dispersed, they now hold fundraising events in other, more heavily Lesbian populated locations. Most of the people who conduct research at the JMLA, both in their physical archival space and via the Internet, are from the film and television industry, a population that seems to have a firm hold on the area. We followed Angela into the archive and began to make use of the few hours of access to what seemed to be one of the only Lesbian spaces left in this neighborhood of Gay bars and reality TV restaurants.

Angela was a magnanimous host, and because we were the only people in the archive, we were lucky to have her full attention. Angela gave us a tour, highlighting *Dykes to Watch Out For* buttons, *A League Of Their Own* era baseball uniforms, June Mazer's Birkenstocks and her partner Bunny MacCulloch's Keds, in addition to information on the archive's events, board, and recent collaborations. As we discussed the shifting Lesbian demographics of West Hollywood and surrounding neighborhoods, I felt at ease and at home. I was in a rare space where I did not have to announce my sexual identity, but rather it was correctly assumed.

My time at the JMLA was precious. There was no way I could view, let alone comprehend, the totality of the archive in the few hours it was open. There is perhaps no way to ever know an archive in its entirety, for the archive holds the herstories of its artifacts as well as its own herstory constantly in the making, as it is marked and re-marked with new relational significance (Britzman, 2000). I made the methodological decision to use Angela as a guide to maximize my understanding of the archive as subject. I understood Angela, a volunteer archivist and board member, as my map to the archival grain. I followed her through the archive, and made note of what she found worthy of sharing with us. If she paused to explain an artifact, I reasoned it must have archival significance. If one policy was worth explaining, or even repeating, this was certainly more pertinent, at the very least to her, than the policies she forgot to mention until the end of the visit, or completely omitted. Angela seemed eager to have company in an otherwise empty archive and guided us throughout the entire archive and then repeatedly returned to the “Lesbian Lounge” while we were reading artifacts to share new stories. I understood this data, my conversations with Angela, to be the most effective, albeit subjective, way to approach the JMLA’s archival grain.

This methodology is steeped in subjectivities and happenstance. Perhaps a different volunteer archivists would have lead me to entirely different artifacts, highlighted different policies, and told me different stories. Angela repeatedly mentioned that the JMLA had to revise their original policy, to archive anything a Lesbian ever touched. This policy remained partially intact, as the JMLA would still archive anything a Lesbian ever touched, as long as it could be made public to all. This new policy excluded some separatist Lesbian materials. Angela continually underscored male involvement in the JMLA. She told us that men were welcome to view artifacts, and that there was a male on their board. Was this because my research

companion was a man? Did she repeat these pieces of information for his benefit or did she find these policies to be central to the JMLA? I cannot know if she would have told different stories had I gone to the archives alone, or with another Lesbian, or what I might have learned from a different archivist. So the record of my experience at the JMLA is colored by Angela's subjectivities, and also my own. As she talked I asked her questions, steering the conversation with my own interests about the neighborhood, the people who use the archives, and archival policies and decisions. The outcome was an intersubjective dialogue between the two of us that could only exist in that singular moment in time and space; a conversation between two Lesbians in a Lesbian archive, in West Hollywood, California.

To explore Lesbian archival knowledge production, I set out to compile an archive of how Lesbian archives understand themselves. To do so I asked: How do Lesbian archives read along their own grain? How do they understand, preserve, and share their herstory, policies, and organizing logics? To answer these questions, I made the ethnographic decision to ask Angela to point me in the direction of any collections on the JMLA. With her help, I pulled a box labeled "Mazer Correspondence 1995" hoping it would illustrate the documents the JMLA deemed salient enough to copy, file, and save despite limited space and money. This methodological decision was an effort to sort out the happenstance from the archival grain.

I also posited that the form of letters would teach me not only how the JMLA understood itself, but how it represented its vision and mission in relation to other archives and individuals. As Feminist scholar Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2014) argues, letters are an "intimate form" (p. 13). Gumbs (2014) writes, in her own letter to the reader, that the epistolary form "will make you feel like an eavesdropper, an interloper, almost like a geeking out retronerd yourself. And you should. Because you are holding history in your hands...A crucial archive for our present moment and

an ongoing act of love” (p. 13). As Gumbs states, letters in Lesbian archives are salient herstorical reference material for the present from the past. Letters also record and convey emotions across time: feelings of connection, intellectual curiosity, and love. My theoretical understanding of letters, informed by scholarship on Lesbian archives, further positioned this box of correspondence as indicative of the JMLA’s archival grain.

I sat down in the JMLA’s “Lesbian Lounge” with the “Mazer Correspondence 1995” box. One of the manila folders inside was filled with multiple copies of the same form letter from archive treasurer Marcia Schwemer. As she thanked individuals for their donations, ranging from \$5 to \$100, Schwemer narrated the JMLA’s purpose:

The Collection facilitates and records the process of reclaiming lesbian herstory and culture, taking the definition of lesbianism and lesbian lives out of the hands of others. Thus, we help reduce lesbian invisibility and empower the lesbian community—a traditionally marginalized and invisible population—with information about our own culture and herstory. (Schwemer, 1995).

Flipping through copy after copy of this letter, I saw the same words repeated over and over, the receipts of identical letters sent to women across California and the country. I had found what I was looking for: documentation of the JMLA’s self-understanding, a record of their relationship to their community, and evidence of this artifacts importance. At one point in time, someone connected to the JMLA found this letter important enough to copy multiple times and file. This archival repetition underlined the importance of the text, both at the time it was written and when it was archived.

In the letter, Schwemer reiterated the persistent erasure of Lesbian herstories. “The Collection exits [sic] to ensure that voices and lives and words of lesbians are never again lost or

silenced” (Schwemer, 1995). According to the JMLA, their role is to make the “voices and lives and words of lesbians” visible by taking ownership and control of narratives of the past. While, I understood the importance of this artifact immediately, as I continued to research Lesbian archives, I saw the same themes of erasure and resistance repeated in and across archives.

Persistent and systematic exclusion of Lesbians from the dominant historical record is the consistently stated *raison d'être* Lesbian archives provide for their existence. Just as the repetition of Schwemer’s letter in the file folder alerted me to its significance, so too did the repetition of the themes of erasure and invisibility, secure their position in my compiled archive. In the fifth LHA newsletter published, Joan Nestle (1979) wrote that “the roots of the Archives lie in the silenced voices, the love letters destroyed, the pronouns changed, the diaries carefully edited, the pictures never taken, the euphemized distortions that patriarchy would let pass” (p. 2). In this oft repeated sentiment, the desire to archive is directly tied to the reality of past erasures and threat of future destruction (Derrida, 1995). The JMLA’s mission is “making invisible histories visible” (McHugh, Johnson-Grau, & Sher, 2014; “The June Mazer Lesbian Archives,” 2015). Similarly, the LHA’s slogan is “in memory of the voices we have lost” (“History and mission,” 2015, “Newsletters,” 2015). Both claims center absences and acts of erasure in the project of archival visibility. Both claims are also repeated on almost every page of these archive’s websites, brochures, and promotional materials. Their prevalence counteracts the inevitable inconsistencies and subjectivities of any individual’s experience in the archive. The theme of past erasure and invisibility is so oft repeated, highlighted, and underlined, that it was impossible for me to ignore.

Once I identified erasure as a central informing theme of the Lesbian archival grain, it became increasingly notable in my archival research. For example, in the spring 1979 LHA

newsletter, Joan Nestle (1979) directly linked past historical erasure of Lesbians to her commitment to resistance through archives.

I thought it was accidental that I found no reference in the surrounding culture to Lesbian creations...I did not even search for markings because I knew we were not a people, just deviant sad wanderers, meeting in dark places. It is the memory of this time, with its sense of homelessness, that is at the core of my commitment to the Archives. The Archives room is a healing place; it is filled with voices announcing our autonomy and self possession. (Nestle, 1979, p. 2).

Across the country in Los Angeles, Lesbian author Lillian Faderman (n.d.) echoed Joan Nestle's sentiments. In a letter about the JMLA posted on their website, Faderman (n.d.) similarly described the 1950's "lesbian world" as "exist[ing] only in darkness." She went on to state, "part of our struggle was to fight the erasure that had always been used to keep us weak" (Faderman, n.d.). The erasure and marginalization of Lesbians and Lesbian cultures is directly linked to the resistance of documenting Lesbian herstory and creating Lesbian spaces. Because I was already looking for information on this organizing feature of Lesbian archives, I was able to trace the similarities across archives, even noting the utilization of the same words and phrases. Reading for repetitions not only allowed me to identify salient epistemologies to analyze, but the process also informed my archival research, as the meaning of artifacts in my compiled archive continually informed one another.

Just as artifacts influenced one another's meaning, there were also multiple meanings contained in each artifact. The act of archiving the folder of donor thank you letters made "invisible histories visible" (McHugh et al., 2014). This archival collection preserves the herstory of a community of Lesbians who took collective ownership and control over an archival

project. In the letter, Schwemer (1995) wrote: “The Mazer collection is unique because it combines the safe-keeping of historic artifacts with the active documentation of contemporary lesbian life.” These letters are both a document of a contemporary Lesbian project and, through their inclusion in the archive, herstoric artifacts. These letters represent the unending relationship between Lesbian communities and Lesbian archives as the JMLA simultaneously thanks donors for past participation, invites further involvement, and literally preserves their place in the archive. This network of donors enabled invisible herstories to be made visible, and the JMLA in turn made visible the community of Lesbians who collectively supported the archive.

While the mission of the JMLA is to make the invisible visible through communal Lesbian empowerment, the archive itself was barely visible to me in the Gay neighborhood of West Hollywood. The JMLA, like many Lesbian archives, operates with limited resources and all volunteer labor. The JMLA is open to researchers for four hours a day, two days a month. To counteract limitations in funding, labor, and infrastructure, many Lesbian archives have created partnerships with libraries and institutions of higher education (Cvetkovich, 2003; Dugan, 1986; Klinger, 2005; Wakimoto, Bruce, & Partridge, 2013). One result of these collaborations is the removal of Lesbian archival collections from Lesbian spaces, as artifacts are moved to institutions deemed more “secure” and “accessible.” So, in an attempt to increase visibility, Lesbian archives disperse their artifacts to non-Lesbian sites. This process is similar to the Lesbian departure from formerly Lesbian neighborhoods such as West Hollywood and the LHA’s home in Park Slope, New York.

During my visit, timed to coincide with one of the JMLA’s open days, Angela informed me of a recent partnership with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The JMLA board did not take this decision lightly, in fact their deliberations lasted over one year. Angela

mentioned more than once that there is a Lesbian working on the UCLA side of the collaboration, which helped the JMLA board come to their final decision. UCLA provides the JMLA with resources such as boxes, digitization, processing, and grant writing, in addition to storing selected collections. Unlike the JMLA, the UCLA archival collections are open six days a week. However, when I inquired about visiting on my trip, Angela told me it would take several days for artifacts to be extracted from deep storage.

Collaborations with institutions such as universities do indeed provide material resources, and are commonly understood to increase access to Lesbian herstory. However, the collections stored at UCLA remained invisible to me on my trip to Los Angeles. The increased “safety” and resources created different barriers to access. Instead of limited space to store artifacts, the UCLA had an overabundance of space that could not easily be navigated by researchers or staff. The attempt to expand archival collections of Lesbian herstory inadvertently created a new, different hurdle to my research. In my compiled archive, the UCLA collections were a blank space, a question mark, and a herstory that remained invisible.

The present day invisibility of Lesbians and Lesbian cultures in West Hollywood made my time in the JMLA all the more valuable. In the archive, I learned of a past of Lesbian historical erasure, and connected this legacy to the present day manifestations of Lesbian invisibility I saw in the Gay community of West Hollywood. I created connections between the neoliberal consumerist celebrations of Gay marriage to the “darkness” of the 1950s. Despite the narratives of progress with the legislation of Gay marriage, I did not see my own Lesbian identity reflected in the celebrations of the Supreme Court decision. My new archival understandings and experiences of Lesbian visibility and invisibility allowed me to reinterpret the temporal progress narratives of marriage. Although Lesbians in the 1950s were living in an

entirely different historical moment, I could trace the legacy of Nestle and Faderman's record of feeling invisible up to the present moment. I too "found no reference in the surrounding culture to Lesbian creations" (Nestle, 1979, p. 2). However, the archive provided me the framework to understand this absence as connected to Lesbians of the past, and as a call for archival resistance.

Attempting to locate the JMLA in the Gay neighborhood of West Hollywood was similar to the process of archival research. I knew generally where the JMLA was, but was not entirely sure how to locate it. I made strategic decisions to find the JMLA – ringing the buzzer, trying a different entrance, calling Angela – some of which yielded my intended result, but many of which did not. I similarly had to make strategic decisions within the archive to make use of my time there, to attempt to meet my research goals. At the outset, I did not know what I would find in the archive, how it would fit in to my preconceived ideas and theories of Lesbian archives, or support or contradict my findings from other archives. I made the methodological decision to use Angela as a guide to both the JMLA and its archival grain. I chose to ask questions about Lesbian communities, archival decisions, and the surrounding neighborhood. I asked for her help to identify collections on the JMLA and center letters. My choices led me to specific artifacts that were then included in my compiled archive of the trip. The JMLA and my own archive are generative and dynamic, constantly growing and changing. Archival meaning was made relationally and through my subjective understanding of the neighborhood, archivists, and artifacts of the JMLA.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives

On a warm April day in 2015, I traveled to the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) in the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York with six students and one Professor from the

course Radical Lesbian Thought. As the Teaching Assistant for the course, I had spent the semester with this group studying Lesbian herstories through the framework of archives, and this trip was the apex of our collective learning for the semester (Carden & Vaught, forthcoming). To schedule this trip I had communicated with volunteer archivists over email and phone, and spent hours navigating the LHA website. After coming to the realization that my phone call was more likely to be answered if I checked their calendar for their open hours, I was able to speak to an archivist to schedule our group trip. “Is it a mixed group?” she had asked. I paused, not knowing exactly what she meant. Were we a mixed group in terms of gender? Sexuality? I didn’t want to jeopardize the opportunity for our class to visit the archive, so I probed further. “Some volunteers don’t take mixed groups,” she stated, without clarifying what she meant by the term. I mumbled something about our course being named Radical Lesbian Thought and hoped that the LHA would accommodate all of us. Through this short phone call, the policies and procedures of the LHA were already a blur, and once again I was left with more questions than answers.

The LHA is located in the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York, a formerly Lesbian neighborhood. Similar to West Hollywood, many Lesbians have relocated. Park Slope is now largely inhabited by young, straight, White families, attracted by low crime rates and the neighborhood schools (Giesecking, 2013). These families were on display with their strollers and baby carriages, sitting at outdoor tables getting coffee and brunch as I attempted to navigate the Park Slope sidewalks. Park Slope certainly did not look or feel like a Lesbian neighborhood, as I had seen more people I read as Lesbian at the pit stop we had made for coffee on the highway. Although I was searching for the absent Lesbians in Park Slope, the other communities that had been and continue to be displaced remained invisible.

The LHA is one of the only remaining remnants of a previously Lesbian enclave. The infamous Dyke TV, one of the last Park Slope Lesbian establishments, closed in 2006 after their business lost financial viability (Cohen, 2006). For our research trip we had hoped to eat our meals at Lesbian restaurants. In preparation, I asked my friend, a Lesbian who had recently moved out of Park Slope, for recommendations. Although she provided me with upwards of a dozen good places to eat in the area, none were Lesbian owned or frequented. I searched online only to read rave reviews of a Lesbian bagel shop that had recently closed. I felt a deep sense of sadness reporting the news back to the rest of the class. While we were traveling by bus, car, and train to one of the largest collections of Lesbian herstory in the country, it was impossible for us to eat at a Lesbian establishment on our trip. Once again, the question: are we in the right place? rose to the top of my compiled archive. Feeling lost, invisible, and erased in the neighborhood of the LHA were feelings I recorded and reflected back to me through the artifacts and stories present inside the LHA.

Because the LHA raised money through grassroots donations to purchase the brownstone housing their collections, they have a more permanent spot in this neighborhood than the individuals, business, and families who have been displaced by rising rent prices (“History and mission,” 2015). I was repeatedly reminded on my tour through the LHA, looking through newsletters and other artifacts about the LHA, and in my conversations with others about the LHA that they *own* their building. Significantly, the LHA does not accept donations from any organizations. In their principles, posted online, the LHA states: “Funding shall be sought from within the communities the Archives serves, rather than from outside sources” (“History and mission,” 2015). This was described, on our LHA tour, as a decision to locate control of the archives within Lesbian communities.

The LHA building is a simultaneous reminder of both presence and absence. It is a record of the Lesbians who used to live in Park Slope and now live elsewhere, as well as the families and individuals the LHA displaced. In the LHA, I found information about how the brownstone was purchased: the obstacles they faced from their lender and the astonishingly short time it took to pay off the mortgage. However, I could not find any archived information on who lived in this building before the LHA. I wondered, who has been excluded even from the preserved herstory of Lesbian erasure? While the brownstone is a reminder of the Lesbians formerly of Park Slope, it is also a record of the previous tenants of the building and neighborhood who were also displaced *and* not recorded in the legacy of the LHA building and project.

After lunch at a delicious, but non-Lesbian owned Thai restaurant, we stepped through the doors to the LHA's brownstone and into the purple living room bursting with books by and about Lesbians. Deborah Edel, one of the co-founders, welcomed us and gave us a tour of the archives. Unlike the archivist I scheduled the tour with on the phone, Deb did not ask about the mixed-ness of our group or inquire into our identities. As their principles state, she required of us "no academic, political, or sexual credentials" ("History and mission," 2015). Although she did not ask us if we were Lesbians, she did speak to us with an understanding of a shared commitment to Lesbian herstories and cultures. Similar to my experience at the JMLA, I understood my Lesbian identity to be assumed within the space of the LHA without being explicitly stated.

Our tour group included Lesbians in their early twenties to mid-seventies. Deb, the oldest out Lesbian I had ever met, co-founded the LHA "so that future generations of Lesbians will have ready access to materials relevant to their lives" (Edel, Nestle, Schwarz, Penelope, & Itnyre, 1979). This tour was a moment, which Deb had likely experienced hundreds of times,

where a once unknown future generation arrived at her doorstep, ready to learn from her and the artifacts she and her cohort had painstakingly solicited, catalogued, and preserved. For me, as the future generation however, this remained a novel experience. Through the tour, Deb included us as all in the ongoing project of the LHA.

Before I stepped foot in the LHA, I had already begun the research process and the information I gathered on the LHA informed my experience at their physical site. Through their digitized artifacts and publicized policies I had identified some of the key figures of the LHA, including Deb Edel and Joan Nestle, two women who were there from the beginning. Before Deb met us in the purple living room, I felt I knew her, and I made meaning of the LHA within the context of my understanding of her and her cohort. I had seen her name, picture, and read her writing online. Meeting her, I came face to face with someone I felt I knew. It seemed that everywhere I turned was another indication of Deb's prolific contribution to the LHA. The commendation from the city of New York Comptroller in the kitchen, the black and white pictures of her in the first floor hallway, candid shots of her with Joan Nestle and Mabel Hampton. Meeting Deb was a moment where herstory came to life. She had taken on the quality of a celebrity and I was star struck.

I had identified and recognized Deb by reading along the archival grain of the LHA, and was lucky enough to meet her. Not only was Deb a celebrity in my eyes, but she was the ideal archival guide. I focused on her calming voice as I became overwhelmed taking in the sheer volume of artifacts and ephemera in the LHA. I was more confident by the second that I could never see everything in the LHA. However, Deb used to live in the same apartment as the LHA in their early days and has remained closely involved. I trusted her intimate, first-hand knowledge of LHA herstory and the contents of the collections. I followed her as she gave us a

tour through the brownstone, learning the herstory and organizational logics of the LHA, and keeping my ears open for directions to the archival grain.

After our introduction to the first floor library, filing cabinets, photography collection, and the working kitchen with a questionably working photocopier, we walked upstairs to a room filled with newsletters, a closet holding old military uniforms and t-shirts with Lesbian puns, and a bathroom packed with ephemera. Together, we entered a room with a wooden table ringed by filing cabinets and boxes. We circled around the table, and watched as Deb opened a filing cabinet drawer and pulled out a manila file folder. “This is one of my favorite collections,” she said. Before reading us a letter from the collection, she told us the story of how it came to be housed at the LHA.

The tale does not star Deb, but a friend, Bert Hansen, who was walking down a New York City street on trash day in the 1970s. He saw a pile of papers waiting to be picked up and taken away to a landfill or recycling center. He praised his good luck at finding filing folders that the LHA could reuse to catalog incoming collections. As he turned the folders inside out, emptying the papers headed for the trash onto the dirty sidewalk, he somehow realized that he was discarding love letters between two women. As it turned out, Bert had not only found folders for the LHA to repurpose, but also discovered artifacts of a Lesbian relationship. With the blessing of the LHA volunteer staff, Bert moved the personal documents from the street to be processed and stored at the LHA. As Joan Nestle once stated in a documentary film: “every Lesbian is worthy of inclusion in history. If you have the courage to touch another woman, then you are a very famous person” (Nestle in Carlomusto, Perez, Saalfield, & Thistlethwaite, 1994). The LHA indeed found these documents to be worthy of inclusion in herstory, and saved them

from destruction. The act of preserving both the documents, and the story of their discovery positioned them within the LHA's archival grain.

Deb picked up a copy of a letter from the collection that had been transcribed with a typewriter from the original floral cursive. The letter was sent to Eleanor Coit from a woman named Alice Brisbank, who worked with Eleanor at a New York YWCA. Eleanor had saved the 1920's note for the rest of her life, over half a decade, until someone had placed it, along with her other personal effects, to be picked up and taken to the trash. Deb read the letter aloud to us, her voice almost breaking, her emotions underlining the significance of this artifact (Cvetkovich, 2003). The letter began with a request from Alice: "This is a 'very quiet' letter, Eleanor dear, and you won't read it when you are dashing off somewhere in a hurry, will you – please" (Brisbank, 1920). Deb read on:

Best Beloved,

I'm writing by the light of the two tall candles on my desk, with the flaming chrysanthemums you arranged before me. It's such a lovely soft glow and I'm glad because this is a "candle-light" letter. I wish you could know what a wonderful person you are, Eleanor darling, and what joy your letter written last night gave me... You know I feel just terribly much the way you do about it all, but I never could say so, even in incoherent fashion, and so many times back of my nobler resolves I am just plain selfish about wanting you to "look at and talk to" especially in the future when I know you won't be there... (Brisbank, 1920).

The beautifully descriptive letter painted a clear picture of Alice's desk. I imagined her sitting at a desk at night, gazing at the chrysanthemums and the shadows they cast across her page as she composed the note to Eleanor. The feelings in this letter were almost as visible as the

flicker of the candle across the flowers. I too, had experienced the desire to look and talk to another woman. I too, had moments, sitting alone, where I attempted and failed to articulate my all-encompassing feelings of love. There was so much in this letter that was familiar, almost as if it was a mirror from the past, held up to my own life.

But just as I could see Alice's desk and feel her feelings, I could not see Alice. What did she look like? How did she understand these feelings? Did shame and secrecy accompany her desire to see Eleanor? Had she confided her thoughts to anyone else? What did she imagine for her future? Could she imagine herself living with Eleanor, or was she resigned to marrying a man? While this letter was at once familiar, it raised questions whose answers the archive did not contain. I filled away both the known and unknown in my own compiled archive.

After Deb concluded our tour, I found I could not yet say goodbye to Alice and Eleanor. I again trusted my Lesbian archival guide to lead me to the archival grain. This was one of Deb's favorite collections, out of all she had ever seen come through the doors to the LHA. Deb's relationship to the letter, and my respect of Deb as a Lesbian archivist, repositioned this love letter as representative of the entire project of Lesbian archives. Hoping to learn more about both Alice and Eleanor, and the significance of this collection, I sat down to look through the rest of the Coit collection.

Included in the same folder as Eleanor's personal papers and correspondence was a letter from Patricia King, the Director of Schlesinger Library, a Women's archive, at the time located at Radcliffe College, now a part of Harvard University. King had corresponded with Bert Hansen about the inclusion of Eleanor Coit's papers at Schlesinger. King wrote in her letter on institutional letterhead: "Obviously there are family who would be concerned about the contents of the letters. Probably they should be restricted so as to forbid the publication of any names"

(King, 1976). Deb told me that some of Eleanor Coit's personal papers were also archived at Smith College, her alma mater, but that all documents marked as Lesbian had been excluded. While Eleanor and Alice's understanding of their relationship and identities still remained a mystery, this folder preserved both Lesbian love and lives as well as their institutional suppression and censorship. The historical erasure of Eleanor's Lesbian relationship became an integral part of her herstory in this archival collection. I did not know why Eleanor's papers were placed on the sidewalk, or who in her life wanted them destroyed, but I did know that two institutions preserved and catalogued her collections under different organizing principles than the LHA.

Months after our trip, I found a reproduction of Alice's letter to Eleanor in the LHA's online archives. In their seventh newsletter, before printing the letter in its entirety, LHA archivists, including Deb, wrote:

The discovery [of the letter] became symbolic to us and we refer to the following letter as the gutter letter, emphasizing the reality that the documents testifying to our love are too often considered garbage, and are destroyed by dismissing or frightened families. (Nestle, Edel, & Schwarz, 1981, p. 8).

This letter, the most memorable moment of our LHA tour and my personal research at the LHA, again rose to the top of my compiled archive through its reproduction in this newsletter. The writing in this newsletter confirmed my methodological assumption that this letter represented ideas larger than its literal text. This letter was, and remains, symbolic of a primary Lesbian archival argument: Lesbian herstories are in danger. The story of this letter's almost destruction produced and reproduced knowledge of the vulnerability of Lesbian herstories and the importance of their preservation.

Locating this blurb in an LHA newsletter felt like an act of discovery, but it was actually a moment of recognition. It was an affirmation from the past that my experience in the archive was indeed meaningful, not only to me, Deb, and our tour group, but also to co-authors Joan Nestle, Judith Schwarz, and the other LHA archivists in 1981. This affective congruence reaffirmed my connection to the legacy of Lesbian archives. In my archive of the trip this letter rose to the top through Deb's presentation of the story of the collection's discovery, my affective feelings of recognition, the censorship by other archives, and the new significance given to my experience through the LHA newsletter.

Both the JMLA and the LHA contain artifacts that were retrieved from the brink of destruction. Herstorical erasure is made visible in Lesbian archives to accurately preserve the past, to record Lesbian life and love, and to document institutional oppression. The visible and the invisible live together, in the same neighborhood, archive, collection, and artifact. The relationship between what is present and absent, what was saved and what was not, preserves the powered forces acting upon Lesbian herstories and the archival resistance of Lesbian communities. These important documents, stories, and themes, made visible to me by my archival guides and repetition, include both presences and absences. As such, the archival grain of my compiled archive represents complex power structures that act upon and within Lesbian archives to produce and exchange knowledge.

Conclusion

Every archive I visited had some barrier to entry: moments where I had to double check the address, re-ring the buzzer, repeat my name over a weak connection, push on locked doors, or wait for them to be opened. With each archive, there was a moment where I looked up and

down the block searching for any sign of an archive and thought, how can there be an archive *here*? There were many times when it would have been easier to walk away, turn around, and go home. I got similarly lost down the twists and turns of digitized archives online, through confusing electronic finding guides and outdated websites. But, because I knew the archives existed, just as I knew my herstory existed, I did not give up. I rang the buzzer again, I waited to be let in, and I found those Lesbian archives, hidden in plain sight.

Once inside each archive, my search continued through mazes of boxes and folders. Armed with finding aids I often did not understand and circumventing confusing or inconsistently informed policies, I struggled to navigate each and every archive. I searched for herstories I was told existed only there. I turned to archivists to guide me through the past, to teach me to make sense of the archive. I hoped to stumble upon artifacts whose value I recognized, but often I could not fully comprehend their significance. It was only in hindsight, looking backwards and armed with relational significance, that I began to piece together the herstory I was simultaneously uncovering and creating.

My methodology of compiling my own archive, and reading along its archival grain, illuminated the multiple forces simultaneously acting on my discovery and creation of Lesbian knowledge and herstory. This process identifies the salient knowledge-producing features of an archive. So while I collected data to analyze power and knowledge production in Lesbian archives, I also recorded my own unique and singular experience in Lesbian archives. This methodology, therefore, situates the researcher as part of the archive they are studying. Just like the archives I was not able to digest in their entirety, my own compiled archive is also continuous and ongoing. This paper both outlines a methodological model for archival research

as well as contributes to the project of Lesbian archives as manifestation of communal Lesbian resistance to historical erasure.

References

Introduction

Stoler, A. L. (2002). Colonial archives and the arts of governance. *Archival Sciences*, 2, 87 – 109.

Chapter One

Britzman, D. P. (2000). Precocious education. In S. Talburt & S. R. Steinberg (Eds.), *Thinking queer: Sexuality, culture, and education* (pp. 33 – 59). New York, NY: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers.

Britzman, D. P. (2012). Queer pedagogy and its strange techniques. In E. R. Meiners & T. Quinn (Eds.), *Sexualities in education: A reader* (pp. 292 – 308). New York, NY: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers.

Carden, K. (2016). Locating the Lesbian archival grain: Methodological considerations of knowledge production. (Master's thesis).

Cvetkovich, A. (2003). *An archive of feelings: Trauma, sexuality, and Lesbian public cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books.

Derrida, J. (1995). Archive fever: A Freudian impression. *Diacritics*, 25(2), 9–63.

Edel, D., Nestle, J., Schwarz, J., Penelope, J., & Itnyre, V. (1979, Spring). Statement of purpose. *Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter*, (5), 1.

Foucault, M. (1982). *The archaeology of knowledge*. (A. M. Sheridan, Trans.). New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (M. B. Ramos, Trans.) (30th anniversary ed.). New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.

Fritzsche, P. (2005). The archive. *History & Memory*, 17(1), 15–44.

- Gopinath, G. (2010). Archive, affect and the everyday: Queer diasporic re-visions. In J. Staiger & A. Cvetkovich (Eds.), *Political emotions* (pp. 165 – 192). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Halberstam, J. (2005). *In a queer time and place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives*. New York, NY: The NYU Press.
- Hansberry Nemiroff, L. (1957). Anonymous letter. *The Ladder*, 1(8), 26 – 28.
- History and mission. (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/history.html>
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Loftin, C. M. (Ed.). (2012). *Letters to ONE: Gay and Lesbian voices from the 1950s and 1960s*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Lorde, A. (1990). I am your sister: Black women organizing across sexualities. In G. Anzaldúa (Ed.), *Making face, making soul/Haciendo caras: Creative and critical perspectives by feminists of Color* (1st ed., pp. 321 – 325). San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books.
- Lorde, A. (2007). An open letter to Mary Daly. In *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches* (Reprint ed., pp. 66 – 71). Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press.
- McLaren, P. (2008). Critical pedagogy: A look at the major concepts. In A. Darder, M. P. Baltodano, & R. D. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (2nd ed., pp. 61 - 83). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Stoler, A. L. (2002). Colonial archives and the arts of governance. *Archival Sciences*, 2, 87 – 109.

Chapter Two

- Brisbank, A. (1920, c). *Untitled letter*. [Letter from Alice Brisbank to Eleanor Coit]. Eleanor Coit Subject File. Lesbian Herstory Archives, New York, NY.

- Carden, K. R. & Vaught, S. E. (forthcoming). A critical archival pedagogy: The Lesbian Herstory Archives and a course in Radical Lesbian Thought. *Radical Teacher*.
- Carlomusto, J., Perez, D., Saalfeld, C., & Thistlethwaite, P. (1994). *Not just passing through*.
- Cohen, A. (2006, September 30). Lesbians moving out of “Dyke Slope.” Retrieved July 30, 2015, from http://www.brooklynpaper.com/stories/29/38/29_38lesbians.html
- Cvetkovich, A. (2003). *An archive of feelings: Trauma, sexuality, and Lesbian public cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1995). Archive fever: A Freudian impression. *Diacritics*, 25(2), 9–63.
- Dugan, L. (1986). History’s Gay ghetto: The contradictions of growth in Lesbian and Gay history. In R. Rosenzweig, S. P. Benson, & S. Brier (Eds.), *Presenting the past: Essays on history and the public* (pp. 281 – 290). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Edel, D., Nestle, J., Schwarz, J., Penelope, J., & Itnyre, V. (1979, Spring). Statement of purpose. *Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter*, (5), 1.
- Eichhorn, K. (2014). *The archival turn in feminism: Outrage in order*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Faderman, L. (n.d.). A letter from Lillian Faderman. Retrieved June 30, 2015 from <http://www.mazerlesbianarchives.org/about-us/a-letter-from-lillian-faderman/>
- Giesecking, J. J. (2013). Queering the meaning of “neighbourhood”: Reinterpreting the Lesbian-Queer experience of Park Slope, Brooklyn, 1983- 2008. In Y. Taylor & Mi. Addison (Eds.), *Queer presences and absences* (pp. 178 – 200). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Giesecking, J. J. (2015). Useful in/stability: The dialectical production of the social and spatial Lesbian Herstory Archives. *Radical History Review*, 2015(122), 25–37.

- Gumbs, A. P. (2014). Preface: Time capsule to the unforgettable. In C. Clarke, *Living as a Lesbian* (pp. 13 – 17). New York, NY: A Midsummer Night's Press.
- History and mission. (2015). Retrieved June 30, 2015 from <http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/history.html>
- King, P. (1976, September 9). *Untitled letter*. [Letter from Patricia King to Bert Hansen]. Eleanor Coit Subject File. Lesbian Herstory Archives, New York, NY.
- Klinger, A. (2005). Resources of Lesbian ethnographic research in the lavender archives. In J. Roberston (Ed.), *Same-sex cultures and sexualities: An anthropological reader* (pp. 73 – 88). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Kumbier, A. (2014). *Ephemeral material: Queering the archive*. Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books.
- McHugh, K. A., Johnson-Grau, B., & Sher, B. R. (Eds.). (2014). *The June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives: Making invisible histories visible, a resource guide to the collections*. Los Angeles, CA: The Regents of the University of California.
- McKinney, C. (2015). Body, sex, interface: Reckoning with images at the Lesbian Herstory Archives. *Radical History Review*, 2015(122), 115–128.
- Nestle, J. (1979, Spring). One woman's view. *Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter*, (5), 2.
- Nestle, J. (1981a, June). *Ending*. SFLG History Project (Box 1, Folder 9: Researching Lesbian History). GLBT Historical Society Archives, San Francisco, CA.
- Nestle, J. (1981b, December). Thinking about history. *Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter*, (7), 7.
- Nestle, J. (1990). The will to remember: The Lesbian Herstory Archives of New York. *Feminist Review*, (No. 34, Perverse Politics: Lesbian Issues), 86–94.

- Nestle, J., Edel, D., & Schwarz, J. (1981, December). The gutter letter. *Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter*, (7), 8.
- Newman, S. (2010). Sites of desire. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 64(25), 147 – 162.
- Newsletters. (2015). Retrieved June 30, 2015 from
<http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/newsletters.html>
- Schwemer, M. (1995). *Untitled letters*. [Thank you letters to donors to the June Mazer Lesbian Archives signed by treasurer Marcia Schwemer]. Mazer Correspondence 1995. June Mazer Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, CA.
- Stoler, A. L. (2002). Colonial archives and the arts of governance. *Archival Sciences*, 2, 87 – 109.
- Stoler, A. L. (2010). *Along the archival grain: Epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- The June Mazer Lesbian Archives. (2015). Retrieved June 30, 2015 from
<http://www.mazerlesbianarchives.org/>
- Wakimoto, D. K., Bruce, C., & Partridge, H. (2013). Archivist as activist: Lessons from three queer community archives in California. *Archival Science*, 13(4), 293–316.