OSU LGBTQ+ Community Film

by
Kiah McConnell

A PROJECT

submitted to

Oregon State University
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in partial fulfillment of
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF
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Title: OSU LGBTQ+ Community Film

Traditional archives have excluded marginalized people (women, people of color, and
LGBTQ+ people) from sharing their histories through socially just representations.
Portrayals of oppressed people that do exist in traditional archives are from the lens of the
white cis-heteronormative patriarchy, and justify a narrative of colonialism, oppression,
and injustice. This thesis project examines the need for archives that specifically strive to
collect and share the stories of LGBTQ+ people while remaining accessible and
accountable to the community that they are serving. This paper contextualizes the need
for a Queer Archive on the Oregon State University Campus, and demonstrates what a
radical archive activism looks like through the creation of a film. The film is a
combination of existing LGBTQ+ records at SCARC, additional documentation
collection over the past year, and interviews, intertwined to portray the narratives of these
individuals within the broader context of three LGBTQ organizations at OSU. This thesis
also provides recommendations for future initiatives of the OSU Queer Archives as the
archives move forward with activist archival work in the coming years.

Abstract approved:

_______________________________________________________________
Dr. Bradley Boovy

Key Words: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, LGBT, LGBTQ, queer archives,
archives, university history, cultural resource centers, Sol, Rainbow Continuum, Pride
Center

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.
Honors Thesis Project: Oregon State University LGBTQ+ Community Film

“When the creators are on the margins, archivists are activists: when materials as archived, they achieve the status of something worth saving…” (Piepmeier, 2012, p.)

Introduction: Why Queer Archives?

Archives are not apolitical, neutral repositories of information that represent all people, groups, and movements equally. The patterns of archival collection have traditionally focused on the experiences and histories of identities and groups who have held the most power, privilege, and resources in society (Schwartz and Cook, 2002). This pattern of collection has left marginalized groups (LGBTQ+ people, women, people of color, and working class people) underrepresented in the archival record, and has transferred into a lack of visibility for these groups in other social and cultural institutions. However, the legacy of archival collection and representation extends beyond a simple binary of visibility of the privileged and invisibility of the oppressed. In instances where marginalized people are represented within traditional archives, it is through portrayals that affirm and justify the dominance of the white cis-heteronormative patriarchy. That is, when archives do focus on oppressed groups, it is for the benefit of those with power. For example, the collections of museums and archives often include objects that were stolen from indigenous people, and the interpretations of these records and items typically view native people through a white European American lens. Another example is the underrepresentation of women in traditional archives. The Lesbian
Herstory Archives’ website explains that a central motivation for their work is “the process of gathering...material will uncover and collect our herstory denied to us previously by patriarchal historians in the interests of the culture which they serve” (Lesbian Herstory Archives, 2015). The archivists and historians working within institutions have been and are influenced by systems of power and oppression, which privileges the narrative of the white cis-heteronormative patriarchy, and therefore represent the histories of oppressed people through a dominant lens. The archive is an institution that creates value, and the histories that the archivists and historians choose to document sends a message on which stories and records are worth preserving and sharing with present and future generations (Schwartz and Cook, 2002). Traditionally, that archival value has been denied to LGBTQ+ people and groups.

With narrow or invisible archival records, understandings of queer and trans histories are limited to relying on the transmission and sharing of histories outside of an institution. Although communities can and do successfully preserve and share their histories without the support of an archive at an institution, there are challenges to saving records and maintaining a visible history within grassroots groups. Activist organizations may not have the capital or resources to record what is happening while also engaging in social justice work (Wooten, 2012). Grassroots groups can benefit from the resources that an institutional, but social justice focused, archive can provide. These resources can help facilitate the collection and preservation of materials while activists continue the work of addressing issues that are affecting marginalized groups in the here and now (Eichorn, 2012). For example, at Oregon State University, the establishment of the OSU
Queer Archives in the fall of 2014 resulted in the video recording of two significant events, the Fall Drag Show (October 2014) and the Queer State of the Union (May 2015). The video recordings of these two events provide an important representation of the current social and political LGBTQ+ culture on the OSU campus, and this kind of record collection would not have occurred without the support and resources of the OSU Queer Archives.

The erasure of LGBTQ+ narratives is an injustice to queer and trans communities, and has consequences for marginalized people who are divided from their histories. The lack of archival representation of queer and trans lives further perpetuates systems of power and oppression, and denies LGBTQ+ people access to stories that are important to understanding their collective history. Therefore, the establishment of queer archives is an activist decision, a choice that places value and worth on queer and trans lives and disrupts the toxic pattern of silence on queer and trans memories.

A queer archive has numerous benefits for LGBTQ+ communities. It can help foster an intellectual, cultural, and political shift towards a society that understands the importance and significance of sexual orientations and gender identities that have been and are oppressed, discriminated against, and subjected to physical and emotional violence (Piepmeier, 2012). Beyond providing positive and complex understandings of LGBTQ+ lives and histories to the broader heteropatriarchal culture that queer and trans people are situated in, a queer archive can directly benefit the community it is designed and envisioned to serve. Through community outreach, participation, and ownership, a queer archive can provide pathways for LGBTQ+ people to place their experiences and
work within a broader and deeper historical context that extends far beyond individual experiences (Bly, 2012). Records that portray the complex intertwining of collective LGBTQ+ trauma, oppression, joy, and resistance can provide legitimacy and create a legacy for current LGBTQ+ activists and social justice advocates to ground their work in (Piepmeier, 2012). On a less collective level, archives that provide documents and narratives on LGBTQ+ people can promote positive identity development and a sense of connection for individuals who may experience isolation, discrimination, negative LGBTQ representation in their everyday lives (Ramirez and Boyd, 2012).

Although traditional archives lack representation of LGBTQ+ lives, there are many well-established archives and museums dedicated to collecting and sharing LGBTQ+ histories. Some examples of these archives include the ONE Archive at the University of Southern California Libraries (established in 1952), the Lesbian Herstory Archives (1974), the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco (1985), the Schwules Museum in Berlin (1985), the IHLIA in Amsterdam (1999), and the Queer Zine Archive Project (2003). These archives’ mission statements vary in content and scope, but they are focused on similar and complementary themes such as collecting, gathering, preserving, and making records accessible, raising public awareness, promoting new scholarship, interpreting history, establishing a living legacy, and sharing the stories of LGBTQ+ people. Despite their similar visions, LGBTQ+ archives and museums are diverse in their own histories. The ONE Archives, which currently have the largest collection of LGBTQ+ materials in the world, began in the 1950s with the personal collection of Jim Kepner (ONE Archives, 2015). The Lesbian Herstory Archives was a
response to the patriarchal dominance the sexism in the organizing and record keeping of groups like Gay Academic Union. The Lesbian Herstory Archives developed into an organization dedicated to gathering and sharing records of lesbian history in order provide counter narratives to the patriarchal dominance of other archival and historical institutions (Lesbian Herstory Archives, 2015). The founding of Schwules Museum was the result of the controversial but successful exhibit *Eldorado – the History, Everyday Life and Culture of Homosexual Women and Men 1850-1950* at the Berlin Museum (Schwules Museum, 2015). The IHLIA was established through the merging of the Lesbian Archive of Amsterdam, Homodok, and the Anna Blaman House, three LGBTQ+ archive organizations that were founded in the 1980s (IHLIA, 2015). The Queer Zines Archive Project is an example of recent archival grassroots activism. The website launched in 2003 as an open, free database of queer zines in order to preserve and make visible underground queer communities and their experiences (Queer Zine Archive Project, 2015). The histories of LGBTQ+ archives and museums represent a legacy of archival activism that disrupts the dominance of heteronormative historical institutions.

Despite the significance of LGBTQ+ archives in their mission to provide historical value and visibility to queer and trans communities, some archival practices and policies limit the accessibility of these collections. For example, the ONE Archives Gallery and Museum is free and open to the public, but conducting research in the archives requires a research account (ONE Archive, 2015). The GLBT History Museum charges an entrance fee, its collections are open to members (who must pay a minimum $50 donation) by appointment, and the records are available to all visitors two Saturdays
per month (GLBT Historical Society, 2015). Meanwhile, the Schwules Museum charges an entrance fee, but the archive is open without registration and research is free as long as it is conducted on one’s own and in person (Schwules Museum, 2015). All three of these institutions have made a commitment to making their records accessible to the communities they serve, but their policies and practices (fees, accounts, memberships, not to mention the need for a user to have confidence and knowledge in navigating archives) still create barriers to access for marginalized people.

These established LGBTQ+ archives are also limited in their own representations of queer and trans people. Just as traditional archives tend to promote a narrow portrayal of history from the white, colonial, cis-heteronormative, and patriarchal perspective, LGBTQ+ archives have been influenced in their practices and collections by systems of power. Visible LGBTQ+ history is predominantly from the perspectives of white, cis, upper-middle class gay men, and this homonormative lens is pervasive in the narratives regarding people of color, trans people, genderqueer people, and working class people. The Stonewall riots, an example of well-known LGBTQ+ history, are often understood as the beginning of the gay liberation movement, despite the reality that queer and trans people had been organizing and participating in LGBTQ+ activism for at least a decade prior to the Stonewall events (Stryker, 2008). The Stonewall riots also prompted the creation of the Gay Liberation Front, which quickly became divided through identity politics and systems of privilege and oppression. The Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) was formed in response to these divisions, and the goals of the organization were focused on the experiences and needs of white, gay, middle class men. The GAA excluded
transgender people and did not represent lesbians, working-class people, and people of color in its policies, practices, and activist work (Stryker, 2008). The political and social presence of groups like the GAA is overrepresented in archival records of LGBTQ+ organizations, and form the foundation of homonormativity in cultural narratives of history.

*The Need for a Queer Archive at Oregon State University*

I became involved with the LGBTQ+ organizations on the Oregon State University campus shortly after arriving in Corvallis in the fall of 2010. During my freshman year I volunteered at the Pride Center, the cultural resource center dedicated to serving the needs of LGBTQ+ people. The friendships and relationships I was able to build through volunteering were extremely influential in my identity development and growth as a social justice activist. Some of my most significant experiences were not the times when I was actively organizing, but the moments when I listened to my older friends and mentors share stories from their personal histories in the LGBTQ+ community. This informal process of storytelling gave me a connection to histories that extended beyond my particular time at this institution, fostered my sense of responsibility to activism and advocacy, and educated me on what values and ideals can create a strong and vibrant LGBTQ+ community. These stories deeply influenced the way that I chose to participate in queer student activism by providing me with a sense of legacy and a context on the significance of these LGBTQ+ organizations to Oregon State University. Through their stories I was better able to understand past struggles and achievements, and
begin the task of imagining what a better right-now might look and feel like for LGBTQ+ people in this community.

The legacy of local LGBTQ+ activism and the histories of LGBTQ+ organizations are significant, but these stories often fade into invisibility through the marginalization of queer and trans people. Sarah Dyer writes about this discontinuity of history that “occurs when material is ephemeral or marginal” (Dyer, 2012). This discontinuity can be exacerbated in student communities where the leadership is in constant rotation. The maximum amount of time an individual is in a leadership positions is three or four years, and often that time span is much shorter. When the discontinuity of history occurs in underrepresented communities, people become detached from previous work that can provide an important foundation in present organizing and activism. Current advocates miss opportunities to place themselves in a greater context and are required to continually engage in work and conversations that have occurred many times before them. This repetition of activism and organizing ultimately limits the depth and magnitude of work that can possibly occur.

The erasure of local LGBTQ+ narratives at OSU and in Corvallis, combined with visible consequences of the discontinuity of history within LGBTQ+ organizations, indicated a need for a Queer Archive Project at Oregon State University.

*Imagining the Oregon State University Queer Archives*

Although the primary focus of my project was not on the creation of the Oregon State University Queer Archives (OSQA), the process of envisioning OSQA aligned with my own growth and development as I undertook the task of documenting LGBTQ+
stories. Therefore, the creation of OSQA is worth explaining within the context of this paper.

OSQA is a collection that is housed at the Special Collections and Archive Research Center (SCARC), which is located in the Valley Library at Oregon State University. Currently OSQA’s collection consists of previously existing records (primarily donated by the Pride Center) and the documents, interviews, and film specific to this project. SCARC also offers digital resources, and OSQA plans to offer an LGBTQ+ digital collection (the documents, interviews, and film specific to this thesis will be made available through that collection). Although OSQA expects that physical items, records, and ephemera will be added to the collection, the organization also anticipates that a significant shift towards digital and online materials will be made in future records, donations, and gifts. The movement towards digital and online records can increase access, since people do not have to navigate the barriers of physical archives and can view digital records readily from a computer. However, digital archives can also limit a sense of physical connection to objects and records, which is why continuing to gather physical items is an important endeavor that balances an archive’s collection. OSQA also recognizes that as LGBTQ+ people and other marginalized groups have limited records in traditional institutional archives, their modes of sharing and documenting their own histories often occur in creative ways outside of the institution. Therefore, OSQA is open to receiving any kind of record or narrative that an individual or group wishes to share in order to further resist and complicate previous archival representations of queer and trans experiences.
The central vision of OSQA can be summarized with their mission statement, which was drafted from a combination of theoretical readings, community conversations, and inspiration from other queer archives. The community conversations, which were a series of three meetings (one per term) were particularly influential in determining the commitments that best addressed the needs of the local LGBTQ+ community. These conversations included students, professors, librarians, and administrators from the OSU community, and the dialogues produced important considerations for developing the archives. The participants were also involved in selecting the logo and planning the organization’s first event during Pride Week 2015.

“The mission of the OSU Queer Archives (OSQA) is to preserve and share the stories, histories, and experiences of LGBTQ+ people within the OSU and Corvallis communities. This mission is rooted in three central commitments:

- fostering intersectional community activism
- resisting erasure of queer and trans narratives
- positioning the collection as a space to imagine alternative futures for LGBTQ+ communities and people

(OSQA Mission, 2015)

Fostering intersectional community activism means that OSQA is dedicated to building and sharing a collection through work that is driven by the community. It also means that OSQA actively disrupts the cis-heteronormative and homonormative narratives by sharing histories that are diverse, complicated, and represent the experiences of people with marginalized identities (women, people of color, working class people, trans people, and genderqueer people). For example, intersectional community activism could look like outreach with multiple LGBTQ+ and social justice organizations, programs and
research that are developed by students, and activist initiatives that are driven by community members. Resisting the erasure of queer and trans narratives means that OSQA understands that the archives have a direct responsibility in providing a platform of resources and support to the LGBTQ+ community in order to create visibility for local LGBTQ+ experiences and histories. Positioning the collection as a space to imagine alternative futures for LGBTQ+ communities and people means that OSQA believes socially just archives have a role in creating spaces of liberation and flourishing for present and future LGBTQ+ people. This third commitment is also an indication that LGBTQ+ histories, although marginalized, are not only stories of oppression but also resistance and celebration, and knowing these stories helps queer and trans people imagine what better futures for their communities could look like. In addition to this mission statement, I have identified several key values from my experiences and research which define radical and community driven Queer Archives.

I. A Queer Archive is Accountable

The Queer Archives must remain accountable to the LGBTQ+ community they are serving. This means that actions of the archives should align with the values of the community. The Queer Archives invites and fosters community participation, and listens to community voices to shape its initiatives and provide direction to the archives’ vision.

II. A Queer Archive is Accessible

The Queer Archives should be accessible to the community it serves. Traditional archives have been inaccessible to marginalized groups, and intentional, consistent effort must be made to maintain the Queer Archives as a space that all can access and benefit
from. Creating an accessible Queer Archives means examining how the practices of the archives, which is situated within a white, middle-class, male dominated institution, can be restructured so that the records the archives have to offer are readily available to people who might not typically access archives. Common barriers to archives include access that is limited to researchers/academics, fees to access records, and archival spaces that communicate white, heteronormative/cisnormative, and middle-class practices (which can be intimidating and unwelcoming for people who do not hold those identities) (DiVeglia, 2012).

III. Community Ownership and Control

This value is related to the concept of accountability, but directly addresses the idea of power in regards to archives. Traditional archives are often spaces where items of meaning have become detached and divided from the people they represent. Jenna Freedman reflects on the importance of ownership and control in her writings on zine culture. Participants in zine communities do not seek to maintain control over their work in a capitalist sense, but maintain agency over their representation by rejecting traditional forms of media production, and imagine alternative spaces where their creativity and identity can be expressed without repression or censorship (Freedman, 2012). Alexis Pauline Gumbs writes that an empowering project is “owned, supported, co-created by, and transparent with the community it nurtures and grows within.” (Gumbs, 2012). The Queer Archives should be imagined as a space that encourages the agency and empowerment of all LGBTQ+ people. It is important that the people in our community feel that they ultimately own the Queer Archives, and that the knowledge the Queer
Archives holds belongs to the community, not to an institution or to academia as a whole. However, the Queer Archives are housed in the Valley Library, and therefore are literally owned by Oregon State University. An archive situated within an institution will face tensions between upholding the values of the community it is serving and following the practices and policies of a university based archive. These tensions should not be ignored but addressed through open, on-going dialogues.

IV. A Queer Archive is Collaborative

The act of collecting, documenting, and sharing archival material should be a community effort. When the collecting and sharing is community based, it fosters the production of tangible, creative, accessible representations of LGBTQ+ communities, made for (and by) queer and trans people. A collaborative, mutually beneficial relationship between archives and marginalized communities is necessary for creating a fuller, diverse representation of the social and intellectual culture at a university. This relationship also disrupts the pattern of archives that collect and take records and documents for their own benefit or for the gain of “qualified” academics (DiVeglia, 2012). When material is representative of the work of community collaborations and outreach, rather than an outside interpretation of queer and trans people, the underrepresented community benefits and people across all disciplines and identities have the opportunity to access records that represent the LGBTQ+ as they want to communicate their lives and experiences.

V. A Queer Archive is Empowering and Engaging
“BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our meanings”

(Bikini Kill, 1991)

The empowering and engaging aspect of a queer archive is less about theory, and more about the actual work of collecting, preserving, representing, and sharing LGBTQ+ histories. The process of queer archival work has to be a multi-faceted effort. It is an effort that ought to be balanced between promoting self documentation while taking on the responsibility of archiving when it requires the resources, knowledge, and longevity that extend beyond an individual’s experience at the university. A careful, critical, and on-going balance between community empowerment and archival support can ensure the multifarious and longstanding representation of an underrepresented communities.

There are several examples of what an empowering and engaging queer archive could look like in practice. It could include giving student groups practical, accessible, creative ways to document their own experience and make their own records (so that they are not solely reliant on archival initiatives for their histories). It could look like engaging student and community activists in doing the work of collecting and sharing stories of LGBTQ+ people. This means not only providing activists with support and knowledge in accessing primary source materials, but also engaging queer student activists in the task of interpreting and sharing the records in meaningful and creative ways. In her writings Jenna Freedman illustrates the importance of documenting movements and events in the participants’ own voices. It gives power and magnitude to the voices in a community and presents an authenticity that simply cannot be created when the documentation is
controlled and maintained by someone outside the community (Freedman, 2012). When
community members have an opportunity to produce their own stories, they have a
chance to disrupt a long held legacy of the pervasive white, cis, straight, middle class,
male perspectives that dominate our social, political, and economic spheres.

Another important practice of community engagement and empowerment is
outreach. Without strong connections in a community, both with individuals and
organizations, queer archives will become ineffective and disconnected. Therefore, it is
important that a queer archive is constantly in the process of building relationships with
the LGBTQ+ community, both in spaces where connections already exist and in places
where collaborations have yet to occur.

In addition to outreach, initiatives like programming, events, social media
promotion, and exhibits can increase community engagement with queer archives
(Freedman, 2012). For example, the Sallie Bingham Center for Women’s History and
Culture at Duke University facilitates Girls Rock NYC, a summer camp zine making
workshop, which educates participants about zines and provides them with the materials
to create their own collaborative zine (Wooten, 2012). This program is an example of one
way archive programming can actively engage community members to produce their own
archival records by documenting their lived experience. On the Oregon State University
campus, OSQA organized its first event in May 2015 in collaboration with the Pride
Planning Committee. The event, modeled after a program in Chicago, was called the
Unfurling and asked LGBTQ+ community members to bring objects that were significant
to them to the Pride Week Opening Barbecue. For this community building event
participants shared stories about the items’ importance in their own histories. Although visibility, organization, and participation in the program should be improved in coming years, it was a meaningful first step in presenting the Queer Archives and gaining an understanding in what kind of programming would best serve this specific LGBTQ+ community.

VI. A Queer Archive Represents Complex, Multi-Faceted Narratives

It is important that a queer archive collection reflects the community it serves. This means having broad and diverse representations of the LGBTQ+ community, and recognizing that sexualities and gender identities are not the only identities that impact an individual’s or group’s experiences. Therefore, a queer archive should portray intersectional identities, but equally important its collection should illustrate that competing, contradictory narratives exist within a community. In other words, it is necessary that a queer archive include stories of identities and experiences that overlap and exist in complementary ways, and simultaneously represent the difficult narratives of tension, conflict, and the reality of fragmented identity politics. Kate Eichorn argues that the lives of marginalized groups are too complicated to be communicated through traditional, linear, monolithic narratives (Eichorn, 2012). A queer archive must be committed to sharing narratives of LGBTQ+ people of color, elders, people with disabilities, working class people, women, genderqueer/gender nonconforming people, and trans people in order to resist the pattern of representing queer and trans as a single, normative identity (white, cis, male, middle class, etc.). In conjunction with representing diverse narratives in terms of identity, there must also be a broad scope of life
experiences portrayed in an archival collection. In other words, LGBTQ+ histories are not about simply the experience of oppression, or conversely the experience of pride. A queer archive is about sharing stories of trauma, pain, violence, resistance, resilience, happiness, and fulfillment simultaneously (Diveglia, 2012). By sharing the complicated stories of people who transgress, transcend, and disrupt traditional constructions of sexuality and gender, resources like archives that have been previously used to uphold oppression and domination can be transformed into activist work that promotes the liberation of LGBTQ+ people (Diveglia, 2012).

**VII. A Queer Archive is About More Than Mere Survival**

This last tenet of a queer archive is inspired by an excerpt from a Bikini Kill’s riot grrrl manifesto, which unequivocally states that “life is much more than physical survival”. (Bikini Kill Manifesto). Similarly, the goal of a queer archive is so much more than merely the physical survival of LGBTQ+ documents, stories, and ephemera. A queer archive actively deconstructs and confronts systems of power by sharing its’ radical accounts of queer and trans lives, with the mission of supporting the connection, fulfillment, and love that already exists in LGBTQ+ communities. Alexis Pauline Gumbs reflects this idea in her writings about applying an ecological approach to community organizing. Through sharing and hearing stories, we celebrate the beauty and value of those that we share community with. Through the reflection and understanding of histories, we can connect with past narratives and experiences that both “grounding and inspirational.” (Gumbs, 2012). An ecological approach in queer archival work means reimagining dialogues around survival and preservation (which are important but limited)
into a focus on the immense capacity for collective transformation that exists when we share our stories authentically with each other.

Honors Thesis Project Description

The lack of representation and documentation of local lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBTQ+) histories inspired me to create a film on the LGBTQ+ community at Oregon State University (OSU). The narratives shared in the film are situated within the context of three of the LGBTQ+ organizations at OSU: the Pride Center, Sol: The LGBTQ+ Multicultural Support Network, and Rainbow Continuum. The Pride Center is OSU’s LGBTQ+ cultural resource center, and provides general resources, support, programming and space for the queer community. Sol, currently housed in the Pride Center, is an initiative to directly address the needs of LGBTQ+ students of color at this institution. Rainbow Continuum is the LGBTQ+ social group on campus, and in addition to facilitating weekly meetings, also organizes the Drag Shows and Pride Week, which are the largest and most visible LGBTQ+ events at OSU. All three of these organizations represent a legacy of student activism and the significance of LGBTQ+ resources at OSU.

The Experience of Documenting, Film Making, and Sharing

The materials used to create this film included interviews with thirteen LGBTQ+ community members, research on the existing Special Collections and Archives records, and the collection of documents and ephemera from OSU LGBTQ+ organizations.

I. Research on Current Records
The records that currently exist in the Special Collections and Archives Research Center (SCARC) include five boxes and 241 photographs. The records are loosely organized and are lacking context (such as labels, descriptions, and dates) that can provide an understanding of when and why these documents were important. Beyond the lack of structure and organization in the records, the records are focused primarily on the Pride Center’s fifteen year history at OSU, with the bulk of the documents originating from the years 2006-2013. Despite these significant limitations, they did provide an important base for me to work from as I undertook the task of creating a film on the LGBTQ+ community. I was able to gain context and piece together historical moments that I would have otherwise been unaware of if these records did not exist.

II. Document Collection

In addition to researching already existing archival records, I collected documents and records from the Pride Center, Sol, and Rainbow Continuum. These records mostly included photos and posters from past events, and provided me with additional materials to include in the film project. Although these new records are valuable, there are still many records at the Pride Center, with the Student Events and Activities Center (Rainbow Continuum’s sponsor organization), and with past student leadership that are not included in the recently added documentation.

III. Interviewing

The interviewing process took up the bulk of the time and energy I committed to the collection of LGBTQ+ narratives. Interviewing was both rewarding and extremely challenging.
To begin, there was a lot of learning that took place in terms of using a video camera. Although interviews are simple in comparison to other forms of video recording, I had never really used a video camera prior to working on this project. I had done video blogs on my computer, but otherwise I was entirely inexperienced in the realm of film and video production. Many of my initial interviews (and some of my later ones) are poorly lit, with the camera set at an awkward angle. Some of recordings are framed too widely, with an undesirable amount of distance from the interviewee’s face. Although I cannot claim complete competency in my ability to set up a video camera, at the end of this project I had a great deal more confidence in understanding the essentials of lighting and framing for a well-recorded interview.

Another significant challenge in the interview process was the development of interpersonal skills such as listening and asking questions. Interviews are different from other interactions because it is not a reciprocal conversation, and requires the interviewer to engage in intentional, active, genuine listening for extended periods of time. I could not give as much verbal feedback as I normally do in conversations. The listening was absent of the verbal affirmations and responses I typically give when interacting with another person. Interviewees were sometimes unsure that they were “saying the right things” because of my limited verbal response. My method for addressing this issue was 1) to give the interviewee affirming smiles and head nods (but not too many because then the interviewee tended to leave out important details), and 2) to assure the interviewee that they were giving great responses while reminding them that I was not seeking a specific “right” answer from them.
Despite these challenges and demands on my growth as a video interviewer, the interviews were my favorite part of this project. The opportunity to sit down with another person and a video camera and listen to their stories and experiences was inspiring and transformative. It can be an uncomfortable process, since many people do not enjoy being in front of a camera and are not familiar with the experience of being intently listened to. Despite the awkwardness, the best moments for me were the instances when the energy in the room shifted from a focus on the uncomfortable circumstances to a beautiful, authentic recounting of a story the interviewee wanted to share. The chance to interview these individuals was truly a gift. I gained skills as an activist that I will carry with me in the future work I undertake, and the way I relate to and understand other people has been profoundly influenced from these experiences.

IV. Outreach and Relationship Building

Since this project was focused on intertwining personal narratives with the successes and challenges of campus LGBTQ+ organizations, outreach and relationship building was central to the completion of this work. For me outreach meant authentically showing up for community dialogues and programs, and displaying a passion and commitment for sharing the work of social justice with people. The work I did relied heavily on connections I had built previously in my past work within these LGBTQ+ organizations. These connections were beneficial because I had a detailed understanding of the structure and role of these organizations, and was able to initiate conversations around document sharing and interviews with relative ease. However, to an extent these
relationships biased my work because it was so grounded in previously created connections, and was not focused on outreach to people I was less familiar with.

*V. Shifts in Theory, Practice and Scope*

When I began this project, I outlined the scope of the film very broadly. I started with the vague goal of creating a documentary that communicated the significant issues, events, developments, and experiences of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community at Oregon State University through the years 2004-2014. The initial parameters of this project were far too general and frankly, far too ambitious for a feasible achievement in the span of nine months. However, diverse communities can be difficult to define, and much of my theoretical background was in queer theory, which generally argues that being inclusive in activist and academic work means actively resisting the need to set strict boundaries on communities or identities. In another example, Kelly Wooten describes the difficulties of defining the third wave of feminism because it is a movement that is complicated, fluid, and highly contested (Wooten, 2012). Although it became clear to me after starting the project that I would have to limit the scope of my work, I did not actively seek out a definition of what those limitations might look like.

Instead, the parameters of the film I created were shaped by the interviews I did and the narratives I listened to. For example, about halfway through this process I realized that the documents I was collecting and the interviews I was conducting were largely focused on and relevant to the context of LGBTQ+ history at OSU as I understood it during my five years of undergraduate coursework. I also realized that I
was more interested in communicating where the LGBTQ+ community was in this moment of time than I was in attempting to represent the community during a time when I was not present (before 2009). Like Liz Bly, who writes about the importance of riot grrrl culture and third wave feminism in her decision to write “a contemporary history” that she was a part of, I ultimately chose to focus my thesis project on examining the social and cultural context of LGBTQ culture at Oregon State University during my time here as a way of contributing to the OSU Queer Archives (Bly, 2012).

Another major shift in the project occurred in the way I chose to approach interviews. Initially I had a firm idea of the history I wanted to present, and had a vision of how the narratives shared with me ought to be. When I first interviewed people, I would have a meeting with them first to explain the project and draft questions together. However, the process of drafting these questions often looked more like me telling the interviewee what questions I wanted to ask them. After a few interviews where the individual would share an unexpected, but ultimately more poignant story than what I had ever envisioned, I realized that to do this work well required me to let go of my ego and my thoughts of what this film ought to be. People know their own histories, and I made the decision to actively affirm that obvious idea in my work. I began approaching the interviews by asking interviewees what they would like to share with me, or asking them what questions they would ask themselves if they were the interviewer. This helped transform my project in multiple ways. First, I sensed relief in some interviewees when they realized that I was not searching for something specific and was only interested in what they wanted to share. It redistributed the power in the relationship between
interviewer and interviewee once the individuals realized that they had control over what
the questions would be asked. Second, as mentioned above, the narratives shared in the
interviews often moved in surprising, but complex and meaningful ways when the
interviewees had the power to design the questions. Third, although these complicated
stories were difficult to fit into an easily understood and cohesive storyline, it ultimately
made a better film that was a more genuine representation of the LGBTQ community and
its resource organizations.

Project Outcomes

1. The Film

The film I created explains the overall history and examines current status,
challenges, and successes of the Pride Center, Rainbow Continuum, and Sol. The film
begins with outlining the history of the Pride Center, and then moves into narratives by
interviewees that describe the current status of the Pride Center. The interviewees
identify the importance of the Pride Center as an organization that provides valuable
resources such as peer support staff and a visible queer space (both in-person and on
social media) to the LGBTQ+ community. The film also addresses the Pride Center’s
historical legacy as a white and cis dominated space, and examines how the inclusion of
trans people and people of color in LGBTQ+ organizations are important issues to
address. The Pride Center segment ends by highlighting the importance of collaboration
among communities in order to address social justice issues, and uses the Pride Center
garden as an example of a recent collaborative project. The film then moves into the
segment on Sol, and explains the history of Sol at OSU. The resources that Sol provides
in the form of peer-support staff and programming are highlighted, as well as the positive impact of Sol for QTPOC students. The rest of the Sol portion of the film focuses largely on Sol’s complex relationship with the Pride Center and the cultural resource centers, as well as the tension that students are experiencing with institutional practices. Some of the interviewees examine the difficulty of organizing as a QTPOC group at OSU in their narratives. This segment closes with emphasizing that Sol is a significant organization and its work represents a dedication to ending the intertwining systems of power and oppression such as racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. The final segment is focused on Rainbow Continuum, which was established in 1976 and is OSU’s oldest LGBTQ+ organization. Like the previous sections, the film gives an abbreviated history of Rainbow Continuum and then moves into explaining the significance of the organization. The weekly social meetings that Rainbow Continuum hosts, as well as major programming such as Pride Week and the Drag Shows, are central themes. The film ends with a clip of a student leader explaining the tensions they experience between being celebrated as a drag performer and the lack of acceptance they experience for their genderqueer identity in everyday life. The film attempts to portray past and current LGBTQ+ experiences through complicated, multi-faceted narratives that both honor and critique the work of LGBTQ+ organizations at OSU.

II. Providing a Foundation for Future Work

Although the film was the central goal of this project, the documents I collected and the full interviews will become part of a foundation of records for the OSU Queer Archives. My own contributions have limitations, and there is far more potential in
LGBTQ+ archival work at this institution than what was documented over this past year. Therefore, I would like this project to be understood as a beginning to a legacy of intentional collection and sharing of LGBTQ+ stories at OSU and in Corvallis, and not as a full or complete representation of LGBTQ+ history in this community.

III. Limitations

There were several limitations to my work on this project. First, there was my own inexperience in terms of documenting, interviewing, filming, and editing materials and footage into a video. Although I am grateful for all of the learning and growth that occurred during this process, and I feel a sense of accomplishment from identifying a need and attempting to address it, this project was hindered by my inexperience. Second, this project was limited by its individualistic framework. Although none of the work I did would have been possible without the support and direction from mentors, student leaders, and community members, I did pursue this work largely as an individual. This limited the perspectives and narratives represented in the interviews and the film. I would encourage future archivists and activists working with LGBTQ+ to pursue projects like these as a collaborative group. The work that can be accomplished through collaborative efforts far exceeds in depth, meaning, and impact of anything that can be done by one individual. Third, the work I did was limited by the identities that I hold. As a young, white, middle class, college educated person, the connections I have and the perspectives represented in the interviews and the film are deeply influenced by the privileged identities I benefit from.
Of the thirteen interviews, eleven were with past or present students of Oregon State University, and only two were with administrators or faculty. Since I was interested primarily in student experiences, this student-centric approach was appropriate in terms of my own goals for this project. However, since student narratives are limited by their relatively brief (usually four or five years) experience at an institution, the project could have benefitted from the narratives of more administrators and faculty who had perspectives that extended farther than a typical student’s. Such experiences would have provided more continuity and depth to the film. Although this project lacked staff and faculty experiences, these narratives are valuable and should be intentionally included in the OSU Queer Archives in the future.

The interviewees were mostly white individuals, with only five of the thirteen interviewees identifying as people of color. It is also important to recognize that four of those five interviews occurred much later in the timeline of the project, after I became aware of the white dominance occurring in my work. I attribute this both to my personal identity, since my social networks and awareness of race and privilege are influenced by my whiteness, and to a broader historical legacy of racism in the state of Oregon. Oregon State University is a predominantly white institution, and its racial and ethnic demographics are influenced by the state’s racist and colonial legacy. For example, when Oregon entered the Union its constitution had a clause that excluded black people from living in the state. The law was repealed in 1926, but it was not until 2001 that Oregon removed the racist language from its constitution (Imarisha, 2013). There is also the history of colonization, with the violence towards and genocide of native people, which
must be recognized as an injustice that is the foundation of the current social and political context of the United States. These are just two examples of the removal and exclusion of people of color from the state of Oregon which shape its’ racial and ethnic demographics, and influence the presence of people of color at Oregon State University. Although it is important to write about the broader context of white supremacy and racism in the state I live in, I do not want to negate my personal responsibility as a white individual that undertook the project of documenting LGBTQ+ history at Oregon State University. The experiences of people of color are underrepresented in this project, and that is an issue I want to address directly in hopes of interrupting this pattern early in the development of the OSU Queer Archives.

**Recommendations for Future Initiatives of the Oregon State University Queer Archives**

Based on the experiences I had while working on this project, I have outlined several recommendations that could be helpful in defining what future initiatives and projects of the OSU Queer Archives could look like.

I. **Record Keeping Practices for LGBTQ+ Organizations**

First, the LGBTQ+ organizations need support in creating record keeping practices for themselves. By guiding and collaborating with these organizations in developing consistent, reliable record keeping practices, the OSU Queer Archives would not only be improving the state of LGBTQ+ documentation at OSU, but would be building valuable relationships for future programs and projects.

II. **Collection and Organizations of Records**
There are many records that currently exist within these LGBTQ+ organizations that I was not able to collect over the course of my project. These documents are extremely valuable, but currently have the risk of being lost because they are not housed within the security of the Queer Archives. These records should be added to the OSU Queer Archives, organized for ease of access, labeled so their context and significance is not lost. Additionally, outreach should be done to past LGBTQ+ leadership, as important records and documents could be currently kept with them. The best records I collected during this project were shared with me by an individual who is not longer at OSU. Without their generous contribution to OSQA, these important documents would be lost to the LGBTQ+ community and OSQA could not share these records through events like the Unfurling.

III. Other LGBTQ Organizations (Queer Affairs, OSTEM, Queer Studies)

There are many initiatives, groups, and organizations I was not able to represent my work with the OSU Queer archives. These entities include the Queer Affairs Task Force, O-STEM, the Broad Spectrum Veterinary Student Association, Full Spectrum Productions, Out and About, the Corvallis Transgender Support Group, the Queer Studies program, and the Pride Panel Program. It is important that the OSU Queer Archives collaborate with these groups to support their archive needs and strengthen the diversity of connections in this community. Additionally, some of these entities exist outside the purview of OSU, and since the OSU Queer Archives seeks to share LGBTQ+ histories from Corvallis, not just the university, it is necessary for OSQA to outreach to these organizations.
IV. Queer and Trans People of Color at Oregon State University

One of the most obvious disparities in records and documentation for LGBTQ+ people at OSU existed in the experiences of Sol: The LGBTQ+ Multicultural Support Network. Sol is an organization that began in 2003, and although Sol has a history nearly as long as the Pride Center (created in 2001), there are very few records on Sol. When I requested the current leadership at Sol for documents, posters, and other ephemera that represented their history, they handed me a small binder that contained a typed draft of Sol’s history, a brochure, position descriptions, and training manuals from past years. Meanwhile, the five boxes in SCARC are mostly committed to Pride Center history, not to mention the numerous records housed at the Pride Center, indicate a disparity in the tools and resources provided to these two organizations. Additionally, the Pride Center has a documentary that portrays the history of their organization from the years 2001-2004. There is not an equivalent documentary for Sol. Although the film I created does include Sol’s history and work, those ten minutes of representation are simply not enough.

One of my interviews was with the founder of Sol, who shared valuable history with me and gifted electronic records of Sol (powerpoints, digital posters and brochures) to OSQA. Other records of Sol (in the form of narratives and likely electronic records) exist with past leadership that were not gathered in the course of this project. Outreach and connections should be made to this past leadership in order to add more complex and farsighted records and narratives of queer and trans people of color at Oregon State University. The OSU Queer Archives should collaborate with Sol to address this lack of
representation for the narratives and histories of LGBTQ+ people of color at OSU. Intentional collaboration with Sol would set a precedent for the values and goals of the OSU Queer Archives. Additionally, connections could be made with the Oregon Multicultural Archives, which directly address and share the histories of people of color throughout Oregon. A strong relationship between Sol, the Oregon Multicultural Archives, and the OSU Queer Archives would represent a commitment to addressing homophobia, transphobia, and racism simultaneously. The systems of power and oppression are upheld through a mutual foundation, and these systems will only be dismantled through the collective efforts of marginalized communities.

Conclusion: Still Working On it

Queer archives are a form of activist work that addresses and disrupts the pattern of silence around and misrepresentation of LGBTQ+ people in dominant historical narratives. As activist organizations, queer archives should communicate the values of accountability, accessibility, and collaboration in their complex and empowering representations of LGBTQ+ lives. The OSU Queer Archives are committed to resisting the erasure of queer and trans histories by providing visibility to LGBTQ+ experiences through activist projects like the OSU LGBTQ+ Community Film. The narratives shared in the film are set within the context of three of the LGBTQ+ organizations at OSU: the Pride Center, Sol: The LGBTQ+ Multicultural Support Network, and Rainbow Continuum. Although the stories represented in the film are important, they by no means complete and do not fully represent the LGBTQ+ community. This project is only a small piece of the much broader work of the OSU Queer Archives. OSQA will continue the much needed work of documenting LGBTQ+ history at OSU and in Corvallis in the
years to come. It is my hope that the narratives shared in this film demonstrate the
continued importance of LGBTQ+ resources and services, and add a piece of collective
history to the Queer Archives for past, present, and future LGBTQ+ community members
to benefit from.

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