

OF BEDROOMS AND BROOKLYN LIMESTONES: HOW ARCHIVAL ETHNOGRAPHY CAN HELP US MEASURE TRUST RELATIONSHIPS IN COMMUNITY ARCHIVES

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INTRODUCTION

- This research project seeks to stimulate discussions surrounding the potential of archival ethnography as a research design for investigating the trust relationships between custodians/users of community archives and professionally trained archivists working in traditional settings (e.g. government, university, and corporate).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the challenges and opportunities related to cultivating more trusting relationships between custodians of community archives and professionally trained archivists working in mainstream archival settings (e.g. government, corporate, university)?
- What factors might influence a community archive to maintain custody of its materials despite the potential or alleged benefits proffered by institutional partnerships? How can archival ethnography be employed to reveal these disjunctures or to challenge assumptions about the role of archival professionals in supporting community archives?

RESEARCH DESIGN

- Based on our review of the literature on community archives, we argue that the qualitative methods used in ‘archival ethnography’ can help us better understand the trust relationships between custodians of community archives and archivists working in mainstream institutions.
- Our research design is also informed by a grounded theory model of inquiry and analysis, which is based on an inductive mode of reasoning and entails an interactive relationship between data collection and analysis.

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| <p>contacted our archives for any information or if they would like to use our services. But as the archivist at the community archives, most of my time is spent collaborating with community members and seeing what types of materials the communities and feminist groups and activist groups or organizations are ready to either donate to the archives or are thinking of preservation strategies for their own materials and eventually build these kinds of relationships. So it's always an ongoing collaborative discussion that I am having with several communities in British Columbia. To talk about the kind of services we offer, what kind of group we are and how we can help collectively preserve a memory for feminist groups.</p> <p>Int: Would you say that your involvement with the community that relationship building is something that you do more as someone who works for a community archive than someone who work for an institutional archive?</p> | <p>Interaction with public</p> <p>Feminism</p> <p>Community collaboration</p> <p>Donations</p> <p>Preservation as physical</p> <p>Relationship-building</p> <p>British Columbia</p> <p>Preservation as link to collective memory</p> <p>Relationship building</p> |
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Fig. 1 Coded transcript of a pilot interview: coding interview transcripts results in the development of concepts, categories, and theories, which can provide an understanding of how community archives operate, who they are operating for, and why they exist.

THE BC GAY AND LESBIAN ARCHIVES

- The BC Gay and Lesbian Archives is the subject of a recent archival ethnography published in *Archival Science* by Danielle Cooper. Cooper immersed herself in the BC Gay and Lesbian Archives from June to August 2014, spending multiple days each week conducting research at the archives and observing its founder and curator, Ron Dutton. Cooper also conducted interviews with researchers and donors (269-71).
- Dutton contains most of the over 75,000 items in his collection in the guest bedroom of his two bedroom condo in Vancouver's West End (Cooper, 263). A retired librarian, Dutton takes great care to make his collection as professional as possible, maintaining a climate-controlled environment in the guest bedroom and draping a blanket over a purpose-built holder for posters to prevent the accumulation of dust (Cooper, 263 and 282). However, the BC Gay and Lesbian Archives is a one-person operation located in a private home, which means that some would-be donors view it as a personal collection rather than a full-fledged archives (Cooper, 285).
- Although the Simon Fraser University Archives has offered to acquire the materials in the BC Gay and Lesbian Archives, Dutton would like the collection to remain in the West End. He hopes that QMUNITY--the local queer resource centre--will eventually take custody of the collection (Cooper, 263).



Fig. 2 Ron Dutton in the guest bedroom of his West End condo where he maintains the over 75,000 items in his collection. Image used for research and educational purposes only. Retrieved from <https://www.biv.com/article/2016/7/pride-festival-celebrates-transformation-outsider/>

LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES

- Founded in 1974 in New York City by lesbian activists, the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) exemplifies the fierce desire for self-determination and community control typical of independent community archives. Now housed in a historic limestone building in Park Slope, Brooklyn, the LHA first began in the home of founding members Joan Nestle and Deborah Edel on 92nd Street in Manhattan (Nestle, 1998).
- The archive's mandate is "to gather and preserve records of lesbian lives and activities" in whatever format they may occur (Nestle, 1998). It is open to "all Lesbian women" regardless of race, class, or "academic, political, or sexual credentials" (Lesbian Herstory Archives, 2017.)

- Self-identified members of the lesbian community have used ethnographic and autoethnographic techniques like group interviews and participant observation to explore how the LHA has afforded the lesbian community valuable forms of self-knowledge throughout time (Giesecking, 2015).
- The LHA's Guiding Principles state that its collection must be housed in a lesbian community space with a live-in caretaker (Lesbian Herstory Archives, 2017). Staffing at the LHA is collective. New "archivettes" are taught how to organize, maintain, and share the collection by older volunteers (Smith-Cruz et al, 2016). The LHA does not accept governmental support, "believing that the society that ruled us out of history should never be relied upon to make it possible for us to exist" (Nestle, 1998).



Fig. 3 The second floor bathroom of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, which includes a screen door covered in buttons. Image used with permission from rights holder.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

These case studies illustrate the barriers and opportunities to fostering more trusting relationships between community archives and mainstream archival institutions. We propose that archival researchers can use ethnographic methods to measure trust relationships in these settings, hopefully leading to a more multi-faceted archival system.

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