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Archival Education

and Student Research
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Archival Education and Student Research: Essays from the University of Pittsburgh

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Dancing: Archival Education and Student Research

Richard J. Cox

Dance Naked: Introduction

John Mellencamp's song "Dance Naked" might seem an inappropriate way of introducing four student essays on archival topics, but it happened to be what I was listening to as I put the finishing touches to this essay. As with most popular song lyrics (and I am not repeating Mellencamp's words so as not to offend anyone), these words can be interpreted on a number of levels. Yet, I know that when students work on such essays in their archives courses that they both feel naked in their lack of security about their own knowledge of archival science while sensing a similar nakedness in an archival literature marked by great strengths and greater weaknesses. At the least, they are dancing round and round with the archival literature and with new concepts in an effort to prepare themselves to be competent professionals.

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In this introduction, I have tried to set the efforts of these particular student essays into their educational setting, profession-wide and in the particular school (the University of Pittsburgh School of Library and Information Science) in which the students studied. These are important and stimulating essays, and I hope the profession sees them in that fashion. They are representative of a new generation of archivists being educated in new, more comprehensive education programs. The work of such young professionals bodes well for the future of our profession and, especially, our professional literature.

The Archives Education Shuffle

When archivists pause to reflect on what they think archivists ought to know to be competent, there are many options presented; the options generally continue old debates. Archivists should be grounded in archival principles and practices, the degree of balance between theory and practice varying according to who is reflecting on this issue. They should have an inter-disciplinary orientation, both for acquiring a knowledge of the records archivists appraise and manage and for working with the diversity of researchers using archival records. It would be nice, as well, if these archivists possessed a substantial knowledge about electronic recordkeeping technology and automated approaches and subject expertise relating to their holdings and the users of these records. Archivists must have excellent writing and communication skills, the ability to work with people, and even the physical ability to move the records from storage to the reference room. It is
obvious, of course, that such competencies can be seen much as the old apples and oranges equation, but there is no doubt that this discipline has both high expectations and often conflicting opinions regarding its practitioners.

What would the profession expect an archival educator to add to this discussion and debate? The educator will stress, of course, the need for the student to master the body of archival knowledge, as well as to have the ability to relate that knowledge to practical situations. Terry Eastwood, Luciana Duranti, and Tom Nesmith have written masterful essays that stress these matters, conveying the nature of the relationship between theory, methodology, and practice, and providing an excellent sense of what the archival knowledge is and what it needs to become, while, and this is important, describing different means by which archivists would be educated.¹ But there is more even than this that must be present in the archival academy and which the educator must convey to his or her students. Learning principles also includes the need for the fledgling archivists to have some sense of when and how to apply the principles that add up to form the archival body of knowledge.

knowledge. This is not an argument for the importance of the practicum or fieldwork component in graduate archival education, but it is rather the need to equip archival students with the tools that enable them to understand applied research and to develop problem-solving skills. These students must be given the big picture (the whys) along with the basic tools (the whats and hows), and their knowledge -- however raw and unformed -- must be built on being able to test assumptions, to consider new approaches, and to pose and answer new questions that will enable them to be more effective archivists. In short, archivists should now be defined by not where they work (an archives) or their job titles (archivist) but by what they know (archival science). They are prepared to pursue careers, not to be plugged into assembly-line operations with short-lived skills.

What should be the educational objectives of our newly forming graduate educational programs? As an educator, I can identify six objectives. Educators should understand and teach the foundational theories of the field, such as provenance, that reflect principles about the nature of records and recordkeeping systems. They must introduce students to methodologies, techniques for managing or controlling records, such as the archival documentation strategy. Educators must orient students to the basic practices of the field, the essential skills for managing archival records and archival programs. Admittedly, how theory, methodology, and practice are intertwined depends both on the specific topic as well as the duration and comprehensiveness of the graduate program, but there is no argument that all three are crucial to the effectiveness of
the particular archivist and the profession. Educators must socialize the student to the profession, meaning that they need to have some understanding of the profession's infrastructure of repository type, associations, professional debates, and continuing and emerging trends; we are providing a road map to help our graduates navigate until they learn their own way (or at least to read the map on their own).

Educators must introduce students to the nature of and needs for research in the field, so that these students can be prepared to carry out applied research in their workplaces as needed and to be able to evaluate other research necessary to making decisions. Finally, educators need to help their fledgling archivists understand that the field is changing and to help them comprehend both how they must react to change and to be change-agents. The archival mission in the modern Information Age is enough to help us comprehend this need. For too long archivists reacted to electronic information technology as obstacle rather than opportunity, and the results have been predictably messy.  

In this discussion, I have been emphasizing that we need to overthrow some basic assumptions about our field.

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2 For my own thoughts on this, see Richard J. Cox, The First Generation of Electronic Records Archivists in the United States, 1960-1990: A Study in Professionalization (New York: Haworth, 1994). Things have shifted quickly in the short time since I have written this study, but the shift has still not affected the greater elements of the American archival community which are continuing to view the information technology as problem rather than as opportunity to convey the essential aspects of the archival mission. A major reason for this problem has been the weakness of graduate archival education.
We are no longer able to state confidently (if we ever were) that the archival practitioner is made by engaging in practice. Practice only provides an orientation to the level of knowledge in one particular archival program; if the student is fortunate, the knowledge level is high. We are now beginning to realize that practice is based on knowledge comprising both theory and methodology. There is more. We are also displaying a sense that we are not interested in training that stresses learning present practice. We are, instead, concerned with education that emphasizes an archival knowledge consisting of theory and methodology and their practical manifestations. There is, of course, a considerable difference in these approaches and their attitudes. If there is to be training, it comes in continuing education that is best built on a substantial archival education and basic knowledge.

What is the evidence of such a change in the archival profession's orientation to the education of its practitioners? We have more academic-based educators, and while they are still a relatively small group, it is a group far larger in size and influence than anyone would have predicted a decade ago. These educators are developing a more substantial graduate curriculum. I predict that the "program" of an introductory and advanced or specialized course melded to fieldwork will disappear as recognized means to educate archivists; they might exist to train technicians and other support staff, but they will not be seen as satisfactory for educating archivists.

Other indicators abound. We have had an explosion in archival publication that is adding research monographs to an already long list of basic primers; students are using
basic manuals as mere frameworks for grasping principles and professional consensus about practice while they are being introduced to studies and writings that stretch far beyond such manuals. They will be better and more creative practitioners. Continuing education offerings are beginning to reflect a diversity that goes beyond the essential archival meat and potatoes dinners to include a gourmet cooking with issues and advanced approaches. Finally, the profession has endorsed as a basic minimum guidelines for graduate education a separate masters degree. The Masters of Archival Studies degree stresses core knowledge, the interdisciplinary aspects of this knowledge, and the fact that there is a substantial cluster of concepts and approaches that requires serious education rather than apprenticeship disguised as education. While at present the apprenticeship mode still predominates with its heavy reliance on short-term institutes and workshops scattered through national and regional professional conferences, this will change over the next generation as well. We need to understand the evolution to this present stress on tightly specialized archival programs as parts of other degree programs from apprenticeship in the early twentieth century to a reliance on continuing education starting in the late 1930s to the slow emergence of archival education in library and information science schools and history departments in the 1960s. We are now poised to do much better.

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3 A reliance on basic manuals by archival practitioners has always been problematic at best, but it is particularly so now.
We might be, in fact, on the verge of reaching for ideals in education and training far beyond our dreams of just a generation ago. Twenty years ago, we deemed it fortunate if we could assemble a few courses. Let me describe just one aspect of a new vision. Instead of developing a single educational venue that strives to educate individuals for all archival work, we might soon be able to think, realistically, about different venues for different types of work. Archival technicians might have bachelor's degrees with an array of continuing education. Professional archivists would be the product of M.A.S. degree programs, updated by advanced continuing education. Archivists with specialized tasks (electronic records management) or focused topical and institutional aspects (archivist in an immigration history program or archivist of a high-tech corporation) would have the M.A.S. degree plus another subject masters. Archivists who strive to be administrators would have the M.A.S. degree and a similar degree in public administration or related discipline. Archivists who become educators must have the doctorate in some discipline, ranging from history to library science and maybe even someday in archival science.

An Archival Waltz at the University of Pittsburgh

In the midst of immense change in archival education, expected because the world archivists work in is changing, what can be offered in more comprehensive graduate programs short of a separate masters degree? While it probably depends where you look and who you talk to, there is no doubt that dances are being held in these
programs that are providing a better educational experience than ever before thought possible. And while it is easy to see the shortcomings of such efforts (one faculty member, courses stretched to cover basic knowledge, sometimes uneasily fit into degree offerings), these weaknesses can be transformed in time through hard work, persistence, and professional leadership into the necessary form of separate masters degrees. The University of Pittsburgh archival education program in its School of Library and Information Science represents one such example of the still occurring transformation.

This school was opened at the University of Pittsburgh in 1962, having evolved from a library school at the Carnegie Institute. It was the first school to include "information" and "library" in its name, and it eventually supported two separate library and information science departments (1969) and expanded to include an undergraduate information science degree. The school has long been a leader in the education of librarians and other information professionals, and it is the largest school of its kind in North America, with nearly thirty-five faculty and over seven hundred students in undergraduate, masters, and doctoral programs in telecommunications, information science, and library science. Archival science is a recent introduction to its wide-ranging cluster of information professions, and while the number of students this program hosts is small (about ten to fifteen at any one time), the

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The school is already established as one of the major centers for graduate study in this area as a result of its having a regular faculty appointment in this specialization and a curriculum that extends beyond a few courses. The school’s interest in archival science was, until more recently, fairly erratic (not unlike the patterns shown by many other such schools). It was not until the mid-1970s that the school offered its first archives course. While offered irregularly and taught by an adjunct (the director of the University of Pittsburgh’s Archives of Industrial Society), this single course remained the only offering for students interested in this field. In 1986, the arrival of a new dean, Toni Carbo Bearman, brought renewed interest based upon her familiarity with archival matters and federal information policy. A faculty retreat held in 1987 identified archives and records management as a potential area for new development in specialization. As a result, in 1988 I was hired as a faculty member to develop a curriculum in archival science, making this school one of the few to have a full-time archival educator on its faculty.

Since 1988, the curriculum has expanded significantly, although it falls short of what is needed to support the movement for the establishment of Masters in Archival

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5 The Graduate School of Library and Information Sciences 1975-1977 Bulletin (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1975), 19. The course was entitled the “Management of Archives and Manuscripts.”

6 This type of adjunct arrangement has long been typical of the American archival profession’s approach to graduate education. University archivists and manuscript curators have been the backbone of archival education programs and, despite the growth in the number of regular faculty appointments in archival science, these individuals still remain the primary source of teaching about archives on the graduate level.
Science degrees such as exist in Canada. In that year a records management course and introductory library and archives preservation courses were added. The following year an advanced course in archival appraisal and an advanced course in preservation management expanded the curriculum. In 1991, another advanced course in archival arrangement, description, and reference was added. During a recent academic year, a course on science and technology archives was taught to enable archives students to examine one area of archival work and to apply their knowledge of basic archival functions; science and technology was a good choice for this kind of course because of the innovative work and research done on appraisal and documentation issues in these areas.

In addition to these courses, there are closely related courses, such as oral history and tradition, the history of books and printing, and critical bibliography. And there are, of course, numerous courses in information technology available to the archives student. The current records and information resources management course has now been revised to focus more on electronic records management, but it is still not sufficient to educate individuals to be electronic records archivists.7 This latter development is definitely the result both of the school's involvement in an intensive institute for government archivists on the topic of electronic records and a recent effort to conduct research about electronic records. The expansion of this course

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7 We seem to be at the same point with electronic records education as we were with graduate archival education thirty years ago -- cursory and more an appreciation than real education.
makes this school one of the few to offer a course on this topic as part of an archives specialization in North America.

The current curriculum ranges through the basic archival functions (appraisal, arrangement and description, reference, and preservation) while including a strong foundation in the administration of archival programs, a knowledge of the nature of records and archival theory and methodology that supports the handling of records, and an orientation to the North American archival community that graduates of its program would work in. Each course stresses the knowledge components of theory, methodology, and practice, along with other equally important elements. We try to develop measures or benchmarks that would assist an archival repository to consider what its degree of success is in meeting its mission. Research needs and skills are discussed. Each particular function or debate is set in its historical context, as a means of socializing the future archivist. Case studies are used at spots, although we are notoriously weak as a profession in this aspect of education. Literature is read deeply and broadly, as is related literature in other disciplines with insights for archival work and theory. The courses are full; not only is there plenty to teach, four full archival and several other related courses leave us still a long way short of providing a sufficient education for archival professionals. Imagine a twelve- or eighteen-credit masters degree program in any discipline, and I think my frustration as an educator and the student’s desire for more can be readily understood.

This is precisely why the task of having students write long, in-depth essays in every course is as necessary as it
is in such a program. While course lectures and seminar-like discussions of professional literature develop the general parameters of archival knowledge in all its guises, the paper enables a student to dig far more deeply in one component of professional practice or theory. In my basic archives course, the directions for this assignment provide additional details of how I perceive this assignment as part of a student’s essential archival education. Students are asked to prepare a major paper on a historical topic, basic principle, or core function of archival or historical records programs, intended to enable the student to do in-depth reading and study on a single aspect of archival administration.

These papers are to consist of at least four parts: 1) definition of the function, principle, or historical aspect and its importance; 2) a review of the literature that reflects both key points of this aspect of archival administration and the development of archival theory on this principle or function; 3) an evaluation of the literature’s strengths and weaknesses, including any conclusions about needs in the profession; and 4) an assessment of how that literature would be useful to the staff of an historical records program. Students must show evidence of having read thoroughly at least twenty articles and, if appropriate, several monographs or textbooks for this paper. Students must also limit their papers to one of the following subjects or a more defined topic within these: 1) history, management and planning of archival and historical records programs; 2) identification and retention (appraisal and acquisition) of archival and historical records; 3) archival preservation; 4) reference and use of archival and historical
records; 5) public programs and advocacy; and 6) the history and nature of the archival profession or one of its core principles. In order to stress the relationship between theory and practice and to enhance problem-solving in these fledgling professionals, students who are working at archives or manuscript repositories may select the option of writing an analysis of some aspect of their employing institution (although he or she must be prepared to reflect the relevant literature and must present to the instructor a research proposal for his approval).

There are other necessary components of the paper requirements. The papers should be well-written, footnoted, and prepared according to the most recent edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*. During the last class, some students may be asked to make presentations about their research. The student is also requested to narrow his or her topic as much as possible. In other words, the student should avoid selecting a subject as broad as "archival arrangement and description," a topic that has been discussed in hundreds of articles, numerous books, and many special reports. A much better focused subject would be something like a "comparison of authority control concepts and perspectives in library and archival science." Students who are committed to, or are contemplating committing to, the concentration in archival science in the MLS program should plan on (if possible) conducting research on an area that can be explored through the course of the three-term program. For example, a student interested in macro-appraisal approaches could prepare a preliminary general paper on this topic in the basic archives course, expand the paper in the archival appraisal course
offered in the second term by analyzing how macro-appraisal has been utilized in science, technology, and medical archives, and explore this matter still further by completing a related fieldwork in an area archives in the last term.

Students may also elect to write a paper on some aspect of a core archival principle or even element of a basic definition. For example, archives students might be instructed in research on any aspect of the definitions of recordkeeping requirements, such as the notion of a "reliable" record or recordkeeping system; "structure" of a document; concept of a record's "integrity; " and notion of the "auditability" of records systems. Students interested in this are required to write papers on these basic concepts as reflected (or not reflected as the case may be) in the traditional archival and records management literature.

Since students sometimes also struggle to determine how to prepare and present their major papers, examples of published essays students could examine and use as general guides are provided. Students writing reviews of the published literature on a particular topic are urged to look at my article "American Archival History: Its Development, Needs, and Opportunities" as an example of this kind of essay. Other students writing essays that compare basic archival functions to related or similar functions in other fields are asked to consider my "Researching Archival Function as an Information

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Function. Finally, some students endeavoring to write about a particular archival concept are directed to James O'Toole's article, "On the Idea of Permanence."

**Dance Marathons and the Archival Student Paper**

Writing the paper for the archives student can be a frustrating and exhausting experience, as well as an enriching educational experience. They discover the trials and tribulations of locating a professional literature scattered across many disciplines and, as a result, dispersed through many bibliographic services and sources. Archival students also are quickly introduced to the weaknesses of our professional literature, poor in definition and poorer in research. They wrestle with the complexities of a field based on a knowledge that is interdisciplinary in substance, while confronting a profession that often ignores the work of related disciplines which would seemingly offer much. And, of course, these students grapple with trying to build a contextual knowledge for what they are reading; they sometimes err in reading articles of twenty years ago as if they are still current and without a yet fully developed knowledge of the professional context of the particular article.

Despite these challenges, there is often an amazing development. Archival students learn while struggling with

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the papers, and, sometimes, they produce writings that not
only edify their instructor but have something to say to the
profession. The four essays published here are examples, in
my opinion, of such writings. They have something to
say to us, they reflect a learning process, and they are
harbingers of important careers ahead.

Diane Shannon's essay on privacy issues affecting gay
and lesbian archival holdings is a substantial contribution to
the emerging archival literature on privacy and access
concerns. Her approach is to consider the legal literature
on the privacy tort and its relationship to the important
careen with "outing" in the gay and lesbian community
revealed through a survey. She discovered an interesting
disparity between the legal and ethical issues and
advocates for outing who are often instrumental in
documenting the gay and lesbian community through the
establishment of archives. Shannon has provided a portrait
of problems often inherent in the motivations for the
preservation and maintenance of archival records, as well as
reveal the tangled web of legal and ethical issues common
to access.

Kimberly Barata's examination of one dimension of the
definition and defining guidelines for intrinsic value suggests
why archivists need to develop more precise and practical
definitions of their basic terminology. In my opinion the only
working description of intrinsic value is riddled with
inconsistencies and ambiguities. Barata's essay supports
this by considering its adherence to the notion of aesthetic
or artistic quality not by considering what archivists know
about aesthetic quality but by looking at the term in art and
art history. In this fashion, she shows the complexity of the
term and its nuances that reduce its effectiveness as a criterion in the way archivists used it in the panoply of terms scattered in the definition of intrinsic value. Archivists need assistance here, an option not well considered in the only writing we have on intrinsic value. I wonder just how well any archivist is employing the concept.

While Shannon and Barata are masters level students with no archival experience, Wendy Duff represents an experienced archivist studying for her doctoral degree in library science and with considerable experience in the architecture of descriptive standards in Canadian archives. She has used her opportunity to return to the academic cloister to study issues related to descriptive standards, in the case of this paper the matter of "use." Duff weaves through the labyrinth of modern appraisal theory with its cacophony of opinions about the relative importance of use as a factor in appraisal. She then suggests a different approach to incorporating use into the appraisal function, focusing on records, their context, and the archives environment and urging archivists to gain a more solid knowledge of just what use of archives constitutes, ceasing to be the weathervanes Ham lamented we were two decades ago.

Finally, David Miller, another masters student now working for the City of Philadelphia, has contributed to this special issue of Provenance. His essay on access to oral history first argues how oral history sources fit into the traditional realm of archival records and historical manuscripts. Miller proceeds farther in his analysis, stressing that access to oral history sources requires similar sensitivity to provenance and other similar elements of
archival records, less we "decontextualize" oral sources into little more than "curiosities." Oral histories need to be scrutinized as records, an argument both logical but seemingly seldom heeded in practice in archives or by oral historians.

Enjoy these contributions, and watch for these people through the years.

Richard J. Cox is an Associate Professor in Library and Information Science at the University of Pittsburgh, School of Information Sciences where he teaches archival science. Dr. Cox has written extensively on archival records management professional issues, publishing articles in a number of journals and has written four major books on archival theory and practice, including *American Archival Analysis: The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States* (1990), *Managing Institutional Archives: Foundational Principles and Practices* (1992); *The First Generation of Electronic Records Archivists in the United States: A Study in Professionalization* (1994), and *Documenting Localities*. 
PROVENANCE 1994
Privacy Issues Affecting Lesbian and Gay Archival Collections

Diane Shannon

Introduction

Originally, I planned to discuss more broadly in this paper issues of access in lesbian and gay archives. Not only did I intend to research and write about the issues surrounding the confidentiality of information contained in those archives, but also the benefits and losses associated with cooperative agreements between those archives and local community groups, and between the archives themselves. Additionally, I planned to discuss the ways in which a lack of funding at smaller lesbian and gay archives affects their operation (hours of operation, the materials and expertise they use, climate control, etc.). My mechanisms for analyzing all of these issues were to be readings combined with information from responses to a survey I sent to the managers of lesbian and gay archival collections across the United States.
As I became involved in my research, however, I realized that in order to do any one of the above-mentioned topics justice, I would have to choose one as the focus of my research. I became highly interested in the problems lesbian and gay archives face when deciding what types of restrictions they should place on some of the documents embedded in the collections they acquire. My initial readings showed these problems to be particularly troublesome for lesbian and gay archives because of the prejudice that still exists towards sexual minorities.

Once I had decided the main focus of my research would be issues surrounding privacy and confidentiality in lesbian and gay archives, I began studying articles in legal journals about the ethical issues surrounding outing¹ and the ways in which the invasion of privacy tort does not protect those who are outing. I focused on those legal debates because statements made in many of my readings and some of the responses to my surveys suggested that the managers of lesbian and gay archives often side with proponents of outing in their arguments for providing access to private information. This is not surprising, since many of those managers are homosexuals themselves and, as a part of that minority, are likely to have adopted some

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of the positions advocated by many participants in the gay rights movement. By studying the ethics of outing through articles found in legal journals, I hoped to provide a framework for thinking about whether or not the concept of outing is ethical, and how archivists can act ethically in their management of materials that could out closeted homosexuals.

Further analysis of the responses I received to my surveys on access to lesbian and gay archival collections helped me to understand better the various ways archives are dealing with (or failing to deal with) privacy and confidentiality issues in the management of their lesbian and gay collections. My readings of archival literature relevant to the privacy issues in archives helped me compare what is generally being done in the archival profession as a whole to manage sensitive information in archives with the views on access to private information held by the respondents to my survey.

Additionally, one archivist working at an archives documenting Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) discussed on the Archives Listserv (an e-mail discussion group for archivists) his views about the restrictions that should be accorded records containing potentially damaging personal information; and I found articles explaining the problems a couple of archivists have faced in managing lesbian and gay collections. I used this information to help me further consider how archivists managing collections of lesbian and gay papers should develop access policies for those records.
Finally, I searched readings from journals and books about issues of access in archives for possible solutions to the problems lesbian and gay archives face as they attempt to manage documents containing information about the sexual orientation of individuals who may not be out. The final portion of this paper analyzes the benefits and problems inherent in the many solutions that have been posed to help archives deal with documents containing sensitive information, and offers possible guidelines for lesbian and gay archives to use when managing such materials.

Archives, the Privacy Tort, and Debates Surrounding the Practice of Outing

Making sexuality-related collections available for use while attempting to solve the privacy problems to the satisfaction of all parties means that the archivist must navigate a thicket of legal questions, ethical debates and processing demands unequaled in many other collections.²

As is the case with the privacy issues surrounding all collections of private papers containing sensitive

information, those managing lesbian and gay archives cannot rely upon existing laws to find their way out of the above—mentioned thicket. The decisions that must be made by archivists about the levels of access that should be provided to such materials cannot be made by studying federal and state privacy acts (since those only cover the management of government records), but they may be reached with the help of legal interpretations of the privacy invasion tort. 3

What lesbian and gay archives should do with records containing information which could reveal a closeted homosexual’s sexual orientation is a question closely linked to recent debates in the gay community and legal circles of the United States surrounding the practice of outing. Because of the discrimination lesbians and gay men face, the debates in the American gay community about whether or not outing individuals is an ethical practice are debates intimately linked with the problems lesbian and gay archives

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are grappling with as they try to manage access to personal information contained in their collections.

Some of the co—workers of one archivist, Mary Bowling, argue that by placing restrictions on documents containing information that could out individuals, the archives they work for is harming the gay community. They believe such restrictions give the impression gays should be ashamed of their homosexuality. Bowling disagrees, however, when she writes:

I would argue empathetically that at NYPL it is just the opposite: we are restricting specific things to protect individual privacy, and not to do so would be homophobic.  

She believes that, by not being careful to protect the privacy of the individuals whose sexual orientation is disclosed in the repository’s records, the NYPL (New York Public Library) would be harming gays. The debate between Ms. Bowling and her co—workers is echoed in the responses I received to my surveys on access in lesbian and gay archives, and in legal articles I read in law journals which discuss the ethics of outing and the ability of the tort covering invasion of privacy to protect those who are outed.

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4 Bowling, 11.

5 I will discuss later in this paper the responses I received to one question I posed in those surveys. In that inquiry, I questioned survey participants about the restrictions their repositories use on records containing sensitive private information.
Because those managing lesbian and gay archives are often gay themselves, and because their interest in working in lesbian and gay archives is often politically motivated (out of a desire to provide positive role models for other gays, and to educate heterosexuals about gay culture/history), archivists at such institutions are likely to support open access to the records they manage even though those records contain information that may out a closeted individual. As members of the gay community themselves, it is not surprising that many of these archivists support a viewpoint on outing that has become common in the gay community as a whole.

I believe the personal stake held by these archivists in the success of the gay rights movement makes their understanding of the ethical and legal issues surrounding outing important to their ability to decide wisely what should be done with sensitive materials in lesbian and gay archives. As a graduate student studying library science wrote about the statements of purpose developed for lesbian and gay archives, the statements:

...are much more than policies about the physical collection of documents, they are political

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statements, calls to action, requests and demands for social change.\(^7\)

Those who manage lesbian and gay archival collections, because they usually see themselves as supporting the gay rights movement, need to "step outside" of the viewpoints many of them hold about the ethics of outing in order to objectively view the ethical issues inherent in providing access to records containing information that would out others.

One author of an article on outing explains the ways in which that practice moved from being something committed by only a few within the gay community to a much more common practice backed by a fairly widely—held set of political views. Outing was introduced in the United States by a militant faction of the gay community in the 1980s who were pushing for increased funding to fight AIDS. They believed making the public aware of prominent gays would encourage funding to combat AIDS, since some of the most vocal opponents to legislation that would benefit gays were said to be gay themselves.\(^8\)

\(^7\) From page 10 of an unpublished paper by Lois Lloewen entitled "Presentation on Lesbian/Gay Archives," (March 1994); a paper read for a presentation at the School of Library and Information Studies at Dalhousie University in Canada. Note: My copy of this paper was sent to me via e-mail by Ms. Lloewen. The page numbers given in my footnotes to information taken from her paper, therefore, are numbers from my printout of that e-mail. They do not necessarily coincide with the page numbers on the original paper.

\(^8\) Moretti, 858.
Though the practice of outing originally was one used against prominent gays, no gay person today is safe from it. There is now a belief held by many gay men and lesbians that all homosexuals should be out and those who are not are harming the struggle for gay rights. One writer describes this newer, more encompassing view of outing when he writes that its proponents assume all homosexuals owe an obligation to other gays to come out. He explains that this is believed by many proponents of outing to be true even for gay people who don't participate actively in gay life. Another author notes that "nonactive" gays are believed by them to benefit from the advances made by more outspoken members of the gay community and to, therefore, have a responsibility to eventually "repay" that community by coming out themselves.

Most of the articles on outing that I read from legal journals, however, argued that the practice is unethical and does more to harm the gay rights movement than to help it. The authors of those articles emphasized the harm often done to those who are the victims of outing who attempt to obtain settlements to help compensate them for the harm they have endured.

The arguments these lawyers make are worth the consideration of archivists who manage lesbian and gay collections because, even though archivists are not usually

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9 Ibid., 885.

10 Pollack, 720.
implicated in cases involving invasions of privacy,\textsuperscript{11} they should be concerned that the work they do is conducted in an ethical manner.\textsuperscript{12} Those archivists managing such institutions who are themselves gay should further be concerned that their actions, if they are not careful, could greatly harm other members of the gay community and damage the very political movement they wish to support.

The arguments advanced both in support of and in opposition to the practice of outing are summarized by David H. Pollack in his article "Forced Out of the Closet: Sexual Orientation and the Legal Dilemma of 'Outing'" when he writes:

Those in the gay community who view outing as a political tool to combat AIDS and homophobia see their action as an affirmative political duty arising out of an obligation to fellow gay men and women. Outing for them is not simply a choice between competing alternatives, but an ethical imperative, akin to a religious conviction. Others, primarily those in the media, view the question as a matter of situational morality, requiring a case-by-case analysis of the particular circumstances, rather than a \textit{per se} rule. Still others argue that the right to


privacy with respect to matters of sexuality is absolute, and that exposing someone's sexual orientation is morally wrong, regardless of the circumstances.\textsuperscript{13}

The advocates of outing say the practice serves three purposes. First, it is often used to expose the illogic of government policies that discriminate against gays and the hypocrisy of gay officials who support such policies. Secondly, the outing of individuals is said to provide positive role models for other gays\textsuperscript{14} and "ambassadors to mainstream America." Lastly, it is argued that outing helps to break down the stigma surrounding homosexuality by making it appear to be more commonplace.\textsuperscript{15}

Those against outing often argue that the "public disclosure of private facts can result in severe psychic distress" because such an act "assaults the person's individuality." Studies support this view by showing that the outing process is often painful even when participated in

\textsuperscript{13} Pollack, 716.

\textsuperscript{14} One problem with the "role model argument" is that if "gays need role models, so does every other troubled minority, such as AIDS patients, rape victims, and victims of child abuse." (Elwood, 773) Such an argument could be used to justify invasions into the privacy of individuals in all of these groups.

\textsuperscript{15} Elwood, 747-748.
voluntarily and that "it stands to reason that forced disclosure would be far more traumatic."\textsuperscript{16}

Other arguments advanced against the practice of outing state that it harms its victims because disapproval of homosexuality in our society makes the social pressures for gays to conform very high;\textsuperscript{17} "without a viable right of informational privacy, the danger of stultifying free thought is great."\textsuperscript{18} Also,

\textbf{...by chipping away at privacy rights, gay activists may cause setbacks in other areas in which they still desire privacy, such as in mandatory AIDS testing and reporting.}\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 763.
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\textsuperscript{17} Though some would argue that the acceptance of gays in our society has increased enough in recent years to make concerns about discrimination against homosexuals unwarranted, recent studies do not support this view.

Pollack cites a 1990 Roper survey in which fifty-two percent of the respondents replied that they would not want to work with gays, and twenty-five percent of those "strongly object" to working with homosexuals; twenty-five percent of survey respondents replied that they believe it should be legal to keep gays out of jobs and housing; thirty-five percent admitted to being uncomfortable around gays; thirty-three percent replied that they avoid places where gays may be present; and forty-nine percent stated that they believe AIDS is causing unfair discrimination against gays.

Also, in Broward County, Florida where an estimated twenty-five percent of the population is gay, a vote in 1990 to pass a human rights amendment preventing discrimination based on sexual orientation failed by sixty percent. (Pollack, 733).
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\textsuperscript{18} Pollack, 766.
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\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 768.
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Pollack further states that outing an individual takes away that person's autonomy (their right to define who they are as a human being) and creates serious possibilities that they will be separated from their family and friends as a result of their homosexuality being made known.\(^\text{20}\)

Besides some of the reasons stated above, the writers of the legal journal articles I read on outing gave several more reasons why outing harms those whose homosexuality is exposed and damages the gay rights movement. Rather than making outing an acceptable form of political protest, they argue, it should be considered by the courts to be a punishable invasion of privacy because it takes away from gays one of the few legal weapons they have.\(^\text{21}\) It often harms people who are struggling to define their own sexual identity. They are denied the chance to sort out their own feelings and beliefs for themselves and must, additionally, sometimes watch their acquaintances and loved ones become the objects of public ridicule. Victims of outing also come to be judged by "ugly stereotypes" rather than their individual strengths.\(^\text{22}\)

Several authors further argue that the belief that outing helps to change positively public attitudes towards homosexuals has no supporting evidence. One of those authors supports this argument by comparing the struggle

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 722.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 732.

\(^{22}\) Moretti, 866.
for gay rights to the struggle African Americans have had in the United States to obtain equal treatment, and by mentioning that racism is still pervasive in our society, even after thirty years of civil rights laws.  

So, it can be seen that outing, by taking away the rights of individual gays to protect themselves from harm and develop their own sense of identity, does little to advance gay rights. Furthermore, unlike other forms of political protest, the damage done to the victims of outing is irrevocable. (A person, once out, cannot choose to go back into the closet.)

As one author states:

Under present circumstances, public disclosure can destroy lives while accruing only marginal gains for gay rights. The only lasting effect is the burden on the target.

Archivists managing records containing information that could out closeted individuals should take the above—mentioned damage caused by outing seriously because, besides causing all of those problems, gays also have little legal recourse when they are victims of an outing. The tort available to individuals who wish to sue for defamation of character is ineffective in cases of outing because the proof of libel in such cases is unavailable to

\[23\] Elwood, 767 and Moretti, 897.

\[24\] Pollack, 749.

\[25\] Elwood, 767.
those victims. One writer explains that, "The simplest defense against a libel suit is truth, and in the typical outing case, the allegations of the subject's homosexuality are true." Also, many courts will no longer recognize the imputation of homosexuality as slander because they believe that the stigma attached to homosexuality has diminished considerably as the gay community has become more visible and acquires more political power.

Additionally, many victims of outings do not want to use the defamation tort because of the stigma our society attaches to homosexuality. For a lawsuit involving outing to be successful under the privacy tort, the plaintiff must be able to show that revelation of their homosexuality was a damaging revelation of a true fact. In contrast, for such a lawsuit to prevail under the defamation tort, the "fact" of the plaintiff's homosexuality must be shown to be an untrue statement, the dissemination of which injured his or her reputation. Even though court cases involving outing are seldom successful under the defamation tort, the majority of such lawsuits are actions for defamation because either the plaintiff actually is heterosexual; because they are homosexual and do not want to admit their sexual orientation by bringing a privacy action; or because they


27 Pollack, 732.
falsely believe that their chances of recovery of damages are better if they resort to the defamation tort.  

Unable to effectively use the defamation tort in court against their assailants, victims of outing must resort to the privacy tort (a tort currently in operation in thirty-eight states and the District of Columbia). This privacy tort is commonly described as involving four requirements for cause of action: "1) public disclosure, 2) of private facts, 3) concerning a matter which would be highly offensive and objectionable to a reasonable person, and 4) which is not of legitimate concern to the public." In a rereading of this outline of the privacy tort, Ronald Wick, in his article "Out of the Closet and Into the Headlines: 'Outing' and the Private Facts Tort" states that:

A close reading of this definition reveals three issues relevant to the determination of an action when the matter disclosed is the plaintiff's homosexuality. The first issue is the extent to which the plaintiff must have kept his lifestyle secret in order to be able to claim that his homosexuality was a matter concerning his "private life." The second issue is whether the disclosure of one's homosexuality "would be highly offensive to a reasonable person." The third issue...is the extent to

28 Elwood, 749.

29 Ibid., 753.

30 Ibid., 754.
which the plaintiff's homosexuality is "of legitimate concern to the public."\(^{31}\)

Wick goes on to argue in his article that, the "private facts" and "legitimate public concern" portions of the tort "significantly undervalue the privacy rights of the victims of outing."\(^{32}\) John Elwood, in his article "Outing, Privacy, and the First Amendment", agrees, writing that the "public disclosure tort is...anemic" and offers almost no protection against outing.\(^{33}\)

The problem for gays with the "public disclosure" or "private facts" portion of the tort is that many homosexuals attend gay marches and rallies, even though there are many people in their lives they are not out to. Attendance by a gay man or a lesbian at such events does not mean that person has disclosed their homosexuality to everyone, or that they want to. Oftentimes, because the individuals they wish to keep the knowledge of their homosexuality from live away from where those gay rights marches and rallies are being held, gays feel relatively safe participating in them. In court cases against outing, however, participation in such events are likely to be seen as intentional public disclosures

\(^{31}\) Wick, 418.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 416.

\(^{33}\) Elwood, 762.
by those individuals of their homosexuality and would more often than not cause them to lose such lawsuits.\textsuperscript{34}

It is less difficult to prove an outing case meets the second criteria Wick lists in his rereading of the tort than it is the "private facts" criteria. In many courts, it can be argued effectively that the revelation of one's homosexuality by another was highly offensive to the victim. Moretti explains that:

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\text{...when a plaintiff suffers severe social or professional repercussions as a result of the disclosure, the requirement is surely met. Accordingly, a disclosure of homosexuality could be considered highly offensive in that it exposes the individual to hatred, prejudice, and discrimination.}\textsuperscript{35}
\]

Wick agrees that proving an outing was "highly offensive" to the plaintiff is not a problem because of the stigma many in our society still attach to homosexuality, and because sexual relations in our society are commonly held to be private.\textsuperscript{36}

The final criteria to be met in such a court case is that of proving that the outing was not of "legitimate public concern" and, therefore, newsworthy. In lieu of actually defining "newsworthiness," the Supreme Court has merely stated that the determination of whether or not information

\textsuperscript{34} Wick, 886.

\textsuperscript{35} Moretti, 872.

\textsuperscript{36} Wick, 424.
Lesbian and Gay Archival Collections

is newsworthy must take into account "community mores"—the mores of the local community surrounding the incident claimed to be an invasion of privacy. Wick argues that the vagueness of the term "newsworthiness" in the privacy tort, and the yardstick of "community mores" which is used to determine the relevance of a piece of information to "public concern" creates great problems for victims of outing who come from communities that are less tolerant of homosexuality than others. In those communities, he explains, victims of outings are likely to face juries that will not be sympathetic to gay plaintiffs. Such homophobic juries are much more likely to support defendants in outing cases by arguing that, according to their community mores, outings are newsworthy and, therefore, not a punishable invasion of privacy.37

Wick concludes his explanation of why the privacy tort cannot be relied upon to protect gay men and lesbians from outings when he writes:

Under these rules, only the most private of gay plaintiffs, with the most limited interaction with public life, with the most uncharacteristic of juries in the most socially conservative of states is likely to prevail.38

His argument should cause archivists managing lesbian and gay archives to pause and think about the damaging affects their sloppy handling of the confidentiality of information in their collections could cause individuals.

37 Ibid., 425-426.

38 Ibid., 426.
whose sexuality is revealed in documents contained in those collections.

**Survey Responses and What is Currently Being Done**

In early March 1994, I sent twenty—two archivists working with lesbian and gay collections in the United States surveys asking them about their access policies. I received eight survey responses, and only four of those responses answered the question in those surveys that was most relevant to the privacy issues being discussed in this paper.

The list of individuals I sent surveys to was compiled in two ways. First, I posted a message on the Archives Listserv asking people who were members of that listserv and who worked at lesbian and gay archives to contact me if they were interested in completing my survey. The remainder of my contacts were obtained through the current membership lists of LAGAR, the Lesbian and Gay Archives Roundtable of the Society of American Archivists.

The archivists I sent surveys to are working both at separate lesbian and gay archives, and with lesbian and gay collections in archives. Some of them are employed at lesbian and gay archives such as the Gerber—Hart Library and Archives in Chicago, the Kentucky Gay and Lesbian Education Center, and the Stonewall Library and Archives in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Other respondents work with (or have worked with) lesbian and gay collections that have either been transferred to an archives, or were originally accessioned at a more "mainstream" repository for inclusion
in its holdings. For example, one response I received was from a woman who briefly worked on processing a lesbian and gay collection at the University of Washington.

Along with my analysis of portions of the survey responses I received, I will include in this section of my paper information about the restriction policies of lesbian and gay archives that I have read about in articles. Also included will be portions of a posting one archivist working at the AIDS History Project sent the Archives Listserv, giving his views about how archives should manage sensitive records in their holdings.

The question in my survey that asked about the policies used to address issues of privacy in the archives survey respondents work in reads as follows:

How has your archives dealt with issues surrounding the confidentiality of its holdings? Please explain the reasoning behind the decisions workers at your archives have made regarding confidentiality.\(^{39}\) The small number of answers I received to this inquiry were very mixed.

One respondent from the Kentucky Gay and Lesbian Education Center (a collection currently being housed in a person's home) stated that, because of the low use of its materials, the archival project has had few problems with confidentiality. He did state, however, that he tries to

\(^{39}\) See Appendix A of this paper for the entire survey. To view responses I received to that survey, see Appendix B. (A few of the respondents, rather than directly answering my questions, sent me responses in the form of newsletters, press releases, and brochures about the archives where they work. Those items are not included in Appendix B and are not discussed in this paper.)
control access "to certain files, such as the names of local gay and lesbian businessmen and artists whose sexual orientation may not be known to the general public."40

Two respondents seemed irritated by the "paranoid" notion that personal papers revealing individuals as homosexuals should be restricted. One respondent from the Gerber/Hart Archives states "We do not encourage stipulations on our materials. The notion is a paranoid mentality that people have lamented for years." Another archivist, writing from the National Museum and Archives of Lesbian and Gay History (in New York City), commented that those working at his institution "do not consider the mere revelation of someone's homosexuality to be a grounds for...placing restrictions on the materials."

The final answer to my inquiry about policies came from the woman I mentioned earlier who has worked on processing a couple of lesbian and gay collections for the University of Washington's archives. She seemed genuinely concerned about providing proper restrictions to the private information included in those collections and explained in her survey response that she wrote the people who might be outed by a policy of open access to those materials to "double—check" and make sure the archives "understood their wishes."

Though this sample of four responses is far too small to use to draw generalizations about the views of

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40 See a copy of the survey response from the Kentucky Gay and Lesbian Education Center in Appendix B. The remaining quotations I use in this paper from the copies of responses provided in Appendix B will not be footnoted.
confidentiality most archivists managing lesbian and gay archival collections hold, it does support the concern I raised earlier that at least some of those archivists have taken on the viewpoint proponents of outing hold towards the confidentiality of the knowledge of a person's sexual orientation. The fact that two out of the four responses I discuss above came from archivists who believe the concerns of some over possibly outing individuals through careless access policies at archives are "paranoid" would indicate that the belief that all gays should be open about their sexuality is alive and well among those who manage lesbian and gay archival collections.41

One Archives Listserv member (Bill Walker from the AIDS History Project in San Francisco, California) posted a message to the listserv in which he explained his view on what archivists should do when managing private

41 In an e-mail message the gentleman from the National Museum and Archive of Lesbian and Gay History sent to the Archives Listserv on 24 February 1993, he also stated that, to place restrictions on materials simply because "they included information that specific persons were Lesbian or Gay" would "imply that there was something to hide in this simple fact." The archives he works for at first tries to talk donors out of requests that their records remain restricted, but does comply with such requests if donors cannot be talked out of them. This compliance seems to be given more out of a sense of necessity, however, than out of an ethical concern that individuals not be outing against their wishes. He explains:

Ultimately we would comply with the request, regardless of any legal or ethical reasons for doing so. To do otherwise would make us appear to be "outing" people, and result in a serious public relations problem, which would do more harm than any temporary restriction would.

This information and quote is used with permission from the writer of that message.
information in "'recent' or 'current' manuscript collections (that is, the donor is alive or just recently dead)." Concerning the management of personal correspondence in archives, he writes:

> It is much clearer to approach this situation from an ethical perspective. If you write me a personal letter, you are giving me the letter itself and the information it contains. Your intent is clearly to communicate directly with me. There is an assumption between us that this is a private communication. Unless it’s filled with personally revealing information, you probably wouldn’t object if I wanted to share it with my mate. Regardless of the content, you probably would not be pleased if I decided to hand out copies of it to a bunch of mutual friends. And I’m certain you would be livid if you found out I had decided to display it in a glass case in the University Library. Depending on the contents of the letter you might have grounds to sue me.\(^{43}\)

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\(^{42}\) Bill Walker to the Archives Listserv (17 February 1994). Used with the permission of Bill Walker.

\(^{43}\) Ibid.
He goes on to state that "the point, however, is not whether it's actionable; it really is a simple matter of right and wrong. I violated your trust, and more importantly, your privacy." Mary Bowling agrees with Bill Walker that lesbian and gay archives should be concerned about being careful not to out individuals who may wish to keep their sexual orientation private information. In her article "The Repository and the Responsibility to Restrict: Privacy Protection in Sexuality—Related Collections," she lists the different types of records contained in a lesbian and gay collection she works with at the New York Public Library as being records that present privacy/access problems. She explains that those "problem papers" (personal letters revealing a person's sexual orientation, personnel records of lesbian and gay organizations, requests for help made by individuals to lesbian and gay organizations, etc.) are "segregated and closed, usually for 75 years from the latest date in the file." Though those "problem papers" represent only five to ten percent of the lesbian and gay records

"Ibid. I find Mr. Walker's comments particularly interesting in light of what I stated in section I of this paper—that outing is a dangerous practice because it makes it more difficult for gays to request privacy in areas other than knowledge of their sexual orientation, such as the privacy surrounding information about AIDS patients. Mr. Walker works at an archives that collects much information about gays, but which attempts to document the experiences of those people as AIDS patients. From his comments, it can be assumed that he believes the rights of those patients to keep personal information about themselves confidential should be of foremost concern to those working at the AIDS History Project, regardless of the patients' sexuality. It would be informative to research the impact the AIDS epidemic, and discrimination AIDS patients have faced, have had on the information access policies of lesbian and gay collections."
NYPL holds, Bowling comments that item level examinations in many of the series of those lesbian and gay collections are made to locate sensitive information that should be restricted.\textsuperscript{45}

The Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) in New York, on the other hand, tries to acquire collections with no restrictions on them. Failing that, they try to have only restrictions on use, not on access. As is the case at the National Museum and Archive of Lesbian and Gay History, workers at LHA try to talk donors out of requesting that measures be imposed on collections to protect the privacy of the information found in them. Barring that, they try to get as few restrictions as possible, for as short a time as possible. Their reason for complying with such restrictions is the same as the National Museum’s — because they do not want the public relations problems they believe would surface if they were appearing to out someone.\textsuperscript{46}

Some archivists managing lesbian and gay collections have not yet decided what to do with the "problem papers" (such as the ones Bowling discusses in her article) they find in the records they acquire. Sara Hodson, for example, in her article "Private Lives: Confidentiality in Manuscripts Collections," describes a problem collection the institution

\textsuperscript{45} Bowling, 6. Since the original writing of this paper, Mary ("Mimi") Bowling has e-mailed me to tell me that she is sorry she used the term "problem papers" in her 1990 paper. She writes that "The term is laden with negativity that I'm now more consciously trying to get away from." [Mimi Bowling to Diane Shannon (8 October 1994).]

she works at (the Huntington· Library) has in its holdings. The collection consists of the papers of a Lord Kinross, who was himself a homosexual. He was a confidante to many other gays who "wrote openly" to him "concerning rather intimate details of their lives." She comments that many of the authors of the letters are likely to still be alive, and that they had no say in "this disposition of their correspondence." Ms. Hodson believes "their privacy cannot be ignored", but admits that she has not decided upon a solution yet to what should be done with those letters.47

As the above discussion in this section shows, there is a great need for clearly articulated access policies for lesbian and gay archival collections — policies that respect the rights of individual privacy while they prevent such stringent restrictions on access that the value of those records to researchers is seriously diminished.

In the final section of this paper, I will discuss the various solutions that have been posed by archivists in archival literature to the problems of providing access to personal records containing private information. Those solutions will be examined to determine their usefulness to the management of lesbian and gay archival collections, after which I will present my personal opinion of what lesbian and gay archives should do to lessen the chances that closeted individuals will be outed because of the improper management of those collections.

What Can Be Done?

Providing unlimited access to information in contemporary personal papers creates a risk of damaging living people and exposing to public view communications and revelations which were made in complete confidence.\(^{48}\)

As has been noted earlier in this paper, the damage done to individuals who are outed is often serious and irrevocable.\(^ {49}\) Because of this, archivists need to develop clear restriction policies for lesbian and gay collections containing information that could out closeted individuals. Some archivists who would justify open access to those documents by saying restricting them would "imply that being lesbian or gay is bad" are avoiding their professional responsibility to protect the subjects of the information contained in the collections they manage.

In fact, the dangers posed by outing are serious enough to prompt some to argue that lesbian and gay archives, by not showing adequate concern for the privacy issues surrounding the collections they hold, may be endangering their own future as well as the future existence of institutions like them. Mary Bowling clearly articulates such an argument when she writes that archivists working with lesbian and gay collections can only get more collections by


\(^{49}\) See appropriate pages of this paper.
demonstrating to potential donors that they are sensitive to concerns about privacy.\textsuperscript{50}

The tangled "thicket" of issues surrounding the confidentiality and privacy of such collections can easily lead an archivist to the conclusion that there are no solutions to the privacy problems surrounding documents in lesbian and gay archival collections that could out closeted individuals. A review of the archival literature concerning access, privacy, and confidentiality, however, provides several strategies for effectively managing personal papers in archives. These policies suggest ways archivists can provide adequate restrictions to sensitive documents while they respect both the privacy of individuals and the needs of researchers.

One possible solution to the dilemma of how archivists should manage access to sensitive information in their collections is hinted at in the SAA Code of Ethics. It is that archivists should impose restrictions they feel are needed on collections even when donors do not request such restrictions. The code suggests that:

Archivists respect the privacy of individuals who created, or who are the subject of, documentary materials of long—term value, especially those who had no voice in the disposition of the materials.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{50} Bowling, 11.

\textsuperscript{51} Quoted in Greene, 33.
There are several problems with the view that archivists should place themselves as the main decision-makers over what will be restricted and what will not. For one thing, many collections contain too many records for it to be possible for archivists to determine everything that should be restricted by reviewing every page.\(^{52}\) Furthermore, when lesbian and gay collections are concerned, there is no way of knowing whether the individuals who are the subjects of archival records are out or not.\(^{53}\)

Additionally, the recent case surrounding the Thurgood Marshall Papers gives examples of public relations problems that can arise when archivists take full responsibility for determining what levels of access should be given to personal papers. One archivist discusses those problems:

> Had the donor contract stated simply that the papers would be open upon Marshall's death, instead of being "made available to the public at the discretion of the Library," there might have been less fire directed at the Library.\(^{54}\)

As an alternative to the suggestion discussed above, some have recommended that archivists encourage different professional groups whose members use archival

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 34.

\(^{53}\) Hodson, 111.

\(^{54}\) Greene, 36.
materials (for example, historians, sociologists, and writers) to develop their own codes of ethics to guide those members in their use of information found in private papers. Some degree of safety for donors could be maintained if such organizations would enforce ethical codes showing sufficient concern for the ways researchers use the personal information found in archival collections. The OAH (Organization of American Historians) was at one point reviewing arguments over whether or not they should develop such a code. 

While it certainly would not hurt for professions that frequently use archives to develop such codes of ethics, archivists can by no means rely solely on those codes to protect individuals who could be outing by collections in archives. For one thing, it is well-known in the archival profession that the primary user group of most archival collections is not professional researchers. Some would also argue that a reliance by archivists upon other professions to solve the privacy issues surrounding archival collections will likely result in more privileged access to a few (professional researchers) than greater access for everyone.

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57 Ibid., 444.
Furthermore, for lesbian and gay archival collections, such a solution would not work because of the lack of a lesbian and gay studies professional organization that has the influence to enforce a code of ethics. The *Encyclopedia of Associations* under "lesbian" and "gay," has almost a full page of organizations listed for gay men and lesbians, only two of which actively support lesbian and gay studies. One of those is the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (CLAGS) in New York, which states its purpose as "encouraging" work in lesbian and gay studies, but which is not a policy-defining society for historians of lesbian and gay history; the other is the Lesbian Herstory Association (also in New York) which works to educate lesbians about lesbian history, but which also is not a professional society with governing power over its members.  

There remain other alternatives, however, for archivists who wish to develop appropriate access policies for the private information found in their collections. One writer argues that the best way of dealing with sensitive information in the papers held by archives is for archivists to rely entirely upon donors' wishes for the restrictions placed on collections they donate. He supports this solution because he believes donors are in the best position to judge the sensitivity of information in those documents. They often know the people who are subjects of the

58 *Encyclopedia of Associations* (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1993).
information contained in collections they donate,\textsuperscript{59} and such a policy would reduce the problems archivists face when they attempt to determine the sensitivity of such materials themselves.\textsuperscript{60}

There are many problems associated with donor—imposed restrictions, however. Donors may specify the removal of certain types of information from the collections they give to an archives, creating time—consuming and costly screening jobs for repositories. They also may require that researchers obtain permission from them to use a collection or cite a quote from it, or may ask that their collection be closed to certain types of users.

Those donors wanting researchers to contact them before they use a collection must be warned by archivists that such policies may result in those donors being frequently bothered by researchers and

...archivists need to be certain donors will grant access on a rational, equitable basis, because they, the archivists, will have to invest time and effort into processing the papers to get them ready for research use and will also have to deal with researchers and their reactions to donors' responses to their requests for permission.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{59} They are often friends and/or colleagues of the individuals those documents are about.

\textsuperscript{60} Greene, 36.

\textsuperscript{61} Floyd Desnoyers in Bradsher, 84.
Restrictions requiring that collections be closed to certain types of users should not be allowed because they are discriminatory and usually impossible to enforce.\textsuperscript{62} The access policies of public institutions containing lesbian and gay archival collections do not allow the exclusion of categories of researchers and realistically could not if they wanted to.\textsuperscript{63} Even in private repositories, however, such attempts by donors to limit access to their collections to certain types of users is an example of how donors sometimes use the "restrictions option" not to ensure privacy "but to wield power by granting or denying access, or to make the material and its use a forum for personal, political, racial, or other biases or prejudices."\textsuperscript{64}

An example of such an unrealistic restriction used to be in place at the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) in New York, where the policy was that only lesbians could have access to the archives.\textsuperscript{65} To begin with, since there are no

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 85.

\textsuperscript{63} Bowling, 5.

\textsuperscript{64} Hodson, 109.

\textsuperscript{65} Lloewen, 7. Mary Bowling has commented to me in an e-mail message that the Lesbian Herstory Archives has recently modified its stance on lesbian-only access, although she is uncertain whether the archives has issued a formal policy reflecting those changes. She writes:

In doing my own research there, I made no attempt to "pass" as a lesbian, and beyond the not inconsiderable difficulty of arranging research time at a volunteer-only institution, didn't have too much trouble....They now also allow men in, occasionally. Fred Wasserman, one of my co-curators on the
distinguishing physical characteristics which separate homosexual women from heterosexual women, the policy was impossible for the archives to enforce. Secondly, it discriminated against researchers who were not lesbian, but who wished to study lesbian culture and/or history. Though some archivists would argue that the LHA had a right to bar men, for example, from its repository in order to create a safe environment for women, I believe such a policy is discriminatory, and harmed the lesbian community by limiting who could learn and write about lesbian history. Many men and heterosexual women who may have had legitimate reasons for wishing to use the archives (such as an interest in studying lesbian culture to better understand lesbian friends or family) were unfairly prevented by the LHA's restrictions on access from using the records held in the archives.

65 (...continued)

(Stonewall) exhibit, was eventually able to schedule a few research trips there...and they have a male volunteer who comes to clean. (I love it.) Since LHA does have to balance its mission as information-provider and "lesbian space," my feeling is that they're doing about the best they can to provide access that, if not strictly equitable, does make an effort to accommodate everyone within limitations. [Mimi Bowling to Diane Shannon (8 October 1994)]

66 Some may argue, however, that the statement of such a restriction does effectively discourage use of the archives by heterosexual women who do not wish to be assumed homosexual. A similar strategy was used by a gay-friendly dance club I used to frequent in Olympia, Washington. The owner of the club placed a large sign on the establishment's door which said "We welcome our lesbian and gay customers. Bigots keep out!" He claimed that such an up front, bold statement about the types of individuals he did not want in his club discouraged homophobic customers from entering.
Where lesbian and gay collections are concerned, I believe that archivists who are sensitive to the dangers of outing the subjects of their holdings must make the final decision about what types of access should be imposed upon a collection. I contend this because donors often, in their recognition of the importance of records for research and education, desire open access to the lesbian and gay archival collections they donate without adequately considering how such open access might out a closeted individual. I would suggest archivists use several guidelines when deciding whether or not to place restrictions on documents in lesbian and gay collections.

Several types of materials in such collections should not be considered problems. Archivists usually consider materials by or about people the they know are dead be a part of this category. It is argued that a dead person cannot be injured, so the privacy of the information found in archival collections are usually considered to end upon the death of the person who is the subject of such information. More research and thought needs to be

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67 As was apparent from the responses I received to my survey on access, some archivists believe all homosexuals should be out. There is a need to educate archivists about the real damage victims of outing fall prey to.

68 These guidelines are based upon those used by the NYPL to manage its lesbian and gay archival collections. See Bowling, 8-9.

69 Hodson, 116. It should be noted, however, that Ms. Hodson also states that archivists "are, however, bound by ethical constraints to honor any reasonable restrictions of sensitive material requested by the descendants of those individuals."
applied, however, to the question of whether or not the dead have privacy rights. Others could argue equally forcefully that people should have rights to privacy which protect their reputation from being affected after they die in what they feel are adverse ways.

Letters to lesbian and gay organizations which do not reveal the sexual orientation of the writer should also not be considered "problem papers." The fact an individual writes such an organization does not mean that they are homosexual; they could be writing to obtain information for a friend or relative, or to obtain information for a research topic.70

Another group of letters that should be considered valid candidates for receiving open access policies are those letters written by service providers seeking referrals of clients from a lesbian and gay organization. Such businesses, because they actively target gay customers, can be safely considered to be seeking public disclosure.71

The correspondence and files of officers of lesbian and gay organizations can usually also be safely made available to most (if not all) archives users. By the time such individuals assume leadership roles in the gay community, they are almost always out, making the fear of possibly outing them irrelevant.72

70 Bowling, 8.

71 Ibid., 9.

72 Ibid., 9.
There are also several other types of records commonly found in lesbian and gay archives which should almost always be restricted. Included in that group are records detailing financial contributions made to lesbian and gay organizations. The philanthropic choices of individuals are their own business, so such information should be protected.73

Letters written by a closeted individual to a friend or to a lesbian and gay organization which reveal that person's homosexuality should be restricted. Such letters should include any written by individuals who are probably still living and who are not known to be out — until the repository receives proof that those individuals are out, it should assume they are still closeted. Restrictions on those letters are necessary because of the harm that can be done to individuals who are outed.

Beyond guidelines for determining which documents in a lesbian and gay archival collection are "problem papers" and which are not, several other suggestions may be helpful to those managing such collections. One is that archivists should always consider the costs of processing collections containing sensitive materials, and consider whether or not such costs are reasonable expenditures for records that will not be open to researchers for a long time.74 Will the money spent on such collections prevent other equally important collections from being acquired and processed by

73 Bowling, 5.
74 Dearstyne, 181.
Lesbian and gay archives? The cost of screening collections containing substantial amounts of personal information is high, and should be considered by any archives that is deciding whether or not to accession such collections.\textsuperscript{75}

The use of forms can also help in the management of private papers containing sensitive information. Some archives, for example only permit access to sensitive information on the condition that researchers sign written agreements promising that individuals' names or other specified information in a collection will not be published.\textsuperscript{76}

Whichever of the above suggestions a person managing a lesbian and gay archival collection chooses to use, the details of the resulting restrictions should be clearly defined in writing and made available for researchers to refer to. Additionally, the archivist should identify exactly what has been removed from files and why; placing a withdrawal notice on each file where a document(s) was removed, or annotating such details in a finding aid. A statement of when restrictions on the collection will expire should also be written down and made available to the researcher. By making the details of restrictions clear and available in writing to researchers, archivists help assure them that

\textsuperscript{75} Floyd Desnoyers, 90. One possible alternative to help defray the cost of screening materials is to postpone screening them until they are requested. The disadvantage of such an approach is that researchers must wait while boxes are examined. (David Kepley, "Reference Service and Access," in Bradsher, 171-172.)

\textsuperscript{76} Dearstyne, 181.
decisions to restrict certain materials are not made arbitrarily.\textsuperscript{77}

There are "no ready solutions" to the dilemmas archivists face when dealing with materials in lesbian and gay archival collections which contain information that could potentially out closeted individuals.\textsuperscript{78} It is also clear, however, that the harm caused by such outings is severe and irreversible; and that archivists managing such documents should make every effort to protect those who are the subjects of such materials. Guidelines such as the ones given above can be used to help increase the chances that closeted individuals will not be ousted by the careless handling of lesbian and gay collections.

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\textsuperscript{77} Kepley, 171.

\textsuperscript{78} Hodson, 116.
APPENDIX A: SURVEY79
Survey On Issues of Access
in Lesbian and Gay Archives

1) Is the archives you work for in a large institution, with plenty of funding, or is it a smaller/grass—roots archives situated in a community center (or other small, community—based building)? What are the benefits/problems you have encountered with your archives being either at a large institution or community center? What benefits/problems do you think lesbian and gay collections in the opposite general type of institution from the one yours is housed in face that you don't?

2) Should lesbian archives have the right to prevent men access to their collections? Should lesbian and gay archives be able to prevent heterosexuals access to their collections? Can partial access be granted to men and heterosexuals in such cases? What are the ethical issues affecting such restrictions? How has your archives dealt with such questions involving access?

79 As was noted in the introduction, this survey was originally written to collect information about access issues in general which gay and lesbian archives face. The only question and responses to that question which are discussed, therefore, in the main body of the paper are those for #7. It may also be noted that most of the questions in this survey require essay responses and probably, because of that, discouraged people from spending the time to answer them. Were I to redo the survey today, I would rewrite the questions in a short-answer format so that the busy archivists I sent them to would be much more likely to respond.
3) What does your lesbian and gay archives collection consider its user population to be? How has that definition affected your archive's policies? Do you see researchers as your main user population, the gay community in general, or the entire community surrounding your institution as its user population?

4) What problems has your archives had with having lesbian and gay materials damaged or stolen? What has your archives done to prevent such problems?

5) What hours are your lesbian and gay collection able to remain open during the week?

6) What materials/expertise does your archives have at its disposal? Are you able to provide citations to your records using the MARC format on RLIN or OCLC? What types of climate control do you have?

7) How has your archives dealt with issues surrounding the confidentiality of its holdings? Please explain the reasoning behind the decisions workers at your archives have made regarding confidentiality?
QUESTIONING AESTHETICS: Are archivists qualified to make appraisal or reappraisal decisions based on aesthetic judgments?

Kimberly J. Barata

During the appraisal or reappraisal process, an item may be either accessioned into or remain intact as part of a collection owing to its intrinsic value. Judgments regarding the intrinsic value of an item range from the purely subjective to the totally ambiguous. The concept of intrinsic value experienced growing interest from the National Archives and Records Service (NARS) as they began to embark on a large—scale reformatting project in 1979. Planning for this project raised the issue of whether certain documents should be retained in their original format or be destroyed following reformatting. In response to this issue, NARS established the Committee on Intrinsic Value. The committee was charged with the task of defining intrinsic value and then determining its qualities, characteristics, and
applications. By 1982, the committee had published "Intrinsic Value in Archival Material." This report resulted in a very broad attempt to examine this issue with respect to the reappraisal and preservation of archival documents. The following is a synopsis of the results of their investigation.

The Committee on Intrinsic Value defined intrinsic value as:

...the archival term that is applied to permanently valuable records that have qualities and characteristics that make the records in the original physical form the only archivally acceptable form for preservation. Although all records in their physical form have qualities and characteristics that would not be preserved in copies, records with intrinsic value have them to such a significant degree that the originals must be saved.

The paper then goes on to list, define, and give the applications of nine physical and/or intellectual characteristics that can be used to determine whether a document possesses intrinsic value: 1) physical form that may be the subject for study if the records provide meaningful documentation or significant examples of the

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2 Ibid., 1.
form; 2) aesthetic or artistic quality; 3) unique or curious physical features; 4) age that provides a quality of uniqueness; 5) value for use in exhibits; 6) questionable authenticity, date, author, or other characteristic that is significant and ascertainable by physical examination; 7) general and substantial public interest because of direct association with famous or historically significant people, places, things, issues, or events; 8) significance as documentation of the establishment of continuing legal basis of an agency or institution; and 9) significance as documentation of the formulation of policy at the highest executive levels when the policy has significance and broad effect throughout or beyond the agency or institution.³ Whereas these categories may eventually lead to the acquisition or retention of an item on the grounds of its possessing intrinsic value, each of them warrants additional investigation and definition. It is important that these investigations should not just further examine the qualities and characteristics of intrinsic value, but also how these determinations are arrived at and by whom. Also, if an item is determined to possess intrinsic value, for what purpose, if any, should an archivist retain such an item in their collections?

This paper will attempt to examine one of the more ambiguous of these characteristics: aesthetic or artistic quality. The Report of the Committee on Intrinsic Value

³ Ibid., 2-3.
defined archival materials possessing these characteristics as follows:

Records having aesthetic or artistic quality may include photographs; pencil, ink, or watercolor sketches; maps; architectural drawings; frakturs; and engraved and/or printed forms such as bounty—land warrants.4

This definition identifies some of the various forms relative to those documents that are assumed to possess aesthetic value. However, it does not define what aesthetics is or address the issues of how and by whom aesthetic judgments should be made. In addition, it does not address the issue of whether an aesthetically valuable item can or should be considered a document or what purpose aesthetic value has in archives? Consideration of these issues will provide the foundation for this paper.

Before addressing the question of how and by whom aesthetic judgments should be made, it is important to examine what is exactly meant by the term aesthetics. The origins of the word derive from the Greek root aesthetikos, meaning "pertaining to sense perception."5 From classical times to the thirteenth century, the notion of aesthetics evolved to a point where it referred to all "philosophical

4 Ibid., 2.

reflections on the nature of beauty." Perhaps Saint Thomas Aquinas best expressed this notion by stating that "beauty relates to the cognitive faculty; for beautiful things are those which please when seen [pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placet]." Please note that during the period spanning from the sixth century BC through the eighteenth century, only the notion of aesthetics was understood; the actual term was not in use. The term aesthetics was not coined until the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten published his work entitled *Aesthetica* in 1750. This work prompted philosophers to speculate on the need to examine beauty's relationship to the nature and philosophy of art. Yet, whereas Baumgarten did make important contributions toward furthering the study of aesthetics, he failed to resolve the fundamental relationship between aesthetics and the philosophy of art. The connotation that aesthetics primarily refers to the philosophy of the beautiful, remained in effect until the turn of this past century. In the twentieth century, the notion of aesthetics broadened as a philosophical discipline to become:

...(an) attempt to understand our experiences of and the concepts we use to talk about objects that

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we find perceptually interesting and attractive. ...[It became] essentially the philosophy of art, being concerned primarily with the nature of the work of art as the product of artistic creative activity and as the focal point of aesthetic appreciation and art criticism.\(^9\)

However, there was still some debate about the need to distinguish between aesthetics and the philosophy of art. Some contemporary philosophers, such as Monroe C. Beardsley, feel that the difference stems from a matter of usage.\(^10\) While others, such as Matthew Lipman, believe that a clear distinction should be made. Unlike Beardsley, Lipman interprets aesthetics as dealing with the nature of art work. The philosophy of art is concerned with "the place of art in the entire panorama of human activities."\(^11\) For the purposes of this paper, Beardsley's view will be adopted and, therefore, no formal distinction will be made between the two terms.

The answer to the question about who is qualified to make aesthetic judgments can best be approached through an examination of how these judgments are formed. Since

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\(^9\) Crawford, 227-228.

\(^{10}\) "As to terminology, I have no quarrel with those who wish to preserve a distinction between 'aesthetics' and 'philosophy of art.' But I find the shorter term very convenient, and so I use it to include matters that some would place under the second." Beardsley, 14.

\(^{11}\) Nwodo, 196; Matthew Lipman, *Contemporary Aesthetics* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1973) 7, quoted in Nwodo, 196.
the time of Plato, the difference between subjectivity and objectivity has been a major issue of debate. Some philosophers claim that aesthetic judgments can only be arrived at through a mixture of the two. Most contemporary aestheticians and art critics feel that an objective approach supported by adequate justification is fundamental to making aesthetic judgments. On the other hand, the fact that aestheticians and critics often disagree with one another lends strong support to the view that aesthetic assertions are reflective of an individual’s taste and are, therefore, always subjective. According to Immanuel Kant, and subsequently F.N. Sibley, we are endowed with certain natural sensitivities that allow us to perceive aesthetic qualities. Sibley regards this sensitivity as taste, and taste is triggered by aesthetic qualities, rather than visual perception.

This leads the proponents of subjectivity to feel that you should approach the field of aesthetics with an open mind; follow your intuition — your sixth sense. They base their aesthetic judgments on value statements such as, "I like X" or "I do not like X." However, when asked to justify their reasoning behind these statements, they are unable to rigorously defend their position with statements of fact.

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Instead they describe the physical attributes of the object and the emotional responses they felt because of their encounter. Advocates of this subjective approach frequently argue that:

...if the correct application of aesthetic concepts depends only on someone else’s say—so, we may wonder whether there are any grounds at all for the application of aesthetic concepts, whether the whole critical game is not perhaps a charade in which the king stands naked while all and sundry, taking their cue from those who "know best," comment on the magnificence of his robes.15

In response to this, proponents of an objective approach will argue that the way in which an artistic object appears relies heavily on the understanding each individual has of that object. In other words, "the visual arts are a compromise between what we see and what we know."16 This knowledge can only be obtained through critical reflection and education. If we base our aesthetic decisions on our personal perceptions, we run the risk of appearing arbitrary.17 However, if perception is substantiated by

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15 Novitz, 13.


critical reflection then it has a basis for justification and can be argued.

But what is critical reflection and why is it so desirable? Critical reflection can be defined as:

"...the assessment of chains of reasoning (or "arguments," as they are called) in the attempt to gain insight into our beliefs and values. It aims at understanding our ideas, clarifying them for ourselves and others." \(^{18}\)

Such reflection allows one to not just enjoy looking at an object, but to also arrive at some understanding of its meaning. It goes beyond physical interpretation and examines the artist’s intentions, as well as the social, political, and cultural influences prevalent at the time the work was conceived. Critical reflection allows for the provision of reasons to support judgments. It is okay if these reasons can be disputed, as long as they are devoid of the personal feelings and preferences of the individual who is making these determinations. A clear distinction must be made between explaining why a person is partial to an object, as opposed to justifying why it is aesthetically pleasing using relevant facts.\(^{19}\) The more facts one is

\(^{18}\) Crawford, 228.

\(^{19}\) "It has frequently been held that a reason is relevant if a feature pointed out is a characteristic that defines the genre to which the work under consideration belongs." Tsugawa, 13.
willing to commit to, the more substantial their argument will become.

The basis for determining what is a relevant fact is best sought in the fields of art history and art criticism. Knowledge of form, style, technique, and innovation can be derived from art history and criteria for critiquing and interpreting may be gleaned from art criticism. Aestheticians generally form their judgments from a more philosophical standpoint than those of the art historian or art critic. However, they justify their assertions on relevant facts obtained through the work being done in these fields. The boundaries between these fields are at times ill defined, but there are some clear distinctions:

...aestheticians see themselves seeking to understand the conceptual underpinnings of the claims of knowledge about art made by art critics and art historians. They recognize that art historians describe, analyze, compare, and interpret individual works, collections of works, and styles, but see themselves as inquiring into the categories used for these descriptions and comparisons. They see art critics engaged in uncovering specific meanings to be found in individual works and making evaluative judgments about those works, but view themselves as engaged in the attempt to understand the criteria employed in these interpretive and critical judgments...[T]he basic presupposition of

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20 Crawford, 229.
aesthetics...is the belief that our creating, appreciating, and criticizing art involve basic human values and, as such, are worthy of critical reflection.\textsuperscript{21}

The ability to engage in critical reflection is what sets aestheticians, art historians, and art critics apart from the lay person. It is not that they necessarily possess a natural superior sensitivity to aesthetic objects, instead they have been conditioned through education to view objects differently. In other words, they just know what to look for. Trained viewers are more likely to identify various design principles and are more efficient in their examination of the relationship between pictorial elements. They are also more apt to distinguish the issues of form from those of content. Untrained viewers generally focus in on a centrally positioned pictorial element. These individuals are not as concerned about the relationships between elements, apart from relating them to the same subject matter. Instead, untrained viewers often skip from one independent element to another.\textsuperscript{22} The ability to know what to look for in an artistic object is a crucial element for critical reflection.

Much information about the era in which the object was created can be derived from a thorough analysis of the elements that comprise the object. For example,

\textsuperscript{21} Crawford, 237-238.

information linking the object in question to a particular artistic movement, historical period, economic strata, etc. can be attained through an examination of: 1) the elements prevalent in the object, such as color, form, texture, and medium; 2) the artistic canons that were selected for inspiration; 3) the physical and intellectual relationship between the elements; and 4) the artist's selection of an element and its relationship to the subject matter. Except for the later, formal artistic training is necessary to really conceptualize these elements.

Besides artistic elements, critical reflection also examines the Zeitgeist\(^3\) of the object in question. Any artistic object, despite its reason for being, is inevitably a reflection of the cultural values prevalent at the time of its conception. Items need to be ascribed a clear place within the universe of objects. This requires:

...a recognition of the object's place in its own cultural and artistic tradition, as well as its place within the oeuvre of the artist. That placement will require an objective knowledge of the 'geography' of cultural traditions, a view of what has been....\(^24\)


Different cultures value different objects in very diverse ways. Each culture's perception of what is aesthetically valuable, and therefore worthy of critical reflection, is dependent upon the cultural, social, economic, and even technological conditions existing within that culture. Aestheticians, art historians, and art critics recognize this and take measures to judge objects in the context of their cultural milieu — bearing in mind that a culture may consist of a grouping as large as the United States of America or as small as a group of friends.

Now that the term aesthetics has been defined and the means by which aesthetic judgments are formed and by whom has been clarified, we can address the issue of whether an aesthetically valuable item can or should be considered a document. Because an aesthetically valuable object is often only a single item, elements from the science of diplomatics will be employed to decide whether such objects are documents. In contemporary archival practice, diplomatics are used in reference to individual administrative and/or juridical documents. However, there are elements that can be applicable to aesthetic objects. Before proceeding, a definition of what is meant by diplomatics is needed. Perhaps the best explanation of the science of diplomatics is offered by Cencetti. His definition, as translated by Luciana Duranti, is as follows:

Diplomatics is the discipline which studies the genesis, forms, and transmission of archival documents, and their relationship with the facts represented in them and with their creator, in order to identify, evaluate, and communicate their true nature.\(^{26}\)

Modern diplomatics are only concerned with archival documents, meaning those documents created by or received into and administrative or juridical environment. However, for the purposes of this paper, we will be extending the rules to encompass aesthetically valued documents created by private individuals.

When an individual creates an object that is considered to possess aesthetic value, is this process of creation comparable to the production of a written archival document? If we refer to the following definition, it seems that the creative process for both is quite similar:

[A written document]...is produced on a medium (paper, magnetic tape, disc, plate, etc.) by means of a writing instrument (pen, pencil, typing machine, printer, etc.).... The attribute 'written' is not used in diplomacy in its meaning of an act \textit{per se} (drawn, scored, traced, or inscribed), but rather in the

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meaning that refers to the purpose and intellectual result of the action of writing; that is, to the expression of ideas in a form which is both objectified (documentary) and syntactic (governed by rules of arrangement).\textsuperscript{27}

There should be no question that the creation of artistic objects involves a medium and an instrument coming together to express ideas in a form governed by the rules of arrangement imposed upon the creator either by himself, his contemporaries, or by any prevalent artistic canons. In addition, the product of this act of creation results in an intellectual pursuit, namely critical reflection. Critical reflection often reveals insights into the historical and sociological, as well as artistic, nature of the object in question.

Like written documents, aesthetic objects have form. Critical reflection is primarily involved with the contemplation of the relationships between elements assuming both physical forms (shape, medium, etc.) and intellectual form (interpreting, evaluating, etc.). In addition, form, as it relates to both written documents and aesthetic objects, is reflective of political structures, culture, economics, etc. Form is what helps the viewer to determine an object’s or a document’s meaning. Diplomatics, as it relates to the written document, strives to ascertain the full meaning of the document, as well

\textsuperscript{27} Duranti, 15.
as determining its authenticity and authority.\textsuperscript{28} Aesthetics also involves striving to interpret the full meaning of an object through critical reflection. However, it should be noted that an artistic object does not necessarily have to be an original to be aesthetically pleasing. On the other hand, unlike aestheticians, art historians and art critics concern themselves with the origins and authenticity of an aesthetic object. They would likely discredit copies or forgeries.

Finally, the science of diplomatics suggests that a document must have a purpose. Although a written archival document would likely be created to fulfill an administrative or juridical purpose, aesthetic objects, such as some cartographic materials, may also, at one time, fulfill an administrative or juridical purpose. Most aesthetic objects, such as cartographic materials or architectural drawings, no longer fulfill an evidential role. However, they can still be used for their informational value. Other types of aesthetic objects are also created to serve a purpose. Their purpose is to convey the creator’s message, whether it is serving a contemplative, moral, or instrumental function.\textsuperscript{29} In conclusion, all these elements do come together with the

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\item\textsuperscript{28} Duranti, 16.
\item\textsuperscript{29} "First, there are the immediate aesthetic effects upon the audience which contemplates a work of art. This is the contemplative function of art. Second, it might be said that art arouses moral awareness, spotlights moral problems, or, in Tolstoy’s claim, further infectious feelings of brotherhood. This would be a moral function of art. Then, for brevity, let us group together a wide variety of other uses of art and call them collectively the instrumental function of art." Donald Walhout, "The Nature and Function of Art," \textit{The British Journal of Aesthetics} 26 (Winter 1986): 18.
\end{enumerate}
intent of conveying information, albeit in visual form as opposed to written, but still conveying relevant information.\textsuperscript{30} I suggest that on this basis, aesthetic objects are potentially documents, just in another form.

Once an object is determined, through the proper channels, to have aesthetic value, and, based on our discussion of diplomatics, fulfills the criteria necessary to be called a document, what application does it have in archives? Before this question can be addressed, we need to reexamine what types of objects we are referring to as potentially having aesthetic value. The Committee on Intrinsic Value listed the following items as possessing aesthetic value: pencil, ink, or watercolor sketches; maps; architectural drawings; frakturs; and engraved and/or printed forms such as bounty—land warrants. I would like to add to this: documentary art,\textsuperscript{31} documents and manuscripts that are retained for their symbolic value,\textsuperscript{32} and other forms of iconography.


\textsuperscript{31} For clarification, documentary art is representative of the art produced by craftsman who have "learnt the business as professional or amateur painter," as opposed to masterpieces in the 19th century sense. Taylor, 421.

\textsuperscript{32} Documents which "...are put to religious and ceremonial uses, the records are revered as objects in themselves more than they are valued for their contents...the Domesday Book offers a good example." James M. O'Toole, "The Symbolic Significance of Archives," \textit{The American Archivist} 56 (1993): 249.
Although these objects possess some research value as visual documentary information, their primary role is for use in exhibitions. They are generally used for their visual appeal as a means of drawing in viewers. Unlike written information contained in typed or handwritten documents, visual information, particularly if it is aesthetically pleasing, is more likely to be absorbed. These objects can be used for livening up a potentially dull subject and also serve to break the monotony of exhibiting ordinary documents. If aesthetic objects are used well, and in context, they will enhance the exhibit by providing visual evidence to substantiate the information found in the other documents. They should be used as a vehicle for showing what is available in the collections. Not necessarily in the random format of a "Treasures of the Archives" exhibit, but as an eyecatching, thematic supplement that draws attention to other documents that patrons may not be aware of. Unlike museums, which use exhibits as the primary means for attaining their educational objectives, archives should create exhibits to encourage patrons to use their


materials. It is through the patron's use of these documents that an archive's education goals are met.\(^{36}\)

In conclusion, to answer the question posed in the title, *Are archivists qualified to make appraisal or reappraisal decisions based on aesthetic judgments?*, my general answer is no. Although there are exceptions, a great deal of educational preparation is needed to adequately support an aesthetic judgment. This does not mean that aesthetically pleasing documents should not be accessioned. However, an expert should be consulted to assess the true aesthetic value of the item.

Many concepts relevant to making aesthetic judgments have been discussed throughout this paper. Nevertheless, other concepts, perhaps not quite as important for our immediate needs, were not explored — yet they warrant a mention. For example, the issues of taste and beauty, as well as the subjects of iconography, symbolism, and antiquarianism, were not addressed. I am mentioning these in an attempt to impress upon archivists the complexity of this subject, and impart further the need to make informed decisions. Although an item may seem pretty, or eyecatching, that perception does not sufficiently warrant accessioning it into a collection.

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Archival Research (CERAR) at the University of Pittsburgh. This paper was written while working on her MLS degree.
Steadying the Weathervane: Use as a Factor in Appraisal Criteria.

Wendy Duff

Introduction

In his 1974 Society of American Archivists presidential address, Gerald F. Ham cautioned archivists against becoming "too closely tied to the vogue of the academic marketplace" otherwise "the archivist will remain at best nothing more than a weathervane moved by the changing winds of historiography." 1 These wise words of advice reflected concern over collecting activities that responded to the latest research interests rather than a broad knowledge of "the scope, quality, and direction of research in an open-ended future." 2 But how can archivists predict the future trends of research, especially those in an open-ended future? Should they even try? Timothy Ericson has


2 Ibid., 13.

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pointed out that "we do not collect or preserve records as an end in itself; we do so in order that others may use what we have selected, whether by viewing it in an exhibit, by conducting personal research, or by reading the scholarship of someone else who has conducted research in our holdings." If archivists preserve the records so others may use them, can they appraise them without determining what those uses may be? If they focus on the potential uses of the material during appraisal will they be at the mercy of the changing winds of historiography? Can archivists steady the weathervane and allow it to direct and guide their appraisal decisions or does considering their current users' needs condemn them to a fate of fluttering to the latest breeze?

This essay will briefly consider the growth in the volume and fragility of modern records as well as the increasing numbers who wish to consult them. It will review traditional theories of appraisal and identify four types of uses which emerge from Schellenberg’s concept of value. It will outline five current theories and methods of appraisal: macro-appraisal; sampling; documentation strategy; risk management; and a social theory of appraisal, and evaluate their consideration of use as a factor in appraisal. After a short overview of selection criteria proposed in related fields, it will present a new structural approach to appraisal.

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that recognizes use as a key component of appraisal decisions.

The Increasing Volume and Fragility of Records

The exponential growth of all types of records is well-documented in the archival literature. The German archivist, Hans Booms, has noted that records growth and diversity is accelerating because of the needs of a world that is highly-managed, and as a result of increased social complexity which has led to more interaction between state and citizen. Without doubt the phenomenon of overabundant documentation will continue to escalate because of technological developments in many areas especially communication. Paul Peters has suggested that poor communications promotes domination, good communication encourages competition, and that excellent communication fosters collaboration.

As our society adopts to a communication revolution, one can foresee a new age of collaboration, with a resulting growth in transactions, leading to a further increase in the volume of records. Upon archivists rests the responsibility to "create, out of this overabundance of information, a

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4 This observation has made by Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources," Archivaria 24 (Summer 1987): 76.

socially relevant documentary record that is, in spacial terms, storable and, in human terms, usable.\(^6\)

Furthermore, as the amount of records has increased, their durability has decreased. With every new technological development, the longevity of our documentary heritage diminishes. "The shift from stone to clay tablets, from clay to papyrus, from cloth paper to wood pulp paper, from paper to photographic media and now to magnetic recording has produced ever shorter format lifetimes."\(^7\)

The increasing fragility of records that have archival value requires a proactive approach to their preservation. Archivists must now intercede at the beginning of the life cycle to ensure the retention of this material.\(^8\) This forces archivists not only to redefine their traditional role as custodians, but to identify records with archival value without knowledge of the creator's actual use of the records. However, it does eliminate the concern that Hans Booms articulated that archivists must free themselves of the social values of their own age and appraise the records according to the social values of their creator. When an archivist appraises records at the beginning of the life cycle,

\(^6\) Booms, 77.


the creator and the archivist are more likely to share the social values of the society of which they are both part. The fragility and volume of records has compelled archivists to re-evaluate their assumptions, their theories, their methodologies, and even their role as records appraiser.

As archivists develop new methods for managing the increasing volume and complexity of records, they must also come to terms with a myriad of new archival users. According to Lawrence Dowler "most archivists persist in thinking of the scholar as the primary user of archives" in spite of the findings of a number of user studies that refute this conviction. In fact, the diversity of use and archival users is escalating along with the growth of records. No longer do archives serve only the creator of the records or the scholar/historian. "Overall use of archives is increasing dramatically with the greatest increase being in non-traditional areas. Archivists increasingly must serve a heterogeneous clientele with diverse needs and expectations." Should archivists alter their traditional appraisal criteria to serve the new demands of this increasing user population? To answer this question, one must first explore established appraisal criteria

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10 Bureau of Canadian Archivists, Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards, Subject Indexing Working Group, *Subject Indexing for Archives* (Canada: Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 23.
recommended by traditional theories. The next section will explore traditional and current appraisal theories to examine their consideration of use as a factor in appraisal.

Traditional Appraisal Theories

British

Sir Hilary Jenkinson, the patriarch of British archival theory, rejected the proposition that archivists should appraise records because of the inherent bias in their selection. He proposed that only the original creator of the records should make appraisal decisions and that those decisions should be based solely on "the needs of its own practical business; provided, that is, that it can refrain from thinking of itself as a body producing historical evidences."11 Therefore, according to Jenkinson, only use by the creator of the records was a valid criterion upon which to base appraisal decisions. An archivist's interest, he said, was "an interest in his Archives as Archives, not as documents valuable for proving this or that thesis."12 For Jenkinson, appraisal should be based solely upon legal or administrative requirements, not to fulfill a research need or any other use. Records should be made available to researchers but selection decisions based on upon

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perceived historical needs distorts the historical record and jeopardizes their "unquestioned impartiality."

**American**

T.R. Schellenberg, the father of American appraisal theory, rejected Jenkinson's proposal that archivists could not select records for retention. He suggested that archivists should appraise records and that they should do so based upon an evaluation of the value of the records. He posited that records have two kinds of value: "primary values for the originating agency itself and secondary values for other agencies and private users." Secondary value was comprised of two separate elements: evidential value or evidence of the originating organization's functions and activities; and informational value which focuses upon the potential of the records to fulfill research interests.

He opined that records that documented how a government was organized and how it functioned were "indispensable to the government itself and to students of government. For the government they are a storehouse of administrative wisdom and experience. They are needed to give consistency and continuity to its actions." These records fulfill an essential administrative need for the operation of good government. They also provide the

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accountability that "every important public official owes to the people whom he serves." Furthermore, according to Schellenberg, the evaluation of records containing evidential value is an objective test, for which archivists' training in historical methodology prepares them. On the other hand, the informational value or research value of records is far more difficult to ascertain with certainty. This decision will rest upon an evaluation of the records' future importance to a particular type of research.

Schellenberg argued that:

An archivist assumes that his first obligation is to preserve records containing information that will satisfy the needs of the Government itself, and after that, however undefinable these needs may be, private scholars and the public generally. He should take into account the actual research methods of various classes of persons and the likelihood that they would under ordinary circumstances make effective use of archival materials. He will normally give priority to the needs of the historian and the other social scientists, but he obviously must also preserve records of vital interest to the genealogist, the student of local history and the antiquarian.

Even though informational value is more subjective and arduous to evaluate, Schellenberg perceived it as

\[\text{Ibid.}, 8.\]

\[\text{Ibid.}, 25-26.\]
determining the selection and retention of the majority of archival records. Schellenberg's divisions of values can provide useful categories in which to group use of archival records. Based upon his values, one can delineate four different types of uses or needs for records.

1) The first category includes primary users who require records for their legal and/or administrative value.

2) The second category includes both primary and secondary users who consult records for their evidential value or for reasons of accountability. Schellenberg emphasized that this value is important to government and students of government because it provides a "storehouse of administrative wisdom." However, today, the need to provide an accounting of an organization's or government's actions may be more valuable than a "storehouse of administrative wisdom."

3) The third category includes all uses of the records for research purposes.

4) The fourth category includes genealogists, students of local history and antiquarians.

The third and fourth category could be conflated but since Schellenberg many archivists refer to and often treat these types of users differently, making it advantageous to separate them for purposes of analysis.

Although Schellenberg's concepts of evidential and informational value were instrumental in shaping North American archivists' concept of appraisal, some have recently questioned his notion of value. Macro-appraisal, a new appraisal strategy proposed by some Canadian archivists, has rejected many of Schellenberg's tenets.
Macro-Appraisal

Since 1990, to help archivists identify records with archival value amongst the overabundance of records created by government, the National Archives of Canada (NAC) adopted a new top-down, or a macro-appraisal approach, to records selection. This approach emphasizes the need to commence the appraisal process with an analysis of the functions and activities of records creators.\textsuperscript{17} Eldon Frost explains this intellectual model:

Archivists ascertain, first on an agency-wide basis, the significance of programmes through a review of their organizational structure, functions and processes; secondly, by a study of records systems, their linkages and interconnections in support of the programmes; and, finally, by appraising the records themselves. Special attention in the research is paid to functions and processes which cross agencies, in view of making the best possible appraisal decisions.

\textsuperscript{17} Frost comments that although “the strategy is based on traditional archival methods,...I am unaware of previous attempts by archives to rank institutions in of their importance of their contribution to government and society,” 84. However David Levine reported in 1984 on the Ohio State Archives’ appraisal policy that included both an evaluation of individual record series, and a “ranking of states agencies [that] specifies which agencies are to be documented most thoroughly in light of their overall impact on the government and the people of Ohio.” David Levine, “The Appraisal Policy of Ohio State Archives,” American Archivist 47 (1984): 292.
Use as a Factor in Appraisal Criteria

by having adequate knowledge of similar record holdings.¹⁸

The application of this approach in Canada ranks the organizations and agencies according to the significance of their contribution to government and to its citizens. The theory, ostensibly, accentuates the functions and activities that created the records over the content or information in the records.¹⁹ Although it seeks records that provide evidence of government/citizen interaction, it does not base this appraisal criteria on any a priori assumption of the potential use of these records. Terry Cook, one of the main designers of the appraisal strategy, decries the propensity of archivists to search for research value in records. He states:

archivists have usually appraised records according to theories of value defined by users or by expectations of future use. This approach by definition decontextualizes the record from the internal, organic relationship of its creation and


imposes instead an external standard for judging value.\textsuperscript{20}

For Cook "values are not found in records — except in rare intrinsic cases — but rather in theories of value of societal significance which archivists bring to the records."\textsuperscript{21}

Cook is not alone in his rejection of use as an important criterion upon which to base appraisal decisions. Ellen Scheinberg, another NAC staff member, also opposed the formation of appraisal decisions based upon use. She stated that "although archivists should be aware of certain research methodologies relating to computers as well as trends within government departments, research developments and interests within the academic community [these interests] should not play a role when appraising archival documents."\textsuperscript{22}

Although staff of NAC discount Schellenberg's concepts of value, their emphasis on identifying records that document government/citizen action should serve well those

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\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ibid.}, 41.

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in the second category of use: patrons requiring an accounting of the government's actions.

However, as the adherents of macro-appraisal reject use as a factor of appraisal, interpreting the theory in terms of use may be misleading.

The top down approach of macro-appraisal determines the important functions or programs that may have created records of archival value. To select the actual records from all the records produced in carrying out the activity, the NAC has opted, in certain cases, to employ sampling techniques.

**Sampling**

Sampling, a statistical approach to appraisal, is a method that enables archivists to handle the increasing number of heterogeneous files, such as case files. As an appraisal tactic, sampling usually denotes the random choosing of files from a series using inferential statistical techniques which ensure that each file has an equal chance of being selected and results in a reliable representation of the series or a predetermined stratum of the series. Terry Cook, also a strong advocate of sampling, has provided a comprehensive review of the stringent procedures required to ensure that a representative sample is chosen. Sampling, he asserts, results in the retention of records that can be used to reconstruct the whole with statistical validity. It thus facilitates accurate quantitative research for a multitude of disciplines and interests....[However] researchers cannot do
longitudinal work: it will be impossible to trace a particular individual or office or county over time, as the county or person or office in all likelihood will not be selected for every annual or decennial random sample from the series. 23

Selection of exemplary files, material that reflects significant characteristics "saves the files usually of greatest interest to researchers who are not undertaking collective quantitative research." 24 Although Cook points out that the technique chosen: sampling or selection, will determine the research value of the records, he does not, as others have, recommend that archivists first identify the potential users of the material. 25

Gerald Ham, on the other hand, recommends that before embarking on a sampling design archivists should ask: "What will be the primary use of the sampled records?

23 Terry Cook, "Many are called but few are chosen: Appraisal Guidelines for Sampling and Selecting Case Files," Archivaria 32 (Summer 1991): 39.

24 Ibid., 43.

25 The FBI files case in an interesting example of users rejecting the use of random sampling techniques and demanding that files be appraise on their individual characteristics. See Susan D. Steinwall, "Appraisal and the FBI Files Case: For Whom Do Archivists Retain Records?" American Archivist 49 (1986): 52-63.
What sampling technique is most appropriate in supporting that use?\textsuperscript{26}

Cook’s failure to recommend that archivists undertake an analysis of potential use of records is not an oversight. As previously noted, Cook strongly opposes the development of an appraisal theory based on use or users’ needs. Therefore sampling, as a technique, does not preclude the consideration of actual or potential use of material but the archivist employing the technique might.

Moreover, as sampling supports those involved in quantitative research, it appears to address the needs of the third category of use: research use. Sampling may result in the retention of records less suited to meet the needs of those requiring an accounting of the government or organization’s actions.

**Documentation Strategy**

Documentary strategy provides a different top-down approach; one that requires inter-institutional cooperation. The SAA glossary defines documentation strategy as:

> an on-going analytic, cooperative approach, designed, promoted and implemented by creators, administrators (including archivists) and users to ensure the archival retention of appropriate documentation in some area of human endeavor

\textsuperscript{26} F. Gerald Ham, *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: The Society of American Archivist, 1993), 76.
through the application of archival techniques, the creation of institutional archives and redefined acquisition policies, and the development of sufficient resources. The key elements of this approach are an analysis of the universe to be documented, an understanding of the inherent documentary problems, and the formulation of a plan to assure the adequate documentation of an issue, activity or geographic area.27

Documentation strategy provides a comprehensive view of appraisal which includes the assessment of an ongoing activity or topic and the identification and selection of records — both public and private — that document the field. The fundamental concept underlying this theory is that "analysis and planning must precede documentary efforts, and institutions must work together because modern documentation crosses institutional lines."28 Prior to an archivist appraising any actual records, a plan is created by: a) identifying and delineating the topic, function, or geographic area to be documented; b) selecting advisors (records creators, archivists, librarians, record managers, and users) to guide the process and identifying a repository


to hold the material; c) organizing the strategy and analyzing the available sources. Only after the completion of the plan are any records selected.29

Selecting an appropriate team of advisors is an integral element of a documentation strategy. By recommending an advisory committee consisting of creators, custodians, and users, the proponents of documentation strategy ensure that the users of the records assist in the formation of a plan to preserve records of archival value. This enables users with many different perspectives and viewpoints to be heard.

Although archival creators serve as advisors, and the use of the records by the creators are considered, documentation strategies appear to be primarily concerned with use of the material by secondary users. Helen Samuels acknowledges that institutions retain records for their legal, fiscal, administrative, and historical value. She likens these records to a library’s core collection and states that the:

...archivist’s legal obligations to their institutions are fulfilled by gathering the core collection. With the legal mission assured, archivists can examine their collections as sources of information, seek ties with

other institutions, and develop new strategies to build and manage collections.\textsuperscript{30}

Based on this statement, it would appear that archivists become involved in documentation strategies after they have fulfilled their responsibilities to primary users of the records: the creators. Furthermore the strategy does not address the needs of citizens to have an accounting of a government’s or organization’s activities.

In confronting the issue that some organizations will be documented while other not, Samuels explains:

If a strategy documents some unions and railroads more fully than other, can this documentation meet the information needs of the employees, individual union members, cities, and companies? The answer is probably no, but a strategy that fulfills everyone’s needs returns archivists to the practice of saving everything.\textsuperscript{31}

Documentation strategy promotes the establishment of institutional archives whose first responsibility would be to address the needs of the first category of users: primary users. An institutional archives would also probably fulfill an organization’s need for records with evidential value or fulfill its need to account for its actions. If they retained these

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 114.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 121.
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records, the second category of use would also be fulfilled. However, the advocates of documentation strategy have not articulated or emphasized these needs.

The proponents of documentation strategy emphasize that they promote "the full documentation of society, not merely the piecemeal evaluation of isolated records for historical or other long-term value."32 Perhaps, due to the complex relationships between organizations and governments, records needed to meet legal and administrative requirements as well as those needed to provide an accounting of actions may only be preserved with a cooperative approach to appraisal.

Furthermore, by emphasizing inter-institutional cooperation and the inclusion of the user population on advisory committees, documentation strategy provides a framework for archival appraisal which incorporates the potential use of records as an essential element. The plan, if so designed, could address the needs of all four categories of use. However, which uses are considered the most important will rest upon the viewpoints of the individual members of the advisory committees.

Risk Management

David Bearman has joined the chorus of archivists who assert that the profession requires a new approach to appraisal — one that does not focus on the actual records

themselves. As a method of achieving this goal, he suggests that archivists replace their analysis of cost-benefit which evaluates the cost of obtaining records against the benefits accrued with a language of risk management.

Instead of asking what benefits would derive from retaining records, they should insist on an answer to the probability of incurring unacceptable risks as a consequence of disposing of records. This will very likely dramatically reduce the volume of records that are judged essential to retain. And it suggests an approach to solving the second dilemma of our current appraisal methods; their focus on records rather than the activity they document.33

This approach accentuates the actions or transactions that created the records. It emphasizes the risk of not saving evidence of actions rather than on the informational value of the records. However, Bearman asserts that in evaluating activities that may have created records of archival value, the archivist must consider use as an integral component of any appraisal decision.

Continuing value looks to use for justification of retention. It will result in considering such highly used series of records as birth, death, and marriage certificates as archival, thus assuring heavier use of archival records by the public. Appraisal based on activity looks at functions

33 David Bearman, Archival Methods, 10.
that had a direct effect on potential users, especially on their rights as citizens in a governmental archives. Decisions based on appraisal of records by functions with substantial potential impact on constituents will result in saving and servicing records that are particularly needed.\(^{34}\)

A theory of appraisal based on risk management could, therefore, accommodate the needs of all four categories of use, if their needs were important to the organization.

Bearman’s emphasis on retention of records needed for an accounting of government activities evolves out of the consequences of not being accountable. "The risk of not being accountable is (if one is a government) loss of legitimacy and if one is a private entity it is the risk of being successfully sued for negligence. The loss of legitimacy is the most dangerous thing that a government can possibly subject itself to.\(^{35}\)

His suggestion that archivists in government archives identify functions that have had an effect on citizens bears interesting parallels to the National Archives of Canada’s macro-appraisal theory. However, Bearman posits that these records should be retained partly due to their potential importance to users, a concept that NAC’s staff neglects.

**Social Theory of Appraisal**

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\(^{34}\) *Ibid.*, 45.

\(^{35}\) David Bearman, e-mail message to Wendy Duff, 30 March 1994.
Terry Eastwood, like Bearman, has also recommended that archivists develop a new appraisal theory based primarily on use. He reasons that as archivists strive to ensure the objectivity of the appraisal process with a system of evaluating records that is inherently biased and subjective, they should develop a theory of appraisal "based ultimately but not exclusively on an assessment of use." He argues that

It is therefore the appraiser/archivist's task to marshall evidence for the evaluation of archives on the basis of an objective analysis of the qualities of any archives to be appraised and an analysis of the uses to which they may be put.  

For Eastwood striving for an objective theory of appraisal requires an understanding of the potential uses of the records as evidence of transactions. He argues that archives are inherently utilitarian, created by a person or organization to assist in the carrying out of an activity or function. Therefore, the appraisal of these records should consider the past, present, and potential use of the records.

Eastwood's assertion of the primacy of use to appraisal decisions is a natural corollary to his belief that archives are arsenals of democratic accountability:

In democratic societies like ours, government administration, and increasingly even private affairs

36 Terry Eastwood, "Towards a Social Theory of Appraisal," 83.
with which government is inextricably linked in myriad ways, is carried out in the name of the people and in and by the law the people sets through its democratic institutions. We are accountable to each other for what we do to each other and to the common land we inhabit and rule so that we may, whatever our conflicts, continue to live in comity. Archives and the institutions which preserve them serve the polity, the commonwealth. All who come to us, the historian to probe subject, the administrator to carry out duties, the plaintiff or defendant to plead before the courts, even the much maligned genealogist to search for ancestry, must make some accounting of past actions and transactions from the circumscribed evidence borne by documents which are themselves a part of the very actions and transactions under investigation.37

In essence, Eastwood is suggesting that archivists must appraise evidence and that their appraisal should incorporate an analysis of societies' past, present and future need for evidence. Appraisal becomes an exercise in evaluating a need or future need for evidence of transactions. Eastwood's suggestion that archivists develop a new social theory of appraisal incorporates all four

categories of uses: use by the record creator, use by those requiring an accounting of an individuals or organizations actions, use by scholars, and all other uses.

This brief review of modern appraisal theory reveals that the profession disagrees on the importance of use as a factor in appraisal. Consulting the writings of related professions that also must acquire material may help the analysis by presenting alternative viewpoints.

Selection Policies of Other Cultural Organizations

Other cultural institutions, such as libraries and museums, have also encountered problems emanating from the burgeoning volume and complexity of material, the growing demands on their services, and diminishing funds. Although museum and library collecting activities normally focus on the acquisition of individual items, as opposed to the whole output of a creator as an archives does, consulting their literature can provide insights into their methods for adapting to these new exigencies.

Museums

Museum curators have identified factors integral to the selection of artifacts including: aesthetic quality, cultural meaning, historical significance, rarity, age and skill of production.38 Most of these qualities, however, are extremely subjective, and heavily depend upon the

educated opinion of the curator. Recently some curators have begun to question the traditional methods of selection.

David Barr, like many archivists, has proposed that museums abandon their traditional bottom-up approach that concentrates on qualities of the material they are selecting and develop new collection policies based on a top-down strategy.

The top-down approach places the emphasis first on determining where we are going and only secondarily on how we intend to get there. It suggests that collecting should start with a definition of the uses we intend to make of our collections. Collections may be used to exhibit fine quality of design or craftsmanship, tell a story, to educate, to supply data for research, to teach or 'act out' an interpretation, or for exchanges with other museums in order to enrich both. Which use or combination of uses is it to be? Asking this question already goes considerably beyond bottom-up thinking. We

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39 Swedish museum curators have developed a collecting program called SAMDOK that attempts to secure materials that document contemporary life. This program attempts to collect artifacts that best represents a family and their home life. Harry Rubenstein, "Collecting for Tomorrow: Sweden's Contemporary Documentation Program," Museum News 63 (August 1985): 55-60.
have replaced what? (and where? and how?) with what for\textsuperscript{40}

For Barr, a top-down tactic focuses first and foremost on the projected use of material and away from the object itself. However, not everyone agrees that museum curators should base their collecting decisions on current use or needs. David Lowenthal has warned:

Museums uniquely mediate past, present and future. They play an often lonely role in seeking to prevent today's viewpoints from swamping tomorrow's. It is all too easy to pillory stewardship as hoarding. It may be our best defense against public amnesia. To serve posterity museums must remind themselves, and persuade their masters, that some custodial autonomy is essential. To abnegate all aloofness, to be wholly responsive to immediate exigencies, would defeat all our ultimate interests and condemn us to a brief and shallow present, one devoid of temporal depth and historical insights. ...

\textsuperscript{40} David W. Barr, "Top Down or Bottom Up?: Which is the Most Useful Way to Develop our 'First Principles' of Collecting," \textit{Museum Quarterly} 17 (August 1989): 19.
demands, the less they can heed our heirs, the constituency yet to come.41

Museum curators are not alone in their quest to "mediate past, present and future." Archivists have also sought to provide future generations with "temporal depth and historical insights." Do we disenfranchise future researchers by concentrating on the needs of our present clients? How do libraries who also serve present and future users integrate the needs of users into their collection policies?

Library Selection Policies

Library literature is replete with treatises on selection policy, collection development, and, more recently, collection management. The scope of this essay does not permit adequate coverage of all the various theories. However, a cursory overview can provide interesting comparisons to archival appraisal.

Librarians generally agree that a collection policy framework should include some, if not all, of the following four components:

1) an institutional context which includes needs and priorities as well as staffing and financial constraints;
2) their users, both present and future. Although librarians generally acknowledge that the changing nature of scholarship makes the prediction of future needs impossible;

3) technologies and techniques which have affected not only the different media required by a library but also the library's ability to share resources;

4) the patterns of scholarship which are being dramatically affected by technology.

Not all collection literature includes all four components but almost all recognize the importance of users needs.\textsuperscript{42}

Librarians can alter collecting priorities to incorporate new patterns of scholarship because current published literature usually reflects contemporary scholarship. Archives, however, cannot quickly accommodate a new pattern of research if they have not previously acquired the necessary records. Furthermore, as Ham has warned, responding to current research needs results in archival holdings that reflect "narrow research rather than the broad spectrum of human experience." \textsuperscript{43}

The other factors that librarians consider: institutional context, the development of new technologies, and users, do concern archives but their importance has often been tempered with concern over the importance of the record itself.

This cursory review of the literature has indicated that selecting material appraisal is a complex, multi-dimensional task for librarians, museums, and archivists. Frank Boles and Julia Mark Young's study of criteria used in appraisal


\textsuperscript{43} Ham, "The Archival Edge," 8.
identified three different separate modules that affect appraisal decisions, each made up of numerous elements. To understand how the different elements interrelate, a structural approach to appraisal is required.

In 1977, James C. Baughman developed a structural approach to collection development in libraries. "The structural approach," he explained, "seeks to find a pattern of relationships, since effective collection building is assumed to rest on identifying a structure." He posited that collection development was comprised of three major constructs: 1) use which represents a cluster of demands; 2) knowledge which represents an assembly of disciplines, subjects, topics, etc., and 3) librarianship which is a manifestation of an array of subject literature relationships. He presented these three constructs in a Venn diagram which depicts overlapping areas and forms a center which he identified as collection development.

**Structural Approach to Appraisal**

Using Baughman's structural approach, one could develop a model for appraisal that would also include three major constructs. Figure 1 illustrates the major clusters essential to archival appraisal. These constructs are:

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1) provenance or records context which represents the functions, actions, and transactions which created the records and the record-keeping systems that controlled the environment in which the records were created;

2) the records and their relationships to other records;

3) the archives environment or institutional context which represents a cluster of demands or constraints on the archives such as their mission, the mandate of their sponsor, and the needs of their users which include the archives' clients, the creators of the records, and their other users. The archives mission will dictate who uses the archives and the needs of the users will impact on, and transform, its mission and policies.

**Figure 1** Structural Approach to Appraisal
Analyzing the three components and their interactions is integral to appraisal. Concentrating on only one component to the detriment of the others will cause archivists to fail in their mission. Appraisal, as collection development, rests on the identification of a structure that represents the relationship among the constructs.

At the intersection of the archives environment and the context constructs lies acquisitions planning. By analyzing the transactions and functions that impact upon, and are important to their mission and their users, the archives can develop an acquisition plan. This plan, as the documentation strategy and the National Archives of Canada have emphasized, should occur before records are examined.

In the section formed by the crossover between the archives environment and records constructs lies the evaluation of the repository's holdings or the material for which the archives has legal or administrative control. Appraisal of new records must be based upon an understanding and knowledge of the use of records already under archival care. Furthermore, an evaluation of the existing collection is essential for ongoing reappraisal projects.46

The evaluation of evidence relies not only on an examination of the records or on an understanding of the functions and transactions that created them, but rather on

the synthesis of the two. Therefore, in the area formed by the overlap of the context and the evidence constructs, lies the evaluation of evidence, which is integral to all appraisal decisions because to appraise records archivists must consider their value as evidence of transactions.

At the convergence of the three constructs is the locus of the most important archival activity: appraisal. Only after analyzing all the clusters: the context, the records, and the archives environment, and their interactions, can archivists determine which of the mass of records they must retain, preserve, and make available.

**Context and Evidence**

The context construct includes an analysis of both the functions and activities that created records and the record-keeping systems that controlled them. An evaluation of record-keeping systems is central to an evaluation of evidence because if a record-keeping system is not secure or cannot prove the authenticity of records, their integrity and their value as evidence are diminished. As Bearman asserts:

> Record-keeping systems are organized to accomplish the specific function of creating, storing, and accessing records for evidential purposes. While they may also be able to retrieve records for informational purposes, they are designed for operational staff, not for archivists or researchers, and thus are optimized to support the business processes and transactions of the creating
organization rather than generic information retrieval. Although record-keeping systems are not created for archivists, archivists must appraise record-keeping systems and make decisions to destroy or preserve the records that they contain.  

Records that the record-keeping systems contain are evidence of actions and transactions. The records are not an end in themselves; they are evidence that substantiate that an action took place. They are the remnants of past deeds and as such can only be evaluated with an analysis of the activities or transactions which they represent. As Cook has argued:

the focus of appraisal should shift from the actual record to the conceptual context of its creation, from the physical artifact to the intellectual purpose behind it, from matter to mind. While good archivists have always considered context more important than content, they have traditionally used context to explain or situate the physical record. It is now time to focus much more centrally on context, or on a conceptual version of provenance, if appraisal theory is to redefined to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.  

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But appraisal is not just an evaluation of context. It is not context over records or records over context, rather it is a symbiotic relationship. It is not mind over matter or matter over mind, but rather their marriage that archivists seek. Although archivists require a top-down approach, supremacy of one construct weakens the whole. Records are evidence of actions and transactions, and therefore the transaction forms and defines the record. One cannot interpret or understand the record without comprehending the transaction from which it emanated. Moreover, the records are the documentary traces of transactions. It is through the records that the transaction reveal itself and speaks to us over the time-space continuum.

A transaction is carried out to support a function and creates a record which is the physical manifestation of that transaction that is enacted to satisfy the function. Appraisal depends upon the "document-event relationship." 49 When evaluating evidence, archivists must understand the relationships between the constructs. They must, as Heather MacNeil has asserted, "allow value to emerge naturally through the archival analysis of relationships of the external [the context] and internal structure [the original order]." 50 Only with an understanding of the whole of the records, the relationships of the series to each other, and


50 Ibid., 10.
the relationships of the fonds to other records in the archives or controlled by other repositories, can one determine retention requirements.

The records themselves must also be studied to ensure they provide the evidence required. Scheinberg has concluded that "although assessing the records may be the last step in the appraisal process, it is certainly not the least important. For the records reveal certain truths about the programs and record management systems that shed new light on existing authorities and/or hypotheses." The escalating growth of documentation may preclude archivists from evaluating individual documents, but an evaluation of records, perhaps through an examination of representative samples or a documentary probe, is integral to any appraisal decision. Barbara Craig has contended:

The reality of the record base must be an indispensable component of all acts of appraisal. Without an understanding of documents and records, of their forms and of their functions, and of how they were created and used, a plan can be so easily upset by the attractiveness of concentrating on information divorced from the realities of its documentary expression....After all is said and done,

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51 Scheinberg, 27.
it is the record which is our special area of knowledge.\textsuperscript{52}

To appraise evidence, archivists require a records expertise. Their training and experience should provide them with a knowledge of the types of records, the intellectual forms and functions of the records, that represent the transactions they wish to protect. Archivists require a greater knowledge of the types of records that they appraise. Cox and Samuels have argued that the profession requires research into the types of documentation and the information (and I would add evidence) they provide.\textsuperscript{53}

Archives Environment

After an analysis of the functions and transactions that created records, a review of the record-keeping systems that controlled them, and a study of the records and their relationships, archivists can determine the value of records as evidence of important transactions or actions. But to decide whether the evidence should be preserved, whether they warrant the cost of their retention and preservation, archivists must decide if the records are needed. They must attempt to understand if and why they might be needed in the future. Therefore the third construct, the


\textsuperscript{53} Cox and Samuels, 34.
archives environment which includes use, is an essential arbitrator of retention decisions. This construct also includes the archives mission and its sponsor’s mandate or, as Frank Boles has labeled them, the "institutional interest evaluation." 54

Hugh Taylor has explained that "without users (which include ourselves), records and the information they contain have only a potential, a pent up 'energy' which is released through the dynamic interaction of human involvement with" the records.55 Decisions that do not consider this dynamic interaction are destined to preserve records that will languish on shelves, until they deteriorate. A well-defined "statement of purpose," 56 or use of records, is essential when the fragility of record carriers are forcing archivists to speak of continuous rather than permanent value. Archivists no longer have the luxury of leaving records untended for a hundred years just in case a future researcher may wish to consult them. They must be used


56 Kent Haworth has discussed the need for archivists to develop a 'language of purpose' which focuses attention on their obligation to their sponsor and their principles. Kent Haworth, "The Principles Speak for Themselves: Articulating a Language of Purpose for Archives," The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor, Barbara L. Craig, ed. (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 94-104.
and have their potential exploited during their relatively short life time.

Archivists do not appraise material for themselves. They appraise records for present and future patrons. As they select records to ensure the accountability of an organization or government, they too are accountable for their appraisal decisions. As the judges in the FBI court case determined, "The thrust of the laws Congress has enacted is that government records belong to the American people." When archivists appraise these records, they do so in trust and, as civil servants, are answerable to the people for their actions. Decisions that do not consider the needs of the people to which the records belong are unconscionable and may lead to the archives losing its legitimacy or being sued for its actions as witnessed by the FBI case file and the ongoing Profs case.

Archivists working in an organizational archives identify and retain records to fulfill the legal, fiscal, and administrative requirements of their organization. Identifying all of these needs requires a careful analysis and an understanding of the legal environment of the primary users. A recent study on the regulatory requirements of the federal


Use as a Factor in Appraisal Criteria

government discovered that banks operating in the United States must comply with ninety-five different record retention requirements. These requirements obviously create administrative obligations for the primary users of the records. Archivists have traditionally acknowledged this need as a responsibility that they must fulfill. A requirement to account for one’s actions has also been identified as an essential need that the archives fulfills for its sponsor and its users. But what other needs do these primary users have? What records must be kept to fulfill other needs?

To understand the needs of their users, archivists must gain a better understanding of the people who use material. In a recent book on emerging paradigms, Peter Schwartz and James Ogilvy has observed that disciplines and mental processes are not neutral. They are affected by our culture, language, and our view of the world. These views or perspectives control what we see and what we ignore. These perspectives will, of course, affect what records archivists see as valuable and what they choose to destroy. It will also affect the user’s evaluation of the


records' relevance. Basing appraisal decisions on just one perspective of the world disenfranchises all those who have different perspectives and therefore find value in different records. Archivists do bring values to records, as Cook asserts, but they are not necessarily the only value that the records have. Any one value judgment can only be a partial verdict of a record’s worth. Other people, with other perspectives, who view the records through a different lens might need to consult different records or the same records for different reasons. Archivists must attempt to understand and take into consideration those other perspectives.

Furthermore Schwartz and Ogilvy state that Western society’s beliefs have undergone a major shift in the way it perceives the world. One of those shifts is a change from seeing the world as definite or predictable to a vision of life as indefinite or unpredictable. Affected by our changing paradigms and perhaps Heinsenberg’s indeterminacy principle, society has realized that the future is indefinite. This realization has resulted in a realization that trends and patterns are more important than individual events.

Archivists acknowledge that they lack prescience. No one can predict future needs. Records kept purely for their value as evidence will gain importance to users because of the information they contain. Genealogists have unearthed a wealth of information in records kept for legal rather than genealogical purposes. If archivists lack foresight, should they base appraisal decisions on a projected use of material? Boles and Young’s study demonstrated that archivists consider use of records an important criterion in
appraisal. But how do they project that use? Intuition and anecdotes of users’ needs will not suffice.

Futurists have developed techniques to identify trends and patterns that guide them in their work of predicting the future. Bertrand de Jouvenel, a French futurist, has stated the possible becomes "futurible" "only if its mode of production from the present state of affairs is plausible and imaginable....A futurible is a descendant of the present, a descendant to which we attach a genealogy."61 The metaphor of genealogy derives out of the belief that "if you know the great-grandparent, the grandparent, and the parent, you can foresee the child, the grandchild, and the great-grandchild. If you do not, your forecasting will be purely speculative. Even if you are missing just one or two links in the chain of events, you may err badly."62 As many archivists profess, 'the past is prologue.' However, do archivists know their past? Do they know the great-grandfather of today's users? I think not. According to Luciana Duranti, archives in ancient Greece were "arsenals of law, of civil rights, in a word...of democracy." 63 These archives preserved the records of both public officials and


private citizens but "all records were kept because nobody could take the responsibility of deciding whether the creator of each single record did not need it anymore." This fact would indicate that the needs of users were considered important, but unknown. This situation bears certain similarities to the present predicament.

**Users of Archives**

Archivists have recently begun to acknowledge that they do not know enough about their users. Cox has stated that "archivists realize that they must know who their researchers are and how to evaluate the reference function; they must understand researcher's information-seeking behavior and be able to apply this knowledge to the management of their repositories." The few studies that have been conducted have mainly concentrated on the users' interaction with the archivist or the archival retrieval system. Few studies have investigated why users consult records or the value of those records to users. Furthermore, the studies have concentrated on current services or records seen through the eyes of the archivist rather than an holistic approach concerned with the needs of all potential users.

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In the 1970s, Wilson and Streatfield\textsuperscript{66} conducted a study into the information needs of a local authority social services department. They examined the documents used by the staff and noted their frequency of use. Grover and Glazier investigated the information gathering and dissemination practices of city managers and their staff.\textsuperscript{67} These studies and other like them provide valuable insights into the information needs of the creators of records, independent of any specific system. How many archivists have conducted similar studies into the needs of their primary or secondary users? How many archivists have even consulted the studies undertaken in other fields?

If use is to be an important component of appraisal theory, and I would argue that it must, archivists must gain an understanding of the reasons why people refer to archival material. Over the last twenty years, the library and information science professions have begun to question the types of user studies that they have conducted. Some have argued that answers to new questions need to be sought.

Information needs result from 'problems arising from specific situations.' A situation is a way to look at a variety of environmental variables. This holistic


approach to information needs provides a logical context for understanding information seeking behavior, and it demands that information specialists learn to respond not only to the single question with which information systems now deal — *What do you want to know?* — but with companion questions — *How and why is the information needed? How is it likely to help? What does the user know already? What is expected? What are the parameters of the problem?* \(^{68}\)

Do archivists even know what their users want? Do archivists know why people visit their archives? Do they know how the information or evidence that users seek will help them? Do they want to know the parameters of the problems? I would say no. To date only one study, never replicated, has examined the type of questions asked. If we do not know what evidence is sought and why it is needed, we can never hope to fulfill the needs of our users. Perhaps people do not need evidence of transactions. Perhaps they only need information which may be readily available in more appropriate sources. \(^{69}\) On the other hand, what needs are archivists not able to fill? What evidence have they failed to preserve? Studies that explore

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\(^{69}\) David Bearman recently posed this question in a conversation with the author.
the evidence that archives have failed to retain and the consequences of those decisions may provide much valuable information.

Current use may not be an accurate indicator of what will be required in the future. But by examining the reasons behind the need for archival records, by studying present, past, and future use by both primary and secondary users, trends and patterns of use or a genealogy of use will emerge over time. The information that archivists must gather will not be collected overnight. The profession must become committed to a research agenda that attempts to understand users, and their need for archival records. As Paul Conway has suggested

All archivists who have responsibility for public service should continually gather and make use of basic descriptive information about users — the who, what, when, where and why questions. Questions that concern process — the 'how question' are more complex, and at the same more generalizable.70

This research, however, must consider all uses, and all users who turn to archives for an understanding of some previous transaction.

Conclusion

Archivists need to acquire a greater knowledge in all the facets or clusters of appraisal. They need to research record-keeping systems to better understand the systems that have controlled records of archival value. They need to identify the functional requirements of the system that will ensure the integrity and completeness of the records in their care. They need to identify not only the major functions that an organization was involved in but also the transactions that they carried out to support these functions.

They require a far greater understanding of the records themselves and which records contain the best evidence of particular transactions. They need to gain the subject expertise that Craig says "is their special area of expertise." They also need to understand the legal and administrative constraints of their parent organization. They need to determine which actions hold an organization to account and for which actions do citizens require an accounting.

When archivists appraise records they should ask and be able to answer the following questions:

1) What evidence of what transactions should be preserved to meet the legal and administrative requirements of the record creator? What records contain the best evidence of those transactions? Where are they located?

2) What other needs for evidence do the primary users have?

3) What evidence of what transactions, are required to provide an accounting of the creators actions? What
records contain the best evidence of actions that require an accounting?
4) What evidence of what actions do other (and I would group all other uses together) users need and which may they need in the future?

Through research, archivists will be able to reveal the patterns and trends in an organization’s structures, their functions, and their transactions. Research will reveal the changing patterns of record-keeping systems and the records they contain. Finally, research will help identify possible uses and needs that these records may fulfill. Only when patterns and trends surface will archivists steady the weathervane and enable it to guide their decisions and point to records with continuing archival value.

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PROVENANCE 1994
Oral History: Provenance and Intellectual Access

David S. Miller

In the second half of the twentieth century, researchers in all fields of study have become more sensitive to documentary gaps, especially the paucity of materials by and about social non-elites. With increasing frequency, oral history projects have been carried out to add these forgotten voices to the historical record and thereby create what may be termed new historical evidence. In the words of one public historian, "a new and integrative paradigm" is crafted out of such initiatives, whereby the oral testimonies of the heretofore ignored are synthesized with the documentation of the powerful. The result is, at least in theory, a more balanced and faithful view of society and history.¹ Such a self-conscious effort to reshape history is troubling to many researchers, those who must interpret

these new records as well as those whose job it is to expose and render their context. Nevertheless, despite its critics, oral history has become a popular method of inquiry and has earned a degree of historiographical significance.

As the concept has evolved over the last few decades, oral history has developed into one of the primary strategies to document social, economic, and racial non-elites. For an archival institution wishing to enhance a particular aspect of its collection, investing in this (relatively) new historical method is tempting. However, as James Fogerty notes, it is so costly a process to perform well that a lack of funding can greatly undermine its value. This value, both evidential and informational, will be discussed in greater depth below.

The form, function, and worth of oral history are contentious issues not only for practitioners, but also for the archivists who must provide intellectual access to these sources. There is discussion within the profession — part of a greater debate over its present and future role — whether it is the archivist’s duty to create oral history. Beyond this, there is the practical matter of accurately and responsibly arranging and describing the oral record once it is acquired. Because of the wide variance in practice and use, and because many are still unsure what oral sources

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2 Though, of course, it is not limited to the margins of society. Witness the massive mainstream undertakings centered around the fiftieth anniversary of the D day invasion.

are exactly documenting, describing oral history is problematic.

This essay will focus on the nature of oral history as a documentary form, its potential meanings, and some fundamental issues involved in its description and arrangement. Along the way, some strategies for providing intellectual access to oral history sources, or as some call them, "sound archives,"\(^4\) will be discussed. The manner of evidence these oral sources engender, along with their place within the universe of documentation traditionally maintained in archives, will also be considered.

Records — written and unwritten — are nearly always created with one eye toward their outside use. Stories are legion of government offices distributing one memo "for the files" and designating other sensitive communications — perhaps more honest and revealing ones — for destruction. For example, the "FBI files" case revealed that documents within that agency were color-coded according to their sensitivity. Those which showed evidence of illegal operations and other shady practices were never to become part of the permanent record. Only the most harmless and, by extension, historically useless documents came to constitute the bureau's record of itself.

A common criticism of oral history, that it merely reframes history according to the recollections of those with

an axe to grind, can also be leveled against the traditional universe of documentation. In fact, an examination of traditional records reveals that they too rely on oral accounts, but that the orality is simply filtered through a chain of command, or an administrative structure, on its way into the written record. Some researchers seem to feel that an indirect oral account "becomes" the objective truth when written down. Stielow argues that print dependence "somehow supposes that the human behind the written record is more prone to 'truth' than the same individual in speaking."5 The powerful few document themselves and their actions in this way; the many powerless and disfranchised do not and cannot. So goes a common argument for the need to create oral history. If performed correctly, its attempts to document society "from the bottom up" may begin to correct the institutional and elitist bias of written history.

Of course, oral history (or, rather, its practitioners) has its own biases. Its approach has tended in recent years to record and celebrate the more palatable voices of "ordinary people." University of Kentucky sociologist Kathleen Blee notes in her study of the Ku Klux Klan that the oral historian's emphasis on "egalitarianism, reciprocity, and authenticity" when dealing with non-elites is "difficult to defend when studying ordinary people who are active in the

politics of intolerance, bigotry, or hatred.\footnote{Kathleen M. Blee, "Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan," \textit{Journal of American History} 80 (September 1993): 597.} Obviously, the strategy is questionable when dubious informants are used to fill gaps in the documentation of transient issues. Oral history must always strive to transcend its medium and its self-consciousness. By exploiting individual speech and memory to create a new documentary form, oral historians must remain vigilant not to repeat individual bias into the record.\footnote{This, perhaps, holds oral history to a higher standard than other record systems. More than anything else, it is a plea for creators to do a better job of explaining themselves and their motives. Of course, government agencies and businesses — whose records are maintained in archives with little reservation — also have motives other than truth, history, and beneficence. The competent researcher is a cynic who can ignore ostensible content while divining context and deeper motive.}

Oral history has become all but essential to understanding the more traditional records maintained in archives.\footnote{Bruce H. Bruemmer, "Access to Oral History: A National Agenda," \textit{American Archivist} 54 (1991): 496.} Indeed, many researchers of recent events have even noted that the nature of modern record keeping makes some form of it "an imperative."\footnote{Fogerty, "Filling the Gap," 150.} Because of the rapid proliferation of records and the attendant subtle decrease in their historical value, oral histories can provide, in the words of Donald Ritchie, "oral road maps through the
documentary thicket" and clarify the written record as it is now constituted.¹⁰

Some argue that oral "texts" are not significantly different from certain written ones already acquired by archives and heavily used by researchers. First-hand accounts of any kind, even those set to paper, are considered oral history in some quarters. One historian speaks of wanting to study the past through existing documentation:

To go back...and still retain the flavor of first-person recollections, I had to look to other sources of first-hand, off-the-cuff, unrehearsed information. So I chose to regard letters, diaries, and testimony at trials, royal commissions, and inquests as oral history.¹¹

Such a liberal definition — sometimes expanded even to encompass legal affidavits and depositions — largely ignores the role of the interviewer in the creation of the oral record. Unlike oral history, none of the above were expressly created to "be" history; all were the created in service of other, presumably more pressing, concerns. These are records in the traditional sense; they are consequences of an event. But, Morrissey argues that while

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such records are no doubt historically valuable, "because oral historians as interviewers exert no performatory role in the co-creation, they cannot be termed oral histories." 12

To analyze what is finally produced by an oral history project, the archivist must concentrate primarily on provenance and the conditions of creation. Just as to handle any other record means delving into the institutional or biographical pasts of the creator, so must the description and arrangement of oral history focus on the creative process more than the final document itself — whatever that may be in the case of an oral source. Decontextualized oral sources are but curiosities. They may hold some interest to a repository or a researcher, but much less than if they had a documented reason to exist, a clear provenance. This fundamental archival principle must be applied as rigorously to these deliberate creations as it is to those organic records which are by-products of some sort of transaction.

Above all, oral history is evidence of itself and its own creation. The action from which it results is the rather synthetic situation of an interview, or in a larger sense, the initiative of the oral history project creator. This essentially inorganic nature makes for difficult application of archival principles. Arrangement and description are problematic for other equally daunting reasons. For example, as for form, what is the final product of an oral history project and how do archivists describe it for research access? Does an oral history consist of the mutually edited transcript of an

interview, or is it the "raw" recording of it, warts and all? Or is it all of the above, and the interviewer's notes as well? Can oral history be described with any degree of certainty without its attendant documentation?

First of all, what is oral history? Or, as Teresa Barnett of the University of California-Los Angeles appropriately asks, "How does an oral history mean?"\(^\text{13}\) There are as many definitions as practitioners. Most conventionally define it in a mouthful, like one director of a university oral history program, as "a process of collecting, usually by means of a tape-recorded interview, reminiscences, accounts, and interpretations of events from the recent past which are of historical significance."\(^\text{14}\) Oral history pioneer Willa Baum, herself the author of two oral history manuals, has developed five characteristics of a source that define it as oral history. Broadly, her conception of oral history consists of

1) a tape-recorded interview, or interviews, in question-and-answer format,

2) conducted by an interviewer who has some, and preferably the more the better, knowledge of the subject to be discussed,

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3) with a knowledgeable interviewee, someone who knows whereof he or she speaks from personal participation or observation (sometimes we allow a second-hand account),

4) on subjects of historical interest (one researcher's history could be someone else's trivia),

5) accessible, eventually, in tapes and/or transcripts to a broad spectrum of researchers.¹⁵

This conception differentiates between oral performances, unwitting recordings which may find their way into a repository, and the fruits of deliberate projects. The rigorous process Baum outlines, in contrast to much which is marketed as oral history, is well thought out, extremely self-conscious, and relatively sure of its direction. A good project must be in its focus neither too broad (without objectives) nor too strict (and closed to revelatory but parenthetical testimony).¹⁶ It is not just a matter of sitting down with a tape recorder and having a conversation about whatever comes up. Indeed, the more complete the interviewer's preparation, the better the evidence generated by oral testimony.


The Watergate tapes — though certainly demonstrating the value of the recorded as well as the written word — are prime examples of oral documents which are not oral histories. Although they are oral, and most definitely a part of history, they fail in what Baum terms "the most basic tenet of oral history." That is, not all of the parties involved were aware of the recording, and not all agreed to make the information conveyed available for researchers. The very quality which makes them so interesting to researchers hoping to reconstruct the events of the scandal — a surreptitious air which seems to put the listener in the position of Oval Office eavesdropper — makes them invalid as pure oral history. The tapes belong to the broader category of "oral source", but do not conform to the fundamental guidelines of oral history which have achieved some measure of consensus.

William Moss laid out three classes of oral documentation. The first is the recording of a scripted performance, such as a speech or a dramatic monologue. The second class, to which Nixon's Oval Office tapes belong, is the recording (not necessarily surreptitious) of unrehearsed conversations which are spontaneous and generally concerned with the immediate present. The final category is what is normally considered oral history, following the precepts of Baum and others.

17 Baum, "The Library in Oral History": 389.

But what do oral histories mean, practically? To anthropologist Elizabeth Tonkin, the construction of oral history is a "profoundly social process." The structuring of individual perception and recall cannot be divorced from its social, historical, and traditional roots. Because of the lack of sources that document, however incompletely, the social construction of memory, a well-done oral history can serve as a valuable research tool in this arena.

History is not simply created by compiling the facts and adding them together according to a formula to reflect the past. The documents within which history is formed are not and cannot be objective. Says Barnett,

[There] are not events and then, incidentally, texts: human reality does not exist outside of the modes in which it is encoded.... In that sense, the event is created only in its recording — in the perception of it, in the memory of it, in the speaking of it, in the writing of it.

An oral history project is a prime opportunity to examine the ways in which people encode events and create their own history. In this realm, it is not so much the factual validity of

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testimony that matters, but rather the individual perception of the social factual landscape.

One of the goals of archival description is to somehow account for the supposed evidential and informational value of an historical record or record system. In the particular case of oral history, this is difficult because of, in Blatti’s words, "its location in an interpretive terrain that must be negotiated by narrator, interviewer, and ultimately user." The form of the record itself is the first to consider. While some claim the transcript — or even the edited transcript — as the primary oral history source, it is the actual recording of the event which is the most honest and accurate rendering of the evidence of a conversation.

The accepted format of oral history is the interview. The individual who acts as the source of insight and historical perspective around whom oral history is created is called, according to various theoreticians, the interviewee, the narrator, the oral author, or the respondent. One particular practice is to have this respondent review the preliminary transcript of the interview for verification, having him or her correct the text for accuracy and clarity while leaving the verbal style as it is. This then becomes the "primary" source. Supporters of this practice, such as Louis Starr, argue that having the respondent edit the text has the value of turning hearsay into "a document that has much of the

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21 Blatti, "Public History and Oral History," 615.
standing of a legal deposition." To these researchers, whatever verbal nuance may be lost through editing and transcription is a small price to pay for the practical benefit of assuring the internal validity of the source.

As a result, many oral historians search for better, more elaborate methods of transcription to capture the oral history encounter. They essentially attempt to remove orality from the oral source, distilling it into the conventional written form. Though researchers generally work from and naturally cite transcripts, Alessandro Portelli argues,

Expecting the transcript to replace the tape for scientific purposes is equivalent to doing art criticism on reproductions, or literary criticism on translations. The most literal translation is hardly ever the best, and a truly faithful translation always implies a certain amount of invention. The same may be true for transcription of oral sources.

It has a practical use in research, but to transcribe is to willfully recontextualize the historical record. A transcription, no matter how good, also cannot capture the subtleties of speech which are so very important to an oral account. Accent, tempo, sarcasm, and irony are but a few of the

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innumerable aspects of oral communication which impart meaning to the listener but which are largely lost to the reader of an interview’s written text. However, these characteristics of oral testimony are precisely what make a source interesting and valuable.

Despite the serious evidential flaws of the oral history transcript, a great number of researchers find it difficult to use the recorded sources upon which the written are based. In our literate society, most everyone is more comfortable using written accounts. The difficulty of physically manipulating individual tapes, as well as the time involved, makes it somewhat prohibitive to search for the material relevant to one’s inquiry. The recording may be the primary source material resulting from an oral history initiative, but it is rather common for users not even to consult the actual tape in their research. Citations are made to the transcript, an inexact practice under the best of circumstances. Indeed, a transcript which is edited by the respondent (or in concert with the interviewer) becomes a different source with a slightly different function, and should be viewed in that fashion. Archivists, in our description of the records, must consider the differing meanings of the transcript and the recording.

Tied to the debate over the evidential repercussions of taping over transcription is the question, so important for researchers and archivists, of project methodology. The

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24 For example, in *Narrating Our Pasts*, Tonkin discusses paralinguistic features of speech as used to structure narrative in oral history, particularly in the African tradition.
methodology is the message in oral history. Trevor Lummis observes that since "oral history is a methodology, not a historical sub-field," the contribution it can make to history "depends upon the authenticity of the source, and this is best guaranteed by the rigor of the method.... [P]reserving the tapes as the original source is necessary to establish the provenance and authenticity of the evidence." Provenance and authenticity are especially important for archivists attempting to describe these oral sources for use outside the immediate circumstances of their creation.

Similar to describing records in other media, the closer the archivist can come to reconstructing the functional structure out of which the records emanate, the more genuinely framed is the evidence contained within them. The archivist must evaluate oral histories according to their internal integrity as records. Of secondary importance is their actual content. In a sense, integrity has to do with the life-cycle of the oral document, from how it came to be created through the interview and subsequent processing until it is deposited in an archives. With the stages of the oral record's life well documented, the responsibility for evaluating its content will rest for the most part with the researcher. Indeed, only when the life cycle is satisfactorily described can the user gain a true picture of the meanings it embodies and the evidence it contains.

An accurate account of an oral history's creative process is the single most important aspect of its description.

Therefore, the archivist must first determine the authorship of the source at hand. It is here where oral history has an advantage over written (non-manuscript) records. It is nearly impossible to determine who the composer of an organizational document actually is. For example, a letter from the executive office of the president may or may not have been composed by the president, leaving much to speculation. On this count at least, oral history leaves little to interpret but the recorded voices.

But another deeper consideration in the determination of meaningful authorship is the nature of the interview process. The interviewer and respondent (as well as the past event and present recollection) are fundamentally enmeshed. The "shared authority" for oral history is one of its defining characteristics. Accordingly, it is said that oral history "begins with two persons meeting on a ground of equality to bring together their different types of knowledge and achieve a new synthesis." But relying on a forced contemporary interaction, "a negotiation of the narrator's and the interviewer's frames of reference," to create a new integrated memory about the past makes oral history, seemingly more so than written history, subjective and suspect as a resource.

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27 Portelli, The Death of Luigi Trastulli, xii.

But this is how oral histories are created. The very element which makes it such an exciting methodology for so many people, its humanity, becomes for some its biggest drawback. To be sure, authority extends beyond mere authorship. In essence, it is credibility that researchers are after. Determining an oral history's credibility as source material is largely the task of the researcher or, at some level, an archival appraisal issue. Portelli maintains that oral sources have a "different credibility" from conventional documents and should be judged accordingly. After factual validity is examined, "the diversity of oral history consists in the fact that 'wrong' statements are still psychologically 'true,' and that this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts."29 The insight into individual recollection and memory formation as a social function is the primary historical evidence to be gleaned from oral history.

Once an oral history record (or the greater oral history project) is deemed credible enough by the repository and worthy of acquisition, the archivist must make the reasoning behind this determination a focus of the description and arrangement. Of course, whether it is the entire project that is valuable — or simply the particular testimony of one or more participants within the project — determines to what level the description should be carried out. As with all records of enduring value, the reason why they should be maintained is what must be described most of all. Here, appraisal and the other archival functions — arrangement,

description, and reference in particular — must come together to assess oral history records at the project level as much as at the interview level. It is then that users will have true intellectual access to oral history.

Gould Colman’s advice for the archival description of oral history projects is a coherent and entirely workable strategy that could apply to much of the universe of self-consciously created documentation:

"Perhaps the best an archivist can do is to record the initial objectives and documentation strategy, keep a running account of adjustments between means and ends, and make this record available to those who use the documentation."30

For the well-thought-out projects from which much oral history is born, this makes sense. But as some are loathe (or do not think) to deposit such background information in archives, it is not always possible for the repository to gain a handle on oral documents acquired long after the creation.

The strategies being developed to deal with electronic records, particularly the injection of archival concerns directly into the record creation machinery, can be applied to oral history as well. Due to the wide employment of the methodology, however, it is not practically possible for the archivist to actually have a direct hand in formulating individual oral history projects. This may be accomplished

indirectly by getting the word out through various historical and archival organizations that more rigorous methodological and documentary standards are required to clarify and prove the worth of individual projects. The institutional background of the oral history initiative, the interviewer's notes, the way in which the respondents were chosen, all these and other pieces of the puzzle must become part of the oral record. Serious researchers have always done this. In this way, by better elucidating the structure of its creation, the source can be described more as organic documentation rather than voices without context or perspective.

As standards are developed for this relatively new methodology, archival concerns are beginning to be addressed. Based on consultations with the Oral History Association, the Organization of American Historians, and the Society of American Archivists, the American Historical Association approved guidelines in 1989 that specifically cover interviewing procedures and protocols. Included is the suggestion that interviewers arrange deposit of their interviews in an archival repository capable of providing general research access, although what that means is not entirely clear. What is clear is that any attendant documentation which helps to frame the oral record is an essential part of description. This documentation must be accounted for, accessioned, and described along with oral

sources, unless archivists wish to treat oral histories as quaint (and meaningless) artifacts.

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