Articles

Queering Ethos: Interrogating Archives in the First Year Writing Classroom

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This essay contributes to recent scholarship in queer and feminist rhetorical studies that has argued for a formulation of ethos as a rhetorical practice that centers the rhetor's awareness of their subjective, spatial, material interdependence with and accountability to others. My first year writing course, titled "Archiving LGBTQ Lives," became an opportunity to reflect on archival work as a specific context through which we might practice this approach to ethos construction while also considering what it might mean to *queer* ethos. This essay argues that by interrogating the role of the archives in normalizing particular histories and ways of knowing, "Archiving LGBTQ Lives" worked to not only redefine, but to *queer* ethos by asking students to listen to the past in ways that centered their accountability to those who've been historically marginalized along intersecting lines of gender, sexuality, and race, and concludes by offering the scholarly personal narrative as a specific tool for helping students to think critically about their ethical relationship to the work of writing and to knowledge production more generally.

In their recent book, *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric*, editors Kathleen Ryan, Nancy Meyers, and Rebecca Jones define a "feminist ecological imaginary" as "a creative and social way of thinking, a living philosophy that better accounts for ethos construction" (3). The concept of a feminist ecological imaginary offers a refined definition of ethos that not only considers one's own subject position in relationship to others, but also the "shifting material, cultural and historical situation circulating around rhetorical acts" (5). This definition of ethos reframes our normative understanding of the term, which in the context of classical rhetoric, is often associated with efforts to affirm one's individual credibility and persuasive power, which Ryan, et al. argue lacks a consideration of relationships across difference (5). As an alternative to classical rhetoric, scholarship in the field of feminist rhetorical studies defines ethos as a rhetorical practice interested, instead, in *negotiating* differences across relationships. In her now well-known book, *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, and Whiteness*, Krista Ratcliffe offers listening, in particular, as a rhetorical practice that performs "a conscious choice to assume an open stance in relation to any person, text, or

culture," proceeding from an "accountability logic" (rather than an attempt to affirm one's one own credibility) and recognizes that "all people necessarily have a stake in each other's quality of life" (17, 26, 31). Together, these important works in feminist rhetorical studies help us approach the work of ethos construction in a way that centers the rhetor's awareness of their subjective, spatial, material interdependence with and accountability to others, and offers listening as a specific practice that might allow us to accomplish that work.

I explored this approach within the context of my first year writing seminar "Archiving LBGTQ Lives." Working with writers in this course became an opportunity to reflect on archival work as a specific context through which we might practice this approach to ethos construction while also considering what it might mean to *queer* ethos. I locate my discussion here in the example of "Archiving LGBTQ Lives," in part, because while Ryan, et al.'s concept of the feminist ecological imaginary emphasizes spatial and material relationships, "queering ethos," as Stacey Waite argues, asks that we also consider our *temporal* location to others (75). Even before encountering Waite's work, questions of temporality struck me as particularly important to consider in work with first year writers, many of whom are still coming to an understanding of the present and future as shaped by the past. In the context of queer studies and queer historiography, in particular, questions of temporality are—given the combination of historical silence and violence surrounding LGBTQ+ experience—also questions of mourning. As Heather Love writes, "The effort to recapture the past is doomed from the start. To reconstruct the past, we build on ruins; to bring it to life, we chase after the fugitive dead" (21). However, Love argues, queer studies scholars have, at the same time, become inadvertently invested in a "linear, triumphalist view of history" that constitutes "a critical compulsion to fix—at least imaginatively—the problems of queer life," making it difficult for us to confront the harms of the past and, by extension, the present (3). For Waite, queer ethos, instead, "calls on us to, as Emily Dickinson might put it, 'dwell in possibility,' to see not only from our own limited positionalities, but to see from elsewhere, to cultivate the ability to imagine elsewhere or otherwise," to imagine alternative futures (72).

In "Archiving LGBTQ Lives," I took a resonant, but slightly different tack than Waite, however. In order to encourage students to "dwell in possibility"—in order to *queer* ethos—and cultivate students' ability to *listen* attentively to the experiences of others across time while maintaining critical attention to where they dwell in historically-constituted relationship to others, I designed "Archiving LGBTQ Lives" with an emphasis on dwelling in the possibilities of *the past* (rather than the future). This essay contributes to the discussion around ethos construction by arguing that by interrogating the role of the archives

in normalizing particular histories and ways of knowing, "Archiving LGBTQ Lives" worked to not only redefine, but to *queer* ethos by asking students to listen to *the past* in ways that centered their accountability to those who've been historically marginalized along intersecting lines of gender, sexuality, and race. My goal was for students to—as Eve Sedgwick puts it—imagine not only that the future might be different from the present, but to make it "possible to entertain such profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently than the way it did" (146). This marking of a possible past, Michael de Certeau reminds us, is not only to "make a place for the dead, but to redistribute the space of possibility," and in doing so, "use the narrativity that buries the dead as a way of establishing a place for the living" (100). Understanding Sedgwick and de Certeau's words as a theoretical approach to engaging with archives recognizes both a) that the historical record is fraught with gaps and omissions that potentially undermine claims to credibility and authority that are normatively associated with ethos and b) that we should ask how those omissions might impact our subjective and ethical relationship to our work as writers in the present.

As I make this argument, I begin by offering some context regarding my course design and the working definition of *archives* from which we started. I then reflect on how our discussions of the assigned readings helped us to collaboratively redefine and expand what we mean by *archives*, and I show how questioning the role of archives in the production of knowledge about LGBTQ+ people and communities contributed to students' critical reflection on the ethical stakes of doing archival research. Indeed, throughout this essay, I often make a distinction between "authoritative claims" (that I associate with normative ethos construction) and an ethical approach to working with archival material (that demonstrates an awareness of difference and of how difference has been shaped, in part, through the very work of knowledge production in which all writers are engaged). In response, students most saliently expressed what I call *queer ethos* in the scholarly personal reflections they wrote at the end of the semester. I conclude by offering the scholarly personal narrative as a specific tool for helping students to think critically about their ethical relationship to the work of writing and to knowledge production more generally.

I taught "Archiving LGBTQ Lives" in a WID-based writing program at a private research university where I primarily teach first year writing courses on topics in queer and feminist cultural studies. In these courses, my goal is for students to cultivate, not just writing and research skills, but *habits of mind* that, in addition to those identified by the *Framework for Success in Post-Secondary Writing*, include a sense of the ethical stakes involved in writing for and about marginalized communities; in other words, it is important that my students—many of whom occupy positions of privilege along the lines of race,

class, gender, sexuality, and ability—learn to operate from the very accountability logic that Ratcliffe argues for in *Rhetorical Listening* (1). Owing to a persistent culture of homophobia and a vast loss of life that includes the early years of the AIDS crisis, LGBTQ+ archives are particularly partial, emotional, incoherent, messy, incomplete, and community-based in their origins, making them a unique site for encouraging students to think critically about ethos, particularly given the normative presumption that ethos is constituted via articulations of credibility and authority that, despite the incompleteness of historical records, are often reinforced via archival research. While I did not explicitly frame our project as an opportunity to reflect on "ethos construction," students were consistently asked to pause and reflect on their subjective position in relationship to what they were learning in the archives (knowledge that, again, we know to be incomplete and shaped by histories of discrimination) instead of moving to make authoritative claims based on what they found. In other words, they were asked, again, to *dwell* in the uncertainties and possibilities.

While all archives, including those representing people of color and ethnic minorities, operate as sites of narrative conflict—making available different ways of telling the "truth" of the past—the particular losses and gaps that shape the development of queer archives make them significant as a starting point for understanding one's subjective relationship to the past. As Valerie Rohy writes, queer archives may be "most compelling not as institutions that bestow 'our' names and tell 'our' stories, but as opportunities to observe how the consolations of identity are inextricable from effacement" (358). In other words, queer archives are sites where we are all—regardless of our particular identifications—moved to question fixed notions of community and identity; to ask what materials constitute "legitimate" historical record; and to question how the legitimation of some knowledges has been used to discipline the experiences of others. Queer archives are, then, also ideal sites to confront what Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes refer to as the uncontainable excesses that make "queer" such a challenging subject for composition studies in that, like queerness itself, these archives have "the potential to stretch our sense of not only what *can* be composed, but *how* it can be composed," and to also look at what is *not* composed or *refuses* to be composed (183). These archives move us to question what we think we know about the past and to interrogate the forces that shape both archival records and the stories that we construct out of them; as such, they are also useful for helping students to think critically about knowledge production and the authority of the historical narratives they are composing in their own writing—in short, for queering ethos.

In "Archiving LGBTQ Lives," students worked with: relevant university archives; several community-based and digital archives, including the

community-based Durham LGBTQ+ History Project, Country Queers: A Multimedia Oral History Project, and the Queer Zine Archive Project; and a range of cultural texts that challenge what we mean by archives, including texts like Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home* and Cheryl Dunye's mockumentary, *The Watermelon Woman*. I'll discuss these archives and how students engaged with them in more detail in a moment, but suffice to say that they varied in the conditions of their production, the institutional relationships that help to produce and sustain them, the degrees of community involvement they invite, and the questions they raise about how we know what we think we know about LGBTQ+ lives past and present. This range of materials was also meant to undermine any understanding of archives as fixed, objective, and complete sources of historical knowledge, housed solely in libraries and universities. In the course description included in the syllabus, I wrote: "The goal of this course is not only to explore and contemplate the documents, manuscripts, and ephemera held in these archives, to glean what we can from them about LGBTQ+ life and history, but to also consider how institutional settings, collection practices, and the arrangement of materials—the *composition* of the collections—shape what we think we know about LGBTQ+ people and communities, past and present." In other words, I asked: What are archives? How do they gain their authority? What understanding of minoritized subjects—their histories and knowledges—are produced through different kinds of archives, and as writers and scholars who may or may not belong to these communities, what is our relationship to that body of knowledge and our responsibility to the communities we are writing for, with, and about?

These inquiries were, in turn, an invitation think critically about our work as writers and the stories we tell about marginalized communities, beginning with two assignments that asked students to reflect on the stories they might tell based on what they found in the archives and the relationship between those stories and more mainstream, taken-for-granted narratives of LGBTQ+ life. The first of these two assignment was a 3-4 page document analysis that asked students to choose 3-4 items drawn from collections housed at our university. These collections, which I chose in collaboration with the collection development librarian, Kelly Wooten, included records from Southerners on New Ground; Mandy Carter's Papers; Lady Slipper Records, a Durham, NC-based record label and non-profit organization devoted to promoting women's music; the North Carolina Lesbian and Gay Health Project; and Triangle Community Works. The assignment asked students to "make a focused, arguable claim about what we can learn about LGBTQ+ history, identity, or community based on the documents you've chosen. In other words, what story does this set of documents tell?" The purpose of this assignment, as laid out on the assignment sheet, was to not only practice analyzing primary source material,

but to begin developing an awareness that different sets of primary source materials tell different stories that we, as writers, have a hand in composing. The second assignment built on the first by asking students to incorporate secondary source research into their primary source analysis. They were asked to write 5-8 pages that drew their readers' attention to an aspect of LGBTQ+ history that has received less attention. Much of our discussion in the context of this second assignment was on the silences and gaps in the historical record that might have consequences for the arguments we make in our own writing. Listening to these silences and gaps, I argued, can help us question our assumptions about the history of LGBTQ+ life and, in turn, raise questions about our accountability to others. Students wrote, for example, about the lack of historical attention to the experiences of bisexual women, attempts to limit and exclude LGBTQ+ art from public exhibitions in the early years of the AIDS crisis, and the underexamined intersection between early transgender and racial justice movements as exemplified by the work of Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR).

I began the reading discussions that paralleled these first two assignments by defining archives as assemblages of primary source materials and objects of analysis, collected in a physical or digital exhibit, in a university library, or in a physical or digital repository accessible to the public at large. My hope was that through our discussions, students would complicate this definition of archives further, and indeed, as we read, they grappled with the more expansive definitions offered by a range of theorists. For instance, in Jack Halberstam's words, archives are not "simply a collection of data" but rather "suggest a discursive field and structure of thinking" (32). In the same vein, Diana Taylor argues in *The Archive and the Repertoire* that the archive functions as "an episteme, a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis," and we discussed how different writers' understanding of archives shapes different ways of knowing (2003: xvi). We considered formulations of archives offered by scholars that included Anne Cvetkovich, Martin Manalansan, Elspeth Brown, Sara Davidman, and Elsie Chenier, among others. We thought about archives as repositories of information, physical sites, indicators of progress or visibility, registers of fantasy or desire, memorials, articulations of trauma, homes, "safe spaces," documents, performances, artworks, memories, and messes. We also considered collections one would not typically think of as archives, such as the households of undocumented queer immigrants living in New York City or Cheryl Dunye and Zoe Leonard's imagined archive that documents the life of the so-called "Watermelon Woman," the subject of Dunye's 1996 mockumentary. We asked how these ways of knowing resonated with or were different from the ways of knowing we encountered in the university archives.

I began our discussions by emphasizing that although many archives of LGBTQ+ life have been lost due to the historical and systematic marginalization of LGBTQ+ people and the stigma associated with non-normative genders and sexualities, many of the institutional collections that do exist began as community-based projects that insisted on the "involvement of members of the community whose records are in the archives in collecting and accessing their history '*on their own terms*'" (Wakimoto et al. 295). Over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, however, many of those collections have become affiliated with colleges and universities or other granting agencies and institutions in order to ensure their survival. This change over time has, in some cases, meant less community involvement in the creation and maintenance of the collections and, often, more limited access for those who do not have academic affiliations. Of course, ensuring the survival of these collections is important and necessary and, as Siobhan Somerville points out, the incorporation of materials documenting LGBTQ+ life into university archives is evidence of the meaningful role that universities played in "the historical production of same-sex sexual cultures" (14). However, as Rod Ferguson reminds us, the management of knowledge about non-normative genders and sexualities also emerged in the late-20th and 21st centuries as a form of "spectacular [affirmation] in the form of rights, benefits, and visibility" that included the development and increased legitimacy of university departments and archives dedicated to minoritarian knowledges (170). Given this tension between universities' roles in the creation of same-sex cultures and the diminishing involvement with and limited access of community members to this institutionalized knowledge, it is worth considering their potentially normalizing and limiting effect on the stories we tell about marginalized communities and people, inadvertent smoothing effect the fissures and gaps that illuminate silences and contradictions in the historical record, and obscuration of less "respectable," more transgressive aspects of LGBTQ+ life.

Marc Stein's essay, "Canonizing Homophile Respectability: Archives, History and Memory," offered us EBSCO's LGBT Life research database as a specific example of the potential normalizing effects that archives can have. Stein argues that the institutionalization of knowledge about LGBTQ+ people in the form of databases and special collections have played a role in privileging the less illicit, less radical aspects of LGBTQ+ life that are part of the community's past and present (66). Stein's principal example of this is historians' tendency to focus on three main periodicals—*ONE Magazine*, *Mattachine Review*, and the *Ladder*—as primary sources for analyzing the homophile movement of the 1950s and '60s. This focus has led to a tendency to "downplay the sexually transgressive elements of homophile activism" that one might uncover in lesser-known, more pornographic texts such as *Drum*, which

Stein reminds us had a significantly larger circulation than the other three texts combined (53). Community-based archives' need for funding helped facilitate the incorporation of many community-based archives into more "legitimate," larger institutional archives and databases, making increased gate-keeping more likely, both in terms of available records and potential access. For example, in order to access the special collections at the New York Public Library, which include some of the most significant historical records related to the early AIDS crisis, one is required to provide an institutional affiliation, project title and description, and references. This fundamentally limits the possibility of community engagement with those records, despite the fact that those records would not exist without community-based archival efforts. We might also consider the potential consequences of, for example, the 2004 renaming of the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives and its subsequent absorption into the University of Southern California's library system in 2010 or the opening of the GLBT Historical Society's new museum space in the same year, which was generously funded by corporations organizations that include Levi's, the City and County of San Francisco, and Starbucks.

Of course, community-based collections continue to exist and physical archives continue to act as resources for the LGBTQ+ community in the form of community centers, despite their occasionally fraught relationship to funding structures, granting institutions, and gate-keeping practices. When I worked as a volunteer processing archivist at the ONE Archives in Los Angeles, I witnessed how that space, despite its then newly formalized relationship to the University of Southern California, operated as an event space and site of communal mourning for LGBTQ+ people lost to HIV/AIDS and other forms of violence. We might also consider the expansive collection of ephemera housed in the Lesbian Herstory Archive—archives that Anne Cvetkovich reminds us began on the shelves of Joan Nestle and Deborah Edel's Upper West Side New York City apartment—which now includes lesbian pulp novels, over 600 t-shirts, banners from marches, costumes, sporting equipment, and pornographic materials (240). Today, the Lesbian Herstory Archive is funded, in part, by corporate matching grants and royalties from EBSCO and Thompson Gale Publishing, and in its current location in Park Slope, it continues, in Anne Cvetkovich's words, to "combine private domestic space with public, institutional ones" and "provide an emotional rather than a narrowly intellectual experience" (241). I point to these tensions in the production of, maintenance of, and access to different archives, however, because they are the tensions I wanted students to consider as they composed their own arguments. Rather than moving quickly to making authoritative claims based on what they found in the archives, I wanted them to consider the normalizing structural forces

shaping their own knowing and what that might mean for the authority they asserted in their own work.

The linear progressive narrative of gay life and history that Heather Love points to is also potentially reinforced by the arrangement and maintenance of special collections and exhibits. Donald Romesburg has attributed this tendency to the "pressure toward grand progressive narratives," the "consignment of queerness to temporary displays," and the "censorship of non-normative or explicit lives, acts, and representations" (132). As an example, we considered an exhibit documenting the history of LGBTQ+ activism on our campus. While the exhibit importantly centered LGBTQ+ student activism in the history of student life (affirming Somerville's argument regarding the role of universities in the emergence of LGBTQ+ culture and activism in the 20th century), the exhibit nonetheless offered a timeline that tracked the university's expanding gender and sexual inclusivity without regard to the ongoing challenges of LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff. Such exhibits risk obscuring the current institutional challenges experienced by LGBTQ+ people and communities by engaging a politics of inclusivity that appropriates difference in service of diversity and inclusion initiatives, rather than meaningfully interrogating gender and sexual norms. When I showed the website associated with the exhibit to students, I framed it as a "composition" grounded, like their own compositions, in a curated selection of materials drawn from the university archives. Our discussion revolved around the questions Romesburg raised for us about whether the exhibit coordinated communities within the university and across the city in order to exhibit the widest array of material; how it articulated community belonging; and where it "made power plain," as Romesburg suggests that "queer" exhibits and archives should (138). During that discussion, one student asked about the audience for the exhibit (such an important question!) and noted that he felt, as a gay student, that the exhibit did not address him, but that it was more interested in promoting the university while failing to recognize the operations of power that shape the experiences of LGBTQ+ student, faculty, and staff at the university, both past and present.

Our rhetorical framing of archives can also influence our encounters with the knowledge found there and students' perceptions of its role in reinforcing their own authority. Despite the messiness and constructedness of all archival knowledge, queer archivist Alana Kumbier points out, for example, that the noun-phrase "*the* archive" as opposed to "archives" operates as a rhetorical gesture that has the potential to fix and stabilize the meaning of *the* archive (Kumbier 12, emphasis added). An understanding of an archive—as monolithic, singular, spatially bounded, and unproblematically reflective of historical truth—implied by this rhetorical gesture also reinforces the expectation that what one gains from the archive is certainty and insight into "others" that

affirms the authority of one's writing. Ferguson's essay implicitly offers historical context for this rhetorical positioning of the archives, defining "archives," as they've taken shape in the U.S. academy since the 1960s, as repositories of national culture that, "affirm difference" while nonetheless "keep[ing] it in hand," helping to manage it (166). And indeed, the insight that students might believe they have garnered helps maintain a belief in identities as stable and manageable categories of difference, rather than offering them an opportunity for critical reflection that might destabilize their understanding of concepts like identity and community, and allow them to consider an ethical orientation to their work that raises questions about one's own subjectivity and historical relationship to others. And the work we did to question the definition, boundaries, and make-up of archives themselves led us to also question assertions of scholarly authority offered by others and in turn, ourselves. I designed "Archiving LGBTQ Lives" with the goal of highlighting and creating more opportunities for this kind of reflection, emphasizing the potential for queer archives to make space for emotional memory that might be specific or personal; be fragmented and resist coherent historical narratives; be rife with possibility; and be informed and shaped by, not only documentation of the past, but—to echo the concerns of Waite's work—a desire for another future.

Indeed, the other tension that we grappled with in our discussions was the distinction between LGBTQ+ archives—materials that document the lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer-identified people—and what some scholars refer to as queer archives. Queer archives, for me and many queer studies scholars, denote archival repositories and projects whose methods of collection and curation self-consciously attempt to challenge institutional conventions surrounding the collection and organization of archival materials with the intention of encouraging us to think critically about mainstream or taken-for-granted histories and knowledge about LGBTQ+ life. Just as the theoretical term queer moves us to examine, in Eve Sedgwick's terms, "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically," so might we refer to those repositories of information that in their very form draw our attention to incoherencies, excesses, and gaps as queer (8). Being attentive to these gaps—or in other words, practicing queer ethos—requires that we be attentive to the incompleteness of our own knowledge and moments in the historical record that might result in uncertainty.

As examples of what we might call queer archives, I introduced students to several digital and community-based projects led by activists, who are not necessarily trained archivists; these included the Queer Zine Archive Project, the Transgender Oral History Project, the Country Queers Multimedia Oral

History Project, the Mobile Homecoming Project, and the Durham LGBTQ+ Oral History Project. As Kumbier notes, these kinds of collections demonstrate that "some queer communities are already actively building archives, self-documenting, inviting community members to help develop collections, teaching others how to archive, and developing culturally-specific practices, principles, and documentation strategies. They are not waiting for archivists to come rescue their collections" (12). I included these community-based projects in the syllabus for "Archiving LGBTQ Lives," not only because they fill gaps in knowledge, but because they highlight archives and the histories that we construct out of them as contested bodies of knowledge. The possibility of narrative conflict, disagreement, and inconsistency are part of the collections themselves.

For example, *Country Queers*, which recently emerged as a podcast, is an "ongoing multimedia oral history project documenting the diverse experiences of rural and small town LGBTQIA+ folks in the U.S.A." that not only troubles dominant urban-centered narratives of LGBTQ+ experience, but also counters assumptions about what life is like for LGBTQ+ people in rural areas (Country Queers). In one interview, Twig Delujé, who identifies as a queer rural trans masculine guy from Hayes, Kansas, living in Pecos, New Mexico, reflects on the different priorities of rural and non-rural queer people:

> I feel like people in cities—I'm going to say, in non-rural areas, for a large part get very, very wrapped up in a lot of politics and a lot of concern around politics not just like governmental, but gender politics… when you're in a rural existence, sometimes you're more concerned about your garden [laughs] or your next meal, or the safety of your pets or your livestock, or just your own safety. (Delujé)

Here, Twig observes an often-unrecognized tension between the material concerns of rural queer people and the political ideals of urban, mainstream queer communities. Twig's narrative and its inclusion in an oral history archive that privileges the voices of rural LGBTQ+ people, operates as a counter-archive that asks us to recognize and sit with this tension, rather than try to resolve it into a coherent narrative of community. By making space for these kinds of tensions, activist archival projects like *Country Queers* offer an opportunity to trouble (or "queer") narratives of identity and community that students might be unconsciously eager to fix into place in their own writing as a way of bolstering their authority as writers. These tensions in the archives are also crucial to engaging students around the question of how we know we know what we know and to encouraging self-consciousness around

their own written contributions to the historical and political production of identity knowledges.

We also looked at texts such as Cheryl Dunye's *Watermelon Woman* and discussed cultural archives that exist beyond the library; what the archives cannot tell us; and how different archives might mark the histories they tell as contested. In her mockumentary, *The Watermelon Woman* (1996), Cheryl Dunye investigates the biography of Fae Richards, a black actress from the 1930s, who appears in film credits simply as "The Watermelon Woman." Although Fae Richards is Dunye's fiction (created in collaboration with the artist Zoe Leonard, who produced the fictional photographic archive for Dunye's film), the character symbolizes an actual early 20th century phenomenon in which women of color were disproportionately cast in supporting roles, usually as domestic servants, and then went unnamed in the film credits. As Dunye's invention of *Plantation Memories* (starring Faye Richards) implies, these films were part of what's sometimes referred to as the "*Gone with the Wind* phenomenon," a moment in the 1930s in which 19th century historical melodramas—which include the first adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1933); *Camille*, starring Greta Garbo (1936); and *Jezebel,* starring Bette Davis (1938)—exploded in popularity (Donaldson 269). Dunye's mockumentary self-consciously works within this system of historical citation, working backward from her present as a black lesbian filmmaker in 1997, studying a fictional film made in the 1930s that tells a fictional narrative about the 19th century, illustrating for students how cultural texts cumulatively participate in shaping our understanding of the past through both the stories they tell and the stories they do not. *Watermelon Woman* is an example of how cultural texts function as archives and of how an archive might operate as a site of both historical memory and a site of imagined possibility when that archive is incomplete. As Dunye notes in the closing credits, "Sometimes you have to create your own history. *The Watermelon Woman* is fiction."

In the discussion that followed, we spent time reflecting on the gaps and inconsistencies in the archives about which we were writing, particularly in the context of Anne Cvetkovich's writing about the work of filmmaker Jean Carlomusto, who argues that "truth is a hunch" and that to historicize is to tell the truth that is a hunch (255). We discussed using reliable, available evidence to argue for that story, rather than allowing ourselves to be seduced by claims to a singular or coherent truth, particularly when the truth has been obscured by histories of violence against a marginalized community. And indeed, in "Archiving LGBTQ Lives," I was pleased that, over the course of the semester, students were increasingly drawn to and invested in claims like Martin Manalansan's that "mess, clutter, and muddled entanglements are the 'stuff' of queerness, historical memory, aberrant desires, and the archive" and

began to listen for the messiness, contradiction, and uncertainty rather than the neatness implied by the boxes of numbered file folders they encountered at the library (94). They looked for the queerness inherent in the archives themselves. As a consequence, students sought out fewer easy answers that affirmed the authority of their own assumptions and were more inclined to interrogate the limits of their own knowledge and the limits of the seemingly coherent, organized, and thorough records they encountered in their research.

Because I was interested in cultivating students' awareness of their ethical relationship to their audiences, encouraging self-questioning in relationship to the knowledge they were helping to produce (and reproduce) was especially important. In "Are the Lips a Grave?" Lynn Huffner, argues for a queer feminist ethics in which ethics is not reducible to authoritative assertions of what does or does not constitute a moral good—the type of assertion we might affirm with normative assertations of ethos—but operates as relational concept in which the "dual burden" is to "first, [acknowledge] harms, and second, [to actively elaborate] alternatives to those harms" (521). Rather than postulating an "ethical agent" whose moral judgments arise from knowing certainty, Huffner's queer feminist ethics is a practice of self-questioning, a historically-contextualized interrogation of one's own subject position and its relationship to the production and erasure of others, that makes space for critical and caring attention to alterity (44). It means, among other things, being honest about and questioning the substance of our own intellectual attachments.

And again, though I didn't frame this for students as a practice of ethos construction per se, it is just that. I also made an effort to model it in the classroom, in large part because I find that too often students' belief in my authority as the instructor translates into a belief in the authority of the archives and the texts we work with (*the* archive that is my syllabus) as evidence of queer experience. Cultivating an awareness of our own affective and political attachments allows us to also be transparent about how they inform the design of our courses and to make our own thought processes available to students for interrogation. In other words, as instructors, we also need to be accountable to others, including our students, by highlighting our subjective relationships to the knowledge being produced in our courses. For example, in "Archiving LGBTQ Lives," I spoke personally and critically about what particular historical materials mean to me as a white, formerly working-class, queer-identified person. The zine collection at the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture is, for instance, a collection that I feel personally attached to given my experience of growing up in the '90s, writing poetry for zines, and later creating a queer zine with my best friend as I was negotiating questions about my own sexuality. As part of this anecdote, I acknowledge to my students that the zine as a material artifact of queer youth experience is

one that, while personally meaningful to me, is also partly constructed by the expansive archival zine collections that exist most notably at Duke University and Barnard College and the celebratory histories that have been written around them. That history is one that privileges a specifically white queer female youth experience connected to punk culture and the phenomenon of Riot Grrl. But what might it mean—how might it change our understanding of those collections, I ask out loud—to read them in relationship to forms of DIY literature that have sought, for example, to critique systems of power that include policing and prison systems? It might connect those archives, I explain, to a history of social justice movements that more fully include the work and voices of people of color and perhaps decenter white queer youth experience in the history of the genre.

While I understand why some instructors prefer to avoid making personal disclosures or sharing anecdotes in the classroom, I find them crucial to demonstrating the unavoidably affective dimensions of knowledge production. Personal disclosures illustrate how our investments in particular historical materials and narratives can produce pleasure and also lead to critical oversights—to a story that, while not untrue, has ethical implications for our work. Demonstrating for students what it looks like to interrogate our own investments is also central to helping them also come to an understanding of identity and community that is less stable and coherent than historical narratives of LGBTQ+ life often suggest.

The third and final assignment for the course was then an opportunity for my students to make a similar move—not to assert what they knew, but to interrogate their own investments in the material they had worked with during the semester. After becoming familiar with several physical, digital, and community-based archival collections, this final project gave them the option of helping to collect and curate materials for the Durham LGBTQ+ History Project or of curating an archive of their own using a digital content curation tool such as Wordpress or Omeka. This assignment built on the previous two by giving students the opportunity to compose in a different medium, to be a part of the creation and curation of an archive, and to think about how what they had learned from queer theories of the archives might translate to the practice of documenting LGBTQ+ lives. During this assignment, we had visits from Wooten, the collection development librarian for Duke's Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, who worked with us all semester; Luke Hirst, the founder and curator of the community-based Durham LGBTQ+ History Project; and Rae Garringer, the founder of the Country Queers Multimedia Oral History Project. Each talked about the challenges and pleasures of collecting and documenting LGBTQ+ experiences in the varying institutional and community contexts in which they work. This

was not only a moment for students to learn about the work that archivists do and the different forms it can take, but also a moment for students to further reflect on their own institutional and subjective relationship to the material they were encountering, working with, and helping to organize and make public.

The students then composed a scholarly personal narrative that reflected on precisely those questions—their subjective, intellectual, and ethical relationship to the narratives that emerged from the archives we engaged with, and what they'd gained from their experience of the course. Scholarly personal narrative is self-reflection informed by scholarly research that includes the "unabashed, up-front admission" that your experience has meaning and significance (Nash 24). A meaningful scholarly personal narrative recognizes the degree to which we affect and are affected by others and that social relationships play a role in meaning making (Nash 26). Authors of scholarly personal narrative make their presence known in their writing in a way that is often discouraged by academic discourse more generally, but that I argue is useful for encouraging critical self-reflection among students and essential to the construction of queer ethos. In their essay, "Queer: An Impossible Subject for Composition," Alexander and Rhodes write that "in asking students to create well-articulated, organized, and coherent texts, we ask them to compose themselves—to order their ideas, their presentation, their texts," and, I would add, we encourage them to do this, in part, as a practice of ethos construction—a performance knowing certainty (194). Alexander and Rhodes call, instead, for "a composition that does not always call on us to be composed," that makes room for the "de-compositions of queerness," for the excesses and gaps that produce uncertainty and fewer neat, knowing narratives of self and other (201). The scholarly personal narrative offers the possibility for students to articulate this lack of composure.

By asking my students to end my class with a scholarly personal narrative, then, I asked them to reflect self-consciously and critically on their subjective relationship to the work of knowledge production in relationship to others. The prompt asked: "What significant institutional forces or power dynamics shape the production of LGBTQ+ archives and how do you understand your role as a contributor to these archives?" One student wrote of their personal experience of marginalization within a mainstream LGBTQ+ movement that in recent years had prioritized same-sex marriage as a political goal and how their feelings of marginalization shaped their approach to the course and the archive they built:

> My goal was to create a history more recognizable to me, one that showed queers not marching with corporate sponsors, and labor activists that weren't just straight men. When digging through archives, I sifted through decades of material on the premise that queer lib-

> eration is ideologically in line with leftist movements and that the destruction of capitalism is the only way that queer folks, like myself, who are victimized by the cycle of poverty perpetuated in our present economic system, can thrive.

This self-consciousness about the degree to which their archival project was engaged in telling a particular story—one that rested on an arguable premise that they acknowledged their own investment in—also allowed the student to see the limits of the story they told. They recognized, for example, the counter-productivity of understanding socialist and communist circles as necessarily receptive to identity politics, in general, and to consideration of LGBTQ+ issues, in particular. They also acknowledged that their own position as a student at an elite university—with access to both archives and the time to reflect on Marxist theory—as a position of privilege that potentially disconnects them from the material realities and day-to-day lives of, for example, poor transgender people of color. Instead of working to compose a coherent, knowable history that unconsciously reflected their investments, they constructed and then deconstructed their own story as they explored the ethical implications of one narrative versus another.

Other students were even more cognizant of the distance between their realities and the realities of the people and communities whose lives were reflected in the archives, and their scholarly personal narratives became an opportunity to acknowledge that distance and also reconsider their approach to the study of LGBTQ+ identities and communities and their own interpersonal relationships. In a one-on-one meeting with me, one student, unprompted, described her engagement with the archives as a practice in listening. In her essay, she wrote: "In my attempts to advocate for the queer community, I began speaking for them in a misguided attempt to defend those I saw hurting…I forced an injured community to step back and allow me to defend them, because I believed that I could do a better job of it than they could." She arrived at this realization, in part, through her critique of our university's LGBTQ+ history exhibit as a similar, but more institutionally located, example of the degree to which LGBTQ+ people, rather than being heard, have had narratives of progress and liberation imposed up on them. The fact that she understood scholarly work as an opportunity to listen destabilized her own self-understanding, and she used that as an opportunity, in turn, to rethink the ethos of telling others' stories for them. This was a complex and moving outcome of her work, and it is what led me to ultimately reframe my students' encounters with archives as an opportunity for rhetorical listening that has consequences for how students communicate both in their writing and in their day-to-day interactions with others.

Indeed, the scholarly personal narrative has become a tool that I now regularly use in my classes to help students develop a scholarly practice informed by self-awareness, empathy, and the ethical stakes of writing for and about marginalized communities. It is a tool that I have found particularly effective when deployed in the context of course inquiries guided by a desire to question institutional and scholarly authority; to think critically about how writing, research, and documentation can become complicit in the production of what we think we know about marginalized people and their experiences; and to examine gender and sexuality as unstable identity categories that, as Rhodes and Alexander argue, might lead to a queer lack of composure (181). In our critical engagement with how other people's stories had been told and shaped by institutional factors beyond their control, I believe students developed habits of mind in relationship to the archive and the experiential records of others' lives that privileged listening both for what is said and what is not; learned to acknowlede where their assumptions obscure the possibility of hearing and telling another story; and a practiced willingness to acknowledge both what they do not know and what exceeds knowability, rather than to make appeals to authority that fail to constitute ethical scholarly inquiry.

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