answers. In some cases only the particular facts suggest particular solutions. At other times, general principles need to be applied. All the case studies and examples used are based on real, not hypothetical, situations. Archivists, like medical professionals, have a duty to keep confidences. In some instances, the details are generalized to protect confidential information. The goal is to involve archivists and curators in a discussion that may in time lead to a broader consensus on ethics than exists today. Our society, of course, is in flux, with a massive loss of confidence in many fundamental institutions. It is all the more important to build trusted archives, both for current policy making, and also as an intellectual life boat for the future. For that reason, one hopes that this discussion eventually also engages historians and the educated public in general, creating an awareness of how our shared memory is constructed. We need cultural bridges that hold up.

CHAPTER 1

# Codes of Ethics

*The archivist has a moral obligation to society.*

—Wayne C. Grover[1]

CODES OF ETHICS ARE LIVING DOCUMENTS, SUBJECT TO FREQUENT REVISIONS AND RETHINKING. The precepts of all ethical codes require frequent discussion and updating. As alluded to in the introduction, the very process of reformulating guidelines and analyzing the implications brings out many important points. Sometimes these lengthy dialogs have more substance than the rules that are eventually frozen into a text. Creating an environment where ethics are directly discussed on a regular basis has a positive effect regardless of the actual code put forward. The Dutch archivist and ethicist Eric Ketelaar compares a code of ethics to a tool that needs to be used and sharpened frequently to keep its edge, by means of ongoing discussions and debates.[2]

There have been many efforts to construct universal principles that apply to government archives, manuscript repositories, and private business as well as religious archives. These codes and statements of principles have not resulted in an iron-clad consensus. It would be a problem if there were no discussion. It is useful to compare the principles articulated in various codes and test their effectiveness in real-world case studies. In the

U.S., these discussions have a history going back more than half a century, and will no doubt continue into the foreseeable future.

In 1955, G. Philip Bauer, assistant to the director of archival management of the National Archives, published a rather stultifyingly factual piece entitled "Recruitment, Training, and Promotion in the National Archives," Bauer delineates the skills and training required for working as an archivist in the National Archives, embedded in the civil service system. In listing the elements of archival knowledge required for the GS-7 level, he supplements the six routine components with a less tangible seventh: "a proper attitude toward archives and archival responsibilities as measured by the standard expressed in the Archivist's Code." The code, widely known as the work of Wayne C. Grover, is simply identified as "Prepared for Use in the National Archives Inservice Training Program."[3] The legendary Grover, a founding member of the Society of American Archivists, served as Archivist of the United States from 1948 to 1965. At this point the word *ethics* is not included anywhere in his text, which Bauer describes as embodying a "proper attitude." Half a century later, after many attempts at defining archival ethics, the goal is still to develop professional judgment and a proper attitude toward archives.

Despite its source in the standardized civil service culture, reflecting its practical emphasis on creating a meritocracy with tests and measurable competence, the 1955 Code is nonetheless a luminous document that deserves to be read carefully by all practitioners, whether in the National Archives, records management, or a private manuscript repository. The opening sentence posits a "moral obligation to preserve evidence on how things actually happened." This precept clearly echoes the famous principle articulated in 1824 by Leopold von Ranke to show history as it actually happened ("wie es eigentlich gewesen") based on primary sources close to the events.

Grover had wide experience in managing military records in World War II and was influenced by the European traditions brought to Washington by another legendary figure, Ernst Posner. Grover credits Posner with providing Americans new to archives management with a broader perspective: "Our newly developing archival profession needed not merely

books on archival practices elsewhere, but a man who could talk to us about them in the light of what we ourselves were trying to do. In this sense Ernst Posner has always been to me and to others a walking Office of Education."[4] Posner's training in the Prussian archives was steeped in Ranke's anti-Hegelian inductive reasoning. History was reconstructed from the remaining shards, like ancient pottery. Archives were those shards. In the German context of the nineteenth century, this effort at scientific objectivity was tempered by Ranke's Lutheran moralism. His approach was scientific, but in the perceived "the hand of God." Prussian archivists were expected to be taciturn keepers of a trust. Such a sense of moralism is also refracted in the postwar American archival environment by Bauer's concept of a "proper attitude" and Grover's "moral obligation to society." The Archivist's Code evolved out of a need for a yardstick to measure this proper attitude and moral obligation.

The genius of Grover's Archivist's Code is that it combines a familiarity with ordinary, often tedious, work routines and an awareness of this larger, moral context. It is worth examining each of the principles. The 1955 text is no longer readily available in print, and the online version has small but important differences from the version published in the *American Archivist* after Bauer's article. The text is quoted below, followed by a few comments. The code itself reads with an almost psalmodic point-counterpoint, balancing the moral and pragmatic demands of the profession.

1.   The archivist has a moral obligation to society to preserve evidence on how things actually happened and to take every measure for the physical preservation of valuable records. On the other hand, he has an obligation not to commit funds to the housing and care of records that have no significance or lasting value.

*Comments:* Preservation of historical evidence in the Rankean sense is the first ethical imperative. Since storage can be expensive, the frugal archivist has to balance such a noble cause with unavoidable economic constraints.

2.   The archivist must realize that in selecting records for retention or disposal he acts as the agent of the future in determining

its heritage from the past. Therefore, insofar as his intellectual attainments, experience, and judgment permit, he must be ever conscious of the future's needs, making his decisions impartially without taint of ideological, political, or personal bias.

*Comments:* After preservation, selection is the next most crucial and elusive element of the job. This process must be performed with foresight and intuition about emerging fields of research that will require special sources at some future time. Forecasting research trends is an unavoidable requirement for successful selection. Another very different and rather weighty matter is the need to document all sides of an issue, not to preserve just the status quo. Even given that argument, the Archivist's Code is prescient for its time about the need for expanding the concept of collecting in an inclusive way, beyond the boundaries of an individual's personal bias.

This code is intended for employees of the National Archives, which acquires materials through legally mandated transfers from government agencies. For that reason, the entire complex of ethical quandaries surrounding the acquisition of papers by private repositories through purchase or private donation is not addressed.

3. The archivist must be watchful in protecting the integrity of records in his custody. He must guard them against defacement, alteration, or theft; he must protect them against physical damage by fire or excessive exposure to light, damp, and dryness, and he must take care to see that their evidentiary value is not impaired in the normal course of rehabilitation, arrangement, and use.

*Comments:* This paragraph, expanding on the moral obligation cited in the first paragraph, addresses three rather different threats to a collection: security lapses, lack of conservation treatments, and general carelessness. The papers must be protected against physical damage or loss as a result of use by readers or even by careless staff. Next the archivist is required to enforce environmental safeguards. The third threat occurs during processing and conservation when clues to provenance, such as old labels on

file folders and shipping containers, are often obliterated. Archives are evidence, and as such textual authenticity must be protected along with the physical artifact. None of these requirements are cheap. While they sound fairly innocuous and self-evident, these three provisions presuppose a substantial amount of funding, good housing, full staffing, and sophisticated management.

4. The archivist should endeavor to promote access to records to the fullest extent consistent with the public interest, but he should carefully observe any established policies restricting the use of records. Within the bounds of his budget and opportunities, he should work unremittingly for the increase and diffusion of knowledge, making his documentary holdings freely known to prospective users through published finding aids and personal consultation.

*Comments:* Here again the ideal confronts reality. As a profession, American archivists and librarians have traditionally promoted free and open access to information as one of the pillars of democratic society. Access is not simply a matter of opening a collection. Potential readers need to know the collection exists and have an idea of the contents to determine what is relevant to their work. This phase of access involves labor-intensive processing, indexing, publication and publicity. These same professionals are charged with enforcing restrictions and limitations on use as mandated by donors, governmental regulation, or the host institution. The 1955 Code does not address the reasons for restrictions such as privacy, protection of intellectual property, lawyer-client privilege, security classifications, etc.

5. The archivist should respond courteously and with a spirit of service to all proper requests, but he should not waste time responding in detail to frivolous or unreasonable inquiries. He should not place unnecessary obstacles in the way of those who would use the records, but rather should do whatever he can to spare their time and ease their work. Obviously, he should not idly discuss the work and findings of one searcher with another; but where

duplication of research effort is apparent, he may properly inform one searcher of the work of another.

*Comments:* Again there is point-counterpoint: The reference service should be helpful, but not waste time on frivolous requests. The reference archivists do not gossip about one reader to another one, but they should alert them to parallel research. The question is one of finding the right balance.

6.  The archivist should not profit from any commercial exploitation of the records in his custody, nor should he withhold from others any information he has gained as a result of his archival work in order to carry out private professional research. He should, however, take every legitimate advantage of his favored situation to develop his professional interests in historical or other research.

*Comments:* This paragraph contains several messages. The civil service ideal is for employees to share their special knowledge freely and live solely on their government salaries. Archivists acquire in the course of their work truly privileged inside information that can be invaluable to the researcher and save enormous time and frustration. Withholding such help or providing it selectively can trigger complaints. There is no explicit prohibition of private collecting, but the wording seems to discourage consulting or other outside pay for the knowledge acquired on the job. It does not directly address the matter of employees who buy and sell manuscripts on the side, a common problem in private repositories. While less prevalent, even government archivists find that insider theft is frequently motivated by private collecting and dealing by employees. A code that covers both private as well as government repositories needs to address this issue more explicitly. As for exploitation of the records for intellectual profit, it has often been seen as a conflict of interest for an archivist to publish based on this inside information in competition with outside researchers, and yet archivists are encouraged to develop their scholarly skills.

7.  The archivist should freely pass on to his professional colleagues the results of his own or his organization's research that add to the body of archival knowledge. Likewise, he should leave to his

successors a true account of the records in his custody and of their proper organization and arrangement.

*Comments:* The history of an archival collection is crucial to its significance. Again, this precept requires adequate funding, staffing, well-organized internal recordkeeping, and a system for passing accessible and comprehensible information from one generation of employees to another. In general, it is impossible to comply with any of these provisions without a well-designed organizational infrastructure.

Copies of the Archivist's Code "suitable for framing" were distributed and displayed where employees would benefit. It served, and still serves, as a brief, readable, and insightful guide for professional behavior. Propriety and morality were and are requirements for professionalism.

## The 1980 SAA Code of Ethics for Archivists

By the 1970s, the archival profession had expanded. The Society of American Archivists (SAA) had begun to formulate general procedures that created uniform standards for government archivists, records managers, and curators of private manuscript collections. There was a need to modernize the Archivist's Code to include this expanded definition of *archivist* and also to formulate issues in a less moralistic and more pragmatic approach. The SAA Ethics Committee, chaired by David Horn, was tasked with pulling together the text of an expanded, revised, and more up-to-date code, while still retaining that brief format that made for easy reading and wide dissemination. SAA Council approved the mandate for the committee in December 1976, and the final text was approved in January 1980. It was published in the Council minutes with an extensive commentary in the summer 1980 issue of the *American Archivist*. The three-year effort involved examining the codes of ethics for other professions and coordinating with the work of the American Library Association. The practical issues plaguing manuscript curators were added to the mix. The document

acquisitions should be kept to the recognized "collecting scope" of the institution, and should not exceed the financial resources of that institution to maintain them according to international standards. To make this even more explicit, the ICA Code mandates that archivists "should not seek or accept acquisitions when this would endanger the integrity or security of the records; they should cooperate to ensure the preservation of these records in the most appropriate repository. Archives should cooperate in the repatriation of displaced archives." Basically the second provision prohibits the collecting of "trophy" archives, out-of-scope collecting for purposes of prestige, including national prestige. Few archival employees would have the clout to defy their employer's pressure to acquire image-enhancing collections, such as the official files of a defeated enemy, a common practice throughout history. Napoleon is probably the most famous collector of such archival trophies. The Czechs are still trying to recover documents removed from Prague by the Swedish army in the seventeenth century.[18] The provision is noble, but the chances of a working archivist defying Napoleon or the King of Sweden are remote. As a profession, archivists can and should publicly comment on such violations of archival integrity, even if it is just for the record, even if the chances of restitution are small.

The third ICA provision is straightforward enough; it calls for protecting the authenticity of the collection. The fourth provision again enters difficult territory. "Archivists should be aware that acquiring documents of dubious origin, however interesting, could encourage an illegal commerce. They should cooperate with other archivists and law enforcement agencies engaged in apprehending and prosecuting persons suspected of theft of archival records." Archivists should not accept stolen property; it seems self-evident. As with the trade in paintings, antiquities, and other items of cultural heritage, the sale of archives has become controversial. There is a growing imperative to investigate claims of title, and not accept the seller's first representation at face value.

The remaining provisions are more or less standard: Archivists document the life history of their collections, promote open and equal access while balancing privacy rights, avoid conflicts of interest, update their skills,

and cooperate in the preservation and use of the world's documentary heritage.

The ICA has taken a strong stand against destruction of records, the acquisition of trophy archives, and the purchase of dubious collections. It aggressively promotes the protection of archives against manipulation for political reasons, and it promotes the return of displaced archives. These professional standards reinforce the SAA Code of Ethics, but fall short of any method for implementation beyond mobilizing public pressure.

## Beyond a Code "Suitable for Framing"

As David Horn stressed, the Code of Ethics for Archivists is an evolving document that reflects emerging standards and changing attitudes toward what is right. There is certainly still a place for a concise summary of principles to guide archivists and to assist with communicating best practices to parent institutions and to donors. There is also an evident need for some kind of apparatus, beyond the confines of a brief Mosaic code suitable for framing, for weighing and evaluating the various dilemmas that confront archivists.

The texts of a sampling of codes of ethics can be found in appendix A at the end of this volume. For current versions, it is always wise to consult the organization's website. If one combs through these various codes, there are dozens of precepts, some highly idealistic, others rather prosaic. Some are controversial and other are plain common sense. The following list of ethical obligations was compiled from the various formulations. It is a snapshot of what professional archivists do:

1. Select archives with respect for provenance and the integrity of collections.
2. Maintain neutrality and minimize injecting personal bias into the workplace.
3. Respect and cooperate with other archives and archivists.
4. Avoid denigrating colleagues.

5. Preserve archives as artifacts from damage and theft.
6. Preserve the authenticity of content and form as evidence.
7. Promote open and equitable access to archives.
8. Promptly publish descriptions of records.
9. Provide helpful reference service.
10. Minimize fees and other obstacles to use.
11. Treat researchers equally.
12. Protect privacy and confidentiality.
13. Protect researchers' privacy by not revealing what materials they use to others.
14. Inform researchers of parallel use only after securing permission from each.
15. Oppose censorship.
16. Respect intellectual property laws.
17. Honor donor contracts and legitimate restrictions.
18. Work with donors to minimize restrictions.
19. Balance open access with protection of privacy.
20. Assist in the repatriation or return of displaced or stolen archives.
21. Decline inappropriate gifts from researchers, donors, and vendors.
22. Avoid conflicts of interest.
23. Avoid personal collecting that competes with one's institution.
24. Avoid outside employment that competes with one's institution.
25. Avoid dealing in archives personally.
26. Avoid making fiscal appraisals for donors to one's own institution.
27. Avoid sequestering archival materials for one's own research in competition with other researchers.
28. Turn down offers of stolen archives or forgeries.
29. Turn down offers of collections that cannot be processed promptly and professionally.
30. Make policies and restrictions public and transparent.
31. Assist policy makers in crafting archival legislation and regulations.
32. Actively participate in continuing education.
33. Obey federal, state, and local laws.
34. Fulfill a moral obligation to society.

Several badly needed safeguards are still lacking in these older codes. Only the 2007 AHA Guiding Principles address the monopolization of the information in archives for commercial profit or political advantage at the expense of research. The challenges of the digital age and globalization have not yet been addressed in formal codes.

The ethical principles under discussion are diverse in range. The emphasis among these thirty or so recurring precepts varies greatly depending on whether the documents are in a government repository, a private manuscript collection, or a private organization. Government archivists are less concerned about cooperative collecting since they have a legally mandated acquisition policy. Manuscript curators need to be very aware of conflicts of interest in negotiating with dealers and vendors. Historical societies need to be sensitive to donor relations. Business and religious archives are less concerned about providing access to outside researchers and more concerned with protecting privileged and proprietary information. In general, however, most of the rules can be applied to all areas.

There are many times when these provisions come into conflict, such as obeying the law and fulfilling an obligation to society. Many informed observers do not feel that complying with the law has any place in a statement on ethics since laws enforce existing power relationships, which may be unfair. The issue of bias is the subtext of precepts regarding acquisition,

deaccessioning, access, and authenticity. Many thoughtful observers feel that neutrality is not possible; rather it is, in effect, a default decision to support the status quo. They recommend that archivists maintain objectivity without being neutral. Serving the public may require advocacy on behalf of social justice.

Leading educators such as Randall C. Jimerson have proposed using the codes of ethics or some form of guiding principles to actively promote archival values rather than simply to prevent abuses.[19] This is sometimes called the *teleological approach* to ethics, a way to define the desired results. Former SAA president Mark Greene, in his presidential address in San Francisco, August 2008, advocated promoting ten core archival values which he identified with keywords: Professionalism, Collectivity, Activism, Selection, Preservation, Democracy, Service, Diversity, Use and Access, and History.[20]

Whether or not one agrees with these specific precepts or the list of values, they all have something in common: their goal is to preserve archives as a trusted witness to what really happened. The archives are preserved to be used by independent researchers, examined from all different perspectives. Archivists need to resist the inevitable pressures to repurpose the documentation as a source of financial gain, status, privilege, political advantage, vindication, or retaliation. Archives are to be preserved as a primary source of knowledge, not instrumentalized for other agendas.

CHAPTER 2

# The Ethics of Acquisition

*Appraisal is the activity whereby archivists identify societal processes they think are worth remembering and the records that will foster such remembering.*

—Verne Harris[1]

THE FIRST STAGE IN THE LIFE CYCLE OF ARCHIVES IS APPRAISAL AND ACQUISITION. It may involve the selection and transfer of nonactive records to an in-house repository, or it may involve the donation or purchase of manuscripts for research use in a library. Whether through transfers, gifts, loans, or purchases, acquisition decisions directly impact the effectiveness of archival institutions and the profession as a whole. Indirectly, they have intentional (as well as unintended) consequences for research in general and for the shaping of historical memory. These consequences justify the extra time and effort needed to comply with ethical requirements, even in a work world filled with competing demands and constrained by limited budgets.

The following example demonstrates how acquisitions procedures can have a drastic impact on the fate of a collection. The Bancroft Library at the University of California acquired the literary papers of the celebrated American author William Saroyan. The collection documented the life and work of a major cultural figure in California. According to press reports, the university assumed it had legal title. The Bancroft's long-term director,

## PERSPECTIVES DAILY

# ARCHIVING A PLAGUE YEAR
## Building a Crowdsourced Digital Archive of COVID-19

*Tom Beazley, Victoria Cain, and Rebecca S. Wingo | Jun 29, 2020*

A Journal of the Plague Year: An Archive of COVID-19 (*JOTPY*) is a crowdsourced digital public archive chronicling daily life during pestilential chaos. The archive's title nods to Daniel Defoe's account of London's Great Plague, and, like Defoe's book, covers the pandemic experience—large and small. What do we accept? Whatever people find important about this moment. As a result, our archive is filled with items from around the world, from images of graduation chairs in empty gymnasiums, to reports about Indigenous health and food crises, to an exhausted Peruvian police officer collapsing outside a hospital.

Founded in March by Arizona State University professors Catherine O'Donnell and Mark Tebeau, *JOTPY* has grown to nearly 5,000 items in just two months. The archive's curatorial collective has also expanded quickly, with more than 150 archivists, graduate students, K-12 teachers, professors, and programmers now shaping the project. The archive and its global team operate on the model of "shared authority," inviting public collaboration and flattening traditional academic hierarchies.



*JOTPY* facilitates public catharsis and community building through the sharing of everyday and ordinary experiences. *Caitlin Brady/JOTPY*

Whereas Defoe assembled his narrative of plague-ridden London some 57 years after the event, *JOTPY* is collecting stories of COVID-19 as they unfold— what archivists, public historians, and curators call "rapid-response" collecting. Other public digital archives, most notably the *September 11 Digital Archive* and the *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank*, have set the precedent for this kind of collecting, with historians and archivists sprinting to gather evidence of a tragedy in a single place. But COVID-19's all-the-time, everywhere nature has forced us to redefine "rapid response." Our collecting began as a 100-meter dash but it's become a marathon.

Playing the long game has given us more time to think about how to build an archive that will be useful decades down the line. For example, we spent the last two months deciding on broad yet relevant subject headings based on our collections but also agreed to include folksonomic tagging, allowing users to define relevant terms. We ensure consistency with "official" subject categories and curatorial tags, while simultaneously empowering the public to create their own vocabulary. The result is a living, breathing archival language that changes and adapts with our user base. We imagine that future researchers will find the language shifts in our archive a fascinating way to study the long-term developments of the pandemic, but they can do that only if we build the capacity for that type of research now.

The pandemic's slow roll opens other collecting possibilities. We've been able to plan out a series of longitudinal oral histories so future researchers can understand how one person's account of the impact of coronavirus changes over six months, a year, or five years. We also hope longitudinal collections of digital ephemera will reveal shifting public preoccupations and trends. Our first waves of contributions recorded empty toilet paper shelves and PPE, whereas contributions now capture graduation celebrations and reopening procedures. What will the iconic coronavirus image be in the fall? In 2022? In 2025?

The ongoing nature of our collecting work has also enabled us to think critically about structural inequities and digital divides. Over the last several years, historians and archivists have worked to address digital and physical <u>archival silences</u>, cultivating face-to-face relationships and building long-term trust with underrepresented communities. The pandemic has strained these efforts. Indigenous, African American, and Latinx communities have been and continue to be especially hard-hit by the virus. Longtime community partners now face furloughs and empty grant coffers, and casual community events that might have led to new partnerships have been canceled. Historians and archivists face an ethical quandary as a result. It is insensitive to ask suffering strangers to spend their time and emotional resources contributing to an archive. It's also wrong not to try.



*JOTPY* chronicles prevailing attitudes, including racism against Asians and Asian Americans. Cross-stitch by Shannon "Badass Cross Stitch" Downey. *Kevin Sichanh/JOTPY*



*JOTPY* captures fleeting moments that reveal the social changes wrought by COVID-19. Here, 2020 graduates at Logan-Magnolia School (Logan, Iowa) practice for graduation. *Ben Tompkins/JOTPY*

Traditionally marginalized communities aren't the only ones whose experiences may be left out in the archival cold. Many elderly communities have now found themselves thrust into a temporarily marginalized status as a result of the pandemic. Older folks whose work and social lives are not conducted primarily online have now become invisible in this all-digital world of collecting. Our informal acquisition policy of "anything you define as important" is broad and inviting, but only for those with the technology to contribute.

To mitigate these silences and increase *JOTPY*'s collections, we are leaning heavily on pedagogy. While universities and colleges tend to skew young, white, and middle class, students
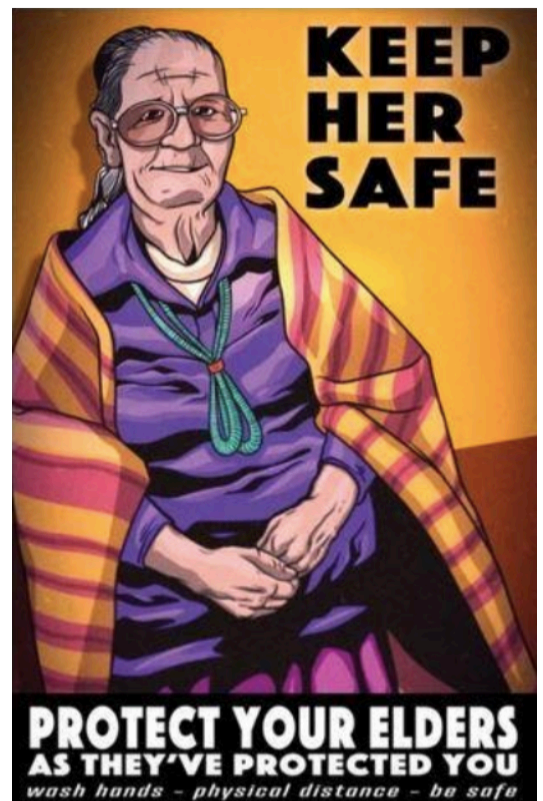
*JOTPY* highlights ongoing silences and the challenging imperative to correct them. The workers hosting a socially distanced press conference here are from the New Orleans City Waste Union. *Peter Gustafson/JOTPY*

can actively work to overcome archival silences and build students' civic character in the process by connecting with their local communities. Instructors can use the archive to teach students fundamentals about history in action, information architecture, metadata, and the politics of archives. Students have also seized on the resume building elements of the project, the real-life skills like digital literacy and networking. Working with the *JOTPY* archive, students have the opportunity to further flatten traditional hierarchies by sharing authority with professional archivists and taking on important leadership positions with guidance from professionals in the field.

We invite you to browse our archive. Share your own story. Take a picture of your neighborhood. Record a short video about your quarantine experience or about the transition to our new "normal." Email us if you'd like to join the curatorial collective or find out more about what we're doing.

We also invite you to teach the archive. *JOTPY* offers a rare opportunity for both students and instructors to analyze how the historical record is formed while helping to shape it themselves. Students will be engaged in relevant, important, purposeful work that will define how we remember and understand this moment. In our attempt to lower the bar of entry, the *JOTPY* team is currently developing modules for educators at all levels to adapt, remix, and reuse during classes this summer and in the coming school year. These are pending, so check back often or inquire with us about new resources.



Poster encouraging hand-washing in order to protect Diné elders by artist Dale Deforest (Diné/Navajo). *Denise Bates/JOTPY*

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# ICE Plans to Start Destroying Records of Immigrant Abuse, Including Sexual Assault and Deaths in Custody

[1]

## Author(s):

Victoria López

**UPDATE (05/29/2018):** *The ACLU and partners submitted public comments opposing Immigration and Customs Enforcement's request to the National Archives and Records Administration last year. As a result of the campaign and overwhelming opposition from the public, NARA decided to review ICE's proposal more closely. As of now, ICE has not made a new proposal regarding the destruction of these records. Government agencies with a long and well-documented record of abuse should not be permitted to destroy records about those abuses. We will continue to keep a watchful eye for attempts by ICE and CBP to destroy records about their own wrongdoings.*

Immigration and Customs Enforcement recently asked the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), which instructs federal agencies on how to maintain records, to approve its timetable for retaining or destroying records related to its detention operations. This may seem like a run-of-the-mill government request for record-keeping efficiency. It isn't. An entire paper trail for a system rife with human rights and constitutional abuses is at stake.

ICE has asked for permission to begin routinely destroying 11 kinds of records, including those related to sexual assaults, solitary confinement and even deaths of people in its custody. Other records subject to destruction include alternatives to detention programs, regular detention monitoring reports, logs about the people detained in ICE facilities, and communications from the public reporting detention abuses. ICE proposed various timelines for the destruction of these records ranging from 20 years for sexual assault and death records to three years for reports about solitary confinement.

For years, advocates and communities across the country have denounced human rights abuses in the detention system. Many of the records that ICE proposes for destruction offer proof of the mistreatment endured by people in detention. Given the Trump administration's plans to increase the size and scope of the system substantially, it is all the more disturbing that the agency wants to reduce transparency and accountability.

NARA has provisionally approved ICE's proposal and its explanations for doing so are troubling. In cases of sexual assault and death, for example, NARA states that these records "do not document significant actions of Federal officials." It's hard to believe that the actions of a federal

official are not significant in the death or sexual assault of an individual who is in federal immigration custody. NARA also posited that in cases of sexual assault, that the "information is highly sensitive and does not warrant retention."

Keeping these documents available is necessary for the public to understand and fully evaluate the operation of a system that is notorious for inhumane and unconstitutional conditions affecting hundreds of thousands of people every year. Even 20 years is far too short for keeping the record of a death or sexual assault of an individual in government custody.

Recent reports by advocacy groups document sexual assaults in detention without adequate investigation or remedy, sub-standard medical care, the overuse of solitary confinement as well as threats and physical assault by custody staff. Since October 2016, there have been 10 deaths in immigration detention. Many of the records used in these reports and analyses would not have been made available without sustained public pressure to force ICE to maintain and divulge this information.

The impacts of detention are devastating on immigrants, their families and communities. For an individual who has been sexually assaulted in detention or for a family member whose loved one died in detention, having a full and thorough record of ICE's actions, its policies and investigation can be an important step toward vindicating their rights.

If the Trump administration has its way, the number of immigrants in detention will increase, detention conditions will deteriorate further and more people will be subjected to life-threatening circumstances and denied their most basic rights. ICE shouldn't be allowed to purge important records and keep its operations out of the public eye.

**Source URL:** https://www.aclu.org/blog/immigrants-rights/ice-and-border-patrol-abuses/ice-plans-start-destroying-records-immigrant

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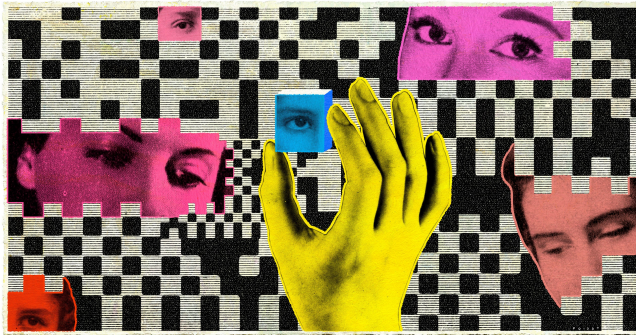[1] https://www.aclu.org/blog/immigrants-rights/ice-and-border-patrol-abuses/ice-plans-start-destroying-records-immigrant

# THE CHALLENGE OF PRESERVING THE HISTORICAL RECORD OF #METOO

**By Nora Caplan-Bricker**

**March 11, 2019**



*Evidence of the #MeToo movement should be preserved, both because it matters and because it could disappear. But archivists face a battery of technical and ethical questions with few precedents.*   Illustration by Chloé Poizat

Around the height of the #MeToo revelations, in the fall of 2017, I interviewed an archivist at a prominent research library for a piece about social-media preservation. It quickly became apparent that he knew less about the subject than I did; he saved Facebook posts by painstakingly copying and pasting them into Word, comment by comment, and manually pressing print. The longer we spoke, the more visibly annoyed he grew by my questions, to which he offered no answers. He leaned farther and farther back in his chair and gazed over my left shoulder. Finally, he launched into a story about his senior year of college, when he wrote his thesis on an ill-defined topic and slowly realized that he'd bitten off more than he could

chew. At first, I nodded politely, not understanding how this related to anything. Then the intent of the anecdote flooded through me on a tide of adrenaline, and I moved my notepad to my lap so that he couldn't see my hand shaking with rage.

Outside of the library, I stood in the cold and waited for my heart rate to return to normal. I wondered if the archivist was right that I was a naïve girl with inchoate ideas. Then I asked myself what gave him the power to make me wonder. Until then, I'd endured male condescension as if it couldn't touch me, observing my small humiliations, across years in the workplace, from the other side of a cool pane of glass. But the barrage of #MeToo stories had stirred the sediment from those experiences, revealing that my self-regard had always been porous. The meeting with the archivist was barely a #MeToo moment—it was not sexual assault or harassment but rather a familiar kind of gendered belittlement. Still, it was the moment when #MeToo fully reached me.

When I consider why I feel compelled to publish this story—so small, and so many months after the fact—I arrive at the answer that I want to contribute, however meagrely, to the record of what it was like to live through that fall. The notion that the memory of #MeToo needs preserving—both because it matters and because it could disappear—is also the premise of a much larger archival effort. In June, the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University's Radcliffe Institute, arguably the paramount repository of works on American feminism, announced its intention to collect the millions of tweets and hundreds of thousands of Web pages—news articles, legislation, changing H.R. policies, public apologies—that composed #MeToo and remain as its evidence. (Harvard faculty members of the steering committee for the #MeToo project include Jill Lepore, a staff writer for this magazine, and Jeannie Suk Gersen, a contributing writer.)

The undertaking has few major precedents. Only in the past decade have historians recognized the value of social media and libraries begun building tools to collect it at scale. (For seven years, starting in 2010, the Library of Congress vacuumed up every tweet, but that archive remains closed to researchers.) The Schlesinger has had to locate its own answers to a battery of technical and ethical questions as it prepares to allow access to its holdings, at least in part, by late 2019. For example, many of the women and men who shared #MeToo stories may have thought of them as ephemeral; they didn't anticipate that they could become fodder for future theories of history. It's a thorny dilemma but one that the library has no hope of solving if it doesn't gather the posts before they disappear. "The argument is always in favor of preservation and against loss," Jane Kamensky, the Schlesinger director and a Harvard history professor, told me. "As a historian, I believe we only understand things through primary evidence. Anything that stays dark is not going to be understood."

I met with Kamensky and her team in January, in temporary offices a few blocks from the Radcliffe Quadrangle (where the library is undergoing renovation), for a virtual tour of what they've collected so far. She said that she hopes the data will go some way toward answering essential questions about #MeToo: What, if anything, has it accomplished? Was #MeToo a burst of revolutionary energy that has since flamed out, or is it a still-growing constellation of attempts to organize? Amanda Strauss, the special projects manager at the Schlesinger, said that their Twitter searches for #MeToo and related hashtags have continued to yield around a hundred and fifty thousand tweets every week, leaving them unsure about when to impose a temporal boundary on the archive—or where, in hindsight, historians will locate the end of #MeToo.

The archivists use a tool, created at George Washington University and called Social Feed Manager, to perform weekly downloads of roughly fifty hashtags, which capture both trending conversations (#MuteRKelly) and sector-specific ones (#MeTooMedicine, #TimesUpTech), and also the parallel universe of counter-denunciations that collect under banners like #MeTooLiars and #IStandWithBrett. On the day of my visit, they scrolled through the latest haul of tweets from the evangelical #ChurchToo movement to demonstrate how the app creates spreadsheets of the posts' metadata (information such as the number of retweets, the number of followers, and geolocation, if user-enabled). Twitter's A.P.I. permits this kind of free mass download for the first week or so after a post appears on the Web, and the library is working with the company to purchase the nearly nineteen million tweets from the first year of the hashtags' use.

Other social-media sites present greater challenges: the Schlesinger can crawl individual Facebook and Instagram pages with a tool called the Webrecorder, but collecting them at scale is notoriously difficult. (Strauss told me that the issue of archiving these platforms more extensively is temporarily "on hold.") The staff had planned to choose news articles and other URLs by hand before realizing that they needed to rethink their reach. Now they're using Media Cloud, a tool developed by faculty members at M.I.T. and Harvard, to run vast searches of news stories that they can archive en masse.

As Jill Lepore has written in *The New Yorker*, most people assume that the Web's contents will be with us forever. ("Don't post that picture if you don't want it to follow you!") In fact, the Internet is among our most ephemeral inventions: a piece of paper can survive for seven hundred years, but "the average life of a Web page is about a hundred days," she wrote. To Strauss, collecting #MeToo feels "like we're in the middle of a ticker-tape parade, and this content is raining down around us, and we need to pick it up or it's going to get swept up and put in the trash." So far, the vulnerable sites shored up on Harvard's servers include a Medium post about sexual harassment in the children's-book industry, a whisper-network-sourced accounting of abuses in STEM, and a hyper-local news service's investigation of the California state legislature. Ultimately, the collection will reach back to 2006, when the activist Tarana Burke began campaigning against sexual assault using the slogan "me too."

The Schlesinger staff's choices shape the archive to a degree that's unusual, and a little unwelcome. Standard collections have implicit boundaries: they're the papers of a person or an organization or perhaps the surviving documentation of a single event, such as the March for Life. But #MeToo—which drew strength from millions of sources and exerted influence in every direction—can only be captured in what archivists call a "constructed" or "artificial" collection, an assemblage of objects of disparate provenance, with borders that are imposed, not absolute. The Schlesinger has other constructed collections, such as a survey of early women's blogs, but the #MeToo project is by far the most ambitious. It pushes the library to the edge of its traditional role in a field that draws a stark line between archivists, who leave as few fingerprints as possible, and scholars, who mold history from the assembled clay.

"It's not the job of the archivist or librarian to try to answer questions like 'Is #MeToo a movement?' or impose our own conceptual framework on this material," Jane Kelly, the Web-archiving assistant who harvests the bulk of the actual posts and pages, said. "My interpretation is a moot point." But in this case the collectors can't help but be curators, judging where #MeToo ends and where every other discussion of women, work, harassment, and violence begins.

Some Internet preservationists have been pushing brick-and-mortar libraries to embrace this evolution. "Traditional archivists seem most comfortable dealing with the outcomes of the work of various types of documenters," Clifford Lynch, the director of the Coalition for Networked Information, wrote in an influential 2017 paper. But the Internet is more like "a nearly infinite number of unique, individual, personalized performances"—a new one every time you log on—than it is an assortment of artifacts. Lynch warns, "If archivists will not *create, capture, curate* the 'Age of Algorithms,' then we must quickly figure out who will undertake this task."

The #MeToo project is one step in this direction, and it's fitting that it occurs in the service of feminist history. Feminism's contributions include a heightened awareness of history as a construct, its shape determined by what it leaves out. In her famous poem "Diving Into the Wreck," Adrienne Rich, whose papers the Schlesinger holds, envisions the legacy of women's lives as a hulk left to decay beneath the surface of the official past. She imagines herself swimming down "to see the damage that was done / and the treasures that prevail . . . the wreck and not the story of the wreck." Survivors used #MeToo to dredge their experiences for inclusion in history. The archive of their efforts will tacitly acknowledge, by way of its construction, that no record is ever objective or complete.

Another theme of feminist scholarship, and of #MeToo, is women's agency: telling your own story on your own terms. In the archive, this principle competes with the belief that the stories are worth saving. It's impossible to ask the individuals behind millions of Twitter accounts for permission to preserve their words, and, legally speaking, it's also unnecessary under the company's user agreement. Twitter says that account holders own their tweets, but the fine print reveals that they don't control them: in a recent survey of two hundred and sixty-eight Twitter users, almost half were under the mistaken impression that their tweets couldn't be gathered for research without their express consent.

At the Schlesinger, these concerns are shaping conversations about which parts of the archive will be accessible to researchers, and when. The library could choose to share Twitter data from verified accounts, or accounts that reach a certain threshold number of followers, under the assumption that they had little expectation of privacy. In theory, it could allow keyword searches in which a researcher "asks the data a question and gets back an answer," Kelly said, even as the actual tweets remain out of sight. The library quite possibly *would* remove content from view of the researchers—though not from the collection—if petitioned by its author. And the staff has considered the possibility that parts of the collection could be requested in the course of ongoing #MeToo litigation.

Ultimately, the archivists view their work as a service to researchers far removed from these skirmishes. "Time solves the problem as long as the material is collected and maintained," Kamensky told me. "Our horizon is very long, so if something needs to be closed for the life of the author, it can be." Harvard, in accordance with federal law, embargoes student records for eighty years, for example. "I often shock students by telling them that's an actuarial assumption about when they'll be dead." And while collections often place restrictions on access in consultation with donors, the archivists hope to make most of the material accessible as soon as possible.

Still, it may take a long time to discern what #MeToo meant, a question that waits to be answered by what happens next. For me, the collection is a comfort, preserving the future's ability to know what we don't—to examine in daylight our record of travelling the undersea deep. I wish that I could see the present through the eyes of that someday, or even that I knew what I would do if I met that male archivist who belittled me now. Would I tell him that I'm good at my job, which he doesn't seem to be—or would his condescension still have a hold on me? Would I even get angry, or would I just keep abjectly nodding, observing the insult from my old, practiced remove? If you're reading this in the future (unlikely, but anyway), I wonder: Does my story make sense to you? I suspect it may sound familiar, but I hope not.

_Nora Caplan-Bricker is a writer in Boston._

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# Beyond digitisation: a case study of three contemporary feminist collections

Kate Eichhorn

# Beyond digitisation: a case study of three contemporary feminist collections

Kate Eichhorn*

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*Using three contemporary feminist activist collections as case studies, this article challenges assumptions about digital archives and, more generally, digital collections. First, it challenges the widespread perception that so-called digital archives are necessarily democratising. Second, it examines how archivists and special collections librarians may adopt new media platforms, often in surprising ways, even as they avoid the development of large-scale digitisation projects. Finally, and most notably, this article makes a case for recognising how archivists and special collections librarians may use new media platforms to open up access to collections that exceed the narrow scope of digitisation projects. Here, what is foregrounded is not necessarily the limits of digital archives, but rather the limited way in which we continue to think about digital mandates in relation to archives.*

**Keywords:** activist archives; digital archives; feminist collections

Throughout the process of bringing my book, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, through the press, editors and reviewers asked me to account for my 'comparative silence regarding digital manifestations'.[1] As one reviewer asked, 'Doesn't the digital archiving of [feminist and activist] materials represent a more democratically accessible and cost-effective means of preservation than physical housing in special collections repositories?' From a publishing standpoint, I was missing a potential readership; from a reviewer standpoint, I was failing to account for the most groundbreaking developments in archives today. Although I appreciated my reviewers' critiques, embedded in their collective response were a series of assumptions about digital archives – their potential and their possibilities. Most notably, my reviewers appeared to take for granted the fact that digital archives are necessarily more democratic, more accessible and, at times, even more cost-effective than archives comprised of documents and artefacts housed in physical repositories. Beyond failing to account adequately for questions of materiality (as if such concerns are ever an afterthought in the archive), the reviewers' responses appeared to be based on the assumption that digital archives hold the potential to do everything that existing archives do but without the elaborate gate-keeping rituals that have historically made archives and special collections hostile or at least inaccessible environments to most activists and minorities. But is this necessarily the case? Are digital archives inherently more democratic than archives housed in physical repositories?[2]

This article represents a somewhat belated attempt to respond to my reviewers' critiques. On the surface, I agree with the spirit, if not the reality, of my reviewers'

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shared insistence that digital archives are democratising. After all, the ability to engage in archival research remains a privilege and one that disproportionately favours tenured scholars and well-funded graduate students from established research institutions in the world's most privileged nations. It is also the case that in at least some disciplines, visiting an archive for an extended period of time to carry out primary research continues to function as a gate-keeping ritual – a sort of professional marker akin to the status of fieldwork in anthropology. For example, a medieval literature scholar on my own dissertation committee informed me on the occasion of my dissertation defence that, despite the fact that I consulted the materials central to my dissertation on microfilm, my dissertation was flawed because I had failed to access the original manuscripts in the archives where they are permanently housed. I would never dispute the value of encountering manuscripts in person: we all know how important a drop of wine, coffee or blood on a page can be and that such textual cues are obscured by many reproduction methods, perhaps especially microfilm. In my case, however, studying handwritten manuscripts from the Renaissance at the British Library rather than reading these same documents on microfilm at the University of Toronto's Robarts Library would have likely had little impact on my research – coincidentally, a comparative media study of Renaissance commonplace books and emerging digital collections. Of course, in this instance, what I failed to complete was not the research for my dissertation but rather the *ritual* of research I was expected to enact as an emerging scholar in the field of book history.

For me, lack of access to archives was a temporary condition remedied with a tenure-track appointment, which gave me at least limited funding to visit archives at home and abroad. For researchers in many other countries, however, the ability to engage in extended archival research outside their home country, or even domestically, is something that remains difficult, even inconceivable. As Jeff Sahadeo observes, in many regions in the world, the archive remains a highly fraught contact zone wherein Western currency and privilege determine access – a situation that can even leave native-born scholars with less access to their history than outsiders with Western capital, both monetary and symbolic. Outside the West, Sahadeo reminds us, 'the prestige and privileges of belonging to the Western world undeniably translate into power in the contact zone of the archive and beyond'.[3]

Given the economic conditions that continue to structure access to many archives housed in physical repositories, there is no doubt that digital archives hold great potential to democratise the archive by opening up collections to an increasingly wide range of scholars. If archival research was once primarily the domain of privileged scholars from elite research universities in the West, the development of digital archives holds the potential to change both how and who can engage in archival research. This change offers hope that scholars from around the world will be able to access materials once available only to researchers with the means to visit the world's archival centres. In the new world of digital archives, researchers from Gitksan territory in Northern British Columbia, for example, would in theory be able to access the documentary traces of colonialism housed in collections at the British Library without ever leaving home. In short, digital archives hold the potential to pry open the archive for scholars and other researchers, including people seeking justice in the face of historical wrongs, whether or not they can afford to dwell at length in these sites of knowledge and power.

The democratisation of archives, however, is concerned with more than the issue of access. The democratisation of archives is also about collection mandates and, once again, at least in theory, digital archives, or at least digital collections, are ripe with

possibility. The mandates of institutional archives are nearly always shaped by outside factors: for example, the special interest of university donors or, in the case of state archives, a nation's desire to construct itself in accordance with a particular set of values. While large-scale digital archives are often costly and difficult to maintain, from the pioneering days of Geocities, the Web has been a place where activists, minorities and esoterics of all kinds have developed collections too radical, marginal and obscure to meet the collecting mandates of most established institutional archives. Although these collections will likely never replace established archives affiliated with existing institutions, as my own research has shown, at least some archivists and special collections librarians see online DIY efforts (for example, individually executed projects such as the Queer Zine Archive Project) as projects that run parallel to and even support the work they are doing in institutionally based collections.[4] At their best, digital collections, including those initiated and maintained by individuals and small collectives, hold the potential to address some of the silences that have historically defined archives. As the founders of the Queer Zine Archive Project emphasise, 'By providing access to the historical canon of queer zines we hope to make them more accessible to diverse communities and reach wider audiences.'[5] Here, it is important to bear in mind that the founders of the online archive are fully aware of other zine collections, including the university-based collections discussed in this article, but understand their open collection as one that provides another route of access to queer zines. In short, the objective is to create a collection that is as accessible to a teenager living in a rural or remote community as it is to a university researcher. At least in some cases, then, the fact that digital collections hold more potential to foster unprecedented levels of accessibility to archival materials is difficult to dispute.

For this reason, it has become somewhat commonplace to conclude that digital archiving does represent a more democratically accessible and cost-effective means of preservation than the physical housing of similar materials in special collections and further to conclude that, when new collections develop without explicit digital mandates, it is due to either lack of funding, lack of appropriate planning or pure resistance to digitisation. My research on contemporary feminist collections, however, suggests that the decision to resist digitisation – or at least not to prioritise it – may be far more complex. My research further suggests that an archive's decision to refrain from investing in the digitisation of a specific collection by no means precludes the adoption of digital platforms and tools as a means to create new avenues of archival access. Indeed, sometimes the decision to avoid digitisation is part of a collection's inherent agenda. In what follows, I examine the three contemporary feminist collections at the centre of my study and discuss why each chose to reject digitisation as a short- or long-term goal at different points in its development. In addition, I consider what each of these case studies reveals about the limitations of digital-archiving initiatives, especially in the context of activist and minority collections.

## Background

My recently published monograph, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, features case studies of three contemporary feminist collections located in the United States, coincidentally all at private universities (where there is more funding for special collections, including collections that hold the materials of radical social movements[6]). The collections at the centre of my study include the Riot Grrrl Collection at New York University; the zine collections at Duke University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library; and

the Barnard College Zine Library. It is important to emphasise that all of these collections were established in the past decade, and that they were developed by archivists and special collections librarians who are still relatively young. The fact that none of these collections has explicitly embraced digitisation, then, is not something we can easily account for on the basis of age or generation or professional training. These collections were developed by archivists and librarians who completed their professional training in the late 1990s to early 2000s and are well aware of the possibilities of digital platforms. That all of these collections exist in a discrete physical location and that none has a digital analogue (a parallel or related online collection), then, does not reflect a naïve resistance to digitisation or a paranoid reaction to the circulation of texts and images online. Rather, as I suggest below, each of these collections has from the outset or in the process of development steered clear of digitisation for distinctly different reasons, each of which also sheds light on some of the limitations of digital archives as they are typically conceived.

## The zine collections at the Sallie Bingham Center

In 1999, Sarah Dyer, the founder of Action Grrrl Comics, emailed the Sallie Bingham Center at the Duke University Rare Book and Manuscript Library to probe their interest in acquiring her collection of more than 2000 feminist zines. Later, Dyer would explain that her decision to donate her zines to Duke University was based on two major factors. First, she recognised that the zines in her collection – highly personal, fragile and hand-bound documents made by girls and women – shared much in common at the level of content and form with the other materials found in the collections at the Sallie Bingham Center. In an interview carried out for my book, Dyer elaborated, '[a]s many of the zines are one-of-a-kind and certainly many of them are delicate, I was mainly concerned with finding an archive that had extensive experience with that sort of thing'.[7] She further explained that because 'there was an emphasis on ephemera and one-of-a-kind items like diaries' within the collections at the Sallie Bingham Center, she felt assured that the archivists 'would know what to do' with her zines.[8] For Dyer, the Center's experience working with particular types of documents (for example, personal papers and one-of-a-kind books, including artist books) influenced her decision. Second, Dyer was interested in placing her collection of zines in an archive with a focus on women's history.[9]

Dyer's donation was significant for several reasons – it represented the first major donation of Riot Grrrl and third-wave feminist materials to an established archive. It also resulted in Duke receiving a flood of similar donations from individual collectors, nearly all women, now in their thirties, who had been collecting materials related to feminist activism and cultural production throughout the 1990s. When I first started to do research in the zine collections at Duke in 2006, I asked the archivists at the Bingham Center, Laura Michum and Kelly Wooten, about their plans for digitisation. At the time, they had no intention of engaging in a digitisation project. Beyond the question of cost and human resources, they emphasised, like Dyer, the materiality of the zines and the inability to reproduce such materiality adequately in a digital archive. By the time I returned in 2011, they still had no plans to digitise their zine collections, but their reasons for choosing not to prioritise digitisation had also grown more complex.

Most notably, after five years of watching researchers engage with the Center's zine collections, they were even more emphatic about why zines needed to be viewed in the context of their larger collection of feminist documents dating back to the nineteenth

century. On the occasion of my second visit to Duke in 2011, Wooten explained, 'the connection between the zines and older forms of feminist self-publishing is becoming more clear to me the longer I work with our collections, but it hasn't been fully explored by researchers yet. I really, really want someone to get in there and look at that in more detail.'[10] When I asked Wooten how I might tackle such research, she responded: 'There's the visual analysis – what images are women from the 1960s and 1970s using in their comic drawings, in their clip art and where does it reappear in zines from the 1990s. You could trace those recurring images, for example.'[11] However, in archives, context is at times difficult to achieve fully. In many archives, including those located at Duke, visitors can only look at one box from one collection at a time (in many collections, researchers can only access one file at a time). In this sense, institutional protocols prohibit the opportunity to engage in the type of close comparative work that might be sponsored by the capacity to view otherwise disparate documents simultaneously. Of course, despite institutional protocols, archivists, such as Wooten, can and often do intervene. On the occasion of my second visit to do research in the zine collections at Duke, for example, Wooten went into the archive's storage and came back with a box of *off our backs* newspapers from the 1970s and 1980s. Her intent was to encourage me to look more closely at the extent to which clip art, headlines and photographs from *off our backs* (a long-running and popular second-wave feminist publication from Washington, DC which circulated throughout North America) had been recycled in punk feminist zines produced in the mid-1990s. The juxtaposition of these radical feminist newspapers and Riot Grrrl zines disrupted a well-entrenched narrative about what happened to feminism in the 1990s – in short, the juxtaposition challenged the assumption that young feminists necessarily rejected second-wave feminism in the 1990s. Indeed, looking at the publications side by side, it was apparent that young feminists in the early 1990s were not only continuing to read earlier feminist publications but also putting the discourses and iconography featured in these publications back into circulation. Although some of the recycling could be understood as a subtle attempt to undermine or parody their mother's generation of feminism, more often than not, the recycling appeared to take the form of a homage to an earlier generation's history of struggle.

In *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, I describe these encounters as forms of 'archival proximity'. The question I wish to foreground here, however, is what happens to the possibilities opened up by archival proximity in so-called digital archives? Theoretically, one should be able to bring all sorts of materials into contact in digital archives – the possibilities for archival proximity should be infinite. Digital archives should enable us, once and for all, to overcome the limitations imposed on us by the archive itself, with its rules of one box or even one folder at a time. I want to suggest, however, that how we interact with archival materials in digital archives may be even more restrictive – most notably because so many of these collections direct us or limit us to engaging with singular collections, one image at a time. After all, when institutional archives engage in digitisation projects, what users encounter online is typically either a single high-use collection, or selected materials from several high-use collections. The question that remains is how do we then create archival proximity in the space of digital archives? Is it even possible? If, for example, Duke was to pursue a digitisation project for its recently acquired feminist zines collections, how would they bring these texts into the broader context of their collections related to feminist and women's history? As emphasised, Dyer, their initial donor, was invested in locating her zines in relation to Duke's earlier collections of women's diaries and letters and adolescent literature. Short

of digitising the entire archive (which is evidently impossible), how might the archivists at Duke honour Dyer's concerns if they were to digitise her donated materials? Context is often why donors bring their materials to a specific archive in the first place. What remains unclear is how digitisation initiatives can take such intentions into account. In essence, how can archives engaged in the digitisation of specific collections or parts of collections ensure that their digitised materials continue to be framed by or read in relation to other collections? This question, of course, is especially pressing for collections such as those housed in the Sallie Bingham Center at Duke University where context is especially important, since the collection's mandate is itself framed by a specific political commitment – in this case to women's history. My point here, however, is not to suggest that digital collections necessarily erode archival proximity but rather to emphasise that digital collections have yet to exploit the possibilities fully for such proximity to be fostered.

## The Riot Grrrl Collection at NYU

In many respects, the announcement of the Riot Grrrl Collection at Fales Library at New York University bore uncanny resemblance to the movement's initial 'discovery' by the mainstream media in 1992. Lisa Darms, senior archivist at Fales Library and Special Collections, explains that news of the collection's development was never a secret, but its announcement was also not something that remained entirely in her control or that of the collection's donors:

> We issued an internal newsletter, which is for the library. It's not private, but it's simply a print and pdf newsletter about acquisitions. It generally goes to alumni and donors. They wanted to announce the acquisition of Kathleen Hanna's papers. It was amazing to watch how quickly – I think the next day – at the *L Magazine*, someone who was probably associated with NYU in some way, found it and scanned it in black and white and put it on their online magazine. From there, it went viral. At that point, I barred myself – I worried about a flurry of people contacting me because it hadn't gone through the press office, which is the normal way we would do such things, but instead of anyone contacting me, all subsequent articles referred back to that one *L Magazine* article. I was somewhat ambivalent about it. I wasn't trying to keep the collection secret, but I did want to reach a certain number of potential donors before making it public.[12]

Although the *L Magazine*'s decision to scan and repost an article about the development of the Riot Grrrl Collection from an internal university newsletter and its subsequent impact is far less significant than the historical arrival of Riot Grrrl in the mainstream media, the similarities are worth considering. Like Riot Grrrl in its early stages of development, which was both public and fiercely protective of its ability to control its representation and circulation, the development of the collection was by no means a secret, but from the onset there was an attentiveness to maintaining control over the collection's publicity.

For me, there are at least two things that this turn of events reveals that are relevant to a broader discussion on archives and digitisation. First, the Riot Grrrl Collection illustrates how social media can be used effectively to promote archival collections. In the days following the *L Magazine* post, news of Fales Library's development of the Riot Grrrl Collection travelled quickly over multiple forms of media, proving especially viral in forms of media that had not yet come into being when Riot Grrrl entered most people's consciousness in 1992 (for example, blogs, Twitter and Facebook). If many

archivists and special collections librarians spend years attempting to generate interest in their collections, for Darms, this achievement was effortless. That news of an archival collection could 'go viral' says as much about Riot Grrrl as a cultural phenomenon as it does about the significance of the Riot Grrrl Collection. It also demonstrates how the social media also holds the potential to change radically who has access to archives by virtue of making archival collections visible to a larger number of people, including people unlikely to consider ever visiting an archive.

Of course, while most archivists want their collections to be used, few welcome their collections becoming destination points for 'fans', and, in the case of the Riot Grrrl Collection, this appeared to be a real possibility. Indeed, within days of the collection's development going viral on social media sites, fans were posting blogs and tweeting about the need to start planning 'road trips' to the collection. Immediately, the Riot Grrrl Collection was taken up as the Graceland of the Riot Grrrl movement, which was neither Darms's intention nor the intention of her donors. For this reason, I assumed that Darms would develop a parallel digital collection – perhaps, simply by making some of the collection's more frequently requested materials available online. This seemed especially likely given that Fales, at least in comparison to many archives, has both the expertise and resources needed to take on a digital-archiving project of this nature. Despite the fact that a digital collection may have been the easiest way to curtail a flood of fan requests to access materials from the Riot Grrrl Collection, Darms did not develop a digital collection. Somewhat surprisingly, in June 2013, Darms, along with donor Johanna Fateman, published *The Riot Grrrl Collection*, a 300-page glossy colour catalogue, with the Feminist Press. At first, I was surprised that the widespread enthusiasm for the Riot Grrrl Collection had resulted in a museum catalogue-style book featuring materials from the collection rather than a digital collection. Upon further reflection, I wondered if the decision not to create a parallel digital collection was in fact entirely consistent with the collection's original mandate.

As discussed at length in my book, in many respects the Riot Grrrl Collection was developed in order to rewrite the history of a specific moment in feminist activism and cultural production. With few exceptions, Riot Grrrl has been taken up by the popular media and by academics as an all-girl subculture; but everyone grows up, even rock stars and their fans. By the time Darms started to contact potential donors, many of the women most synonymous with Riot Grrrl were in their late thirties to early forties and had reinvented themselves as visual artists, performance artists, novelists and academics. Understandably, then, there was a desire, at least among some of these women, to locate their youthful interventions as an artistic, intellectual and political movement with a traceable lineage rather than a youthful subculture with an expiration date. Indeed, in my study, I argue that, by placing their personal papers in an established university archive alongside other notable collections related to earlier New York art scenes (for example, the Downtown Collection, which holds materials related to New York's downtown art scene in the 1970s to 1990s, and the Avant-garde Collection, which primarily holds materials related to the Intermedia movement in the 1960s), they effectively repositioned Riot Grrrl as a movement that may just as easily be read through the history of feminist avant-garde art, performance and writing as it might be read through the history of punk. The Riot Grrrl Collection, then, may be best understood as a form of position-taking, to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's concept. In other words, the collection can be read as an interruption in the field of cultural production that effectively transforms Riot Grrrl's status.

As the above example illustrates, the archival apparatus may also be understood as an authorising apparatus which holds the potential to legitimise certain materials and to reposition them in the field of cultural production. But do digital collections share this potential? While digital collections no doubt open up archival collections, as previously discussed, do they serve to authorise documents to the same extent as collections held in material archives, or do they function along radically different lines? Here, I am suggesting that for groups who may feel that their histories have been marginalised, the material archive continues to hold a promise not obtainable through the development of digital archives, whether or not such archives are connected to established institutions. On this basis, my speculation, then, is that Darms's decision not to develop a digital collection and instead to publish a museum catalogue-style book featuring carefully selected documents, photographs and objects from the Riot Grrrl Collection was by no means a coincidence. In the case of museum exhibits, for example, a published catalogue is a way to draw attention to an exhibit's highlights, but these catalogues also function to create fixed narratives about the documents and objects in question; insofar as they function as souvenirs, they also work to distance viewers from the objects in question. In essence, the published catalogue featuring objects from the collection may have been understood as a vehicle better positioned to promote the implicit mandate of the existing archival collection than a digital collection. At issue here, then, is not a rejection of digitisation but rather a recognition of the limited potential of digital archives in the broader cultural field.

## Barnard Zine Library

The Barnard Zine Library began with an ambitious proposal and modest budget in 2003. Recognising that zines are a 'nontraditional medium and potentially a little scary to administrators', Jenna Freedman's initial proposal included a seven-page rationale, primarily aimed at persuading her Dean that zines, specifically zines by girls and women, belong in university-based libraries and that a special collection of this nature was especially in keeping with Barnard College's history and mission:

> Although zines have been around for a long time, few libraries have yet to begin collecting and preserving them. This project will allow Barnard to provide catalog access to these important publications on an item level, something that is not being done systematically by any major library that catalogs with the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), which includes virtually every academic and public library in the United States and 85 other countries. Zines are a rich and democratic form of self-expression that range from scholarly treatises on diverse issues to wildly creative artworks. The collection and preservation of these materials will provide both contemporary and future researchers a unique insight into today's feminist culture.[13]

From the onset, Freedman's intentions for the Barnard Zine Library were driven by at least two distinct objectives: one centred on collection, and the other centred on cataloguing. Only later did Freedman recognise and openly admit that these objectives were by no means entirely compatible. 'If I knew what I was doing,' Freedman admits, 'none of this would have happened, so it's a good thing I was a bit naïve!'[14] For people outside the profession, the happy accidents guiding Freedman's work may not be apparent, but, inside the profession, the Barnard Zine Library represents a strange hybrid straddling the special collection, archive and catalogued library collection.

At the centre of Freedman's original proposal was an intention to establish an open stacks collection of non-circulating zines. In the original proposal, however, Freedman also sought to collect and preserve 'born-digital' zines or 'e-zines' and to explore further the possibility of digitising print zines whenever possible, emphasising that 'providing electronic access to print zines is important for research use as well as for preservation'.[15] As the collection developed, Freedman abandoned her proposed digitisation project. In lieu of digitisation, she eventually established a parallel archival collection which not only holds doubles of all the zines found in the open stacks collection but also hundreds of additional zines (many donated as part of larger zine collections by former zine producers, readers and individual collectors seeking a permanent home for their collections). Despite the fact that in many respects Freedman's proposed collection became more rather than less attentive to the preservation of printed materials as it developed and even found Freedman, a reference librarian, becoming an archivist 'by accident', the collection's profile and significance remained contingent on the advancement of another aspect of the originally proposed digital mandate.

Beyond Freedman's proposal to digitise print zines and even collect born-digital materials, she proposed to catalogue the zines collected with the goal of ensuring their visibility to not only Barnard Library users but also all users of WorldCat, the world's largest online public access catalogue. The decision to catalogue the zines was driven by a recognition that cataloguing would make zines increasingly accessible to users worldwide while simultaneously heightening the visibility of both zines and contemporary feminist discourses. As Freedman emphasises, cataloguing the zines was important for several reasons. First, cataloguing would enable readers and scholars to encounter them 'just as they would any other print, electronic, or media holdings as they searched the catalog'.[16] In other words, cataloguing the zines was a way to change the status of zines by effectively making these self-published works just as visible and retrievable as published materials in the library catalogue. Second, the cataloguing would enable the zines to be made available through interlibrary loans and therefore expand their potential readership. Finally, the cataloguing was a way to disseminate contemporary feminist materials not only within the Barnard College Library but also beyond it, to worldwide library users: 'For us the priority was achieving visibility for the materials, and the legitimacy their presence in WorldCat would bestow on them.'[17] The impact of Freedman's initiative is far greater than one might expect. If you do a search for the term 'riot grrrl' or 'third wave feminism' on WorldCat, for example, hundreds of documents appear. A closer look reveals that most of these hits are for zines, not published books or magazines, and the vast majority of these zines are in the Columbia University Library system; we can assume these zines were catalogued at Barnard by Freedman and her staff. In short, Freedman's decision to do item-level cataloguing of archival materials has made an entire body of knowledge about 1990s feminism visible on WorldCat which would otherwise not be visible to researchers.

It is on this basis that I argue that radical librarians and cataloguers are engaged in the work of reinscribing the epistemic terrain by situating knowers in spaces that were previously inaccessible and rendering certain knowledges visible that were previously obscured. Without downplaying the importance of digital archives, I maintain that the cataloguing work of activist librarians such as Freedman cannot be underestimated. Indeed, her cataloguing project demonstrates that the act of reinscription (tagging) may hold even greater potential for social transformation than the act of media transfer (digitisation).

## Conclusion

In this article, I have outlined why three contemporary feminist collections chose not to pursue the development of digitisation projects. In the case of the zine collections at the Sallie Bingham Center, the decision not to prioritise digitisation reflects both a recognition that the materials in their contemporary collections – namely zines – are defined by their materiality and a recognition that archival proximity may be more effectively fostered by actual archivists than via digital platforms. Indeed, as emphasised above, there appears to be a strong sense here that their contemporary feminist collections may be most effectively animated when read in the context of their historical collections on feminism and women's lives and that this is something that would be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve through the development of a digital collection. The second collection – the Riot Grrrl Collection at NYU's Fales Library and Special Collections – appears to represent a case in which digitisation has been sidelined in favour of dissemination formats that are already recognised as a proven means of position-taking in the broader field of cultural production. As I argue above, while digital archives may be democratising, groups that have traditionally felt marginalised from the mainstream continue to gravitate to archives housed in physical repositories, in part because these established archives remain an effective means to authorise lives, histories and work that may otherwise be overlooked. In this respect, not prioritising the development of digital archives may also suggest that, to date, digital archives remain differently situated in the field of cultural production than material archives. Finally, in the case of the Barnard College Zine Library, one encounters the case of a collection that has an explicit digital mandate but one focused on cataloguing rather than the transfer of printed documents into a digital format. Here, what is foregrounded is not necessarily the limits of digital archives, but rather the limited way in which we continue to think about digital mandates in relation to archives. As emphasised throughout this article, despite the fact than none of the aforementioned collections have chosen to embrace digitisation as it is commonly understood, each demonstrates a consciousness of how new digital media might be used to open up access to archival collections – for example, by publicising their existence to populations who have traditionally not accessed archival collections or by rendering archival documents visible in databases, such as WorldCat. What is perhaps most notable here, however, is that the assumed democratising potential of digital archives is not necessarily an assumption that all archivists and special collections librarians share, not even those developing activist-based collections.

## Endnotes

1. *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* was published by Temple University Press in 2013.
2. For the purposes of this discussion, 'archives housed in physical repositories' refer to archives comprised of collections of material documents housed in fixed locations. I use the terms 'digital archives' and 'digital collections' to refer to a wide range of collections of documents and other materials available online whether they are hosted on institutional or personal sites. However, the division between these types of collections is not as obvious as one might expect. So-called digital archives have their own materiality and are often closely linked to physical repositories; archives housed in physical repositories are increasingly being made available through various digital platforms (this is discussed at length in the final case study presented in this article). The nomenclature I have adopted, somewhat reluctantly, in this paper reflects what may be best understood as an ongoing ambivalence in the field about how best to theorise and categorise archives in a digital age.

3. See Jeff Sahadeo's 'Without the Past there is No Future', in Antoinette Burton (ed.), *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2006.

4. QZAP or the Queer Zine Archive Project is a donation-based, volunteer-run project that aims to digitise queer zines and make them readily available to visitors in an easily accessible digital format. Indeed, visitors to the site are free to download any zine and to use it for whatever purpose they wish (reading, research and even reproduction). Many of the zines available on the QZAP site are available in institutional collections, including the Barnard College Zine Library and the zine collections at Duke University. All the librarians and archivists I interviewed during the course of my research considered the work of QZAP to be in keeping with the work they are carrying out in their own university-based collections. For more on QZAP, visit their website at <*http://www.qzap.org/v7*>, accessed 14 May 2013.

5. See QZAP's mission statement, available at <*http://www.qzap.org/v7/index.php/about-qzap/mission-statement*>, accessed 14 May 2013.

6. Notably, all three contemporary feminist collections featured in my own study, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, are housed in archives at private universities. More recently, after considerable debate, the Occupy Wall Street Archive, originally a haphazard collection of documents culled together by a collective at Zucotti Park, was donated to the NYU's Tamiment Library & Robert F Wagner Labor Archives. It is worth noting that, while it took over a year for the Occupy materials to end up at the Tamiment Library, NYU archivists reached out to the collective when the occupation was still active. To be clear, these are just a few notable examples of activist-related collections ending up in private university archives. Moreover, while the practice of donating radical collections to archives at private institutions is controversial, in my own research I have discovered that, in many cases, activists support the move since the private institutions appear better equipped to both preserve and publicise these collections than public institutions and community-based collections.

7. Sarah Dyer, online interview, November 2011.

8. ibid.

9. ibid.

10. Kelly Wooten, interview, 26 January 2011.

11. ibid.

12. Lisa Darms, interview, 25 June 2010.

13. Jenna Freedman, 'Collection Proposal: Women's Studies Zines at Barnard College – Pilot Project', June 2003, available at <*http://zines.barnard.edu/proposal*>, accessed 14 May 2013.

14. Jenna Freedman, interview, 17 April 2012.

15. ibid.

16. ibid.

17. Jenna Freedman, 'AACR 2 – Bendable but Not Flexible: Cataloging Zines at Barnard College', in KR Roberto (ed.), *Radical Cataloging: Essays at the Front*, McFarland & Company, Jefferson, NC, 2008, p. 233.