ARCHIVAL PRIVILEGE: CASE STUDIES IN HOW INDIVIDUAL COLLECTING AFFECTS WHO IS HEARD OR SILENCED IN ARCHIVES

by

Tesa Lark Burns

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Author's Signature ____________________________________________________________

Tesa Lark Burns

First Reader's Signature _______________________________________________________

Charity Fox, Ph.D.

Second Reader's Signature ____________________________________________________

Anne Verplanck, Ph.D.

Program Chair's Signature ___________________________________________________

Anne Verplanck, Ph.D.

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
ABSTRACT

In this project, I critically examine the act of collecting in archives through the lens of intersectionality. This thesis examines two archival collections to address the following question: In collections compiled by private individuals and then transferred to historical or academic institutions, how do factors such as the collector’s privilege and interests and the historical context in which they collected affect which historical voices are heard or silenced?

To achieve this, I utilize case studies from two local archival collections: the Alice Marshall Women’s History Collection, part of Archives and Special Collections in the Penn State Harrisburg Library; and the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project, which is a collaborative project between the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania and Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections. In each example, I examine the contents of the collections and examples of research and outreach created from their primary sources; introduce the collectors themselves and the historical context in which they collected; and gain insight from the professionals and volunteers who work closely with these collections to get a sense of the history and implications of the collections and the perspectives they represent.

By critically examining collecting, interpretation, and outreach practices, this project engages with conversations regarding the production of history using archival collections, including the question of “objectivity” in historical research and interpretation. I also explore possible solutions, such as digital collections and ethical action by archivists. I approach my research through an intersectional lens to highlight
how history cannot be “objective” when perspectives are left out of historical and cultural memory in archives.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Archives are powerful places. They are the keepers of the past, and society looks upon them as reservoirs of cultural, social, and historical memory. These institutions are charged with a great task: the preservation of documents, objects, and ephemera that tell the stories of history. Archives collect, preserve, arrange, describe, facilitate access to, and interpret these items so that people—scholars, students, the general public—can learn from them. In all of this lies an immense power over perceptions and knowledge of history. Far from being the neutral, objective, temples of “truth” they are often assumed to be, archives are political spaces as well, and are reflective of numerous cultural processes. They reveal the process of intentional selection of records to collect and preserve. They mirror cultural ideas of what types of material are important to save or which were insignificant enough to destroy or simply lose to history. Perhaps most importantly, archives reflect values of whose lives were important enough to document.

In this way, archives have the power to both privilege certain voices and silence others. The ways in which voices are silenced in archival sources and narratives are varied and complex, and can be both intentional or unintentional. Archivists, based on the Society of American Archivists Code of Ethics, have a responsibility to “document and preserve the record of the broadest possible range of individuals…in society.”

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Archivists have this ethical imperative, individuals, organizations, and governments have historically used the destruction of records as a method of silencing or delegitimizing entire groups of people—or simply allowed for records to be lost to history without efforts at preservation. In this way, the destruction or neglect of records is a politically charged way to erase certain historical narratives. On the other hand, groups can be unintentionally left out of the historical record during the selection and appraisal of records, based on collecting policies, unconscious personal bias, or availability of material.

In the 21st century, scholars in the archives field have begun to acknowledge, examine, and critique the role of the archivist in this process and the ethical and social justice implications of the archivist’s hand in the selection, appraisal, and preservation of archival material. However, few archival collections are hand-selected by archivists. Often, private individuals and collectors donate, bequeath, sell, or otherwise transfer their private collections or personal papers to archives and historical institutions. In this case, while archivists may have the power to choose which collections to accept, they often have little control over the content of their collections or the perspectives they represent. By only discussing the role of the archivist and overlooking the role of the collector who originally compiled the collection, scholars also overlook a pivotal part of the process of historical and memory construction.

In this way, the archivist is not the only active player with the power to construct history. The private collector, through their position, privilege, and ability to collect, begins to shape history before the archivist is even involved in the process. However, archivists and historians have not often enough considered the ways in which collectors’
interests and ideologies shape collections in archives, and therefore the way we remember history. When private collections are used for scholarship, teaching, or outreach, how does the private collector’s hand in constructing the content of archives and other historical institutions affect the construction of history and social memory? By paying closer attention to these individuals, the archival community can better grasp the power structures inherent in archival collections and work to construct a more complete version of history.

To explore this issue, in this thesis I critically examine the act of collecting in archives through the lens of intersectionality. I examine two archival collections, the Alice Marshall Women’s History Collection and the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project, to investigate the following question: In collections compiled by private individuals and then transferred to historical or academic institutions, how do factors such as the collector’s privilege and interests and the historical context in which they collected affect which historical voices are heard or silenced? While archivists and scholars have considered their own role in the shaping of collections and the production of history, and have considered the circumstances that affect the perspectives reflected in individual sources, they do not often enough examine the role of private individuals, who often are the ones who decide to save archival materials in the first place. Additionally, contextualizing the creation of collections can be just as crucial to understanding history as contextualizing individual sources. Ideas of context and provenance, so pivotal to archival theory, are often neglected when considering the way collections were compiled, rather than just the creation and custody of documents. This project fills that much needed gap in the literature, considering how individuals’
collecting priorities and ideologies play a role in shaping history as much as the individuals who create documents and write history.

To accomplish this, I examine the collections through an intersectional feminist lens to argue that the private collector is an active player in shaping history. The Alice Marshall Women’s History Collection, part of Archives and Special Collections in the Penn State Harrisburg Library, was compiled by a Harrisburg-area collector of forgotten women’s history materials. However, I argue in Chapter 3 that Marshall’s perspective—as a white, upper-middle-class woman collecting primarily during the mid-twentieth century and inspired by the second wave feminist movement—led to a collection that privileges the experiences of straight, white women and silences the voices of others. The LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project, a collaboration between the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania and Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections, is a collection of smaller accessions compiled and donated by members of the local Harrisburg-area LGBTQ+ community. In chapter 4 I discuss how, as a community-based archive related to LGBTQ+ history and activism, the historical context of prejudice and secrecy in the mid-twentieth century in Central Pennsylvania affects which voices were heard and what sources survived to be archived.

Based on the power and privilege necessary to collect and preserve, certain marginalized voices are privileged while others are left out of narratives in both of these collections. Because only certain individuals have the ability to collect, and therefore be seen in archival collections, archives can exhibit the same type of positionality and perspective as a written work, created from the perspective of the author. In this way, the myth of “objectivity” in archives is incredibly damaging: collections are not objective,
but are, indeed, quite subjective and shaped by the people who compile them. This process creates the potential for a multitude of voices to be unintentionally left out of historical narratives. Voices aren’t being forcibly silenced through destruction or explicit exclusion—instead, they are being quietly silenced through a lack of archival privilege.

I hypothesize that each collection represents a personal and historical perspective, rather than an objective historical “truth,” which leads to the silencing of certain historical voices—which in turn forms interpretations that favor certain perspectives. Both collections are privately compiled local resources that highlight the history of marginalized groups—women and the LGBTQ+ community—but present different and complex challenges in documenting a complete social history. Both can also be interpreted not just as a collection of primary sources, but as primary sources themselves—primary sources that provide vital information about the collectors’ lives, interests, privileges, and the world in which they collected.

In each example, I examine the contents of the collections and examples of research, interpretation, and outreach (such as exhibits and online content) created from their primary sources. This provides insight into what types of objects were collected, how they are interpreted for and presented to the public, and what historical silences may be present that are passed on through these interpretations—illustrating how the private collector and their perspective influence the production of history in a broader sense. I also conducted biographical research on the collectors themselves and discuss the historical context in which they collected in order to reveal the collecting process and the interests and/or historical forces that may have driven their collecting choices. Finally, I interviewed the professionals and volunteers who work closely with these collections to
gather information about how the collections were acquired and processed, how they are used and interpreted, what silences may exist, and strategies used to combat silences. My findings, interpreted through the theoretical framework of intersectionality and ethical conversations in the archives field, uncover the ways in which voices are privileged and heard—or forgotten and silenced—in these collections, and how those silences are then perpetuated through interpretations and the production of history.

By critically examining collecting, interpretation, and outreach practices, this research engages with conversations regarding the production of history using archival collections, including the question of “objectivity” in historical research and interpretation. Archival theory, conversations about archival ethics, and works on the production of knowledge inform each part of this research. I also explore possible solutions, such as digital collections and ethical action by archivists. I approach my research through an intersectional lens to highlight how history cannot be “objective” when perspectives are left out of historical and cultural memory in both archival collections and interpretive work by archivists, curators, scholars, and students.

Through this project, I aim to engage with conversations of inclusivity, objectivity, and the ethical role of social justice in archival work. In particular, I aim to situate historical work as a process of production. History does not simply exist in a pure and unchanged state—it is constructed through varied, complex, and intersecting processes—ranging from the creation of sources to the processes through which they are saved and archived to the ways in which they are interpreted. By choosing to—or simply being privileged enough to be able to—save and collect archival materials, individuals assign value to those materials that then create a more concrete archival value for future
generations. Becoming aware of this issue, and along the way shattering the illusion of archives as neutral spaces, is the first step to creating a more complete and inclusive history. Archivists and researchers must take an active role by championing awareness of each collection’s strengths and silences—for history cannot be “objective” when groups are left out and voices are not heard.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

In order to better understand the role and significance of the private collector in shaping history, it is important to contextualize this work within a broader discussion of how archives are powerful and political spaces in which historical voices can be silenced. The Alice Marshall Women’s History Collection and the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project represent case studies situated within larger discussions in the following literature and, as this chapter illustrates, serve as a unique window into an under-researched area.

This review of the scholarly literature explores the conversations in which this project and its professional and theoretical frameworks are based. How have archivists taken on the “myth of neutrality and objectivity”\(^5\) in their work? What theories have they used to highlight silences and power structures within collections? Randall C. Jimerson says:

Scholars have challenged positivist assumptions about objective, neutral, and impartial archives providing unimpeachable evidence of the past. The archive has become a focal point for analysis and contestation, not simply a hallowed shrine of Truth.\(^6\)


In order to illustrate this, I explore four areas of scholarly work. The first is centered on the archival profession and its efforts to situate the archive as a powerful space and the archivist as an active player in its dynamics. The second and third explore the pivotal theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and the production of history. The last is concerned with praxis, and what strategies have been explored as solutions to the inherent power imbalances of archives. All illustrate the importance of this project and situate it as a unique effort within a thriving conversation.

**Archives as powerful spaces and the archivist’s social justice role**

Archives have long been viewed as temples of neutrality and objective historical “truth.” Sources themselves may represent the perspectives and biases of their creators and historians may debate the role of objectivity in their work, but archives themselves were assumed to be neutral spaces. However, archivists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have begun to seriously discuss the political and powerful nature of their work and the implications of their profession in the production of history.

Howard Zinn’s 1977 article, “Secrecy, Archives, and the Public Interest,” originally an address to the Society of American Archivists, marks perhaps the beginning of the archival profession’s awareness of their own power in the process of creating archives. He takes a highly political stance for the time, arguing that archivists should fight the status quo of “passivity,”7 “professionalism,”8 or neutrality in order to promote

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8 Ibid., 15.
“humanity”\(^9\) in the profession. Attempts at neutrality, he argues, are not in fact truly neutral, but political in that they help maintain unjust societal power systems. Archivists have the imperative to use their power “to promote those human values of peace, equality, and justice, which our present society denies.”\(^10\) This proclamation laid the foundation for archivists who came after Zinn to debate the role of social justice in archives—embracing the political and inherently unobjective nature of their work.

In the next decade, Helen Willa Samuels boldly challenged archivists to think about “who controls the past” with her 1986 article of that name. In posing this question, she highlighted archivists’ new challenges in choosing which records, from a vast array of information, are to be kept in archives—therefore shaping and controlling history. She suggested a new (for the time) type of collecting plan for archives: the “documentation strategy”\(^11\) wherein the archivist makes an ongoing attempt to document something (a topic, issue, geographic area, etc.). Through this “documentation strategy,” Samuels shows us that the questions we ask matter in what is saved and how history is interpreted. She says that “topics are chosen based on current historical understanding,”\(^12\) highlighting how the historical context of collecting impacts what is saved and beginning to draw attention to the human hand in selecting records and shaping the past.

After Zinn and Samuels, the archives profession did not truly embrace (or fully begin to debate) ideas of power and social justice in their work until the first decade of

\(^9\) Ibid., 25.  
\(^10\) Ibid., 20.  
\(^12\) Ibid., 117.
the twenty-first century. Randall C. Jimerson and Verne Harris were at the forefront of this debate. Harris, a South African archivist working with the country’s records during the transition from apartheid to democracy, examined South African archives as a case study to illustrate the inherent power structures of archives. In his 2002 article “The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa,” he argues that archives are an “expression and instrument of power”\(^\text{13}\) and represent only a “sliver of social memory.”\(^\text{14}\) Additionally, when someone appraises records in an attempt to capture “reality” and collect records of historic value, they are in fact “creating archival value”; and that “the archival record provides a window into [this] process as much as it does into anything else.”\(^\text{15}\) While Harris’s discussion is particularly focused on the work of archivists, private collectors are also firmly involved in this process of “creating archival value,” and their collections can be just as much evidence of this process as they are evidence of the historical topics they document.

In a similar vein, Randall C. Jimerson, former president of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and former chair of SAA’s Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct, calls archivists to action by arguing for their power in a social justice role. His 2009 book, *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice*, further shatters the norm of the archivist as a neutral figure in caring for historical material or acting as a simple intermediary between researchers and archival materials. Instead, he argues that archivists “[wield] a power of interpretation over the records in


\(^{14}\) Ibid., 64.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 84. Emphasis added.
[their] custody.” Further, archivists have a hand in which records are preserved at all, and should shed their previously assumed passive role to become “active agents in the process of shaping our knowledge of the past” in a socially conscious way.

Jimerson and Harris’s ideas were not accepted without debate. For example, Mark Greene critiques both archivists in his essay “A Critique of Social Justice as an Archival Imperative: What Is It We’re Doing That’s All That Important?” He disagrees with Jimerson’s idea that the archivist’s “only truly significant role in society is a social justice role” and with his assertion that archivists should be political, abandoning neutrality. Jimerson responded by clarifying that he views social justice in archives as “a personal choice” rather than “a professional obligation.” He also argued that, while Greene discusses the dangers of “politicizing” archives, archives have, in fact, always been political spaces. Finally, he discussed how his “argument has been to expand our concept of professional ethics to include…perspectives such as the call of justice”—not just narrowly define it as such.

Taking these ideas further, many other scholars in the archives profession have embraced and discussed the implications of archives as spaces of power. Other notable scholars include Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, who co-edited two thematic special issues of the journal Archival Science in 2002 that took on ideas of “archives, records,

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16 Jimerson, Archives Power, 8.
17 Ibid., 19.
and power.” In their introductory article to the special issues, the authors go so far as to challenge the term “archival science” itself. Archivists, they argue, must shed scientific ideas of neutrality and objectivity and embrace the complexity of power structures in archives. They state that “[u]sers of archives (historians and others) and shapers of archives (records creators, records managers, and archivists) add layers of meaning, layers which become naturalized, internalized, and unquestioned.”

Shaping collections does not only mean acquiring and appraising records, but also arrangement, description, and making records as accessible as possible. However, I argue that archivists are not the only shapers of archives; private collectors, as the ones who often decide to save material to begin with, are just as crucial in the process of shaping the historical record.

To create a more inclusive and complete record and recognize which voices are silenced by these power structures, it is crucial to begin to question and unravel these “layers of meaning” by recognizing the human hand in record creation and archival collecting. To do this, Rodney G. S. Carter argues in his 2006 article “Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence,” archivists can (and should) “disclose the absences, make it known who is excluded, and do our best to offer them a place, if they would have it.”

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Historical silences and history as a process of construction

As this project explores the (lack of) objectivity and neutrality in archival collections, including how the perspective of the collector can be transferred not only to institutions, but also interpretations, I draw upon the theoretical work of historians as well as archivists. One of the most influential frameworks that I draw from in this project was laid out by Michel-Rolph Trouillot in his work *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Trouillot discusses the Haitian Revolution as his primary example to illustrate how voices are silenced in the production of history as a result of societal power structures. He says:

Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance).23

This project examines all four of these steps as they relate to the construction of history in the Alice Marshall Collection and LGBT History Project, with a particular emphasis on “the making of archives” as a pivotal moment of silencing. As Jimerson asserts above, archivists have a responsibility to be “active agents in the process of shaping our knowledge of the past”24 in a socially conscious way, both in the way materials are archived and in the way they are interpreted—how “narratives” and “history” are constructed. However, the private collector is also situated within the process that Trouillot describes. By choosing to save materials that they have created, purchased, or

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acquired throughout their life, the collector participates in “the making of archives” and assigns value to those particular materials before they even reach the hands of archivists.

In a similar and more recent take, historian Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra discusses, in an interview with the social theory journal *disClosure*, his new, unpublished work related to archival silences and the production of history. He argues that every archive has “two dimensions”: the stories told *and* the silences, and that both must be considered in historical work. Additionally, he challenges the ways that dominant “historiographical categories,” or the questions scholars choose to ask, affect what is archived and therefore affect societal memory. This is similar to how Samuels’s work, cited above, brings to light the same question for archivists. By highlighting the processes that create silences, these historians open the conversation for strategies to combat them in both historical and archival work.

**Intersectionality in archives**

Intersectionality is a powerful theoretical and analytical tool with which to think about these absences and examine both collections and collectors. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge define intersectionality most simply as the ways in which “major axes of social divisions in a given society at a given time, for example, race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, and age operate not as discrete and mutually exclusive entities, but

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26 Ibid., 19.
build on each other and work together.” By utilizing this tool and positioning the private collector within these major axes, we can better understand the perspective from which they collected and therefore explore why certain voices or silences are present. Additionally, an intersectional lens is useful for examining an archival collection with the goal of highlighting its silences.

Scholars, particularly feminist ones, have begun to discuss archival collections through an intersectional lens. In her essay “The Lesbian in the Archives: An Overview of the History, Themes, and Challenges,” Mary A. Caldera explores issues related to documenting lesbians in archives. Notably, she points to the historical contexts in which lesbians were silenced in U.S. history, such as their difficulty finding a place within both the women’s rights and gay rights movements of the twentieth century despite their strong activist presence. She situates lesbians (and particularly lesbians of color) in a uniquely intersectional position within this history and applies this to the challenges of collecting lesbian historical material in both community and mainstream archives.

Deborah Gray White and Audrey T. McCluskey challenge the ways in which women of color are represented or left out of collections. McCluskey argues that Black women must define their own history in order to counteract the ways in which they have been silenced and misrepresented in historiography. She defines three main “errors” through which Black women have been misrepresented in historical work: “1) errors of

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distortion, 2) errors of omission, and 3) errors of a biased perspective.” Simply put, Black women’s historical experiences are often viewed through the biased lens of other historical players’ perspectives, distorted or misrepresented through depiction in archival materials, or just completely left out of archival narratives. White discusses how Black women, posed at a uniquely intersectional place in history and while occupying a unique and powerful activist space of their own, were nevertheless often silenced in documentation of both the civil rights and feminist movements. Further, she argues that the creation of sources (i.e. Trouillot’s “moment of fact creation”) is a pivotal place where Black women were silenced throughout history; as they were often “peripheral” to the lives of those most likely to produce written documentation. For instance, women of color who were enslaved or employed by wealthy white families may be invisible in documentation of those families, as their lives were “peripheral” and historically defined only in relation to those in a socially dominant position. Women in this position often did not create sources of their own, and may only be documented in sources created by others, if at all. Additionally, White points to indexing and archival descriptions as another place where Black women have been silenced. Materials related to Black women’s lives are often buried in collections that are indexed and described in relation to white and/or male individuals; or simply not described in terms that identify them as relating to Black women.

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These three authors provide insight into challenges in both the Alice Marshall Collection and the LGBT History Project. For instance, in the Alice Marshall Collection, Black women are primarily silenced (omission)—but when they are represented, it is often in a racist, caricatured way (distortion or biased perspective). Identifying these intersectional issues within both collections will help tease out the ways in which the collections do not represent an objective version of women’s or LGBTQ+ history; and positioning the collectors on intersectional axes will help understand why.

**Community archives as spaces of representation**

One way that marginalized groups have taken control and begun to combat silences in institutional archival collections is through community archiving. Community archives are archives created by a community to document that community’s history where it may have been overlooked or silenced in other historical institutions. In fact, “the rise of community archives” can even be viewed as “a challenge to traditional archives.”[^31] The LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project is an excellent example of a community archives project. The local LGBTQ+ community, finding a lack of representation in Central Pennsylvania’s historical institutions and wanting to preserve their history before it was too late, created the project as an oral history program and archives. Archivists have explored this trend as a way for marginalized communities to take back their historical narratives, which are often forgotten or misrepresented in more mainstream archives. Brenda J. Marson’s article “History Projects, Libraries, and

[^31]: Caldera and Neal, “Introduction,” xviii.
Archives” in the 2004 *Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender History in America* contextualizes why community archives projects, particularly through LGBTQ+ history projects, are so crucial to the preservation of LGBTQ+ community history. These historical materials “often faced insecure futures” as a result of several factors. For instance, in cultural contexts in which the LGBTQ+ community was forced into secrecy, fear of being identified as queer prevented people from keeping possibly incriminating materials. In some scenarios, LGBTQ+ materials have been systematically destroyed by states or homophobic relatives. Additionally, she notes that “[c]ommunity history projects have had a significant impact not only on the collection and preservation of documents, but also on the interpretation and dissemination of LGBT history.” In this way, through community archives, marginalized groups can take back not only the preservation of their historical material, but the interpretation of their history in a broader sense.

Two articles by authors Marika Cifor, Michelle Caswell, Alda Allina Migoni, and Noah Geraci explore the dynamics of community archives utilizing the results of a surveying project with key individuals at community archives sites. In the first paper, the authors explore both the harm done when groups are silenced in mainstream archives and the healing and power of representation in community archives, highlighting the

33 Ibid., 45.
importance of these projects. The second paper looks more closely at the archivists who work with community archives and the role they play in social justice movements. They argue that these archivists not only identify themselves as activists and community organizers, but that in their work they challenge the idea of neutrality in archival ethics. This marks part of the larger shift in the profession: the rejection of neutrality or objectivity in favor of a more active role in documenting the past. This work is well situated within the conversations discussed earlier in this chapter. In the case of Cifor et. al.’s study, archivists are using their active role to highlight marginalized voices that have otherwise been silenced, therefore taking on a social justice role.

While community archives represent one way to infuse social justice into archival work and highlight voices of those often silenced in more traditional archival settings, they can also present their own challenges. Chapter 4 further examines some of these possible issues for the LGBT History Project.

**Situating this project within the literature**

While it is evident that “[s]cholars now question who creates … archives and for what purposes,” private collectors have largely been ignored in the literature in favor of the professional archivist. In fact, in researching this project, I have only uncovered one

source that discusses the private collector and their role in shaping institutional collections. Bregt Lameris, in his book *The Film Museum Practice and Film Historiography: The Case of the Nederlands Filmmuseum (1946-2000)*, devotes a chapter to “Private Collectors” and their impact on film museum collections. He says, “[p]rivate collectors, for the most part, selected films according to their own insights, goals, and passions.”  

Because of this, private collections, once transferred to institutions, do not necessarily reflect societies in the neutral way in which museums and archives are assumed to. In this case, Lameris takes his evidence from Dutch silent film collections. However, his argument can be applied more broadly.

Privately-compiled collections, therefore, create a unique challenge in the production of history and social memory. Even if archivists take a more active role, often having the ability to choose which private collections they acquire, they have little to no control over what a private collection contains once it is acquired. Therefore, while Harris argues that archivists “create[e] archival value” when appraising and collecting records, the literature does not take into account how private individuals create this value as well.

By highlighting the human stories behind the Alice Marshall Collection and the LGBT History Project, I aim to bring visibility to the humanity behind the creation of archival collections. Like the people who compiled them, these collections are un-objective and far from neutral. Once we begin to think critically about the people who

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38 Harris, “The Archival Sliver,” 84.
collect archival materials—often everyday people unconfined by the professional and ethical standards of archivists—archives are de-mystified as temples of historical “truth.” In discussing the private collector, we can begin to see the privately-compiled collection as a text, created by another person, and reflective of that person’s interests, privileges, and perspectives. Then, we can go further to begin to think more critically about the sources themselves and the voices that we hear or don’t hear within the collection. This awareness is the first step in creating a more inclusive, and therefore more complete, version of history.
Chapter 3

Case Study: The Alice Marshall Women’s History Collection

Alice Kahler Marshall (1923-97) was a journalist, researcher, speech writer, Pennsylvania state employee—and a collector of women’s history. Of her collecting, she said, “I never started out to collect women's memorabilia; it just gradually happened…I’ve been a collector of old books, prints and newspapers for years. I think one reason I started to collect it was because not many people were, and a lot of our history was being lost or thrown away.”39 She also credited the women’s movement of the 1960s and 70s for helping her realize that women were underrepresented, and that women’s history collecting was an important gap to fill. She said, in 1987, “It wasn’t until the women’s movement came along

Figure 3.1: Alice Marshall. Courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Penn State Harrisburg Library

that I realized there weren’t any women in these newspapers”\textsuperscript{40} and that “not many people were [collecting women’s history], and a lot of our history was being lost or thrown away.”\textsuperscript{41} The Alice Marshall Women’s History Collection (AMC) became a vast primary resource for the study of women’s history, stereotypes that affected women’s lives, women’s roles and portrayal in mass media, women’s health, women’s activism from the suffrage movement through second wave feminism, and much more. In fact, her 1997 obituary noted that her collection was “reportedly the most comprehensive private collection of women's history material in the nation.”\textsuperscript{42}

The expansive collection consists of thousands of books, pamphlets, magazines, postcards, advertisements, valentines, sheet music, pinback buttons, posters, and other artifacts and ephemera dating from the 16\textsuperscript{th} century through the 1990s (the bulk of which

\textsuperscript{41} Allen, “Display to Portray Women’s History.”
dates to the 19th and 20th centuries). In a history dominated by men, Marshall was interested in bringing women’s experiences and accomplishments to the surface. She was truly dedicated to both preserving this threatened history and making it more visible in public narratives.

In 1991, through donation and purchase, Marshall transferred ownership of her extensive collection to Archives and Special Collections in the Penn State Harrisburg Library. Today, after years of work by Archives faculty and staff processing, arranging, describing, and preserving, AMC is available to the Penn State Harrisburg community and the public for research and is utilized extensively for the Archives’ outreach, particularly in exhibits and online content. The collection represents one single accession, meaning that the materials all came from one source at the same time, and is a closed series, meaning no materials are added or removed. Essentially, the objects in the collection are the exact same objects that Marshall carefully selected based on her own interests and priorities.

AMC is, therefore, an excellent example of a privately-compiled collection, donated to an academic archive, that reflects an individual’s interests and perspective rather than a neutral historical “truth.” In this sense, AMC is a text. It was created and compiled within a context, just as any text is. It is both a collection of primary sources about women’s history and in itself a primary source about Alice Marshall’s interests and values. Because of Marshall’s interest and perspective and the context in which she acquired the objects, AMC largely represents the experience of white American women.

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in history. Scholars and students relying on the collection for research into women’s issues in American history simply do not have access to perspectives other than a white one. The collection fails to address the many intricate intersections of race, sexuality, class, gender, nationality, ability, and more that women have experienced. It represents just one line of perspective out of countless—and therefore the voices of others are potentially silenced both in scholarship produced using the collection and in the Archives’ public outreach.

In understanding the construction of women’s history in AMC, it’s helpful to return to Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s description of the silencing of historic voices:

Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance).44

There are many factors that influenced which materials Alice Marshall collected and, therefore, the materials that are used and interpreted in what Trouillot describes as “the making of history in the final instance.” For this study, the “moment of fact assembly (the making of archives)” is paramount. For her personal collection, Marshall selected which sources were archived and which were not. Her selections, based on the availability of material, her own interests and collecting priorities, her own identity and perspective, and the historical context in which she collected (mid-20th century), are representative of a very narrow view of women’s history and therefore all but silence a multitude of women’s voices, including women of color and LGBTQ+ women.

44 Trouillot, Silencing the Past, 26. Emphasis original.
Personal perspectives and privilege in collecting

Thinking about AMC and the ways in which archives represent social and cultural memory, it is helpful to position Alice Marshall on intersectional axes. Doing so helps us better understand the perspective from which she collected women’s history materials to better understand why some voices are missing from her collection. Marshall was a white, upper-middle-class, and (probably) straight woman living in Central Pennsylvania, whose ideas of women’s history were influenced by the second wave feminist movement. She collected materials that interested her, and that she felt connected to.

This personal perspective and connection to materials leads to the subjectivity involved in the way a private collector selects items to purchase or save. Unlike archivists who, as discussed in chapter two, have widely begun to discuss the implications of their appraisal choices on the formation of the historical record, private individuals base their collecting decisions on their own individual interest and perspective—or what is available for them to acquire—rather than ethical or documentary concerns. Alice Marshall is an excellent example of this, as several interviews and articles about her collecting leave us evidence into her motivations. In fact, she even left behind her own writings about women’s history that provide insight into the topics she found interesting enough to document, such as the suffrage movement, women’s health, women writers, and women’s depiction in mass media and advertisements.

While Alice Marshall possessed a unique perspective on women’s issues and history based on her identity and interests, that perspective only persists through her collection because she also possessed the privilege required to collect. She often collected
whatever women’s history materials she could find, through antique dealers, flea markets, and other local venues. She forged connections with local dealers who would alert to her to any new materials related to women’s history that were available to purchase, and began to grow her immense collection. Compiling a collection of historical material requires many things: resources (money to purchase sometimes rare and expensive items), time (to spend at antique stores, auctions, and markets), education (to know the historical significance of the items you collect), housing (and space to store an immense collection), and even relationships (with dealers who know your interests). Alice Marshall had all of these things. Because of her privilege, her perspective is preserved while others’ perspectives are not.

**Historical context of collecting**

In his work, Trouillot goes on to assert that “one will not castigate long-dead writers for using the words of their time or for not sharing ideological views that we now take for granted.” These ideologies may have been “unthinkable” and inconceivable within a particular historical, social, or cultural context.\(^{45}\) In a sense, Marshall was the author of the narrative that AMC represents, and I hold her in the same category as the writers Trouillot discusses because the bulk of her collecting work predated our current, more inclusive, view of women’s history.

Marshall conducted the bulk of her collecting during the mid-to-late 20th century, at a time when women of color and LGBTQ+ women were often left out of the feminist,

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 562.
gay rights, and civil rights movements. In interviews, she even professed that the feminist movement was an inspiration; one of the reasons she realized that women’s history needed to be preserved. She collected for approximately fifty years of her life, after her World War II service through the early 1990s. Her largest collecting period took place in the 1980s, right at the tail end of the second wave feminist movement.

This cultural context and admitted inspiration in second-wave feminism, a movement now widely known for its exclusion of women who were not straight, white, and middle class, is pivotal to Marshall’s perspective as it is solidified in her collection. She was influenced by, and collected during, a historical movement that pre-dated our modern, intersectional, and inclusive version of feminism. While the theory of intersectionality finds its roots in the frustrations of women of color during the women’s movement of the 1960s and 70s, it did not take root in mainstream feminism until much later.46 In fact, the term “intersectionality” did not appear until it was coined by UCLA law scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989.47 In this sense, intersectionality (and a more inclusive feminism) may have been “unthinkable” to Marshall, a white, upper-middle-class woman whose interest in feminism stemmed from the early women’s movement and who ended her collecting endeavors in the 1990s. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect Marshall’s collection to represent a twenty-first-century intersectional feminist perspective; instead, those working with the collection must be aware of its biases and examine it as a text created in a cultural and historical context.

Research and outreach using the Alice Marshall Collection

As part of the Penn State Harrisburg Library, the Archives and Special Collections is, first and foremost, a research source for students, faculty, and the community. AMC, as the Archives’ largest collection, is often utilized by faculty as a teaching tool or by students in their individual research for classes, theses and dissertations, and more. Additionally, AMC is utilized by Archives faculty and staff as an outreach tool, primarily through exhibits in a high-traffic area of the library and through digital content online. When Marshall’s collection became part of these academic functions, the implications of silencing become more severe. When utilized for research and exhibits, AMC also silences voices in the production of scholarship and public outreach, therefore influencing “the making of history in the final instance.” When voices are silenced, history is incomplete, and therefore cannot be objective. In this section, I utilize examples to illustrate the way Alice Marshall’s interests, perspective, and privilege affect interpretations of women’s history and silence historic women’s voices.

The first example is a critique of my own past research using AMC. In Spring 2017, I spent time in the Archives researching and developing an exhibit project for a professional course in Museum Studies at Penn State Harrisburg. As a student, this was my first encounter with conducting research in an archive. The title of the project was “We Can’t Win Without Them: Women During Wartime in the Alice Marshall Collection” and the goal was to illustrate the varied and integral roles American women played in the First and Second World Wars. The exhibit includes a selection of objects from AMC, including photographs, magazine articles and covers, posters, postcards, and
other ephemera depicting the various roles in which women participated during wartime. Organizations such as the YWCA, Salvation Army, and Red Cross are highlighted, as well as images of women workers in the U.S. Military and industrial labor.

Of the twenty-four objects featured in the project, twenty include images of women. Every single woman depicted in the exhibit is white. Figures 3.3-3.5 provide examples of how women are depicted in objects in the exhibition.

**Figure 3.3:** *Saturday Evening Post* cover, 1943. Courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Penn State Harrisburg Library

**Figure 3.4:** *Sunday Magazine* cover, 1918. Courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Penn State Harrisburg Library
A Penn State Harrisburg student, faculty or staff member, or even a member of the public viewing the exhibit would see and associate only white women as active players in American war efforts. Additionally, as a student producing a piece of scholarship using the collection, I interpreted history in this way as well. Leaving women of color out of wartime activity simply does not represent the historical truth, and other archival collections prove it. Among digitized collections from the Library of Congress and National Archives are photographs of African-American women working in various capacities during the First and Second World Wars (figures 3.6 and 3.7). Placed beside the exhibit images, these photographs provide a powerful perspective shift. Although African-American women faced discrimination in war efforts (particularly the military) they did work in factories, serve in the military, and serve in charitable organizations.

Figure 3.5: Photograph of women aviators, ca. 1941-45. Courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Penn State Harrisburg Library

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Figure 3.6: “Operating a hand drill at Vultee-Nashville, woman is working on a ‘Vengeance’ dive bomber, Tennessee,” photograph, 1943. Courtesy of Library of Congress

Figure 3.7: Pvt. Ruth L. James, one of the first African American WACs to arrive on the continent of Europe, 1945. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration
such as the YWCA and Red Cross during wartime, just as white women did.\textsuperscript{49} The overwhelmingly white perspective of AMC, influenced by Marshall’s interests and collecting choices, therefore influenced the way women were represented and silenced in this example. Additionally, as mentioned previously, because the collection silences the voices of women of color during war in America and diminished their roles, it does not represent the objective historical “truth.”

Another excellent example is Archives and Special Collections’ Flickr website,\textsuperscript{50} which serves as one of the program’s primary outreach tools. Archives faculty and staff use the Flickr page as a digital collections tool, a platform for digital exhibits, and a way for students engaging with the collections through class work or research projects to access primary sources remotely. Several collections from Archives and Special Collections are highlighted, but AMC is most prominently represented (41 out of 66 albums on the site are dedicated to AMC).

This digital platform reveals much about the ways that AMC is used and interpreted by not only Archives faculty and staff, but also teaching faculty and students at Penn State Harrisburg. The images from AMC on the site are, unsurprisingly, only representative of white women’s historical experiences. This implies that, when students study historical and cultural phenomena such as “The American Dream,” “Fashion and Sexuality,” or “College Women”\textsuperscript{51} using primary sources from AMC, they are actually


\textsuperscript{50} Penn State Harrisburg Archives and Special Collections, Flickr, accessed December 6, 2019, \url{https://www.flickr.com/photos/pennstate_harrisburg_archives/albums}.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
studying these concepts through Alice Marshall’s perspective and through the lens of her experience as a privileged white woman in America.

Digital exhibits on the platform also present a biased perspective on American women’s experiences in history. A 2018 exhibition, *A Day in the Life of Mother: Her Varied Roles in the Domestic Sphere, 1870-1960*, which was a physical display in the Penn State Harrisburg Library and is now a digital exhibit on the Archives and Special Collections Flickr page, aims “to highlight the varied forms of domestic work expected of women in the home.” Again, this exhibit fails to reveal an “objective” view of motherhood and domesticity in America, because it only depicts the experiences of white women. It fails to reveal the stark differences and surprising similarities of home roles for women of diverse ethnicities, economic status, immigration status, religion, and more. In the exhibit, the viewer observes domesticity and motherhood through Alice Marshall’s eyes, rather than an “objective” perspective as may be expected of an archival collection.

A theme prevalent in all of these examples is the types of materials depicted, which, through familiarity with the collection, is largely representative of the dominant types of materials Marshall collected. The vast majority of the collection is published materials—books, pamphlets, postcards, advertisements, posters, and more. By collecting these types of materials, rather than more photographs, manuscripts, or other unpublished formats that are more likely to represent marginalized and diverse women, Marshall further limited the perspectives that the collection represents.

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Conclusions

Marshall’s contribution to the documentation of women’s history was immensely important, and just because her collection does not represent a complete view of American women’s history (no single collection possibly could) does not make it any less valid for researching certain issues. But we must position her work and her collection as just one piece of a broader effort to document the lives of women throughout the history of the U.S. It is important to remember that Alice Marshall, as a successful white woman with connections to government, the community, and, perhaps most importantly, antiques dealers in her area, had the ability and the privilege to collect. This helps open a conversation as to why her materials—and her voice through her collection—are remembered, while others are not.

McCluskey’s theory of “1) errors of distortion, 2) errors of omission, and 3) errors of a biased perspective” are useful here in understanding how Alice Marshall’s personal perspective and the historical context in which she collected affect the ways in which women of color, or any women positioned on different intersectional axes, are represented in AMC. Exhibits, outreach, and interpretations of women’s history created using AMC’s primary sources illustrate the collection’s broader “error of omission”—women of color, LGBTQ+ women, and other diverse perspectives are simply left out of the historical narrative. Some materials, such as a small selection of cartoons and advertisements depicting Black women in the collection, present an immense “error of

53 Allen, “Display to Portray Women’s History” and Baker, “Woman’s Collection Fills a Historic – Female – Gap."
distortion” and “error of biased perspective”—the women depicted in these images are often a caricature of Black womanhood, distorted through a biased white perspective (figure 3.9). Alternately, they are peripheral to white women’s interests or activities—simply props in advertisements aimed towards privileged white women (figure 3.10). While this may not have represented Marshall’s own views on women of color, it does represent a collecting choice. She was collecting from her own perspective and based on her own interests, so creating a more complete picture of diverse women’s experiences may not have been a priority, especially when these materials may have been more difficult to acquire.

Alice Marshall and her collection serve as an excellent example to illustrate the ways in which private collectors have the power and privilege to shape the production of history and the formation of societal memory through archives. AMC provides insight into how historical narratives are constructed through varying historical and personal processes, and how archival collections are not only windows into the historical periods

Figure 3.8: Cartoon depicting African American suffragists, portrayed in a distorted way. Courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Penn State Harrisburg Library
in which the primary sources were created, but also the processes and historical circumstances that lead to their archiving and preservation.

Figure 3.9: Ivory Soap advertisement, illustrating women of color as “peripheral” to white women’s activities. Courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Penn State Harrisburg Library
Chapter 4

Case Study: The LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project Collections

The LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania is a non-profit community resource located in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania that serves the local LGBTQ+ community through “social, educational, and cultural engagement.” In 2012, the LGBT History Project evolved out of a “story circle” program conducted as part of the Center’s Aging with Pride group. Barry Loveland, Chair and founding volunteer of the History Project, said that, after the success of the story circle,

I was surprised because there was a lot of stuff that I didn't know. So it really made me sort of wake up and think about the fact that we as a community had not really done anything about collecting and documenting our own history and that we were at risk of losing that history because a number of those folks were getting older.

In this way, like Alice Marshall observed that women’s history was being lost or thrown away, Loveland and volunteers from the Center decided to start the History Project to preserve the at-risk history of their community. The project began with oral history interviews, until the first physical archival collection was donated in 2013.

Unlike the Alice Marshall Women’s History Collection, which was compiled by one individual, the LGBT History Project consists of many collections, ranging in size, compiled and donated by a multitude of individuals. In addition, the Project is actively collecting materials to add to the collection, either by conducting oral history interviews,

56 Barry Loveland, in discussion with the author, August 2019.
soliciting donations of archival material from community members or oral history participants, or pursuing the purchase or donation of specific items. By its very nature, as a group of collections from varying individuals, the Project documents a number of different perspectives. In addition, as it is actively collecting, the Project has the capacity to document new and different voices through strategic collecting practices. However, the Project faces similar challenges to AMC. In fact, next to AMC, the LGBT History Project collections both highlight a solution to the problems in AMC while also struggling with similar and varying problems themselves.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the LGBT History Project is a community archives project—an archives created by and about a certain community. The Project began as part of an outreach effort for a local LGBTQ+ community center, and functions to collect and preserve materials that document the history of and ultimately serve that community. It aims to educate the local LGBTQ+ community about their own remarkable yet often overlooked history, while also making that history accessible to the broader public. The project serves to preserve the materials that tell the stories of the community’s past, therefore serving as a reservoir of its collective memory. This is particularly important for the LGBTQ+ community, for whom collecting materials that might reveal their sexuality or identity could be dangerous in certain historical, cultural, or family environments. LGBTQ+ materials were often discarded or not collected at all because of a fear of being outing or because family members cleaning out deceased individuals belongings did not recognize or appreciate their historical importance. Therefore, LGBTQ+ community archives projects such as the LGBT History Project are crucial for preserving an at-risk history.
White, male, and gay: The Joseph W. Burns Collection

As with AMC, the LGBT History Project’s archival collections are not immune to the forces of personal privilege, interest, and perspective that shape the contents of collections and, therefore, the way history is interpreted using them. When asked about the Project’s strengths, Loveland said that both the oral history and archival collections are “slanted towards the white gay male experience,” often leaving out the voices of queer women, queer people of color, trans people, and other further marginalized groups.

An excellent example of a collection within the Project is the Joseph W. Burns Collection (accession LGBT-001), the first collection of physical archival material that the Project accessioned in 2013. The collection consists of 3 linear feet (or 3 boxes) of archival materials that Burns collected throughout his life related to his involvement in LGBTQ+ activism and social activities in the Central Pennsylvania area. Burns (1940-) was pivotal in gay organizing in rural Pennsylvania; he was one of the founders of the Le-Hi-Ho (Lehigh Valley Homophiles) organization, the first LGBTQ+ organization outside of Philadelphia or Pittsburgh. He was later involved in the Rural Gay Caucus and other community organizing outside of large cities in the state of Pennsylvania. During his lifetime of activism, Burns collected meticulously and extensively. His papers are a phenomenal resource for those researching early gay activism in the local community and serve as evidence of overlooked gay organizing in rural Pennsylvania.

57 Barry Loveland, in discussion with the author, August 2019.
However, the Burns Collection presents the history of the LGBTQ+ community in Central Pennsylvania through his own lens, his perspective, both historically and personally. That lens is a white, male one. With foresight similar to Alice Marshall’s, Burns collected, organized, and preserved these materials with the thought that someday they would be important. And they absolutely are. They provide a rich resource for the formation and evolution of certain pivotal LGBTQ+ rights groups in Central Pennsylvania. Burns’s collection provides insight into these organizations, who was in them, what they did, and how they fit into the larger gay liberation movement of the second half of the twentieth century. But they do so from Burns’s perspective as a gay, white male. This perspective is important to document, but absolutely does not account for the entirety of the LGBTQ+ experience in the local area.

Burns is just one example of a donor to the LGBT History Project whose experience is documented, preserved, and has become “history” because he had the privilege to collect and save materials. Burns decided what materials he believed were important to save, and by donating his materials to the project, passed along his perspective of what has historical value. They are also reflective of his own life: the people he interacted with, the groups he was part of, and activism in which he participated. Unlike Alice Marshall, Burns wasn’t necessarily seeking out items to collect—his collection is reflective of his own activities. Therefore, the collection is even more representative of his personal experience and perspective.

While Burns’s papers only represent a small part of the LGBT History Project, it does serve as an example of some collections’ primary challenges. “We do have a
collection that is probably a lot more slanted towards the white gay male experience,” said Loveland. Malinda Triller-Doran, the Dickinson College archivist who works with the History Project, said that “it is apparent that, as the collection has grown, it does include more documentation of white men than anyone else; that there are not a lot of people of color.”

By highlighting these experiences, others can be unintentionally left out.

**LGBTQ+ silences: lesbian, trans, and QPOC communities**

Although the LGBT History Project’s archival collections provide an excellent source for primary historical materials related to a historically marginalized and overlooked group—the LGBTQ+ community—several cultural and historical factors,

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59 Barry Loveland, in discussion with the author, August 2019.
60 Malinda Triller-Doran, in discussion with the author, October 2019.
including discrimination both within the community and from outside, contribute to which voices are heard and which are not. Although it’s often difficult to pinpoint exactly who is missing, Loveland points to several areas that lack representation in the collections, including people of color and queer women. Additionally, looking at the collections intersectionally reveals that people at the intersection of different identities—queer women of color, for instance—are the least represented. Aside from the male-female gender binary, more diverse genders, included as part of the LGBTQ+ spectrum, are underrepresented as well. The trans community, particularly trans people of color, is an area that Loveland would ideally expand upon. The most marginalized communities, and subcultures in general, are underrepresented as a whole.

While it can be difficult to pinpoint the silences (how do you quantify who you don’t see?), it can be even more difficult to understand why the silences exist. In fact, it’s likely that we will never fully understand the full range of historical, cultural, and personal circumstances that lead to Trouillot’s moments of construction, particularly “the making of sources” and “the making of archives.” Who was left out of the documented communities, and therefore left out of the creation of sources? Did these groups form their own communities that created archival materials of their own? If so, were these materials saved, and by whom? Who decides which materials are saved, and therefore what materials become the primary sources of history?

In the history of the LGBTQ+ community in Central Pennsylvania, there are some cultural and historical themes that affect the complex process of historical construction

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through archival sources. Two main themes are discrimination against queer people of color in the eras that the collections most fully document, and the separation of lesbian and gay communities at that time. Oral history interviews from the collection illustrate a climate of exclusion for people of color in the Central Pennsylvania gay bar scene, a pivotal space for the fostering of the local LGBTQ+ community. One narrator said of bars in Harrisburg, “We were a gay bar community downtown of white males, period,” and goes further to discuss how only a certain number of black men were allowed in the bars. The same situation applied to women, whose access to most gay bars was also restricted, and who often frequented their own, separate establishments. These rules were “strictly enforced,” and were considered a keen business decision—the perception being that if women, people of color, or drag queens were allowed equal access, they would “take over” the bars. These oral history interviews also illustrate how the Project’s oral history collection acts as an excellent supplement to the material archival collections: this issue would be left unknown to future community members and researchers without the first-hand recollections in these interviews. The interviewer in one oral history even asked, “So now, if there were lesbians here in this room right now, or [people of color], what would I be hearing from them on this side of story?”

62 Larry Wilson, interview by Lonna Malmsheimer, November 17, 2015, LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project Oral History Collection, Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections, Carlisle, PA.
63 Ibid.
64 “1960s Group Interview,” interview by Bill Burton, June 16, 2016, LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project Oral History Collection, Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections, Carlisle, PA.
The best represented historical periods in the Project are the 1960s-1970s, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, was a historical period of great change and struggle. Separate groups—women, people of color, and the gay community—were all struggling for liberation. But people at the intersections of these identities, or those from further marginalized groups, were often left out of the mainstream movements and therefore are often underrepresented in archives and histories. As Caldera notes, despite their activism, lesbian women are often silenced or underrepresented. This issue is especially true for queer people of color, who are often located at the intersection of many oppressions including race, gender/gender identity, sexuality, and class.

Race, sex, and gender identity are not the only factors that contribute to the silences. Class or economic privilege, as is the case for Alice Marshall, contribute to whose materials are saved. The ability to participate in activism, go to or own bars, or participate in community activities are often dependent on economic status. To have a place to house your own personal collection is dependent on housing security. Funds are required to travel to and attend local, state, and national LGBTQ+ events, where history projects often spread awareness of their collections and recruit oral history candidates. All of these factors contribute to the fact that the most vulnerable people in society leave the most minimal trace in archives and historical institutions.

65 Caldera, “The Lesbian in the Archives.”
Giving voices to the silent

Like the professionals who work with AMC, volunteers and staff of the LGBT History Project are acutely aware that their collections are far from representative of the complete LGBTQ+ experience in Central Pennsylvania. However, they are in a unique position to combat these silences through outreach and collecting strategies. Unlike AMC—which, as the compiled collection of one individual, cannot be expanded—the Project is actively pursuing and collecting new materials.

Loveland outlines how collecting materials that represent a more diverse LGBTQ+ community in Central Pennsylvania is one of the Project’s strategic goals. Volunteers actively reach out to diverse LGBTQ+ individuals in the community to conduct oral history interviews and solicit material donations. For instance, an intern with the Project who was also part of the transgender community, passionate about better documenting the trans experience in Central Pennsylvania, made great headway in conducting more oral histories with trans narrators.66 Aside from oral history, the Project has the ability to purchase new collections that will fill important gaps. Recently, Loveland sought out a collection for purchase to better document the lesbian community in the Project’s archival collections.

Interpretation presents a powerful opportunity to highlight traditionally silenced voices in the collections, and the Project makes the most of their interpretation and outreach to do so. A recent exhibition in the Dickinson College Library, titled History Comes Out: LGBTQ+ Spaces and Places, specifically featured poster-sized displays,

66 Malinda Triller-Doran, in discussion with the author, October 2019.
positioned near exhibit cases, highlighting lesbian spaces in Central Pennsylvania (figures 4.2 and 4.3). In my own recent research in the collections related to the early gay bar scene, materials related to men’s gay bars far outweighed materials related to lesbian or lesbian-friendly bars. But, through intentional and careful selection of objects and interpretation, the lesbian community is well represented in the LGBTQ+ Spaces and Places exhibit, both on the posters and in exhibit cases. Additionally, materials in exhibit cases provided images of people from diverse...
backgrounds when possible. While it’s difficult to interpret a diverse history for the public when the materials are limited or restricted, these efforts go a long way in ensuring that a collection’s silences are not passed along to “the making of history in the final instance.”

Chapter 5
Discussion and Conclusions

Both the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History project and the Alice Marshall Women’s History Collection are local community resources that document the history of traditionally underrepresented groups. Both collections are exceptional assets for the local community, in an academic research sense and in the way that they contribute to our collective cultural memory. While the LGBT History Project, as a community archives, does offer one solution to some of the challenges of AMC, it also shares some common challenges while presenting its own unique set of issues.

Examining the two collections side by side, common themes emerge about the ways in which private individuals shape history and societal memory through their collecting.

Scholars have long strived for “objectivity” in their work—the search for the truth or the facts, independent from bias. Jimerson discusses how, while scholars often examine and critique individual sources, most continue to view archives themselves as sources of this objectivity.68 This is a problematic assumption that does not take into account the human role in selecting the content of archives. In her book *The Ethical Archivist*, Elena S. Danielson asserts that “our perception of truth is shaped by what is acquired and saved,”69 meaning that when acquiring and preserving artifacts, archivists and curators have a responsibility to shape truth in an ethical way. Private collectors, on

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the other hand, do not have a code of professional ethics to follow. Therefore, private
collections in particular cannot be objective because of their very nature. An individual
person chose objects and shaped the narrative that collection represents, like an author
shapes a narrative while writing a book. The collection, then, becomes a text, created
from the point of view of the creator. I argue that the Alice Marshall Collection tells the
story of American women’s history from Marshall’s perspective. The LGBT History
Project collections also represent a variety of texts, carefully selected and shaped by the
people who saved and donated their materials. Just in the way an author constructs a text,
which is then examined and interpreted by readers, history is constructed through these
archival processes.

**Comparisons**

By looking at both collections through an intersectional lens, it becomes apparent
that both lack representation in some common areas, primarily those of the most
marginalized groups in society. For instance, people of color are conspicuously absent in
both collections, as well as the trans and non-binary population. Groups at the
intersection of multiple marginalized identities, such as lesbian women of color or trans
people of color, are even more likely to be absent from both collections. These silences
are due to a number of factors, some of which there simply isn’t time to explore in this
thesis and some of which are unknowable. For instance, it would be nearly impossible to
definitively know what percentage of the LGBTQ+ community in Central Pennsylvania
in the 1960s-1970s included people of color to compare whether the collections present a
true representation. Another example is that future work could examine how different types of oppression stopped certain individuals from saving their materials while others did. However, it becomes evident that these marginalized groups are underrepresented in the historical record represented in these collections and therefore at the highest risk of being erased from history as it is constructed using these primary sources.

The major types of materials represented in each collection also have an impact on the ways in which groups are represented. Most of the materials that Marshall collected were published—advertisements, pamphlets, magazines, postcards, and more; whereas there is much more unpublished material in the LGBT History Project collections. Another major difference in perspective is a national versus local one. Marshall collected materials broadly related to American women’s history that were created and distributed on a national level. AMC even contains some international materials. On the other hand, the Project’s collections are defined specifically as materials related to the LGBTQ+ community in Central Pennsylvania, and almost all were created right here in the local community by local people or organizations.

In classic archival theory, AMC would be considered an “artificial” collection, in that the materials were not created and accumulated “naturally” through Marshall’s activities⁷⁰—they were intentionally collected based on a specific collecting goal. The LGBT History Project collections represent a combination of collection types. Many personal collections, such as the Burns collection, were collected and accumulated

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“naturally” through the person’s life and activities. In Burns’s case, his collection was naturally accumulated through his activist activities. However, even when collections are “natural” rather than “artificial,” collectors make conscious or unconscious choices as to what materials they keep and preserve and which they discard. Privilege also plays a pivotal part; as discussed previously, not everyone has the ability to preserve their own materials, let alone actively collect.

Additionally, the LGBT collections represent a wider scope simply by the fact that it consists of multiple collections, compiled by multiple individuals, rather than a standalone personal collection. Already, the potential for as many voices as there are collections is present, while the Project continually adds more and more. On the other hand, AMC really only presents American women’s history from one person’s perspective and always will.

On a very basic level, the institution that each collection calls home also plays a part in how they document history. The Alice Marshall Collection, as a closed collection in an academic archives setting, is fixed as it is, and Archives and Special Collections in the Penn State Harrisburg Library is bound by the institutional collecting policies of the Pennsylvania State University Libraries. University policy UL-SP03 specifies that any special collections housed outside of Penn State’s University Park location must fit within very specific collecting categories: campus history, local community history, special regional interest, donor-mandated, or curriculum-specific.71 This policy makes it

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71 Policy UL-SP03 Special Collections and Commonwealth Campus Libraries, Penn State University Libraries, accessed December 8, 2019, https://libraries.psu.edu/policies/ul-sp03.
nearly impossible for Archives and Special Collections to actively collect more material to supplement Alice Marshall’s view of women’s history, also makes it difficult for Archives and Special Collections to justify the purchase or donation of complimentary collections. On the other hand, a community archives project such as the LGBT History Project collects with the goal of serving a specific community through the collection and preservation of archives. Even though it is part of an academic archives as well (Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections), the Project has the ability to create their own collecting policies and make final appraisal decisions. The Project is actively collecting new material from individuals’ collections, and key members of the project are even seeking out and purchasing specific items to fulfill certain collecting goals or gaps in the collections.

However, Penn State’s limiting collecting scope and bureaucratic institutional policies don’t mean that Archives faculty and staff can’t mitigate the harm done by Alice Marshall’s limited perspective. Through awareness of and critical thinking about the collection’s gaps, intentional counseling of students and researchers, and active knowledge of complementary collections (such as the LGBT History Project), these professionals can make AMC a part of a larger archival documentary history.

**Future work and possible solutions**

So, what can archivists and scholars do in the future to create a more inclusive archival environment? A few solutions that I’ve already explored—like community

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72 Malinda Triller-Doran, in discussion with the author, October 2019.
archives, more intentional and inclusive collecting practices, and oral history projects that complement archival collections—are pivotal steps that the archival profession can take towards more complete documentation. Oral histories can document the experiences of marginalized groups, particularly when other types of documentation have been lost, destroyed, or simply not created. The LGBT History Project’s robust oral history collection is an excellent example. The Project even acquired many of its physical archival materials through oral history narrators.

Going beyond these kinds of initiatives, digitization and digital collections spaces are some of the most promising tools for diversifying the record and highlighting diverse voices buried in the archives. In the technology age of the 21st century, the field is more equipped than ever to meet these goals. Digital collections make it easier for researchers to locate materials without traveling long distances or poring over boxes and boxes of paper. One excellent example of a digitization project that highlights the voices of an underrepresented group in a unique way is the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA).73 SAADA uses a post-custodial model, meaning that they locate and digitize records that are already arranged, described, and preserved in archives, or sometimes records that are held by private individuals but are not available for donation to an archive. By doing so, SAADA locates and Compiles records that might otherwise be lost in collections, institutions, or private homes. And, by bringing together a wealth of geographically separate materials in one digital archive and describing them in ways that

highlight South Asian American voices, SAADA ensures that the stories of South Asian Americans are easily accessed, researched, and heard.

Archival description is another area where archivists can make a difference towards highlighting underrepresented groups. Materials that highlight the experiences of marginalized people can be “buried” or “undiscoverable” in archival collections if they are not well described in terms that inform users of their significance. As White points out, materials related to traditionally silenced groups are often described only in relation to more dominant categories. For instance, materials related to a primarily Black women’s liberation group could simply be described or indexed as related to women’s liberation—therefore diminishing the importance of group members’ position at the intersection of gender and race. Intentional and inclusive description, plus future scholarly work on the importance of archival description in documenting and giving voices to marginalized groups, are an important next step.

Accurate and thorough archival description can also make collections more “discoverable” to begin with, or more visible and easier to access for researchers. Additionally, collections that have been digitized are often much easier to access in the digital age where many researchers require access to geographically separate, yet thematically related, collections. Which collections are digitized and well described, therefore, can determine which collections are most used and therefore affect the questions that historians and students ask and the resulting interpretations. Intentional prioritization for digitization projects that highlight traditionally underrepresented

74 White, “Mining the Forgotten,” 58.
materials can be crucial for ensuring that history is interpreted and constructed in a complete and inclusive way.

   No single collection can fully document all historical voices, which is why complimentary collections are key to the process of constructing a more inclusive history. Recently, Barry Loveland of the LGBT History Project discovered a “hidden” but complementary collection:

   Surprisingly a lot of the historical societies around here actually have more than they think they do. For example, the Dauphin County Historical Society—I’d gone there many times and tried to get specific photos and they never had what I was looking for. However, at one point the archivist there sent me a database of photographs from the Patriot News photographic collection. So I started looking through that…and I found this stuff that I wasn't expecting…things that are relevant to the community. We might have a treasure trove of photographs here. Just right here in a historical society. 75

   As collections such as these become more accessible, are more accurately described, are digitized, or simply see more use, the potential for inclusivity in archival research becomes more and more realized.

   Perhaps the most obvious, but also one of the most important strategies that archivists, curators, and community members can employ to make archives more inclusive and history more complete is collecting. Making an active effort to collect more diverse materials and include marginalized communities in both archival collections and the archival process is crucial to creating equality in how we remember our society.

75 Barry Loveland, in discussion with the author, August 2019.
Conclusions

I argue that archivists and curators have a professional and ethical responsibility to know as much as possible about the context in which their collections were created and collected and share this information with researchers and the public to ensure that the biases or silences of a collection are not passed on to broader interpretations of history. With this knowledge, archivists and curators can create a conversation about the values and shortcomings of each collection, provide opportunities for expansion of historical perspectives, and create a climate of inclusivity and social justice in historical research.

The fact that these collections do not represent all possible voices does not make them somehow invalid or void. Instead, I argue that these collections are texts that can be interpreted alongside their sources and other collections. Awareness of their silences and perspectives, however, is paramount. Heidi Abbey Moyer, Coordinator of Archives and Special Collections at the Penn State Harrisburg Library, asserts that AMC is best used in conjunction with other resources about women’s history. Further, she suggests that with the advent of digital collections in archives, it is easier than ever before to bring geographically separate collections together to form a more complete picture. Even within the same community, AMC and the LGBT History Project can complement each other to better (if not fully) represent women’s experiences in history.

The purpose of this project is to incite a conversation among scholars and professionals in archives. It is clear that—even when working with closed, privately-compiled collections—archivists have an immense power over their material. Moyer

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76 Heidi Abbey Moyer, in discussion with the author, October 2017.
provides an excellent example of the awareness professionals must maintain about the biases, perspectives, and privilege the collections in their care may represent. With this awareness, archivists can guide those learning from their collections to a more holistic and intersectional perspective than the one a collection represents. Through their counseling of researchers using the collection and through their interpretation in public outreach endeavors such as exhibits, we can—and should—take control of these perspectives. As Jimerson asserts, archivists should no longer be “regarded as the neutral guardian[s] of historical source materials…but as active agents in shaping our knowledge of the past.”

Archives have the power to change lives and empower marginalized groups. A quote from Malinda Triller-Doran speaks for itself:

I have seen the impact that this project has made on the people who contribute to it in the sense that at the end of oral histories, the narrators will often say, ‘thank you very much for this. It really means a lot to me to be able to share my story.’ And I've gotten a number of deeds of gift where … people have said, ‘it's very meaningful to me that my items are now in an archives, thanks for making this happen.’ Having a place for their memory to be saved and shared is something that people recognize the value of and express openly at times.

This sense of empowerment makes it all the more important that archivists continue to work towards opening their collections to all historical voices.

All of the people who collected and donated to either of these collections were doing so from their own individual perspective—whether it was Joseph Burns or Alice Marshall or even Barry Loveland, Chair of the LGBT History Project. These different

78 Malinda Triller-Doran, in discussion with the author, October 2019.
perspectives create different issues, but can also complement each other; meaning that a wider range of human experience is being documented. In that way, archives mirror society. Different voices are heard in different contexts, and some voices are heard more loudly than others. Therefore, it's critical to acknowledge how power structures influence and are present in archives, and be aware of the hands that work to create archives, rather than laboring under the assumption of neutrality or impartiality in archival collections.

This assumption is dangerous. As a profession and a community, we must open our eyes and ears to find the silences and break them.
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