

Archivist as activist: lessons from three queer community archives in California

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Abstract California is home to multiple queer community archives created by community members outside of government, academic, and public archives. These archives are maintained by the communities and are important spaces not only for the preservation of records, but also as safe spaces to study, gather, and learn about the communities' histories. This article describes the histories of three such queer community archives (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society Lavender Library, Archives, and Cultural Exchange of Sacramento, Inc.; and ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives) in order to discuss the role of activism in the community archives and implications for re-examining the role of activism to incorporate communities into the heart of archival professional work. By understanding the impetus for creating and maintaining queer community archives, archivists can use this knowledge to foster more reflective practices to be more inclusive in their archival practices through outreach, collaboration, and descriptive practices. This article extends our knowledge of community archives and provides evidence for the need to include communities in archival professional practice.

Keywords Archival activism · Archives · Community engagement · GLBT · LGBT · Queer community archives

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Introduction

Archivists have been activists within their communities for many years. This is especially true of the archivists who have created and worked in community archives created by queer communities in California. These vibrant spaces are maintained by committed archivists and volunteers who have collected and protected records that were unwanted by university, public, and government archives in the past (Brown 2011). This article first describes the histories of three queer community archives in California in order to discuss the role of the archivist as activist in the community archives. It then identifies the lessons that can be applied to archival practice to better serve communities through activism. Through understanding the reasons behind the creation and continued importance of queer community archives, archivists will be better positioned to take action to develop more inclusive places and be more reflective in their work.

The article begins with a review of the current literature discussing the evolution of the role of the archivist and the developing research on community archives, followed by a discussion of the methodology used in researching the archives. The next section covers an historical overview of the three queer community archives in California being used to further the talks about the archivist as activist: the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender (GLBT) Historical Society; the Lavender Library, Archives, and Cultural Exchange of Sacramento, Inc.; and the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives. Commonalities of the archives are then synthesised before concluding with a discussion of the lessons archivists can apply, especially in terms of activism and reflective practice.

Note on terminology

We use “queer” as the most inclusive, practical term for individuals who identify as non-heterosexual as do other authors writing about the queer communities (Stryker 2008). The term queer is more inclusive than acronyms such as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) or LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning), which leave out such self-identifications as intersex, asexual, and fluid. As Barriault and Sheffield (2009) noted, queer is an “umbrella word” and a “practical choice” to use for the many identities that are non-heteronormative. We acknowledge and understand that the usage of the term queer is not without controversy (Eaklor 2008); however, in order to be as inclusive and non-hierarchical as possible about designating identities, we use queer throughout the article.

We would also like to clarify our usage of the terms archives, communities, and community archives. While the term archives has many definitions (Pearce-Moses 2005), we use the term to refer to the places that house archival collections. We define communities in the manner of Jim Kepner, founder of the International Gay and Lesbian Archive: as a way to describe a group of people “partially joined to each other and distinguished from others” by characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes. Kepner also noted that these characteristics may vary within the group (ONE 2011.002 Brief chronology undated). We use the plural communities to emphasize the diversity of communities whose records are found within community

archives. Community archives are defined then as archives that have been created, maintained, and controlled by community members within their communities. As Stevens et al. (2010) noted, the defining characteristic of community archives is the involvement of members of the community whose records are in the archives in collecting and accessing their history “*on their own terms*” (p. 60, emphasis in original). The community archives which remain in the communities and not donated to other archives or organizations are sometimes also known as community-based archives (Stevens et al. 2010), while other community archives are housed within mainstream, formal, or other organizations not directly controlled by the communities (Flinn 2007).

Finally, we need to define activism. Activist practice in terms of archival work is, according to Flinn (2011), associated with challenging the status quo in order to end discrimination and enable “social transformation,” while an “active and activist approach” to the mission of the archival profession fosters engaging with outreach and “external activities” to all peoples to allow the archives to reflect diversity in society (p. 1). Archivist Verne Harris (2002) often writes about the power of the archivist and ability to use archival practice for social justice, which is inherently activist in nature. He has called for archivists to acknowledge, embrace, and include multiplicity of voices and competing narratives in the archives as we work to break down unfair power relations in the archives, which silence certain sectors of our communities. In this article, we use the term activism to define those practices which are used to challenge injustice and discrimination in order to create a more inclusive and just environment, both in archives and in wider society.

We will discuss more about the specifics of the archival collections housed with the community archives and what the implications from studying community archives have for the role of archivists and archival collections later in the article. First, however, we turn to discussing the associated and important discussion of the evolving role of the archivist and the increasing literature on community archives through the lens of activism.

Development of the activism in the archives

The concept of archivists as activists in the archives can be seen as a two-pronged development. First, there has been the evolution of the professional role of the archivist to include activism, in its many forms, for some archivists around the world. Second, there has been the development of the community archives, which are activist in their very nature. These archives can be seen as the convergence of activism and archival work which leads to the need to re-open questions like: what constitutes an archival collection, what is the mission of the archivist, and how can the profession include communities in the heart of their work?

Since the founding of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) in 1936, the identity of the archivist has been vigorously debated within the archival profession in the United States. Jimerson (2009) suggests that much of this debate stems from the fact that the Society of American Archivists grew and separated from the American Historical Association and archivists trying to define their identity as

separate from historians (p. 105). As Gilliland-Swetland (1991) noted, in the first half of the twentieth century, there was much debate over the place of the archives in society and there is still debate about the professional role of the archivist (p. 163). Now, however, the profession is experiencing a convergence of sorts; research on community archives and research on the role of the archivist may be seen as coming together when viewed through the lens of activism as it relates to archival work.

The conception of the role of the archivist has evolved throughout the history of the profession in the United States. Early archives pioneer Margaret Cross Norton, State Archivist of Illinois, advocated for the separation of the roles of the archivist from that of historians and librarians. Her writings focused on the need for archivists to be impartial keepers of records to ensure the accountability and evidentiary value of the records under the archivists' care (Gilliland-Swetland 1991; Norton 1945). The importance of evidence and accountability in the role of the archivist has been reiterated more recently by Richard Cox and Luciana Duranti (Cox 2011; Duranti 2000). Cox (2011) in particular has written clearly and strongly on the role and mission of the archival profession in the United States and his concerns over how others conceptualize these roles and missions. Cox (2011) cautions archivists to remember the importance of maintaining evidence in archival work and the importance of standards in determining who is considered an archivist. Others have also focused the profession's attention on the evolving role of the archivist. Archivists, such as Terry Cook (2011), Randall Jimerson (2011), and Verne Harris (2011), have challenged the profession to see the evolution of the role of the archivist to include activism and social justice work alongside the maintenance of the authentic evidence in the archives as part of the archival mission. Challenges to the neutral role of the archivist as concerned primarily with maintaining evidence have been traced to the changes wrought by the civil rights movements in the United States by Jimerson (2011) when calls came from outside the profession for a shift in perspective as well (Van Wingen and Bass 2008; Zinn 1977). These challenges and the growing focus on activism and communities within the profession and society have also become evident in changes to the education of archivists.

The increased call for emphasis on outreach, communities, and activism by some archivists can be seen to have influenced a growing number of graduate education programs in the United States, signaling, perhaps, a sustained shift toward the expansion of the role of the archivist. For example, there are courses offered at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Simmons College, and University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill that cover issues of diversity, outreach, and collective memory. Gilliland (2011) recently wrote about her experiences at UCLA incorporating social justice into the Department of Information Studies. Interestingly, the course came into being due to the interest from "minority students" within the department requesting a course to address issues of power, justice, and diversity in the information science fields (Gilliland 2011). White and Gilliland (2010) have reported on other schools, such as the University of Oklahoma School of Library and Information Studies, which are developing coursework focused on diversity and multiple voices in the archives. They further call for programs to reflect on and determine ways to "pluralize" archival education to create a "richer

educational environment” so that students are able to work with communities in a multiplicity of settings (White and Gilliland 2010, p. 244). Another example is Simmons College which offers courses in establishing archives and in collective memory, which serve to highlight issues of sustainability, outreach, funding, and the intersections of memory and archives (Simmons College 2012). UNC Chapel Hill also offers a course in access and outreach in “cultural heritage repositories” (School of Information and Library Science 2010). These examples show that some of the archival education programs in the United States are offering or beginning to offer courses aimed at a more activist role for the archivist through exposing students to a plurality of modes of understanding archives. Through this increased sensitivity and knowledge, students will be able to be reflective in their practice as archivists, which may lead some to be involved in issues of social justice and the archives which are activist in nature. These expanded educational offerings and more calls for expanding the role of the archivist to include activism have occurred alongside the growth in attention and literature on the community archives, which are activist by their very nature.

Community archives are the embodiment of activism in the archives and are expanding our understanding of the role and mission of archivists and archives. Studies of community archives have reinforced the fact that the documenting of histories by communities “is political and subversive” (Flinn and Stevens 2009, p. 3) and a challenge to other archives’ monopoly over representing history. By collecting records of communities which were not found in other archives, community archives physically proved that there were collecting gaps in other archives. The community archives challenged the limited histories able to be created when marginalized groups were left out of the historic record collected (Flinn 2010). In relation to this study, queer community archives collected materials because no one else was collecting these records and making them available, let alone writing histories on queer communities (Katz 1976). The research has emphasized that the communities’ creation of their archives were conscious, political acts, and important for representing the communities positively to the dominant cultural group in their country (Flinn and Stevens 2009; Hall 2005; X et al. 2009). Jeannette Bastian (2003) has also linked the need for archives to create and sustain community and national memories in her study of the Virgin Islands and the challenges suffered if communities do not have access to their records. Community archives are a way for communities to maintain their own records and memory as well as a way to combat the inevitable silences and gaps in other archives and repositories due to the lack of collecting certain groups’ records (Carter 2006, p. 216). Additionally Ricardo Punzalan (2009) found, like others (e.g., Brown and Davis-Brown 1998), that community members felt that having their documents in the archives made them more important and their history more meaningful. Harris (1998) also noted that communities play a key role in ensuring that national archives remain cognizant of community archives and the need to consider “community interests” (p. 37). The community archives challenge the profession to respect community knowledge and needs for archives as well as acknowledge the possible evolution of the role of the archivist as protector/keeper of archives to include that of guide/collaborator involved with the communities.

A subset of the research on community archives has focused on those archives created within the queer communities. Koskovich (2009), for example, provides an overview of the queer community archives in the United States in his article in *LGBTQ America Today*. Many themes that he noted, such as private collecting due to lack of institutional collecting, struggles for funding, and differences in archival models, have been corroborated by the research of other scholars including Barriault (2009), Brown (2011), Fullwood (2009), Meeker (1999), and Rawson (2009). As these studies show, there have been numerous archives created within the queer communities (Carmichael 2000) and the political activism of the communities no doubt accounts for the continued interest in and study of queer community archives (Marston 1998). The majority of published studies of queer community archives focus on the state of the archives presently (Stevens et al. 2010; X et al. 2009), although some do focus on the history of the archives (Barriault 2009; Brown 2011; Fullwood 2009) or on how the organization of the collections was determined (Lukenbill 1998). Most of the historical treatments comment on the difficulties faced by the individuals creating the archives and the importance of community support (Barriault 2009; Meeker 1999; Thistlethwaite 1998). Research into the contemporary archives and current situations reveals the same grassroots, activist attitudes, and desire to have control over their representations in archives (X et al. 2009). Often the studies noted how members of the queer communities distrusted other institutions, such as public libraries and academic archives, after seeing how their lives had been represented or, in some instances, completely omitted (Nestle 1990; Wolfe 1998).

While the literature on activism and communities in the archives is growing, there is still much research that needs to be completed. Increasing the body of research will strengthen our understanding of community archives, activism, and how research implications should influence the mission of the archival profession. A number of case studies and descriptive narratives on community archives have been completed (Bastian 2003; Punzalan 2009) and with each study, the generalizability, or rather the transferability (Stevens et al. 2010), of the results grows. As Stevens et al. (2010) noted, findings from qualitative work such as ethnographies and other qualitative works, like this study, are not considered generalizable. While the findings may be useful when transferred to other settings, they do not claim to be applicable to all instances or comprehensive of/able to account for all interactions. However, the great variety and diversity shown among the community archives necessitate greater study and understanding. The study related in the remainder of this article seeks to help fill in the gap in knowledge by adding to the research base on community archives and using this research to evolve the focus of the archival mission to incorporate activism and communities. Through adding to the research base, we will be able to start comparative studies and critical examinations of the community archives in relation to other types of archives. Critical studies also enable the profession to determine how best to assist community archivists and evaluate best practices that are just beginning to appear in the literature (Stevens et al. 2010). The rest of this article focuses on three community archives in California, and the lessons that can be learned from them in regard to incorporating activism and communities into archival work.

Methodology

The creation of community archives by members of queer communities changed the dynamic of private collections being the sole means of finding documents of queer history as people came together to make their collections publically available in centralized locations (Nestle 1990; Walker 1985). As noted by Brown (2011), there were multiple queer community archives that came into existence during and after the 1960s gay rights movements. Historians now use collections from community archives in addition to, or in place of, privately held collections when writing queer histories. Today these archives are vibrant, important places for the queer communities and for researchers in general. They embody the fruits of activism and communities working together to document their histories (Brown 2011).

This study combined archival research with oral history interviews in order to collect the information necessary to construct the histories of three queer community archives and analyze the findings to determine possible implications for the archives profession. Ethical clearance for this study was granted by Queensland University of Technology on April 11, 2010. This study focused on California as it is home to multiple queer community archives, and also because California is one of the epicenters in the queer rights movements. The three archives explored were: the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives in Los Angeles, the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, and the Lavender Library, Archives, and Cultural Exchange of Sacramento, Incorporated. The three archives were chosen because of their differences in geographical location throughout the state as well as differences in the length of time since their founding. The two urban community archives in Los Angeles and San Francisco, epicenters of queer rights movements, juxtapose interestingly with the archives in Sacramento. While Sacramento is the state capital and a city, it is more rural in nature and is California's political epicenter, but not as well known as Los Angeles or San Francisco for queer community-based organizations and activism. The diversity in longevity of the archives, ranging from the ONE Archives founded in 1952 to the GLBT Historical Society founded in 1985 to the Lavender Library founded in 1998, was also a factor in selecting these three archives. Requests for interviews with the archivists at each archives, along with long-time volunteers, were sent to each archives and interviews were conducted at the archives. The resulting seven interviews followed a semi-structured interview format. The interview guide covered: the interviewees' involvement with the archives and their background, the histories of the archives' creation, the current statuses of the archives, collection, processing, and descriptive policies and practices, and user communities (see Appendix A for interview guide). The community archivists and volunteers interviewed were: Loni Shibuyama and Joseph Hawkins from the ONE Archives; Korey Brunetti, Marjorie Bryer, and Rebekah Kim from the Historical Society; Ron Grantz and Buzz Haughton from the Lavender Library. The names of the interviewees are included due to the use of oral history methodology, which requires the naming of sources in order to verify and validate the research. All the interviewees were able to revise and edit the transcripts of their interviews before use in the study, as is standard practice (Yow 2005). Also, as noted by Stevens et al., acknowledging the interviewees by name enables the

researchers to “recognize publicly the contributions” made by these archivists and volunteers (2010, p. 63). Interviews were conducted between May 2010 and May 2011. The best practice guidelines of the Oral History Association in the United States and the Oral History Association of Australia were followed. In addition to the interviews, archival collections housed at the archives, as well as magazines and newspapers were consulted to construct the histories and current statuses of these archives following traditional archival research practices (Howell and Prevenier 2001).

ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives

Located in Los Angeles, ONE Archives is one of the largest queer community archives in the United States, if not the world. The ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives (ONE Archives) is the oldest of the three archives in this study and its predecessor organization was ONE, Incorporated. ONE, Inc. was founded in 1952 and was one of the first and most important homophile community organizations in Los Angeles. Created by former members of the Mattachine Society, the first mission of ONE, Inc. was to publish *ONE Magazine* (ONE 2011.001 ONE Magazine February 1953). Issues of *ONE Magazine* were impounded by the United States Postal Service which eventually led to the first time that a governmental agency had to declare that materials that discussed gay men were not inherently obscene (ONE 2011.001 ONE Magazine October 1953). This was an important victory for the nascent homophile movement, as it was known in the 1950s. However, the founders of ONE, Inc. were not content to limit their work and activism to the publishing of a magazine and quickly expanded the work of ONE, Inc. into education and created the ONE Institute (Shibuyama 2011b).

Due to its educational mission, ONE, Inc. unsurprisingly established at its founding a library and archives to support the research and work of its students and staff (ONE 2011.001 ONE Magazine 1955). The library and archives were virtually one and the same throughout the history of ONE, Inc. as staff members and then professional librarians were responsible for the growing collections. ONE, Inc. was one of the first educational institutes to award degrees in homophile studies. Its office, complete with a library (Shibuyama 2011b), was opened in 1953.

A turning point in the library’s history came in 1966 when ONE, Inc. appointed two part-time librarians. In October 1966, it was announced that Bill Baker was named “Honorary Librarian” and William Sutherland was named “Librarian in Residence” (ONE 2011.001 ONE Confidential 11.10 1966). Both men were educated librarians and began a systematic inventory of the library’s holdings. Sutherland also began offering “Library Workshops” in order to explain the library’s holdings to members (ONE 2011.001 ONE Confidential 11.10 1966). The collection also grew and by 1966 included 2,100 titles along with collections of archival materials (ONE 2011.001 ONE Confidential 11.8 1966). Under the guidance of Baker and Sutherland, the library was well on its way to becoming a professionally run and cataloged library. In 1969, ONE, Inc.’s library and archives expanded even further and warranted the creation of the division of libraries.

A position of Head Librarian was created and filled by William F. Baker. The Head Librarian was the executive officer of the entire division and also oversaw the branch libraries maintained in other cities (ONE 2011.001 ONE Letter 15 1976).

Created due to the lack of queer materials held in public libraries and academic archives, the ONE Archives has grown through donations and through mergers with other community archives such as the International Gay and Lesbian Archives in 1995. In order to understand the creation of the International Gay and Lesbian Archives (IGLA), the background of its creator, Jim Kepner, must be discussed. Kepner was one of the first members of ONE, Inc. and a prominent figure in the homophile movement in Los Angeles in the 1950s. Kepner began collecting materials because of what he described as his “packrat habit” and his concern over public libraries not collecting information on the gay community (ONE 2011.002 Archiving gay literature 1992). As with many community archives, Kepner’s personal collection eventually became the IGLA, demonstrating once again how personal collecting was vital to the saving of queer community history. Having cataloged his collection, in 1972, Kepner opened his personal archives to researchers, even though it was still located in his residence. In 1975, he named his collection the Western Gay Archives (Shibuyama 2011a), and then in 1979 changed the name to the National Gay Archives. At the same time, Kepner’s archives became Incorporated with a Board of Directors (Shibuyama 2011a). Ultimately, however, financial problems experienced by both IGLA and ONE convinced the two archives to merge in 1995, becoming the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, according to Shibuyama. Unfortunately, Jim Kepner died shortly after the merger on November 15, 1997, after an unsuccessful operation (Carmichael 1998). By the end of the 1990s, ONE, Inc. changed its focus from being primarily educational to a focus on its library and archives. However, the management of the archives by a professional archivist did not occur until very recently.

ONE Archives has continued to grow and continues to offer public programming. It has been successful in obtaining multiple grants which have supported making accessible much of its vast collections. Of particular importance were a National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) grant awarded in 2006 and a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant obtained in 2010. As Shibuyama said during her interview, these grants allowed ONE Archives to hire professional archivists who processed a large number of collections. Making its finding aids available via the Online Archive of California (OAC), ONE Archives has increased its visibility and accessibility to a far wider audience than at any time in its previous history. Its collections also reflect the diversity of the queer communities and underscore how much of the historic record would have been lost without many activists working to save these materials. These materials include: copies of newsletters from the Mattachine Society, the first homophile organization in the United States, copies of a Kirk/Spock slash fiction zine, collection of gay and lesbian television scripts, records from Southern California Rainbow Society of the Deaf, records from the Southern California Council on Religion and the Homophile, transcripts from the Alice Y. Hom Lesbian of Color Oral History Project, and papers of Harry Hay (founder of the Mattachine Society) and Reed Erickson (philanthropist

of ONE, Inc. and female-to-male (FTM¹) transgender/transsexual individual). Even though ONE Archives is the largest queer archives in North America, if not the world, it still has a very small staff. In October 2010, it became part of the University of Southern California Libraries system when it essentially donated itself to the university to secure its future and its ability to provide access to the archives for its community members.

GLBT Historical Society

Located in San Francisco, the GLBT Historical Society (Historical Society) was founded in 1985 through the tireless efforts of members of the Lesbian and Gay History Project, led by Willie Walker. The History Project was formed by community scholars in the late 1970s as a support group for their research into the history of homosexuality (Meeker 1999, p. 197). Project members included Alan Berube, Gayle Rubin, and Eric Garber (Walker 2003), some of whom were also active in creating the Historical Society. Walker (2003) was inspired to create this archives because there “just was nothing” being collected (p. 50). The Historical Society has always functioned as more than a traditional archives, serving also as a meeting space and a museum. From its beginnings as a periodical archives, it has grown into one of the largest queer community archives in California and now includes the GLBT History Museum in the Castro.

At the start of the 1990s, the Historical Society was well on its way to becoming an important organization within the queer communities. In the Spring/Summer 1991 newsletter, Walker highlighted the diversity of the archives’ collections which showed the “diversity among queers” (Walker 1991, p. 3). This diversity was due in large part to the mission of the Historical Society that Walker stated as being a “nonprofit voluntary organization” dedicated to preservation of records from the communities (Walker 1991, p. 5). Walker (2003) later lamented in his oral history interview with Terence Kissack that the Historical Society was still working on documenting the full range of diversity in the communities, as it proved difficult collecting materials documenting minority communities. However, the collections that the Historical Society has received over its history do demonstrate a wide range of the communities’ diversity. The Historical Society has the papers of Daughters of Bilitis founders, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, and records from FTM International, the Asian/Pacific AIDS Coalition, the San Francisco Women’s Building/Woman’s Center, and the Tavern Guild, among others. This focus on filling in the gaps in representing the diversity of the communities in the collections was noted by all three interviewees from the Historical Society as a continuing emphasis for its archival collection policy. The Historical Society also developed a relationship with the San Francisco Public Library’s James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center when it deposited a number of the most used collections at the center because it could provide better access to the collections (Mahaney 1997). Today, the Historical

¹ FTM is the initialism for female-to-male and denotes “the direction of gender crossing” (Stryker 2008, p. 21).

Society is assessing its relationship with the Hormel Center in order to figure out the best ways to partner in order to continue to protect and to provide access to the diverse histories of the communities in the Bay Area.

As managing archivist, Rebekah Kim, noted that the Historical Society has created a large body of archival collections that are processed and available to the community. Volunteer, Korey Brunetti, described the many public programs and exhibits that have been created which foster awareness and support for the Historical Society. The public programming and exhibits have been very important because, as Marjorie Bryer said in her interview, “It is a good tool to do outreach to not only to queer people but to the straight community as well. They recognize the humanity of the people they are dealing with.” The importance of the Historical Society in the lives of people who have subsequently donated their collections to the archives can be seen within the materials of the collections themselves. As Walker (2003) noted, many donors had whole runs of the Historical Society’s newsletter in their papers, demonstrating their connections to the Historical Society (p. 54). The history of the Historical Society is intertwined with the personal histories of the people who founded the archives and donated their papers. Its history demonstrates the importance of community involvement, continued vigilance to make sure that queer history and voices are not silenced, and the ongoing efforts to define the role of the archives.

The GLBT Historical Society continues to grow and remains active in San Francisco, including adding a museum to its list of activities. The GLBT History Museum opened in the Castro in San Francisco in 2011 and provides a large, permanent space for the exhibits based on records and objects found within the archives. Throughout its history, the GLBT Historical Society has had a focus on documenting not just the most powerful and visible people within the queer communities, but the ordinary and under-represented as well. The museum is another way of bringing these histories to the fore and educating the public as the Historical Society continues through the work of its dedicated staff and volunteers to preserve and make accessible the diversity of histories.

Lavender Library, Archives, and Cultural Exchange of Sacramento, Incorporated

The Lavender Library, Archives, and Cultural Exchange of Sacramento, Incorporated (Lavender Library) is the youngest of the three archives in this study and was founded in 1998. It is also the smallest of the three archives and is located in the capital of California. Completely run by volunteers, including professionally trained librarians and archivists, it was the brainchild of Gail Lang and as the lead cataloger, Buzz Haughton in his interview explained, “I think a lot of people who became active in the Lavender Library did it out of a sense of loyalty to Gail because we loved her so much.” Lang studied nursing and was an occupational therapist in New York before moving to California in 1979 and becoming an employee at the Open Book (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society 2006). She was instrumental in bringing people together to create the Lavender Library.

During the library's formative years, she was helped by Michael Bennett (Yannello 2003) and Kimberly Weer (Lavender Library 1999). Bennett's work was important in the formation and growth of the Lavender Library, especially in the early years, as he had been involved with the Roundtree Library while it was part of the Lambda Community Center (Roundtree [sic] Library 1998) and Weer was one of the first presidents of the Lavender Library's Board of Directors. Due to the passion of its founders, by the time of its opening, the Lavender Library already contained over a thousand books in addition to videotapes and periodicals. However, the volunteers were eager to grow its collection, especially in the area of out-of-print books and archival materials (Lavender Library 1999).

From the beginning, the Lavender Library was run by volunteers and continues to be run by volunteers and funded through grants, donations, and membership dues. At the time of its founding, membership levels were based on the rainbow flag used by queer community members as an emblem of pride, with each color indicating a different membership level. Today, the Lavender Library has two levels of membership dues and these dues, plus donations from other local organizations and the money from the trust fund that Lang bequeathed, comprise the totality of the funds of the Lavender Library as Buzz Haughton noted. The volunteers comprise the board and carry out all the work of the Lavender Library including cataloging of the collection, which falls mainly on Haughton, who is the lead cataloger. The Lavender Library, along with ONE Archives and GLBT Historical Society, participated in the creation of Catalog Q, the now-defunct union catalog of periodical holdings related to the queer communities, Haughton stated. While the Lavender Library has collected ephemera and archival collections since its founding, its archives program is a rather recent development.

Members of the community have donated archival materials to the Lavender Library since its founding in 1998, but it was not until 2005 that any processing was completed. Before a trained archivist began volunteering, Haughton admitted, the archival collections "had lain dormant because none of us had the archival background to make it real." The archives program was begun in 2005 when Ron Grantz began volunteering his archival expertise to the Lavender Library. Prior to joining the Lavender Library in 2005, Grantz worked for 9 years at the Detroit Public Library in the National Automotive History Collection until his retirement in 1994. As with the Lavender's lending library, the archives also operate on a shoestring budget or, as Grantz noted in his interview, "We don't really have a budget here. So if you need something, within reason, they'll order it. Many times we just chip in our own." Therefore, unlike the ONE Archive and the GLBT Historical Society, the Lavender Library has few collections processed, but like the other archives, it is working to have its collections reflect the diversity of the communities. As noted previously, the process of fully documenting the diversity within the communities is an ongoing process for the archives.

Like the library, the archives have also participated in collaborations with other institutions in documenting queer history. For example, Grantz noted that the Lavender Library was "a contact organization" for IMPACTSTORIES, a statewide oral history project with gay and lesbian Californians who were politically active from the 1960s to the 1980s. This project, unlike Catalog Q, is ongoing and the

intent is to donate the oral histories to a university in Southern California. This is just one example of the ongoing outreach and collaboration that enables the continued collection of important histories that may not otherwise be saved for future generations. Through this collecting of important histories, others may use them to support activism, showing past discrimination in order to fight for a more just future. These activities are only possible at the Lavender Library due to the dedication of its volunteers.

Commonalities and lessons for archival work

The three archives in this study began because pioneering individuals saw a lack of representation of their communities in archives and public libraries. This exclusion from the historical record by mainstream institutions signaled that queer history was not worth preserving. The creation of queer archives sought to redress this discrimination and ensure that their histories would not be lost to future generations. In this section, we discuss commonalities among the three queer community archives studied and suggest lessons from the findings that may be useful for archivists working outside of queer community archives to reflect on/consider and incorporate into their practice.

In preserving their own histories, queer community archives protected and made visible that which had been considered unmentionable by mainstream society. Like a physical representation of Queer Nation's slogan, "We're queer and we're here," the community archives marked a space for queer community members to come together and remember their past. As a result, community archives sponsor many forms of public programming related to issues surrounding identity and community pride. Haughton said that the Lavender Library provides meeting space for book groups such as "Eclectic? Trash?" and Shibuyama noted that the ONE Archives sponsors a regular lecture series in which writers, artists, lawyers, and others talk about their work in queer communities. ONE Archives also collaborates with Christopher Street West, an organization that coordinates the Gay Pride Street Parades in Los Angeles. As noted by Marjorie Bryer of the GLBT Historical Society, public programming, like exhibits, is very important means of outreach not only within queer communities but to the straight community as well. It provides a way, as noted in previous research by Kaplan (2000), to control public representations of communities and to present positive images to dominant society. This type of public programming is supported by the archival collections, which also reflect communities' interests.

Queer community archives collected materials deemed important by community members, regardless of format. This is similar in collecting scope to manuscript repositories as opposed to more traditionally defined archival collecting scopes in institutional archives (Cox 2005). And, as Flinn (2011) noted, this wide collecting of many types of materials is characterized by more "traditional archivists" as "not properly archival...and without any lasting value" (p. 6). However, these "ephemeral" materials are incredibly important for preserving and understanding queer histories. As a result, these archives preserved not only manuscripts and

records, but also zines, ephemera, and newspaper clippings (Walker 2003). For example, the GLBT Historical Society has a chair from Harvey Milk's camera shop and murals from the bathhouses in San Francisco as Kim showed at the archives during her interview, while the Lavender Library has vibrant art pieces created by local artists which line the walls of the reading room, and Hawkins stated in his interview that the ONE Archives has an art collection which numbers over 5,000 pieces. This rich diversity of materials is one of the overarching commonalities among the historical development of the archives and one of the reasons they are still relevant to today's researcher and community member.

One of the reasons that these three community archives continue to remain so relevant to their communities is the fact that they are historically dependent on donations from the community members and therefore the collections reflect each community's particular interests. Although the GLBT Historical Society's Friends group purchased a few collections for the archives, the vast majority of the collections in the three archives came from community donations. As Shibuyama noted, donations to the ONE Archives have increased over time, even though more archives are collecting queer materials. The GLBT Historical Society receives many inquiries from community members about the possibility of donating their materials and Kim spends a good portion of her time handling donation inquiries. The Lavender Library also depends almost entirely on donations for the expansion of its collections.

These queer community archives began out of necessity through the actions of individual activists and continue to be important places within the communities even though other archives now collect materials about and by the queer communities. At the same time, the GLBT Historical Society, ONE Archives, the Lavender Library developed community spaces that became known safe places to house records of lives so they would not be forgotten. These archives continue to function as community spaces for study and learning about the queer communities and enable the community members to have control over their own histories and memories. This was made possible by their dedicated founders who still inspire the staff and volunteers today.

Importance of personal connections

A historical commonality among the community archives studied is the significance of their founders in spearheading the archives' development. While ultimately many volunteers and professionals were required to sustain the archives, without the founders' vision and efforts, the archives would never have become a reality. This same characteristic was noted by Flinn et al. (2009) in their research on community archives in the United Kingdom. While the larger historical context of the queer rights movements was of vital importance for creating a favorable environment for activism, individual activists were responsible for the creation of the archives. As in all movements, including the queer community archives, without individuals who were motivated to create change, there would be no social movements or archives.

While many individuals held private collections of personal ephemera and records, individuals, such as Gail Lang, Jim Kepner, and Willie Walker, acted as

catalysts to bring people together to create the archives. Lang's influence on Lavender Library can still be seen today. For example, Haughton uses Lang's death date as a referent when determining the year Lavender Library moved into its current building. "I think it was about 2002 [that they moved into their current building]," he recalled, "I think she was here about 2 years before she died." It took a small group of people from the San Francisco Lesbian and Gay History Project led by Walker to bring others along in the vision of the GLBT Historical Society, and it took Kepner's constant crusading for the archives to help secure a place for the queer community archives in Los Angeles. It is important to remember that individuals created the collections that would become the basis for these archives and that personal connections drove community members to volunteer their time and money in support of their efforts.

Personal collections were created by individuals in order to save queer history materials and provide these records for future generations. Individuals were instrumental in gathering and indexing records of the queer communities and getting others to come together to create community spaces around the records. As the queer rights movements matured and as collections outgrew personal apartments and storage lockers, the queer community archives took shape. These archival projects united community members as they endeavored to preserve their records and craft collective representations of their pasts. Through these collections and the pioneering research in them by community members, the first queer histories were constructed and controlled by the communities and not by academics. These important archives created through their dedicated founders and cadres of volunteers offer evidence for the importance of activism in archival work. They reveal the needs for understanding communities, outreach to other community organizations, changing collecting policies, and more fully documenting diverse communities, people, and perspectives in archives. They also suggest it would be positive to incorporate more activism in the archives to fully document society.

Incorporating activism into archives work

Although as noted in the introduction to this article, the study's findings are contextual, archivists may find it useful to transfer or to translate the findings to their own archival practice in various forms of activism. While there has been a transition in thinking in the United States about the appropriate role for the archivist and the archives generally, this study's findings show that, by being activists, archivists have the opportunity to rectify silences in the archives created by previously limited collecting scopes, which marginalized some communities, such as queer communities. This finding supports previous research by Flinn (2010), Harris (2011), and Katz (1976), which showed the gaps in collecting by archivists outside of marginalized communities and a need for activism in archival practice to truly preserve and represent diversity in all archives. As noted by Katz (1976), Brown (2011), and the community archives volunteers interviewed, if the archives had not collected records of the queer communities, these records would have been lost. Therefore, only through being an activist and actively creating connections with community members and collecting records of groups who have been historically

marginalized can the archives reflect the diversity of society and actually begin to document the whole of the communities. Archivists are keepers of records, but this means much more than passively receiving and storing documents. Archivists need to shed the idea and stereotype that they are neutral, apolitical, and non-activist in their work. Instead, archivists have the opportunity to embrace their power to right historic imbalances in the archives and should be more mindful of how they describe and provide access to their different communities' records. As Harris (2011) noted, archivists who are concerned with preserving the diversity of voices in the archives, and not only the elite, must be activists in creating and collecting records. They must engage in oral history projects, or partner with oral historians, to fill in the documentary gaps in their collections for those groups who have not left written records. They must work with community members to respectfully describe archival collections in ways that are meaningful and appropriate for the communities represented in the archives (Huebner and Cooper 2007). By doing so, archivists will be able to create and maintain collections that are of deep significance and value to their communities (Allen et al. 2012). Furthermore, by relinquishing some of their tightly maintained control over the definition of archives and archival records, archivists will be able to work with community members to collect and describe the materials that are of importance to the group.

Professional organizations, such as the Society of American Archivists and especially LAGAR (the Lesbian and Gay Archives Roundtable), can play a role in promoting the archivist as activist and bridging the divide between mainstream archives and community archives. LAGAR has already created resources to help community archives learn about archival best practices (Lesbian and Gay Archives Roundtable 2012) and can extend the work so it has more visibility. While the information for community archives about basic processing is helpful for some, the archives discussed in this article all have professionally trained archivists managing the collections so this type of information is of lesser importance. Archives, such as the Lavender Library, would benefit from outreach by LAGAR for support and connection to the larger archival community. More advocacy to increase the visibility of the queer community archives within the archives profession and further bolster the role of activism and outreach in archival practice would greatly benefit the community archives and the profession.

Stevens et al. (2010) in their recent work on community archives and their relationships with other, mainstream archives uncovered five categories of interaction: “custody, collection, curation and dissemination, advice, and consultancy” (p. 63). They also identified that one of the key changes in the interactions between different types of archives is the recent practice of having donors remain active in the management and care of their collections if they decide to deposit in an archives that is not community based (Stevens et al. 2010). While in the past, professional archivists may have seen themselves as the “experts” graciously giving advice to the “amateur” community archivists, the community archivists are now seen as “sources of specialist knowledge” (Stevens et al. 2010, p. 68) by those professional archivists who have worked with community archivists and are receptive to new modes of practice.

Archives are incredibly important spaces for the preservation and validation of the past, but also for creating social spaces and safe places to study one's community as seen through the three queer community archives discussed in this article. As noted by the community archivists and volunteers in this study, the archives are special places for community members to come together to learn from each other and from the past. They are also important places to find information to challenge current discriminatory policies and legislation. As Bryer said, "It's just an essential part as passing a gay marriage law. You're not going to pass a gay marriage law unless you have a history that shows you that marriage has not always been one thing all the time." Community archives provide this evidence in the records they keep that allow for the ongoing subversion of the status quo through political activism.

Because of these many facets of the archives, this study suggests that the mission of the archives should be such that it is inclusive of all communities (Lukenbill 1998) and the various forms of records which are important to the communities. As Nesmith (2011) stated, archivists would do well to acknowledge that "societal well-being" is the "heart" of the archivists' mission and role (p. 46). By discarding the notion that archivists are neutral custodians and embracing the idea that archivists have power and influence over "societal well-being," the profession will be more relevant to society as a whole. Archivists can also adopt the various collaboration roles noted by Stevens et al. (2010) and begin evaluating which practices are most useful for supporting archival work in the communities. Of course, there are constraints on what forms of activism archivists can reasonably incorporate into their work (Perkin 2010); however, all archivists can become more knowledgeable about the communities whose collections they hold. Furthermore, all archivists can be reflective in their work leading to better descriptions of collections, even if collaborations or ongoing partnerships with the community archives are not possible.

Reflective practice in archival work

By embracing the ideas and theories behind the archivist as activist, the archives profession will also be able to continue to create a mindful, reflective practice that will be manifest in all archivists' work. Donald A. Schön (1983), in one of the seminal works on reflective practice, argued that a reflective practitioner would recognize that his/her work and knowledge is embedded within a "context of meaning" (p. 295). Furthermore, the reflective practitioner realizes that expertise is constructed, not a given constant, and always able to be reconstructed (Schön 1983). By understanding this construction of expertise, the practitioner is able to reflect on the different ways in which others may interact with the practitioner and his/her work. For an archivist, this means understanding that the archives is constructed and is able to be viewed from multiple, contradictory viewpoints. As seen in the examples of queer community archives in this study, community members constructed archives which provided context for their records and a way to share perspectives lacking in other archives that did not collect records of these communities. Therefore, the archivist must reflect on his/her work and, in

consultation with the users of the archives, construct archives and archival programs that reflect these multiple understandings and needs of the communities. As Cook (2011) argued, archivists need to be consciously reflective of their assumptions and choices that influence their archival work. Fostering a reflective practice will ensure that archivists are self-conscious about their decisions in what to collect and preserve in the archives. Archival education, as noted previously, is beginning to include courses which appear to help students reflect on their role and mission as archivists (White and Gilliland 2010), which can only help the archival profession grow in its ability to represent and to become relevant for more people. Furthermore, this reflective practice will shine through in all their work, but especially in the thoughtfulness of their descriptive practices.

Description is a very powerful controller of how communities and individuals are represented in the archives. In the past, the descriptive standards used have not been the most empowering for minorities, women, and queer communities (Berman 1971; Greenblatt 2011; Olson 2001). For example, Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) has been slow to adapt subject headings to reflect current terminology for describing materials related to queer communities. For example, “bisexuals” did not appear in LCSH until 1993 and “transgenderism” and “transgender people” were not authorized until 2007 (Greenblatt 2011). This lack of sensitivity to appropriate terminology led some archives, like the Lavender Library, to use alternative standards created specifically for archives and libraries which collect materials from and about queer communities. Archivists who ultimately choose what descriptive standards and practices are used in their archives and sanctioned by the profession as a whole have the power to insist that descriptive practices are reflective and meaningful to the communities whose documents reside in the archives and that the language used is appropriate to the communities. Being reflective about descriptive practices is also a way that all archivists can support the communities whose records are in the archives. It is a means of activism that may not be as immediately visible as a community-led exhibit, but is a powerful, lasting act of activism in the archives which ultimately benefits both the communities and the archives profession.

Archives are places of power over memory, history, and identity and the finding aids that allow people access to these archives are also infused with power through their ability to describe and categorize people and communities (Duff and Harris 2002; Olson 2001). If archivists understand the communities whose records they keep and work with the community members, then outdated descriptors would be unacceptable to the profession as a whole and more quickly discarded. Truly working with community members and community archivists is one way to ensure that descriptions and descriptive standards are created and used in ways that respectfully represent the communities (Shilton and Srinivasan 2007) and ensure that entrenched descriptive standards like Library of Congress Subject Headings continue to evolve and reflect the language used by the communities (Johnson 2007). After appraisal and collection of records from historically marginalized communities, description and access are at the heart of archivists’ work. By acknowledging past mistakes in not collecting and then not accurately representing marginalized groups, archivists can move forward creating archives that are

meaningful to their communities and developing practices that empower rather than recreate unfair power hierarchies. Furthermore, this shows respect for the communities and their archives.

Conclusions

This study's findings clearly show that being an activist enables an archivist to preserve histories of many communities. Only through being an activist and actively creating connections with community members and collecting records of groups who have been historically marginalized can the archives reflect the diversity of society and actually document the whole of the communities. Archivists are positioned to embrace their power to right historic imbalances in the archives and should be more mindful in how they describe and provide access to their different communities' records (Flinn et al. 2009; Stevens et al. 2010). Future research could expand the study of community archives to other geographical locations and other community groups to further enhance our understanding of these archives and the ways in which all archivists can work together to record, preserve, and make accessible the many histories that make up our societies.

Through new partnerships and bringing in new people through public programming and exhibitions, the community archives will be able to remain self-sustaining as the first and second generations of archivists and volunteers retire. Through increased visibility and bringing in younger community members and educating archivists about the community archives, these archives should continue to grow and allow more generations of community members and scholars to reap the benefits of learning from these unique collections, spaces, and people. The histories of community archives are stories of defiance, change, and activism. The community members defied mainstream society and declared that they and their records were worthy of being, of preserving, and of writing in histories. The queer community archives are places of great change as they struggle and sometimes thrive in their continued quest for being. These struggles, these histories, can and should inform our work as archivists and our relationships with the people who ultimately make up our archives.

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Appendix: Interview guide

Biographical information

- What is your name and age?
- Please tell me about yourself.

- Can you please tell me about how you came to work in this area? What interested you in the archives?

Involvement in community archives

- How did you come to be involved in the archives?
- How long have you been involved with the archives?
- When was this archives started?
- Why was the archives created?
- Why did the community start this archives instead of depositing materials in an institutional archives, such as at a university?
- How was the archives created? Who was first involved in the creation of the archives?
- How is the archives funded and staffed?
- What changes have you seen in the development of the archives?
- What kinds of materials does the archives collect?
- How do you decide what materials to add to the archives?
- What are the most important collections in the archives?
- What standards do you use in the description of the collections/creating of the finding aids?
- How did you decide on the format of the finding aids and the content of the description?
- What about the archives is important to you? To the community?
- How do you define the community that the archives serves?
- How does the community use the archives?
- What collections get used the most by the community members?
- How do you get the community involved in the archives?

Other community projects that relate to community history

- Have you been involved in any other community-based projects?
- Does the archives collaborate with other organizations on community-based projects?
- Do you know of any other projects or programs relating to the community's history and culture?

Other people/archives to contact

- Do you know of any other archives similar to your community's archives?
- If you were doing these interviews about the history of the community archives, who would you interview?
- Is there anything else that we did not cover that you would like to add?
- If a person knew nothing about the archives, what would you tell her/him?

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