

Trans Lives in Metadata in the Archive, Past and Future

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Chapter 1: History of Struggle in the Archive

Cataloging reform and metadata standards in a shifting political landscape have a long history, of occurring in times of both relative peace and great upheaval. Though in popular culture the library and archive is thought of as a quiet and peaceful place for reflection on history, they are quite frequently the sites of battles over how the people and events of the past and present are even named. As Sanford Berman wrote in the Introduction to **Radical Cataloging** “Libraries accept [Library of Congress] LC-like products and tools with an almost infantile faith that they’re really useful. In fact, they are frequently imperfect and dysfunctional.”

¹ Berman was referring to the ways in which the LC and major institutions like it, such as bodies deemed somewhat authoritative in their fields like the Smithsonian and other national archives or libraries, fail to recognize the need for subject headings such as “Culture Wars.” Political terms referring to cultural events, such as the Culture Wars, a term developed to describe the cultural conflict perceived by some members of American society between progressivism and conservatism in media. When it comes to the lives and histories of transgender people, arts, history and media, that relationship with categorization becomes significantly more fraught.

¹ Radical Cataloging, pg. 6

Institutional issues, such as an overly codified central authority to lack of information in larger institutions regarding trans issues with few internal or external voices being heeded regarding how they operate, and with a slow to move public and lack of expertise have left the vast majority of archives not devoted to trans materials without any sort of guidelines as to how they can more easily become better accommodating institutions for trans researchers, or more accurately identify and label existing media to allow for a history of trans people in society to surface and become accessible.

The question of queer access to libraries and library materials has been one that institutions have been wrestling with as the gay liberation movement began to gain momentum in the 1970s². At first this took the form of removing associations between “homosexuality” and “sexual perversion”³ representing a cultural shift away from seeing queer identity as a deviant sexuality and moral failure. However, in the question of queer liberation the trans community, which had been integral to being seen, seen as human and valid and in need of protection from state and private violence by other groups, and early organizing of the movement, was noticeably absent from any sort of larger cultural narrative. A narrative libraries and moving image holdings have a role in shaping, through the ways in which they present materials. In addition, through the listing of queer culture as just that, the lack of identification for heterosexuality implicitly still others queer identity⁴. The notion of a specified other requiring a separate category in the record implies that this other is distinct in some material way from what is considered normal within a society. This dynamic is replicated in the modern culture’s lack of awareness of the concept of

² The Joy of Cataloging, pg. 110

³ The Joy of Cataloging, pg. 110

⁴ Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs, pg. 65

cissexual identity.

To explore how archives and libraries must adapt to the needs of trans user bases and more accurately catalog the materials most relevant to trans history, a comparison to how archives and libraries responded to previous and ongoing civil rights efforts. In a time in which libraries, media, and reality itself is coming under attack by a new demagogic power in the United States, from the office of the presidency to a years long campaign by one of the major political parties to paint racial and radicalized hatred as a neutral response to people's existence, the role of the library as a defender of history, access, truth and knowledge must be further explored. As argued in **Questioning Library Neutrality** the issues at stake are deeper than simply how libraries and archives react on the surface level to the needs of endangered user bases. Rather, these institutions must consider their curatorial responsibilities in a dangerous and hostile environment. The best models we have at present are the ways in which libraries learned to remove offensive terminology regarding race and sex in their subject headings and catalogs, and the ways in which feminist movements have struggled to remove the ghettoization and stigmatization of women in any given field, while still attempting to make that specialized history searchable and available.

Identity, be it racial, sexual or otherwise, has been used more as a means of self categorization in community archives and specialty institutions⁵, in which the mission of the institution is limited enough to encompass a perceived class of people. A sort of "strategic essentialism"⁶ is used to define the class by a unifying feature, such as the use of the term South

⁵ Identity Palimpsests, Pg. 101

⁶ Identity Palimpsests, Pg. 40

Asian in the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), to unite a diverse groups of people. The whole of South Asians do not have identical experiences, for instance with the life of an immigrant from Pakistan being materially different from that of a third-generation Indonesian person. This difference is important to the individual, but smoothing over these differences allows for a sort of politicized unity, a shared identity that centralizes knowledge and creates a history within a new geopolitical context.

Specialty archives such as SAADA have developed a means of talking about such a broad categories, and so in these specialty institutions they are able to define their terms regarding both the broad categories and make room for specificity in their collections. But that becomes a more complicated proposition when encountering intersectional identities that may cross between the experiences associated with different groups. The trans experience, as it is stereotypically considered, is not often thought of in how it may intersect with the experiences of an Indonesian immigrant. Similarly, queer archives run primarily by people used to working within the cultural hegemony of white supremacist American society may not know how to approach complex issues of race and class in discussions of trans people. As the subject of this paper is primarily devoted to the treatment of trans individuals in the archival record, I will not be spending too much time on the ways in which racial discussions are often elided by queer institutions. However, the principle stands, that what is required between institutions is the generation of a better shared language, and more communication about the requirements of individual populations within archival records.

This sort of identity based archiving began in earnest in the 1970s⁷, a reaction to the

⁷ Radical Cataloging

monolithically white environment that had dictated administration of cultural institutions⁸ and the narrative that they cultivated. In a manner akin to post-colonialist self determination struggles, identity based archives seek to define history and selfhood in the language acceptable to their user base, not the terms or structures that may be standard within the hegemonic culture that surrounds them. Thus, there exists a responsibility for the larger institutions, the theoretical gatekeepers of culture and standard bearers for archival practices, to take note of the actions of smaller archives and institutions that cater to specific ethnic, cultural, or gender groups and to in turn alter their behavior to fall in line with these organizations. Rather than large institutions and the mainstreamed culture they represent expecting specialty institutions, and by extensions the populations they represent, to simply fall in line with the status quo, in a grim reproduction of the pressure to assimilate and deny cultural heritage within white American society, the heralds of the archival profession must adapt their standards to fit the behavior of the small and disenfranchised institutions.

Race, both as a social construct and a fact of life that materially affects the experiences of various populations in wildly divergent ways, in an American environment was and continues to be hypervisible, both to the benefit and detriment of activists working towards greater social justice along social lines. People working to remove racist ideas from the national dialogue may at times have a platform to speak on, given broad understanding of race and racism as things that exist within American society. However, this same familiarity breeds resentment in the people, primarily white or white-adjacent, who already harbor bigoted attitudes, or an inclination towards them, and so that platform is seen as evidence that racism is no longer a problem. This

⁸ Prejudices and Antipathies

leads those holding these ideas to dig in their heels, and resist change. Luckily, many cultural institutions charged with safeguarding history progressed a great deal from the days in which they would display Black people in zoos alongside animals⁹. This reluctance to slide back into that shameful area led to an opening in which activists could effect change in institutions, such as removing the language from use that would be offensive.

Initiatives such as the push towards greater sensitivity regarding treatment of First Nations peoples and their objects, film and video of their communities and ceremonies, such as the Association of Art Museum Directors Report on the Stewardship and Acquisition of Sacred Objects¹⁰. In this report, the Museum directors encourage the museological profession to go beyond what is legally required of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act¹¹, in the fair and just treatment of the materials of people already subjected to colonial occupation and oppression. The consensus in the field has become one of shame at the field's history of benefitting from the pillaging of occupied people's and cultures. As an extension of this same principle, populations that do not exist with a similarly restrictive and equally colonial gender binary should be treated with care, and materials relating to them understood, not to be sacred in the same sense, but as having meaning distinct from what museums, libraries, and archives may be used to dealing with in.

Women's rights movements also parallel the work of racial justice activists, in their attempts to remove specific and harmful terms and ideologies from the commonly accepted archival terms. Whether or not this actually undermines patriarchy and oppressive ideologies, the

⁹ The Man Who Was Caged In A Zoo, The Guardian

¹⁰ Association of Art Museum Directors Report on the Stewardship and Acquisition of Sacred Objects

¹¹ Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, <https://www.nps.gov/archeology/tools/laws/nagpra.htm>

goal of some feminist movements with library professions and associated works was to move away from terms such as “women scientists” allowing women to simply be classified by their professions.

The effect of this is that women’s history becomes part of the mainstream conversation, no longer a specialty subject. Women, of all races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, become folded into a national and universal dialogue, a part of the wider discussion of achievement and regret and loss and success as any other group. The problem this potentially poses for people, either researchers or the public at large, is that this same fusion of histories may render that specific set of histories buried. Hidden in the massive number of texts that characterize the verbose output of male and male oriented historians and historical figures.

The queer and trans struggle is similar in this way. There are conflicting impulses, to become a part of the mainstream conversation, and to remain a unique subculture(s) with a parallel history. Somehow, the library and archive must make room for both of these narratives. In a world such as this, in which marginalized people continue to be faced with dangerous and exclusive laws, cultural attitudes, and business practices, cultural institutions have a social responsibility to make it clear to mainstream society that these subcultures are a part of the human race, with dignity, histories and desires similar to anyone else’s. However, at the same time, these subcultures must be able to access their own history and form their own identities, and the institution should not obscure that process in an attempt to smooth over perceived complexities or differences for a more typical audience.

A more typical audience in an archive would depend a great deal not only on the sorts of

material they carry, but the ways in which the archive or cultural institution presents itself. As will be covered throughout this paper, the physical design of locations, and the ways in which archive spaces may be designed can and do send signals to users about whether a space is safe. An archive on history that largely displays objects and ephemera from the confederacy, regardless of its particular purpose, may signal to some degree that the physical location itself is unsafe psychologically, and quite possibly physically, to Black users. A similar principle holds true for historically offensive materials and any marginalized group. As such, even if an institution exists to provide evidence of great crimes and the horrors of the prejudice the objects it holds are symbolic of, if the space is not designed, and the objects not immediately contextualized within a particular political context, it may result in only users with little to lose psychologically or emotionally interacting with the holdings of the archive.

Metadata standards have historically had difficulty finding any sort of universally applicable form, that meets the needs of all institutions. Many smaller institutions that work with trans material use Dublin Core (DC), as it is a fairly simple and flexible standard. The work done by both the Digital Transgender Archive, the Pittsburgh Trans Oral History Project¹², and still more have used DC as a basis for their own metadata standards. DC, being a basic and flexible schema, lends itself well to institutions that have little use for the codified language of primarily cis institutions. Others rely on LC Subject Headings, and still other institutions, like the Lesbian Herstory Museum, use largely self-generated means of organizing material, such as organizing names not by last name but by first. These metadata standards are theoretically apolitical, a means of classifying and describing objects within a collection. But there is no such thing as an

¹² Harrison Apple, interviewed by Raanan Sarid-Segal on phone February 8, 2017

apolitical system. These standards all to some degree reflect an ideology and a set of priorities, both with regard to the materials and to the sorts of subjects the archivists, librarians, and administrators had considered. No system is endlessly flexible, and each have required significant overhauls over the years to keep up with the times.

Though in many ways the larger standards will always be behind the times. The fight to remove the term “illegal alien” from LoC Subject Headings was a long and arduous one¹³, reflecting the difficult, fraught and highly politicized atmosphere that some populations have to live in. Politicians even raised objections to the removal of the term “illegal alien” from the subject headings, an unusual breach of protocol on the part of the congressperson. This sort of micromanaging by administrative overreach and public pressure is highly unusual in the operation of libraries and speaks to how ideology leads individuals to object to library best practices, though usually inconsistently. Some people and groups have their lived experiences politicized and turned into props by political powers bent on stoking fears. This atmosphere of fear requires organized resistance in everyday life, and also requires the work of cultural institutions to amplify voices.

¹³ Library of Congress to stop using term ‘illegal alien, by Steve Padilla and Selene Rivera, LA Times

Chapter 2: Deconstruction of Terms, Sex, and the Basics of Categorization

Before a full accounting of current practices and deconstruction of terms can be done, some **basic** definitions and baselines must be established for the audience who may not be familiar with the terminology and issues facing or referring to trans people and issues. At the most **basic** level, most people aware of the term transgender, most commonly shortened to trans and sometimes stylized as trans*, have a rough idea of what it means. A person who, in some way shape or form, resists the categories of gender or sex assigned to them at birth, and may express their true self through either acts of social transgression, medical intervention, private practices and feelings, or any range of potential combinations or unnamed possibilities. The most **basic** definition is that of people who have a gender identity or expression that is different from their assigned sex¹⁴. This term's less known opposite, to refer to people who are not trans, is cisgender¹⁵, commonly stylized as cis. This term means that one's gender identity or performance aligns with that assigned to them at birth, and is deemed acceptable to society as a result. However, like so many aspects of trans life, even this most **basic** terminology is frequently misunderstood and misrepresented due to a widespread lack of education, empathetic effort, or

¹⁴ Social Work and Social Welfare: An Invitation, pg. 229

¹⁵ Multicultural Intricacies in Professional Counseling, pg. 59

even **basic** curiosity in cisgender society, across all institutions.

The issues the archival field will have to wrestle with regarding trans populations are multitudinous, but one of the most complex and potentially upsetting is also one of the most **basic**. This is the **basic** concept of sex and gender, and how an archive with what is supposed to be a semi-permanent record can deal with concepts such as these when sex, in truth, doesn't exist. This is a difficult topic for most cis people and even some trans people to understand, but at every level, every means of defining sex becomes inaccurate and full of inconsistencies. In order to create a true taxonomy of sexes, massive expansion of terms in use would be required, going well beyond male and female and including a whole host of overlapping terms that connote different experiences and facts.

But first, what does it mean when it is said that sex doesn't exist. Sex has, in the medicalized history of recent western society, been defined by a rather narrow set of physical parameters. These criteria have traditionally been the presence of certain organs and a perceived as normal path for development. Women as defined by the presence of a uterus, broadly using biological assumptions to justify hatred and legal restrictions, a la Aristotle's view of women and their rights within Ancient Greek society, building a theoretical structure in which sex is immutable and renders the individuals fundamentally different and unequal. With the discovery of genetics and chromosomes, this definition was seemingly bolstered by the concept of the sex chromosome¹⁶. The so called Sex Chromosome presented a possible answer to how sex characteristics are developed and thus allowed a scientific definition of sex not reliant on the presence of organs that may or may not be present in an individual for any number of reasons,

¹⁶ The Accessory Chromosome – Sex Determinant?

ranging from accident to birth defect. However, over time this cis-centric view of sex has been repeatedly challenged, with mainstream scientific definitions and their popular acceptance slowly being chipped away at¹⁷. Beyond the simple fact of the existence of atypical genetic formations such as XXY or XYY, over years of study it has become clear that chromosomes are relatively poor predictors of a person's identity or the development of secondary sex characteristics. Whether because of genetic abnormalities, unrelated health conditions, or even simple quirks of the body, a person's chromosomal makeup does relatively little to predict the way the body will produce or react to "sex" hormones, which are seemingly the greatest physical influence over the development of primary and secondary sexual characteristics. In addition to this, development of typical genitalia has a number of exceptions, where occurrences such as cis women with penis like organs are not wholly uncommon¹⁸, however offensive the terms in use in the modern scientific community are. Rarity is not an excuse for not considering this sex variance either. If for a definition to apply some percentage of the population must intentionally not be considered, then the definition is poor, not through the fault of the people not counted, but through the intentional actions of the dominant class and ideology. The issue we see present in resistance to breaking down social definitions of biological concepts and accepting sex as a more varied thing than simply a case of a male/female binary is indicative of an overall ideology of repressive force, in which people must fit into clear biological and, more to the point in a western Christian-dominant context, spiritual categories or become shunned and in some extreme cases exterminated. Their existence, our existence, is seen as a threat to the social order, and to the

¹⁷ Sex Redefined, <http://www.nature.com/news/sex-redefined-1.16943>

¹⁸ 46,XX Testicular Disorder of Sex Development, <https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/condition/46xx-testicular-disorder-of-sex-development>

identities of cis people who wish to continue seeing the world the way they always have.

Social definitions of sex and gender are even less stable throughout the long view of history, yet simultaneously rigid and violently enforced in each era that they exist in. The terms and signifiers of sex used at the beginning of the 20th century have little resemblance to what would now be considered masculine or feminine. Aside from superficial details such as colors associated with “masculine and feminine” values, there arise other shifts. In the history of human society, makeup was not seen as solely the domain of women¹⁹, rather men were also involved in the effort towards self beautification and body modification quite heavily. This division based on makeup usage gets even more complicated when figuring class into the equation. Simultaneous to the upheavals that occurred within the broadly defined category of western society, there have been a number of cultures that demanded behaviors from the sexes incompatible with the modern western vision. Both biological and social definitions of sex have proven unreliable. So the central issue arises, how are archives and libraries, given this information, going to react?

Firstly, an honest appraisal would seem to require that the only true means of identifying sex and gender of a subject is the self identification of the subject. As explored in the Journal article **Queering the Trans* Family Album**²⁰ from the journal **Radical History Review** a key concern to trans people when considering photographs of their physical form is maintaining a degree of control over the materials, allowing them to communicate that no matter how or what the actual image may display, there is a truth that remains outside of the frame, that points to the limits of the photograph as a means of capturing reality. Though moving images present different

¹⁹History of cosmetics, pg. 1

²⁰ Queering the Trans* Family Album

problems than the more static works of the photograph, the underlying concern remains the same.

How are archives to deal with trauma, a near universal experience that afflicts many in the trans community? Traumatic memories and experiences, from abusive upbringings, violent everyday encounters, or even simple traumatic alienation, are common among trans people and populations. This is not to pathologize the trans community, only to explain that the cultural milieu is one hostile to trans individuals. As such, objects representing the past in a way that can't be changed, a notion of an archive holding an unchanging collection of materials that would remain relatively stagnant, picturing the individual in ways they might find inaccurate at best, traumatizing at worst, would keep many trans people from trusting the archive with materials.

The archive must find a way to cope with this experience. What does a photograph really mean? Is it simply a chemical reaction on paper creating a representation of a physical form taken at a particular time? Or can it be said to capture a person, as they were at a point in history? If this is the case, then the status of trans people may complicate this notion. Trans people and gender theory have been attempting to communicate for years that to the trans person, to the alienated individual, the body is not the reality of life. The physical representation that a person has is not representative of the person they are.

Julia Serano, in her landmark book **Whipping Girl**²¹, described the trans experience as having a “subconscious sex” that is in conflict with what society tells you is your biological one. And that realizing your identity in part comes from recognizing that you are not the sum total of

²¹ Whipping Girl

your body. Rather, you are an individual with a more complex than typical relationship with the body, and must begin to navigate what it means to be human and yourself. The human being, in cis society, is so often defined in part by their body parts. At the Women's March on January 21st, 2017, signs held proclaimed "Pussy Grabs Back" a reference to then-Candidate, now President Trump's leaked bragging of his habitual behavior of serial sexual assault. Cis men discuss their worth as being related to the presence and size of their penises, with insults such as "this man has no dick" becoming centerpiece jokes in movies like *Ghostbusters*, *The Hangover 2*, *Archer*, and many more American comedies. Slogans saying "The Future is Female" and other such means of describing womanhood as intrinsically attached to biological organs become a staple of any discussion of gender. So a trans person must begin to realize that humanity and worth are not attached to the physical facts of one's body. However successfully society has made us feel about our bodies and our inability to be beautiful by cis standards, already unattainable to the vast majority of cis people, the truth of the matter is that trans people are not their physical representations. We do not have a male or female body, because such a thing does not exist. The body is as much a social construct as any other aspect of society. And through acceptance of this fact, moving image institutions and archives in general can come to understand that the body is not an effective or equitable means of identifying anyone, let alone trans people.

In **Archive Fever**, Jacques Derrida conceived of the archive as a form of cultural collective memory. Through the archive, a culture could know itself, make its history available. But simultaneously the archive had a role in shaping the culture's self image through selective

and judicious choices over what objects to feature and avenues to pursue. In most cases, this would mean a collective understanding of the work involved in creating and maintaining an archive would be a curation of experiences. How these are presented in a culture that has normalized the images represented is not comparable to the project of archives wishing to convey a counter-narrative.

Despite the seemingly only recent appearance of trans people and rights in the national dialogue, with dangerous and discriminatory new laws being proposed almost every day and murders of trans women of color happening with startling frequency,²² trans people have been existing in cultures of all sorts since the very start. As such, an archive that claims to objectively present the lives of people in a given culture must responsibly grow to accommodate narratives it has no experience with. The trans community requires a different approach to language that, much like the community itself, runs counter to culture narratives that may exist within the archive.

²² The Hill, <http://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/322923-transgender-bathroom-bill-reaches-texas-senate>

Chapter 3: Case Study of Institutions

Recent developments in technology and activism have led to the creation of accessible digital databases, in which researchers and interested parties can view materials held at a number of cultural heritage institutions specifically regarding trans people and content. However, despite the hard work on the part of all involved, and the thought that must go into remaining true to the content and its original context, there is an issue with language that has yet to be addressed.

Before examination of terms currently in use and their impact on user experience can be done however, some terms and basic issues must be addressed. However familiar the audience of this paper may be with trans issues and people, it is highly likely that the information is incomplete and still reflective of a binaristic worldview.

The Digital Transgender Archive represents a positive step forward in cataloging and presenting specifically trans history to the world, allowing anyone to browse a large collection of items held at over 20 colleges and Universities. On the site you can browse or search, finding activist history, home photographs, evidence of daily life, community meetings, magazines, and fetishistic pornography. And here we come to an issue. Though the terms in use in the search fields are historically accurate to the terms used in the materials, the sum effect of the simple appearance of these terms sparks confusion in the audience. A confusion that may be consistent

with the goals of inclusiveness to trans users of all ages and geographic and cultural origin, but results in search terms and collection descriptions that, regardless of whether or not the institution wishes to politicize language and the terms being used, are nevertheless political and capable of doing harm when perceived as normal by a cisgender user base visiting what is also a space not of contemporary trans theory, but rather a repository for the history of what transness has meant to people and populations throughout history, unbound by specific cultural or historical biases and worldviews.

Overview

The purpose of the Digital Transgender Archive (DTA) is to increase the accessibility of transgender history by providing an online hub for digitized historical materials, born-digital materials, and information on archival holdings throughout the world. Based in Worcester, Massachusetts at the [College of the Holy Cross](#), the DTA is an international collaboration among more than twenty colleges, universities, nonprofit organizations, and private collections. By digitally localizing a wide range of trans-related materials, the DTA expands access to trans history for academics and independent researchers alike in order to foster education and dialog concerning trans history.

The DTA uses the term **transgender** to refer to a broad and inclusive range of non-normative gender practices. We treat **transgender** as a practice rather than an identity category in order to bring together a *trans*-historical and *trans*-cultural collection of materials related to *trans*-ing gender. We collect materials from anywhere in the world with a focus on materials created before the year 2000.

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The most common term in use in the Digital Transgender Archive is the term “crossdressers,” used a total of 798 times, followed closely by “crossdressing,” used 723. While these terms are an important part of trans history, representing a stage of confused medicalization in the journey towards greater understanding of trans people in the United States, to a modern audience these are outdated terms. And to the trans youth of the day, who may be interested in their history, the term is confusing at best, insulting at worst.

“Crossdressing” as a term referring to trans people has its roots in the early days of

²³ Digital Transgender Archive, Overview

medicalized understandings of trans people. Along with the then trendy concept of transvestism, the mainstream medical and psychological bodies classified the act of wearing what they perceived as the “opposite sexes” clothing as an act of sexual perversion, or a paraphilia. This theory would go on to influence decades of destructive medical theories, such as the concept of “autogynephilia” that have been used to demonize and sexualize trans people, in particular trans women. So its use in a modern day archive of trans materials raises some questions.

In a modern context, “crossdressing” has a confused and uncertain definition. In the associated web pages explaining the mission statement and some basic terminology, the Digital Transgender Archive describes “crossdressing” as being used interchangeably with the term “female mimics” and “drag,” both terms with confusing and potentially dangerously misleading definitions in the modern setting²⁴. Crossdressers is a historically specific term, and its introduction in a depoliticized context available to all threatens to render it a legitimate term for all transgender individuals or performers of transness in the minds of a cis audience, though this view is not shared by all people involved in the field of archiving. Interviewing Assistant Professor KJ Rawson of the English Department at the College of the Holy Cross, Project Director of the Transgender Digital Archive²⁵, revealed that some users of the archive, who still use the term would find it disingenuous to politicize the term when they do not see it as political. While important not to center cis considerations in the mind of cis people, at the same time there must be contextualization for terms that can be seen as hurtful to present day trans people, and may contribute unintentionally to a culture of discrimination and recrimination based on their

²⁴ Topic: Crossdressers - Digital Transgender Archive Search Results

²⁵ KJ Rawson, interviewed by Raanan Sarid-Segal, on phone on April 3, 2017

gender expression. By this I mean that terms and ideas unfamiliar to cis users should be contextualized so that they learn not just through interacting with the materials but through the actions of the archive what words and ideas are acceptable to apply to trans people. This also has the effect of providing an environment for trans users where it is clear their needs are understood and respected.

Traditionally, the archive and library wish to preserve their own history of using offensive terminology, retaining those terms as part of the record. In the Library of Congress Subject headings the terms African-American still links back to the library's older, more shameful terminology. This provides a constant link to the past of the institution itself, and makes the older items still discoverable under the new term. The Library is thus no longer burdened with rewriting all their metadata, instead allowing the old and offensive terminology to become a vestigial holdover from the era of greater social injustice and institutionalized racism.

However, this becomes a more complex issue dealing with trans people. No individual likes to be dehumanized, to see the language of their oppressors and their victimizers in official text. It has a chilling effect on readers and researchers, nevermind the public at large. In addition, it lends a veneer of credibility to the bigots to see their language in official or authoritative records. But an argument can be made for the language's necessity at times. However, the cost to a trans individual is distinct. What characterizes a major axis of oppression and marginalization of trans individuals? The institutional and social unwillingness to let go of a formerly accepted identity.

Trans people are beset on all sides by a society that refuses to accept the past as an

unimportant detail, the way it is for so many trans individuals. Names assigned at birth are asked for on job applications for background checks. Lawmakers use the specter of our existence to make unnecessary laws surrounding our lives, on the presumption that somehow, a coercive act occurring at birth renders us a threat to children and women, when they have never cared for the safety of women and children in any other context. The archive, moving image or otherwise, carries a responsibility in this narrative, in its ability to shape how a culture views itself, and views the people who make it up. The bigots will never be convinced by facts and reason, they have long ceded that territory in favor of their toxic ideologies. However, the archive, through judicious curation, and a form of strategic forgetting, may make histories and lives understandable to the culture.

In archival best practices, there is a strongly held belief that deaccession and destruction of a record, or even the record of a record's existence, represents something of a betrayal of the profession and the object itself, perhaps even of history. While this strong belief in history has allowed for the protection of unsavory aspects of history and culture to survive, free from suppression by nationalistic political forces intent on whitewashing society and history, it also represents a problem for the categorization and respect towards people with flexible identities and histories.

Trans individuals, while not a monolith, often experience several similar means of oppression and ways of being made unsafe within a society. One of the most common acts of violence that exist against a trans person, endangering their employment, living situations, relationships, and even their physical safety and lives, is the disclosure of their status as trans to

third parties without their consent. The solution many trans individuals have found to this issue is the removal or outright destruction of all evidence pertaining to their previous body and life.

In a personal aside, how this has affected my life is emblematic of the struggles of many trans individuals. For years throughout my life, I experienced a discomfort with photographs of myself that remained inexplicable to my young mind. Why should I be so opposed to visual representation of my body, of being seen, when I, at the time, liked acting. As I grew this distaste for visual representations of the body that I was inhabiting became a constant fear. Upon realizing that I was not a man, that instead I was a woman with a trans experience of gender, I took it upon myself to never allow a photograph of my body until I felt the body I was inside of accurately represented my true self. This desire extended into a sincere wish to remove all previous photos of myself from existence. Photos friends had posted online were asked to be taken down, or at least I took it upon myself to hide them from search results when possible, removing any tagging information.

My story and experience is not unique. Trans people all over the world have struggled with attempting to control their own narrative and image in a world designed to make us hate ourselves and hide. What the archives can do, in their holdings, is allow for flexibility in how it classifies what is relevant information to a person's identity. Sometimes this will be as simple as striking all deadnames from the record, and using only chosen names, which can vary on context. For instance, I myself use different names at different times and in different circumstances. Some chosen to seem neutral and unthreatening, some chosen to project an identity i was not yet comfortable claiming as my own, some chosen in admiration of a person or work of art. Still

more have yet to materialize. How an archive documents that experience will be an enormous challenge, but it will be a necessary one, if the archive is to document anything at all claiming it is being responsible and true.

Other times, respecting a person's narrative may even mean destroying or altering records. Some people choose to get photos from their pre-transition life doctored to represent their true self more accurately. Still more will destroy evidence of a past life. An archive, especially one with unique audiovisual materials, may be loathe to destroy any part of its collection, no matter how great the hurt it causes. However, it is possible, and maybe necessary, for archives to make any access copy respectful to the needs of the persons pictured. This may mean introducing means of obscuring the body of the person into access works, such as blurring or glitch effects, or adding a commentary track correcting cases of misgendering and adding context. This may not be easy, or even within the consideration of the mainstream archival community, but they would be ways of helping trans people feel more comfortable entrusting their histories to cis institutions, and would allow for at the very least a lessening of the psychological and social damage that pretransition photos and moving images can cause in the present day.

This is not to pathologize the experiences of all trans people without their consent. This too would be a violation of their subjectivity, when the purpose of greater inclusivity is the understanding of the individual experience and respect for personhood of all individuals, of vastly different backgrounds and experiences. Rather than medicalizing or making assumptions about how a trans person in a home movie or similar object should be presented, great care must

be taken to try and conform to the wishes of the individual, if at all possible. If they are living and known, then permission and discussion should be a vital step in the process.

Attempting to establish identity for any dead or unknown figures has always been difficult. However, in order to be truly inclusive, some aspects of identification and discovery may need to be reworked. For this sake, the concept of sex distinctions in metadata existing at all without clear evidence that the individuals pictured in the work identify in the manner in which they appear. The violence of coercively assigning sex to infants should not be replicated in the archival process, to further enshrine a false gender binary. Sex and gender must be treated as aspects of an identity, rather than basic facts of a person's physiology and descriptions of their form.

Each trans person has their own journey, which may range from knowing from a young age their true self to discovering at any other point in life. Each person has their own language and path towards finding and revealing who they really are, and finding how they can make society, or at least a small circle within it, accept them and love them. Many trans people achieve this by killing the past. Birth names become deadnames, referring to a previously held social standing based upon assigned sex becomes an act of social violence, and appallingly commonly a precursor to physical violence. As such, this tie to the past in archival records has myriad consequences to the immediate mental health of any trans individual. Stumbling across invalidating language, even within a relatively safe space, can have significant repercussions on an individual's health, as spiralling self doubt and shame are kept at bay sometimes by only the flimsiest of barricades. While historically accurate, what a term like "crossdressers" being held

in common usage to refer to trans history invalidates the current lives of the people reading and accessing the materials.

But how then are archives to act? In some sense it would be irresponsible to label historical figures using terminology that they themselves would not be familiar with. Although Michelangelo²⁶, Walt Whitman²⁷, Inoue Masashige²⁸ and Alexander the Great²⁹ in all likelihood engaged in romantic relationships with men, they would be unfamiliar with the modern concept of being “gay.” So would it be fair to label them as such? Similarly, would the historical figure James Barry/Margaret Bulkley fit the modern definition of a trans, nonbinary, or gender nonconforming person? The archive must examine its biases in regards to the identities it assigns people who cannot be present to identify themselves. But at the same time, to fit all narratives into a simplistic hetero and cis normative worldview, eliding the existence of trans people throughout history, would be just as inappropriate as using a historically inaccurate term to refer to a historical figure. Context must be understood in each circumstance, and room must be made in the archival record for discussions of the stories we tell about world and cultural history.

Smaller archives and audiovisual archival institutions, specialized institutions with small funding sources and small user bases, that do not exist as research facilities, like the Pittsburgh Queer Oral History Project, comparatively take great care to respect and reflect the terms of the individuals represented in their materials, as disclosed to me in an interview with Harrison Apple, Ph.D Student at the University of Arizona and founding co-director of the Pittsburgh

²⁶ University of Illinois Springfield, Michelangelo

²⁷ University of Illinois Springfield, Walt Whitman

²⁸ Sexual Diversity in Asia, c. 600 - 1950, pg. 105

²⁹ An Atypical Affair, Alexander the Great, Hephaestion Amyntoros and the nature of their relationship

Queer History Project³⁰. The degree of engagement afforded by the “boutique” approach of such a small institution allows a greater degree of understanding between archives and trans population to arise, with the sort of respect for lives and identities and experiences that have rendered many trans individuals anxious regarding academia or organized archives and museums in the cis community. This intellectual disinterest, while at first glance merely a frustrating lack of empathy on the part of cis institutions, in fact reveals a complicity and subliminal approval of the social exclusion and marginalization of trans people.

This understanding and trust is facilitated by the fact that the materials do not exist for public consumption, and the institution is not thus equipped to package its materials in such a way that they would be searchable in a wide audience. Trans donors of materials, people who allow their lives to be documented by the Oral History Project do so knowing their lives and experiences will be treated with respect and care. This assurance does not, and will not exist at larger institutions without significant community outreach, image rehabilitation, and policy changes.

³⁰ Harrison Apple, interviewed by Raanan Sarid-Segal on phone February 8, 2017

Chapter 4: Future Steps for the Archives

What steps are archives to take to correct this massive misunderstanding of trans people and lives, while holding true to archival principles. And more specifically, how can moving image archives make their materials that may include trans people either pre transition, or any point after they begin to come out as their true selves, available for viewing without somehow violating principles of respect for the individual photographed within? What do trans people need archives to do to become places in which people can trust their materials will be handled with care, and users will feel safe in the first place.

Some of this is very **basic**, and is beyond the scope of **basic** operations of archival administration. Making sure that the archive, library, or institution has an inclusive bathroom policy, whether that means converting bathrooms to gender neutral facilities, or making it explicit that the building is understanding and accepting of trans people and their right to use public facilities for biological needs. Other things that archives can do is train their staffs to ask people their pronouns before misgendering someone, regardless of what they may look like. This is a **basic** step, and can become a simple part of any first time greeting. “Hello. How are you? My name is _ and my pronouns are _. What’s your name and what are your pronouns?” While this may feel uncomfortable and cumbersome at first to those not used to this practice, it will become more natural for both the staff and users with familiarity, and this brief discomfort of changed

routines on the part of cis staffers would certainly make the lives of some trans people a great deal easier. It places the burden of the coming out process less squarely in the realm of an unequal power balance, in which the trans individual must correct a mistaken individual and risk retribution or unwelcome attention, ranging from benign transphobia to violence.

However, the question of how archives and libraries are to deal with both the materials themselves and the metadata surrounding the materials is significantly more complicated. As discussed previously, sex terminology in the English language is woefully inadequate to describe the experiences and identities of trans people in the United States and abroad. Trans people, a broad group that includes people who adhere to a western notion of a gender binary and gender-neutral or non-conforming individuals will have different experiences. The archive must find a way of being general and specific in its terminology.

Introducing new elements into the work may be a solution to the problem of trans misrepresentation in visual media. The cis audience, trained to see the body as an expression or at least extension of the person, may not be able to be trusted with understanding how to interpret media that pictures trans people not possessing the sorts of bodies they would hope to have. As such, perhaps the archive must introduce elements into access copies of the work to obscure, or mark, the body as distinct. As a traumatic memory of the person involved, rather than a sober documentarian glimpse at a person's past.

Already something akin to this has been championed in **An Archive of Feelings**³¹ by Ann Centovich, a book which seeks to illustrate the issues surrounding archiving the experiences of being queer in America when so much of queer life is characterized by a sort of everyday and

³¹ An Archive of Feelings

constant trauma. A privilege surrounding how people respond to external stimuli and culture, even culture supposedly catering towards queer audiences, exists to favor the psychological security of straight people. “Does Boy’s Don’t Cry Make You Cry,” a chapter from the book, discusses specifically how cis positions of privilege in effect render the film *Boy’s Don’t Cry* a movie for cisgender audiences, not for trans people. The trauma of life as a trans person, knowing the increased likelihood of sexual assault and murder for one’s status if it should be disclosed or revealed to untrustworthy individuals, looms over every trans person in America. The archive, and media that archives deal with, must recognize that the ways in which they interact with materials related to trauma and privilege are not neutral just because they exist in archival settings. Trauma never leaves us, it haunts survivors forever, and even their descendants and people they associate with will feel the effects. As such, traumatic materials, or materials that may induce personal or specific traumas must be properly contextualized. For this, we can look to the academic field of Traumatic Realism.

Traumatic Realism refers to a school of study and cinema in which living with a trauma becomes an ever present fact of life, inescapable in society. It has its roots both in Holocaust studies and Palestinian cinema, referring to an ever present traumatic sense of the world, defined as “the presence and operation of an extreme and traumatic event in the quotidian continuum of everyday reality.”³² What this has to do with the lives of trans individuals is that trans people are inevitably affected by an alienating and oftentimes dangerous cultures. Trans people are responsible for defining themselves and their cultures largely by opposition to an intensely binaristic worldview, dictated to culture at large by seemingly every authority.

³² Traumatic Realism Review

In addition to this struggle there are more complicated concerns. Reina Gossett, Black trans activist who among other things made a copy of Marsha P. Johnson's speech "Y'all Better Quiet Down" available on her vimeo page^{33 34}. The video was taken down in a copyright claim by the Lesbian Herstory Archive on behalf of the Lesbians Organized for Video Experience (LOVE) Collection³⁵. In fact, nowhere in its mission statement or statement of principles does the Lesbian Herstory Archive clarify that it does view trans women equally as cis women, and will not discriminate based on experience of gender³⁶. This exact sort of passive erasure is the sort of behavior that endangers trans people, and their use of archives. Even as the Lesbian Herstory Archive claims to make its collections available to all lesbian women, regardless of their academic background, it fails to clarify that it does view trans lesbians as lesbians. Within a hegemonic trans exclusionary society, no term implying any degree of gender determinism can be safe from implications of discriminatory belief or intent. As such, institutions devoted to principles of fair and equal access must clarify language in their physical and digital spaces, so as not to scare away potential users in fear of retaliatory action by groups that they would hope were on their side. And archives that do demonstrate discriminatory intent based on spurious beliefs regarding transness should be seen as abusive and ostracized within archival communities.

Though the law is on the side of the LHA, their actions raise the issue of what it means to be respectful of trans people, issues and history. The video held by this institutions was taken by

³³ Reina Gossett, <https://twitter.com/reinagossett/status/854142738266181632>

³⁴ Reina Gossett, <https://twitter.com/reinagossett/status/854143360742838272>

³⁵ Lesbian Herstory Archive, <http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/tourcoll3.html>

³⁶ Lesbian Herstory Archive, <http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/history.html>

an exterminationist group of trans exclusionary lesbian activists. This raises the question of how archives deal with the materials in their collection that may document trans life that may come from sources devoted to the exclusion, repression or even murder of trans people, women most visibly. In the case of trans people's history, videos with repressive origins will not be uncommon. Radical access to materials that manage, by any means, to be supportive and instructive for trans users, must be a priority in instances where the origin may be a hateful organization or individual. Threats to trans lives are not solely cis men endangering women because of imagined threats to their masculinity and children's safety, but also Trans Exterminationist/Exclusionary Radical Feminism^{37 38} and its various offshoots. TERF ideologies, organizations and people have a remarkably strong hold on some sections of the queer and feminist world, and as such many works may be in archives with them as sources, as part of their supposed evidence of trans people's unnatural state, or any given means of invalidating and excluding trans people from any given narrative surrounding the rights of women, men and nonbinary individuals to exist, peacefully or otherwise, as any other cis person.

In addition to all this, increasingly archives and scholars will find that the respected and peer reviewed journals are not the spaces in which one will find the most informative understanding of trans or intersex issues. Mainstream medical organizations still openly support coercive so called corrective surgery for people born with ambiguous genitalia³⁹, and there are few, if any, trans people in academia with the clout to publish large bodies of work specifically

³⁷ TERF: Where the Term Comes From, <http://theterfs.com/2013/10/11/terf-where-the-term-comes-from/>

³⁸ SWerfs/Terfs, the Westboro Baptist Church of feminism.

<https://everydaywhorephobia.wordpress.com/2013/08/03/swerfsterfs-the-westboro-baptist-church-of-feminism/>

³⁹ Ambiguous Genitalia Treatment and Drugs,

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/ambiguous-genitalia/basics/treatment/con-20026345>

about trans experiences in everything from the medical fields to home life to recreation. So in order for archives, cultural institutions, and even academia to get a greater understanding of trans lives and needs, active research will have to be done. Finding spokespeople within the communities in the area of the institution, activists who will help guide and instruct. Finding the forums and communities online where trans people feel free to discuss themselves and their needs, with reasonable safety. Seeking out the literature that does exist, and privileging the works written by trans individuals over those written by cis people. All archives that seek to live up to the principle of equal access must recognize the failings of institutions nationwide to account for the needs of marginalized populations, and put in the effort immediately to correct this.

The archive, moving image or otherwise, serves a social function to empower people to know themselves and their present through the judicious presentation and availability of their pasts. In the case of trans people and experiences, this will mean significant changes in archival communities understanding of what can and should be done with materials of all sorts. Some proposed solutions may be anathema to traditionally trained archivists, but I would hope that this profession, that so cares about community outreach, activism, and caring for the narratives of underserved communities, will see this thesis not as a threat but a call to arms. As a rallying cry to come together, consult with trans activists, and make trans lives and struggles and joy and pain a central part of the archival effort, and will amend behavior and records where needed to become a more inclusive, progressive, and accepting profession.

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