Jack Tieszen
6/12/19
LIS 212: Values and Communities Final Paper

A Discussion of Fusion: Institutional and Community Archive Mergers

The ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives is the oldest existing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender organization in the United States and the largest repository of this community's materials in the world. Founded in 1952, ONE's original purpose was publishing a self-titled LGBT+ periodical in California. From those beginnings, ONE's history in downtown Los Angeles has been filled with expansions, moves, mergers, and other things that have helped it to become the significant archive it is today. In October 2010 the ONE archives "became part of the University of Southern California Libraries system when it essentially donated itself to the university to secure its future and its ability to provide access to the archives for its community members" (Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge 2013, 302). Judging from the press surrounding the recent move, the merger of this community archive into a larger institution seemed like it was beneficial for both parties. Since this merger, the archive has only grown which indicates a positive trajectory for the historical repository. However, an interesting thing to note from the literature surrounding this move was USC was not the first choice for an institutional merger. There was another university interested in acquiring the material that ONE had. The problem with this was that they wanted full possession of it rather than allowing ONE to maintain ownership of their artifacts (Boxall 1995). This addition to the story of the move from a community archive to an institutional one presents a debate extending beyond ONE about the differences between these two types of repositories and what happens when a merger occurs. The gains and losses of the community archive are at the forefront of this discourse, especially when the archive houses material and history from a socially marginalized group. While there are

many ways in which a community archive can merge into an institutional one, ONE archive's own merger with USC provides a real-world example to discuss and critique Angela DiVeglia's concept of "mutually productive partnership," an idea involving the collective engagement of all parties in collaboration to help each other (DiVeglia 2012, 77). Mutual productivity is certainly a goal, but beyond discussions of ownership and costs that come with mergers, one must dissect "mutual" further in order to understand the archival gains and losses represented earlier. With any merger between a community archive and an institutional one, there are areas that the merging parties must take into account, benefits and setbacks that require discussion as the two types of archives are not identical nor do they have the same level of power and influence. Areas such as the representation of materials through cataloging, access to the community, increasing user base to broaden knowledge, and reducing user alienation are all things that one must consider before a merger is to occur.

Before addressing the discourse with mergers it is important to outline ONE as a community archive, the history behind it, and the changes that have occurred after the USC connection. This is important to display as it presents a real-world example of what happens when two different institutions come together in this particular manner. As expressed before, ONE was created to disseminate information about queer life through a magazine in Southern California. Eventually, ONE began to expand from the magazine publisher business and founded the archive and library with education and community outreach as the main goals in mind. According to the article *Archivist as Activist: Lessons from Three Queer Community Archives in California,* ONE's creation was specifically linked to "the lack of queer materials held in public libraries and academic archives" (Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge 2013, 301). From there the archive and library grew through "donations and through mergers with other community archives

such as the International Gay and Lesbian Archives in 1995" (Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge 2013, 301). These contributions by the greater queer community in Los Angeles as well as the community archive mergers were further bolstered through the archive obtaining "multiple grants" which supported the continuing push towards collection accessibility (Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge 2013, 301). Around the end of 1995 ONE "changed its focus from being primarily educational to a focus on its library and archives" which were built previously (Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge 2013, 301). This shift allowed ONE's library to begin consistently appointing trained librarians to its staff, positions which have helped the space expand enough to warrant "the creation of the division of libraries" and establish it as one that is professionally run and cataloged (Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge 2013, 300). The archives are similar to the library in this respect, however, professional archivist positions are a much more recent addition to the ONE workforce (Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge 2013, 301). The grants discussed earlier were a huge help for the archives in particular as they "allowed ONE Archive's to hire professional archivists who processed numerous collections. Making its finding aids available via the Online Archive of California (OAC)" (Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge 2013, 301). This has made ONE archive's much more visible and accessible to the public than it has been in the past.

This is not to say that ONE didn't suffer from the common problems associated with community archives. For instance, financial problems were the explicit cause behind the merger with the IGLA. Not only does it bring up the fact that the merger between ONE and USC wasn't an entirely new venture for the community archive but it also provides context for the reason why the merger even occurred. According to *Archivist as Activist*, the reason for this union was "to secure its future and its ability to provide access to the archives for its community members,"

the same reason provided for the previous mergers (Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge 2013, 301). But how is this different from the USC archives? What separated the community approach from the institutional one beyond financial and logistical if the cataloging and archiving practices were coming from a similar professional source? To answer that one must look broadly at the definitions and differences related to community and institutional archives, as subtle changes that might not be noticed make huge differences in the grand scheme of archives and how they relate to the communities they serve.

From the basic outline of ideas presented one can surmise the definitions of community and institutional archives quite easily. These definitions are related to who owns and operates the archive. Institutional archives like Universities operate within the parameters of whatever institution runs the space. This means that the decisions made within the archive are led by those employed within that space. On the other side of this, community-based archives are more open to the communities that they serve, allowing higher levels of access to those who wish to use the archive for research. According to Michelle Caswell in the article *SAADA and the Community-Based Archives Model: What Is a Community-Based Archives Anyway?* community archives "serve as an alternative venue for communities to make collective decisions about what is of enduring value to them, to shape collective memory of their own pasts, and to control the means through which stories about their past are constructed" (Caswell 2012). This doesn't necessarily mean that institutional archives are fully closed off to the public as many of them work towards open access to users. Rather, the structures of community archives function differently and often work on building new models for how they treat and store records. Caswell discusses this difference in her article by writing on how an institutional archive might treat a record when compared to a community-based one using a 1907 Letter from A.W. Mangum, Jr. written to his

mother. Caswell writes that an institutional archive might be more inclined to represent the letter through areas of expertise and research interest beyond the individual letter. In a different environment such as a community archive like SAADA, the archivists would be inclined to represent the content of the letter through the lens of the person who wrote them, in this case, a South Asian individual writing on the Bellingham Riots (Caswell 2012). This difference is rather influential in how an outsider of the archive is to look at the materials, and furthermore how the community itself is represented to these users. If a marginalized community lacks this representation, or the representation is incorrect/biased, as the LGBT+ community has been in the past, then that reflects broader cultural misunderstandings (i.e. cisgendered heterosexual assumptions on queer identity) that can lead to further alienation or violence levied against the marginalized group.

The distinction between community and institutional presented above might make it seem as if they are two fundamentally opposing archival practices with no links which is an incorrect assumption as the two are quite closely related. A community archive will often maintain the same standards or practices of an institutional one, going so far as to employ those who are institutionally trained to handle the work of organizing and cataloging the archive. The ONE archive when it hired its first librarians made sure to hire ones that were fully educated and trained to create a systematic inventory of the libraries holdings so that it functioned correctly (Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge 2013, 300). These librarians, once hired, taught the community by holding “library workshops” to make sure that people within the community had access to the working methods that the library used (Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge 2013, 300). However, this doesn't mean that these standards aren't critiqued within the community archive. As Lindsay Kistler Mattock writes in her article *Where is the Archivist in Community Archiving?* “while

professional archival standards may inform the practices in these organizations, communities often establish their own standards based on their philosophies and values" (Mattock 2019). This trajectory of standards and how the community archive chooses to manipulate or not manipulate these practices presents the community archive not as an opposing separate entity, but rather as an extension of the other existing archive forms. The community archive takes information on how to function from the institutional and shifts it to suit the needs of the community. Whether the institutional can implement these changes from the community archive into their own archive through an acquisition or merger is where the ideas of mutual productivity start to show themselves. It is also the main contention regarding community archives merging with larger institutions as relinquishing control to the materials and how they are displayed can lead to potential distrust between the different archive models if the institutional archive neglects the work that had been done previously (Mattock 2019). In order for an institutional archive to merge correctly with a community based one, the various cons that allow for this distrust must be addressed and dealt with.

The first major issues to represent when discussing the merger between an institutional archive and one closely linked with a historically marginalized community is the loss of control for the community towards its artifacts and history. Mergers between the two spaces often involve a hierarchical dynamic in which the prominent institution has power (space, finances, etc.) over a struggling community archive. Andrew Flinn writes on this discrepancy of power under the framework of sustainability versus autonomy within his article *Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy and the Mainstream*. He writes that if the achieving of sustainability is through the accessing of public funds or through collaborations with institutions, then it presents the trade-off of a loss of independence and

autonomy (Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd 2009, 80). Mattock repeats this sentiment when she states that "the institutionalization of the archive also means that the community group has relinquished some control over these materials" (Mattock 2019). Community archives are aware of this power dynamic between them and institutions and try to make it "very clear that they wish to retain their autonomy and independence in any relationship and participate in partnerships and project work very much on their own terms" (Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd 2009, 80). This is why ONE refused to merge with the unnamed university because that institution wanted full ownership of the material which would have resulted in a loss of autonomy. Furthermore, it could have led to a significant amount of other issues including the decontextualization of their material and the input of dominant/incorrect forms of representation of the LGBT+ community. These aspects are important to discuss as they can occur after a merger even if full ownership of the material is left to the community archivists.

The contents of archives are powerful in how they shape the history and understanding of a particular group. They are constructed as monuments to a shared history and in the context of a community archive, they are created mainly because of a lack of representation within popular institutions. "Understanding that archives can be construed as an instrument of power, one begins to understand the complex and often uneasy relationship between archive and marginalized or oppressed communities" (DiVeglia 2012, 72). While the uneasiness within the context of this quote from DiVeglia is related to the power dynamics between archives, it also presents the understanding that an institution can either intentionally or unintentionally misrepresent the acquired merger materials. This issue was referenced earlier with the discussion on the treatment of records and how the frameworks can differ between community and institutional archives. However, that paper referenced only frameworks of representation rather

than how these frameworks can affect the overall understanding of knowledge; as well as how misrepresenting materials can unintentionally continue dominant methods of thinking. This problem is found both systemically and individually.

On a broader systemic level, things like biased classification systems are easily noticed when one looks for them. Emily Drabinski writes about this in her article *Queering the Catalog* in which she argues that "the placement of materials in the classification can reflect prejudice about certain identities" (Drabinski 2013, 98). Classification placement has the potential to not only misrepresent (or present in archaic outdated language) entire communities but also alienate those from these communities who wish to use the archive. Caswell writes about this misrepresentation and the harm it causes in her article *'To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise': community archives and the importance of representation*. She states that absences or misrepresentation of community materials in mainstream institutions have "profoundly negative affective consequences" to those who are from a marginalized community who wish to use the archives (Caswell et al. 2017, 6). This systemic manipulation of the record directly impacts individuals resulting "in anger at, alienation from and disinterest in these cultural institutions," which is not the intention of what an archive is attempting to achieve with its collections (Caswell et al. 2017, 14). It must also be made known that this miss-categorization isn't always reflective of outside forces as knowledge and representation, especially in queer communities, changes over time according to Drabinski. "Central to queer claims about structures of identity is this idea that such structures are always already in motion, contingent, and subject to change" (Drabinski 2013, 103). An example of this quote would be that the classification of studies referring to homosexual behavior in the past was under the moniker of homophile studies before being changed (Boxall 1995). Homophile, as it is currently viewed, is an outdated term that isn't

often used in the context of queer studies and therefore reflects this inner community dialogue and its ability to shift. For those who are within the community and wish to study this material, coming across archaic classifications or highly debated terms such as certain self-identified slurs may cause similar alienation to the misrepresentation discussed previously. What this means is that constant critique of representation must occur within the archive to avoid these pitfalls and that this critique involves those within both the institution and community.

On an individual level, someone working in an institutional setting who is not a part of the community has limited experience and can be prone to using these classifications under the assumption of neutrality without understanding the problematic issues involved. These are "ways of seeing, organizing and knowing the world that have been externally imposed by structures of power" (Gilliland and Caswell 2016, 60). As Michael Brown writes "any perspective that is unreflectively locked inside its own experience is limited, and this is particularly so when that perspective reflects the dominant culture" (Brown 2003, 35). To avoid these issues an institutional archive and those who work within it must be made aware of the dominant structures of power and how their institution can unintentionally uphold these structures. They must critique the supposed neutrality of the archive and work with the community to represent these materials how they wish to be represented. If the merger deals with these particular issues, then the community archive stands to gain quite a lot from the equal partnership. The institution also has much to gain both for materials along with knowledge.

The benefits of community/institutional mergers are based heavily in what both areas have to gain through this connection. Those discussed earlier such as the benefit of a more permanent space or of more consistent funding allow for the collections of artifacts to have a sense of archival permanence. However, much like with the cons represented above, there are

many pros to the merger that are not as obvious and require further discussion. An example of a merger having benefits to the community would be in how a merger like this represents the cultural shift towards broader representation. An LA Times article about the USC and ONE collaboration explains that this connection was important to the larger community because it was a testament to the "increasing acceptance of gay studies" within the context of a nationally known institution (Boxall 1995). This shows a broad cultural shift with the merger, one that has significant value for the sake of pushing towards the correct representation of archived materials (at least within the context of the merger between USC and ONE). However, beyond this culturally significant shift, there are other elements to discuss such as the research connections of the institution as well as the effect on students and users of the archives.

The impact of a merger between two different institutions is that the merger furthers connections made between both groups, those who work in/use the institution and those who work in/use the archives. These connections help to expand research capabilities in under-documented areas of interest. The community archive is merging with a broader set of users behind it, those who donate their artifacts and information for the sake of self-preservation. The institution is merging with a known set of researchers and those with connections outside of the community that could benefit from knowledge creation. María Cotera's article *Nuestra Autohistoria: Toward a Chicana Digital Praxis* discusses this type of connection through the context of the Chicana por mi Raza collective project, an archival project designed to preserve the memory of a specific community (Cotera 2018, 490). She writes that the scholars who worked on the project "used their connections to the institution" such as the systems, infrastructures, grants, and students, "to create a network held of discourse encompassing communities inside and outside the institution" (Cotera 2018, 489–90). From the community

side, knowledge and artifacts are collected and preserved safely. These are two different backgrounds, but because of that difference, the group related to the archive becomes significantly larger and this can benefit all for knowledge creation.

With regards to students, the merger of a community archive related to their own community into their institution might alleviate the alienation discussed by Caswell. She writes that there is a "positive effect" for individuals when they find "complex and autonomous forms of representation" within their institutional archive (Caswell et al. 2017, 6). Students, both undergraduate and graduate, who see themselves and/or their extended communities represented correctly are more likely to feel connected to the institution which, in response, makes alienation less likely. The institution can push this by allowing open access to these community-based collections and by creating programs that reach out to students. ONE specifically does this through programming, exhibitions, and education initiatives open to the public.

While the representation of the ONE archive within this text has been a majority positive it isn't without criticism regarding the mergers between community and institutional archives. While one can notice instances of good outreach and archival practices from this merger, there are lacking aspects as well that the previous paragraphs on cons can help to fix. USC still acts administratively towards the archive which keeps the power dynamic between the two alive rather than having both institutions work in a more mutual manner. Furthermore, USC houses the items in a different location than the original area which removes a level of community accessibility. The area where these artifacts are housed inherently creates its own context for the materials within, especially if the context is institutional. USC isn't an inherently queer space in the same way that ONE was and that warrants external critique. This critique is based on the mutual productivity discourse in that it needs to involve a dialogue between the institution and

the community in order to avoid incorrect recontextualization. In addition to all of this, it is key to understand that a merger will not fix issues already within the community archive beyond space and funding. For instance, if there are gaps in historical material a merger will not immediately fill them in. It will grow its base of users which could help to find these materials, but it could also distance people as well if not treated carefully (i.e. taking to long to catalog and organize materials might turn people off of giving them to a particular archive). Despite this, the relationship between the two institutions isn't supremely contentious and the issue of catalog misrepresentation and exploitative ownership are seemingly lessened, though the debate of how to define the community is still one where tension remains but that is a broader issue involving the larger LGBT+ community.

Considering the discussion there is no clear-cut solution when merging a community space with an institutional one. The fears of losing accessibility, decontextualization, and user/community alienation are valid for the community archive and can occur within the institution unintentionally even if precautions are taken to avoid them. The "archivist wield power in representing historical actors, whether they embrace this power or not," and in an institutional setting, this power can create problems with the community (Caswell et al. 2017, 8). On the other hand, the possibility of opening up the archive for broader accessibility and an increased user base for broader knowledge creation would be possible with an institution through their funding and space occupancy. It is important for the institution to understand the power that it holds within a merger and it must constantly critique itself to avoid the pitfalls discussed. On the community archive side of things, those who work with the space must be in contact with the institution so that the transition is smooth and continued archiving work isn't being decontextualized. Both the institution and community must work together to assure mutual

productivity within the archive as a merger occurs and if they do this work correctly the archive will continue to grow in a beneficial manner.

Citations:

Boxall, Bettina. 1995. “Major Gay Archives Find Home at USC.” *LA Times*, 1995.

Brown, Michael. 2003. “Of Fish and Water: Perspectives on Racism and Privilege,” 32.

Caswell, Michelle. 2012. “SAADA and the Community-Based Archives Model: What Is a Community-Based Archives Anyway?” Text. South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA). April 18, 2012.

Caswell, Michelle, Alda Allina Migoni, Noah Geraci, and Marika Cifor. 2017. “‘To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise’: Community Archives and the Importance of Representation.” *Archives and Records* 38 (1): 5–26.

Cotera, María. 2018. “Nuestra Autohistoria: Toward a Chicana Digital Praxis.” *American Quarterly* 70 (3): 483–504.

DiVeglia, Angela. 2012. “Accessibility, Accountability, and Activism: Models for LGBT Archives.” Litwin Books, LLC.

Drabinski, Emily. 2013. “Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction.” *The Library Quarterly* 83 (2): 94–111.

Flinn, Andrew, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd. 2009. “Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy and the Mainstream.” *Archival Science* 9 (1–2): 71–86.

Gilliland, Anne J., and Michelle Caswell. 2016. “Records and Their Imaginaries: Imagining the Impossible, Making Possible the Imagined.” *Archival Science* 16 (1): 53–75.

Mattock. 2019. “Where Is the Archivist in Community Archiving?” Americans for the Arts. May 15, 2019. https://www.americansforthearts.org/blog-feed/where-is-the-archivist-in-community-archiving.

Wakimoto, Diana K., Christine Bruce, and Helen Partridge. 2013. “Archivist as Activist: Lessons from Three Queer Community Archives in California.” *Archival Science* 13 (4):