Introduction

In the early 1980s, when computer networks felt new and their utility for feminist organizing was still unclear, the "Women's Information Exchange" began to advertise in lesbian-feminist newsletters. These women had witnessed the manipulation of computer databases by "enemies" to feminist causes such as the "anti-abortion Moral Majority" and thought it was time to form computerized information infrastructures of their own: "We recognize that many women are fearful about having their names on a computer. It is important to remember that most of us are already on any number of computerized mailing lists, none of which are voluntary nor oriented towards feminists. . . . Feminists, too, must come out of isolation and become part of a national communications network, made possible by computer technology."[1] Their lengthy announcements promoted a new, nonprofit "computerized databank" service: the National Women's Mailing List. Based in San Francisco, the project used database software to gather information about women's backgrounds and interests, and then connect them with corresponding publications and activist organizations they might not know about: "Formed by grassroots feminists, the Women's Information Exchange is dedicated to putting information technology to use in facilitating outreach, networking, and resource sharing among women. The goal of the organization is to use computer technology to support the efforts of women's projects throughout the country."[2]

To do this, the Women's Information Exchange gathered radical feminist resources from publications and community groups and added them to a computer database organized by "area of interest." Subscribers to the service mailed in surveys in which they chose fields for "the areas of interest that affect your working self, your political self, and your social self." This service allowed lesbians, often marginalized within mainstream feminist

movements, to access information specific to their interests. Subscribers who worried about privacy could "select the level of access" others would have to their names and other personal information: "You can participate in larger information networks by choosing the highest level of access, or you can restrict your participation, for example, to women-only organizations." The service added information about each subscriber to the database, generating a rudimentary user profile, and subscribers received specialized mailings tailored to the data points they provided.

In many ways, the Women's Information Exchange was a typical 1980s computerized mailing list. It used a database to gather and deploy information about user demographics in ways that define online platforms decades later. This particular database matters because of the specific promises it made for lesbian feminism, including the autonomy and privacy offered to users regarding their data. The Women's Information Exchange explained to lesbians how computer databases could benefit their movements by connecting individuals with niche information about lesbian life that was otherwise difficult to access, even within feminist circles. Lesbian feminists evaluating their representation in 1980s computer databases raised unique privacy concerns, including fear of antifeminist backlash and wariness about the stigma that could result from personal information falling into homophobic hands. To address these concerns, the Women's Information Exchange promoted a burgeoning feminist data politics based on user control and transparency about how and why information about individuals would be collected and stored. This mailing list is one small part of a larger, community-generated information infrastructure behind lesbian-feminist movements and their transitions to digital technologies. Although it is much less exciting and less sweaty than the collective din of consciousness-raising circles and other embodied forms of activism, information has been just as critical to late twentieth-century feminism.

This book examines a series of social movement organizations and individuals in the United States and Canada whom I call *information activists*: women who responded to their frustrated desire for information about lesbian history and lesbian life by generating that information themselves.[3] Information activism describes a range of materials and processes constituting the collective, often unspectacular labor that sustains social movements.[4] This concept brings together people, their visions of justice, and the media they use to organize, store, and provide access to information, a relationship that is key to understanding feminism's role in histories of commonplace technologies such as computer databases.

Radical feminists have designed complex multimedia practices to circulate information that has been difficult, or even impossible, to come by otherwise—from basic wayfinding information about where to find a lesbian roommate, plumber, or therapist to historical information about earlier generations of lesbian activists from whom to draw essential inspiration. Information activism provides basic support and care that makes living a lesbian life possible. Oriented toward these goals, lesbian feminists practice technological resourcefulness and perform behind-the-scenes labor with new media technologies that constitutes a queer history of information.[5]

Feminist theory and politics develop alongside practical, technical skills; the specific media formats feminists choose; and the distribution methods they develop to reach a public.[6] Historicizing feminism means exploring these engagements with media as conditions of possibility. Media practices enact theory and politics, and technologies can enable and constrain relationships between feminists and the collectivities on which they rely. Lesbian feminists built or altered sociotechnical systems to carry out their work, and these systems materialize their imbrication in queer, antiracist, and feminist life-worlds. Information activism leverages the entanglement of politics with technologies to build infrastructures for lesbian feminism.

Theorizing a concept such as information infrastructure—and, more broadly, the turn *to* information and infrastructure within media studies—through lesbian feminism might seem like a non sequitur. I argue that groups marginalized because of gender, sexuality, and race have the most to tell us about how, when, and for whom information matters. As Susan Leigh Star put it, "Feminist, antiracist, and multicultural theory, and our collective experience in these domains is one of the richest places for which to understand these core problems in information systems design: how to preserve the integrity of information without *a priori* standardization and its attendant violence."[7] Lesbian feminists show us another way forward with information—a different set of questions to ask.

Late twentieth-century U.S. lesbian-feminist activists worked to collect and parse large amounts of information that would make marginal lives visible, adopting various information management and compression techniques to do so. They did this work within conditions of exclusion from access to reliable, high-quality information about lesbian life and from the margins of social structures and even mainstream feminism. Their tactics often created anxiety over the effects rationalization procedures might have on information meant to represent messy, sexually and politically complex lives. To address these tensions, activists reworked existing standards in information

management through the design of unique subject-classification schemes; the use of alternative communication networks; and the appropriation of tools such as telephones, filing systems, early computer databases, and, more recently, digital archives.

Lesbian-feminist activism's transition from paper-based methods to computing and other digital technologies spans a period from the early 1970s to the late 2010s. Following historiographic methods that consider media through emergence, negotiation, transition, and struggles over meaning and use, I zero in on a series of moments "before the material means and the conceptual modes of new media have become fixed, when such media are not yet accepted as natural, when their own meanings are in flux."[8] Through analysis of social movement archives that gather the records information activists leave behind, and interviews with activists about their technological work, I examine how lesbian feminists shaped developing understandings of digital media when it was new.

This story begins in the Women in Print Movement of the 1970s and '80s, when feminist publishing houses, periodicals, and bookstores began feverishly producing printed matter for a growing popular movement. Within their niche corner of this print revolution, lesbian feminists wanted to organize, describe, distribute, and archive newsletters and other gray literature *as information* that present and future generations could use.

Scholars have generally approached the Women in Print Movement's history through the rubric of print culture studies. The affordances of new, low-cost publishing technologies drew lesbians toward what Barbara Sjoholm so elegantly calls "the sheer butch glamour of printing."[9] This "print" movement took shape during the emergence and wide adoption of computing and accessible database technologies. Digital understandings of information shaped how print-newsletter makers understood their publications as building communication networks. Housed today in LGBTQ community archives, this print activism's paper trail continues to search out digital avenues for wider access. Lesbian history accounts on platforms such as Instagram provide online engagement with the past as they reproduce a wide range of print ephemera generated by this movement, scanned and recirculated for an intergenerational audience eager to connect with, critique, and reimagine queer history.[10]

But present-day online collections are not where this paper movement first entered digital spaces; rather, ways of thinking digitally about information were embedded in lesbian-feminist work with paper, in the ways lesbian feminists learned computing and imagined and built networks and

databases for storing and sharing information. Tracing the digital life of a paper movement responds to Lisa Gitelman's critique of "print culture's" conceptual paucity—specifically, its inability to account for the specificities of media and the messy work people do across forms.[11] Rather than rely on "print" and "digital" as stable categories that represent a temporal progression—paper is scanned and "put online"—this book takes a more archaeological approach, considering complex transitions between media and listening for the unexpected echoes of the digital in the past: how, for example, lesbian-feminist indexers sifted through mountains of paper index cards while dreaming of computer databases.[12]

Echoes are not always easy to hear, and the historical aspects of this work were not always obvious to me. This research began as a contemporary study of digital archives that enliven lesbian-feminist histories. More specifically, it began in the basement of the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA), where I found myself at the end of a tour on the first of what would prove to be many visits over the coming years. The LHA is an unusual space to begin with; a volunteer-run, community archive housed in a brownstone in Brooklyn, it's part cultural heritage organization and part domestic space.[13] Researchers visit the archives from around the world in search of records that document lesbian life and activism, most of which have been donated by individual women, or grassroots social movement groups.

Working in the archives, you feel as if you're in someone's home. There is a couch and a kitchen where coffee is often brewing, but there are also vertical files, worktables, computers, scanners, an audio digitizing station and acid-free boxes filled with special collections. The basement similarly straddles the domestic and archival spheres. Like the basements in many homes, it is crammed with things that don't quite belong upstairs but are impossible to throw out. But these particular objects aren't old Halloween costumes or discarded sports equipment. They're the remnants of twentieth-century lesbian history. Audiocassette tapes, posters, records, and other ephemera crowd the partially finished basement. Despite occasional moisture problems, the materials are generally safe but take on an undeniable quality of "overflow" when situated in relation to what is upstairs.

I found myself standing in this overcrowded basement, staring at a wall of shelving filled with three thousand audiotapes (the archives' spoken word collection), thinking about the twentieth-century archive as a space presented with a very twenty-first-century problem of transition: what to do with all this stuff—box after box filled with magnetic tape, paper documents, and

other precarious formats? This was 2013, and the archives was beginning to implement digitization projects they hoped would improve and expand access to collections, address the problem of preservation, and ameliorate a physical space crunch. As I learned over the coming years, they were doing digitization their own way, bringing a feminist critique of technological accessibility and a resourceful, "good-enough" approach to bear on established archival standards. The archives' intervention with digital media became the focus of my work. I wanted to learn how these women were approaching digitization as an extension of their broader lesbian-feminist activist practice, and I wanted to learn what their work could tell us about the politics of digital media more generally.

Like basement storage, the edges of this project slowly expanded as more objects in need of care arrived. What began as a contemporary study of these particular archives in transition expanded into a media history of U.S. lesbian-feminist information activism; it couldn't have been any other way. Thinking about digital archives in the present proved impossible without understanding a longer history of how lesbian feminists appropriate commonplace media technologies toward the goal of better, more accessible information that might sustain feminism, and the everyday lives of lesbians. While watching archives volunteers create records using a desktop computer and the simple database software program DB/TextWorks, I found myself asking when the archives got its first computer (1984); what the first mailing database looked like (pretty rudimentary); and how volunteers learned how to use the new system (one computer-savvy woman was responsible for teaching everyone else). I searched for ways to connect the archives' choice of open-source audio-capture software today to the organization's founding principles of accessibility, written in 1978: "Archival skills shall be taught, one generation of Lesbians to another, breaking the elitism of traditional archives."[14] Understanding how feminist histories live on in digital archives means engaging deeply with the information infrastructures out of which these digital histories emerged.

Lesbian Infrastructures

In addition to looking both backward and forward in time, information activism bridges a range of media technologies that lesbian-feminist organizations used to create actionable information that could *do something* for their movements. Information activism works across multiple media toward accessibility and social transformation. Technologies are combined

to form the larger information infrastructure that allowed lesbian feminism, as a social movement, to cohere.

At the core of this infrastructure are print newsletters, which became a common lesbian feminist activist technology in the early 1970s and were important for telling women about events, issues, and resources. Newsletters used information to facilitate everyday connections among readers, who might live in different places but share interests and political commitments. Information activists created indexes and bibliographies to make the content in these newsletters searchable and actionable. These resource guides categorized information drawn from print newsletters by subject so that those in need of information on a given topic—Censorship, Chicana Lesbians, Pornography, or Softball, to name a few—could find it at their fingertips. Indexes to lesbian materials became definitive "guides to the literature," assembled by capable lesbian-feminist hands that parsed raw information using paper index cards and, later, computer databases. Circulated in the form of books or smaller, self-published documents, these indexes were often advertised or excerpted in newsletters.

Telephone hotlines provided yet another avenue for accessing this information. Lesbian-identified telephone operators thumbed through reference books or drew from file cabinets full of print resources to provide callers, some in crisis, with the information they asked for, which was also the care many needed to survive the day. Today, the work archives do to organize and open access to collections through digitization evokes many of the management and pathfinding techniques practiced by earlier newsletters, telephone hotlines, and indexes. These technologies are entangled across time in ways that become apparent through a longer history of lesbian feminist information-management as activism.[15] Through historiographic methods, a wide range of media technologies become interconnected in a larger activist information infrastructure.

The term "infrastructure" describes technical systems in which resources operate in complex combination to make communication or knowledge work possible.[16] Infrastructures operate in the background and thus are often taken for granted, until they break, fail, or otherwise frustrate users.[17] Infrastructure failures and breakages are not equally shared. Lesbian-feminist activists came up against these failures often, like many groups marginalized from mainstream information sources. For example, indexers created their own sets of terms to classify information because existing schema, such as the Library of Congress's standard subject headings, failed to describe lesbian materials in sufficient detail or in affirmative, subculturally meaningful terms.[18]

Activism is most often written into history as big events and public spectacles, which renders quieter infrastructures invisible. A recent turn in feminist historiography seeks to address the basic methodological problem of how to write about a monolithic social movement—twentieth-century feminism—that is in fact made up of many tiny, unevenly connected groups.[19] My attention to information infrastructure is most specifically in dialogue with alternative feminist historiographies grounded in the study of activist mediation.[20] Activist infrastructures are where the messy, grinding, generally invisible labor of "doing feminism" takes places. As Samantha Thrift and Carrie Rentschler argue, "Feminists build technological, affective and cultural infrastructures through which they produce, disseminate and share resources, ideas and knowledge."[21] This everyday work provides crucial support for the high-stakes goals that drive social movements in the first place. It's work feminists do together in collaboration, conflict, or something in between. As Star and Karen Ruhleder discuss, infrastructure is a "fundamentally relational concept" wherein processes, technologies, standards, systems, and work become infrastructures only in relation to particular organized practices and cultural contexts.[22] Although Star and Ruhleder are not writing about activism specifically, their emphasis on praxis is instructive: "Infrastructure is something that emerges for people in practice, connected to activities and structures."[23] The history of feminism is also a history of media and the infrastructural work activists do.

Researching information activism means paying attention to a lot of run-of-the-mill, often overlooked work with common media technologies. Rentschler takes an infrastructural approach to the study of feminist social movements and their media practices, arguing that much feminist activism is "communicative labor" that takes place out of sight of its final representational forms. Rentschler makes a methodological argument for studying feminist social movements at "the midlevel scale of their communication," through documentary research among memos, reports, newsletters, and other movement texts.[24] These papers form "rich documentary evidence" of a movement's communication networks.[25] Focusing on these document genres and work processes, and their entanglements with people and politics, is an entry to understanding how activist infrastructures develop across time. Reading closely and for relationships across texts, I examine a range of documents that include newsletters, meeting minutes, telephone call logs, internal memos, letters and other correspondence, online archival interfaces, photographs, catalog records, log books, subject thesauruses, instruction manuals, handbooks, bibliographies, and actual index cards.

The LHA is an unusual institution, and other research has emphasized its eccentric physical space.[26] While a thick description of the basement is part of understanding this archives' media practices, an infrastructural approach also considers the invisible, interstitial processes that make archives tick, such as batches of index cards that are written on, edited, and sorted with care. The work of writing this book began in a basement full of audiotapes and ended sorting through boxes of telephone hotline call logs. The differences between these materials—the often-invisible, strange paths taken to get from one to the other—are precisely the project's point. Studying information activism means following information as it moves—the logistics of information—to see the infrastructures that quietly get it where it needs to go: across space, across different forms of media, and through time.

As a method, following information lends itself to studying process over product. Lesbian-feminist *media practices* are the everyday, amateur work activists perform with technologies to build grassroots information infrastructure. My research objects tend to be less glamorous records: I explore how books are assembled instead of the words they convey and investigate how archives are run at the cost of paying close attention to the unique materials and rich histories they house. This approach is foremost about the project's grounding in media and infrastructure studies, a field that considers the systems, technologies, standards, and routines through which knowledge is produced. A media studies approach to process investigates the conditions of mediation through which identities such as lesbian are relegated, rationalized, and ordered retrospectively. Information activists do work "about" sex and sexuality but spend most of their time on the not-very-sexy shuffling of documents—paperwork that is crucial and urgent even when it cannot capture the vitality or erotic energy represented by what is printed on these papers.

In archival documents, interviews, and second-wave publishing, the term "information" is often used in subtle ways that foreground its interstitial role in making collaboration among feminists possible. "Information" is a slippery term, pinned down most notably by the Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom (DIKW) hierarchy prominent in information science. The DIKW model constructs information as a stage in between "raw" data and actionable knowledge, where information is parsed to some extent so that it might be readily used by human actors. Information also requires additional work, and critical analysis, by these actors, to advance knowledge. Scholars in information studies have questioned the methodological usefulness of these divisions, which are often arbitrary in practice or based on dated philosophical assumptions. Similarly, the media studies scholars

Lisa Gitelman and Virginia Jackson have outlined the troubling cultural work that the "raw data" myth performs.[27]

Information's essential properties are elusive, so the term is best characterized through its forms and transmission processes. As "knowledge that is communicated," information achieves its status as "information" through the act of being imparted and the forms that this movement takes.[28] Information must be "capable of being stored in, transmitted by, and communicated to inanimate things" ("information, *n*."). For example, genetic information becomes information, as it were, when it is transmitted through biological matter. This book understands information primarily through the material work processes that organize and transmit information so that it might be useful to marginalized publics who otherwise lack easy access to these resources. Distinguishing information from data, or knowledge, is less important than the category's emphasis on creating infrastructures and interfaces that open up worlds.

I approach information as the object that moves through the application of specific media practices—practices that form nascent publics and shape their demands. Information is articulated to political visions of what might be, the kind of worlds and lives that strong lesbian-feminist infrastructure might sustain. The ability to access information is always about much more than the simple fulfillment of a query. In its movement and use, information makes promises that are much greater than "finding things out."

Activists are at information activism's center: the people who publish newsletters, answer telephones, and maintain archival collections. They are actors in bold sexual subcultures who have taken great personal and professional risks by working to make and distribute information about sexuality. To supplement my documentary methods, I have interviewed these activists whenever possible. During three months of research at the LHA, I interviewed a number of the archives' volunteers about digitization, online media, and the future of the archives. These interviews involved a lot of talking, but also showing: I asked volunteers to walk me through the work they were doing, whether it was scanning photos of Dyke Marches from the 1980s and putting them online, "cleaning up" metadata in the archives' catalog, or digitizing a tape-recorded speech by Audre Lorde.

How these volunteers described their work was important, but I learned just as much from watching them do digitization, especially about how commitments to technological accessibility take form in practice. This show-and-tell was also an education in how community archives work; these volunteers, not all of them professional librarians or archivists, taught me what my own

training in the humanities and media studies had not. They patiently explained terms such as "Dublin Core" (a metadata standard), "original order" (a contentious approach to records arrangement), and "OPAC" (online public access catalog, or the public's interface with a library database), equipping me with the education I needed to do this work. As I listened to, watched, and worked alongside these volunteers, the interviews became opportunities to learn how information activists transgress standards in information management though everyday technological decisions.[29]

The information activists whose work is considered here—archivists, newsletter makers, telephone operators, and indexers—engage with new media technologies in ways that are critical for establishing more expansive, comparative media histories of information. For example, these activists brought grounded commitments to self-determination to the decisions they made about database design, resulting in systems whose flexibilities around classification are informed by lesbian feminism.[30] Put another way, these activists needed to be able to easily revise how they were describing political and identity-laden materials in databases in order to be sensitive to shifting community values. Lesbian feminists thought computers would offer this flexibility, even though these machines were otherwise difficult to access. The LHA and the Circle of Lesbian Indexers are two organizations whose attempts to "go electronic," chronicled in this book, offer feminist interventions with common understandings of computerized information management when it was new. Hesitant computing practices interrupt histories of the "user-friendly" computer in the 1980s as an inexorable and accessible time-saving device, placing lesbian feminist values in the way of computing's promise as a new technology for managing information.

Feminist media studies often draws on archival research to account for the contributions of apparently "minor figures" in media and technological history. Jennifer Light's study of mid-twentieth-century women computer programmers "hidden during this stage of computer history," Lisa Nakamura's work on the Navajo women who assembled early microchips in the late 1960s and early 1970s using hands practiced at weaving, and Patrick Keilty's account of the women librarians who tediously developed machine-readable cataloging standards in the 1960s are three examples.[31] These feminist media histories argue that gendered labor is easy to overlook because it takes place behind the scenes, as programming, manufacturing, or data input. However, this work constitutes inventive sites where new media technologies are tested and adapted, building a cultural infrastructure for twentieth-century information management.[32]

The invisibility of women's work in histories of media and technology is perhaps most acute when this work takes the form of service, care, or emotional labor, categories that include activist projects understood as labors of love. By centering "minor players" in media histories we become attuned to how sexuality and emotion make technological systems work smoothly. Dylan Mulvin's history of the Lena test image, a torn-out *Playboy* centerfold used to develop image compression algorithms, shows how women's sexualities became a form of communicative exchange in computer engineering labs.[33] Similarly, Alana Cattapan and Quinn DuPont's history of "Alice and Bob," characters used as standard prototypes in computer engineering problems, uncovers the heteronormative relationship dynamics at the heart of how students who go on to develop new computing technologies are trained.[34] Even as prototypes, stand-ins, or what Mulvin calls "proxies," women such as Lena and Alice do deeply cultural, communicative work that matters in how technological systems are established.[35]

Women's affective work with media and technology sits stubbornly at the heart of communication studies. A "Telegram Girl" is central to Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver's foundational theory of transmission, the postwar communication model still taught in introductory communication studies course today. Shannon and Weaver argue that the content of a message does not matter to its successful transmission by describing the "very proper and discreet girl accepting your telegram [who] pays no attention to the meaning, whether it be sad, or joyous, or embarrassing."[36] Women performed telegraph and telephone operations and other low-level communications tasks in the post–World War II period, and these workers were expected not to remark on the sensitive information they relayed. The choice to read and then not act on the content of hundreds of messages each day would take an emotional toll on workers that complicates how we understand the so-called neutrality of information delivered by telephone operators. These women surely took subtle, subversive maneuvers with whatever agential opportunities they found.[37]

This telegram girl's labor, attention, or refusal is central to transmitting information. As I explore in chapter 2, lesbian-feminist telephone operators responded in creative ways to the information hotline's expectations that they "be neutral" on the phone, practicing forms of affective management, active listening, and commitments to "meeting women where they are at," even when they disagreed with a caller's position. Attention to this careful telephone comportment centers affective labor and everyday information technologies in how social movements are built.

Information activism describes how movement-related information is stored, sorted, searched for, and retrieved by lesbian-feminist activists serving communities they care about. Archives figure prominently in the lesbian-feminist information infrastructure to which this book is attuned. Information activists draw on archives for research when they create resources and use these archives to store their finished work so that it can continue to serve in the future. Lesbian-feminist archivists are themselves information activists, building and maintaining community archives to document the everyday work social movements do with information. These archives, especially in their digital manifestations, emphasize access and community accountability over preserving documents in boxes kept "safe" from use. Preservation and access are inextricable aspects of collections management that ideally should be complementary but often are in tension in archives.[38] The LHA has an open access policy, and even one-of-a-kind special collections are stored on open shelves so visitors can take down boxes and peruse at will. This policy materializes a unique feminist access politics that shapes the archives' overall preservation strategy: visitors who handle these materials share an unusual level of responsibility for their care.

Digitization offers no easy solutions for problems of preservation, as it introduces a host of concerns about managing digital objects over time. Archivists migrate data across formats as they become obsolete and confront the pressures of ongoing user demand for access to original records.[39] Bracketing many of these concerns, the LHA's digitization initiatives seek improved access for community members and researchers, practicing a "good-enough" approach to creating and managing digital collections. This approach to digitization puts into practice what Lucas Hilderbrand has described as an "aesthetics of access" with media technologies.[40] When the archives uploads photographs from their collection to an online database, they want to get great scans and write useful, consistent metadata, but they are not intimidated by elusive technical standards or best practices. The archives will not wait to acquire better technology or settle on a perfect, controlled vocabulary for metadata; those photos of lesbian history need to be online because queer communities need access to them now.

Digital archives have democratized historical research but long after information activists sought to do this democratizing work with paper and "analog" electronic tools.[41] Newsletters, telephone hotlines, and indexing projects share with community archives the goal of mediating between a

public and various kinds of information; they give users access to primary sources or published materials, someone kind and knowledgeable to talk to, or connection to a network of other lesbians they did not know about. Digitization introduces new ways of thinking about media and access but ultimately builds on the movement's longer work with media and information technologies.

Approaching archives through the rubric of information, infrastructure, and access reconsiders the status of the "archive" and what a media studies approach might offer to queer and feminist archive theory. Feminist media studies scholarship considers the archival logics and material timescales of particular technologies, as well as how those technologies underpin actually existing archives, broadly conceived.[42] Community archives are built, managed, and encountered within specific mediated conditions that shape social movements' histories. Some feminist media practices are more, or less, "archivable." The dominance of print culture in second-wave feminist historiography ought to inspire us toward more speculative methods that can account for the kinds of feminist media practices that resist documentation: the actual telephone calls made to information hotlines or the connections with embodied others facilitated by newsletter networks. In the archive, call log sheets filled out by volunteers and classified ads placed in newsletters gesture to these mediated encounters, even as actual connections resist capture. These are the aspects of social movement infrastructure that we can only *sort of know* via actually existing archives.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault describes the archive as a discursive system, or a kind of infrastructure.[43] For Foucault, an archive is made up of statements, units of speech that have meaning only in relation to the communicative web in which they are situated. Archives organize statements in such a way as to produce a notion of "history," grouping together what is thinkable and sayable in a given social context, such as Lesbian Feminism (capital L, capital F). For Foucault, the archive is a living constellation in which the relationships among statements are always under negotiation. Some contemporary scholars of archive theory have bridged these ideas with actual archival collections. Ann Stoler's work on colonial archives and her methodological incitement to read along the archival grain imagines archives as systems that have particular organizing logics and governing effects, shoring up power over colonial subjects over the long term.[44] Jarrett Drake, a digital archivist and scholar, argues that the foundational principles structuring archival science (ownership, authorship) "valorize and venerate white western masculinity."[45] Kate Eichhorn's work

on feminist print archives of the recent past positions archival collections as technologies that order feminist social movements in retrospect, where archives make forms of feminist activism appear discrete at the cost of preserving their complex heterogeneity.[46]

Community archives attempt to ground their work in different logics. Created by minority groups, these archives respond to what Michelle Caswell terms "symbolic annihilation" performed by mainstream archival institutions, which "has far-reaching consequences for both how communities see themselves and how history is written for decades to come."[47] Caswell and other scholars emphasize archiving from below as a form of protest communities use to imagine other kinds of histories and futures, including by opening up archival processes to critique and revision.[48] Community archives are interfaces with history and discursive systems that have epistemological, ontological, and social consequences.[49]

As Jamie A. Lee explains, recognizing and understanding the intricacies of how community archives work differently is necessary for opening up the archives and its methodologies, and experimenting with queer approaches to the digital mediation of stories about the past.[50] Similarly, Tonia Sutherland and Drake each argue that community-based approaches to archiving can alter the terms through which marginalized people's histories are narrated by building alternative systems that make visible the role archives have played in sustaining anti-Black racism.[51] Community archives organized around gender and sexuality do not always offer these alternatives, and can be complicit in sustaining cis-normative and racist practices within the field, framing queerness as a unifying experience of historical erasure at the cost of attending meaningfully to other axes of difference. Syrus Marcus Ware and Rio Rodriguez, each working on activist archives by and for queer and trans Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, have theorized some LGBTQ community archives as tools of white supremacy, oriented toward understandings of events, spaces, and documentary practices that systematically erase queer and trans people of color from the historical record.[52]

Each of these scholars understands archives as constructed interfaces with history and discursive systems caught up in larger operations of power. Their work frames archives as epistemological technologies that structure how the past is encountered. Basic information-management techniques play a role in these encounters, where various media practices central to archival processes facilitate historical ordering. The archive is indistinguishable from its conditions of mediation, including the kinds of

activism that gets documented, kept, or digitized one day and the practical decisions archives make about the technologies they will and will not use to do this work.

Information studies scholars, along with practicing librarians and archives scholars, have helped me consider how everyday choices such as the assignment of a particular subject classification to materials mediate access to information in ways that matter.[53] Queer and feminist indexers, librarians, and archivists examine the digital present with an eye to a longer history of queer, trans, and feminist information activism.[54]

In the early 1970s, at the height of the women's liberation movement, Dee Garrison published "The Tender Technicians," a significant feminist information studies text that identified a need for historians of information science and women's work to recover the history of gender's influence on information.[55] Since then, theory and historiography by feminist information studies scholars has sought to fill this gap.[56] Focusing on ruptures with standards in libraries, archives, and other information contexts, this work considers such sites as the feminization of information work; the careful, gendered labor of description; the queerness of cataloging practices; and the trans-ing of archival systems.[57] Improving access to information within archives and databases is bound up with digital understandings of interface design, search retrieval, networks, disability, and ethical questions about minoritarian users and their digital records.[58] Historicizing these ways of thinking digitally shows how queer digital media practices emerge out of long-established activist information work.

Lesbian Counterpublics and Information Precarity

Information brings a public into existence by giving shape to networks, framing common interests, and acting as a shared resource for activists. Reading, researching, writing, publishing, communicating, and archiving are all tactics marginalized users adopt to imagine and enact transformative modes of counterpublic address.[59] They are discursive and self-organizing processes for circulating information, through which strangers with something in common come into relation, working out the terms of shared (or divergent) political visions. The terms "social movement" and "counterpublic" are distinct but related here. Social movements bring together activists who may or may not have common identities to work toward a shared vision of social justice and transformation external to the groups themselves. Counterpublics describe groups with shared identities who

gather for mutual support and world making that can include, but is not limited to, outward-facing transformation.

Nancy Fraser's construction of counterpublics emphasizes their distinction from social movements, where counterpublics "function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment" and "as bases and training grounds for agitation activities directed toward wider publics."[60] In Fraser's model, marginalized groups require spaces in which to do identity work, in part because gender and sexuality are perceived as "private issues" that are often excluded from legitimate public contestation in wider discourse.[61] Second-wave feminism's commitments to "the personal as political" explicitly worked against this public-private bifurcation, and lesbian-feminism in particular understood that dismantling compulsory heterosexuality would liberate all women—straight, gay, and otherwise—from oppressive socio-economic structures.

Lesbian feminism created places of respite from mainstream feminism and the gay liberation movement. It also looked outward, toward critiquing patriarchy and building a more inhabitable world for lesbians. Information brought lesbians together for support and acted as a catalyst for a broader critique of standards. My focus is on information's role in lesbian feminist counterpublic formation and expression, even as "social movement" is most often the shorthand through which lesbian feminism is categorized. Approaches to lesbian feminism as a social movement varied, because of ties to discrete counterpublics formed around race, ethnicity, class, and disability, which mattered even as women came together in activism.

"Lesbian Feminism" here describes both a historical social movement active in the United States and Canada in the 1970s and '80s and an ongoing politics in the present. Historically, lesbian feminism is the branch of women's liberation-era feminist activism that set itself apart from the mainstream feminist movement through the political and emotional ideals of lesbianism and the bond among women. The ideological underpinnings of the movement involved envisioning a life lived without a primary relationship to men as a choice made in service of emancipation rather than "merely" sexual gratification.[62] Lesbian feminists were also leaders in the pro-pornography and S/M debates that characterized much internal conflict within feminist movements in the 1980s. While lesbian feminists took different stances toward porn and censorship issues, their readiness to center sexual expression as a ground for politics speaks to the broader conceptual work lesbians did, and do, within feminism. Lesbian feminists often referred to themselves just as "feminists," and my language follows this

practice while marking lesbian feminism as a distinct set of commitments, publics, and practices when this distinction is most relevant.

Sexual identification with other women fueled lesbian-feminist counterpublic formation, but this sexuality was entwined with political action. The "Woman-Identified Woman" the activist group Radicalesbians described in its much-cited 1970s manifesto "may not be fully conscious of the political implications of what for her began as personal necessity, but on some level, she has not been able to accept the limitations and oppression laid on her by the most basic role of her society—the female role."[63] As "the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion," lesbians energetically organized with others out of anger at exclusions within an increasingly moderate and strategically heterosexual women's movement.[64] By the mid-1970s, lesbian feminists who had worked tirelessly to sustain women's movements were frustrated by a lack of reciprocal attention to lesbian issues and invigorated by developing lesbian activist methodologies.[65] Similarly, lesbians worked in the gay liberation movement but wanted to carve out alternative spaces for organizing around sexuality that centered feminist concerns about gender, race, class, and other forms of difference that were often sidelined by gay men's issues.[66] Still, forming coalitions with men remained crucial to women of color, especially Black lesbians, who needed "solidarity around the fact of race."[67]

Lesbian-feminist counterpublics have never been monolithic, in part because attention to the ways in which women are different from one another informs consciousness-raising as a communications method and guides how embodied, structurally informed experience can be a ground for politics.[68] Despite these commitments, SaraEllen Strongman argues that interracial organizing among lesbians depended on deep investments in exploring the intimacies and erotics of racial difference, consciousness that white women often failed to develop.[69] Aware that a singular lesbian-feminist counterpublic was neither realistic nor desirable, the information activists featured in the book—many of whom are white—tried to create useful resources that would speak about and across difference.

Communications media are critical for counterpublic formation, particularly for marginalized groups, because they allow members of an emerging public to work through internal issues, recruit new members, and do outreach. Catherine Squires's work on the Black public sphere compels scholars to focus on a given counterpublic's safety and access to communicative resources and institutional supports. "Enclaved" groups working together within hidden spaces to "create discursive strategies and gather oppositional

resources" emerge into more outward-reaching counterpublic formation "in response to a decrease in oppression or an increase in resources."[70] In other words, counterpublics form at the point where marginalized groups begin to experience slightly less precarity and fewer threats to safety and security and gain access to self-determined communications media.

Lesbian-feminist counterpublic formation has been intimately entwined with burgeoning access to communication technologies. Lesbians' growing ability to express their sexual identities in public, and in print, in the late twentieth century came along with diminishing fear of obscenity charges, employment discrimination, physical violence, and losing custody of children in a homophobic court system. Information activists took advantage of access to low-cost print methods, private telephone lines, and other communication technologies to support lesbian-feminist counterpublic formation, even as censorship of lesbian materials and expression persisted, particularly in Canada.[71]

Lesbian-feminist counterpublic communication reaches its apex in the Women in Print Movement. Within this broad second-wave feminist publishing movement, lesbians created their own newsletters, pamphlets, resource guides, reading lists, and small-press books. These publications facilitated communication, circulated information, and ultimately performed outreach that would bring more women into lesbian communities. Niche publications recognized the diversity of lesbian experience, targeting rural women, women of color, and other groups.

Agatha Beins and Trysh Travis each emphasize how feminist theory and politics defined the Women in Print Movement's drive to build communication networks outside patriarchy.[72] Evoking the inside-outside counterpublic model, Travis writes, "Participants believed they would not only create a space of freedom for women, but would also and ultimately change the dominant world outside that space."[73] Creating alternative communication methods responds to conditions in which many women lacked access to other lesbians and were desperate to find connection. While women's movements had entered wide popular consciousness by the early 1970s, that did not mean that interested women knew how to find these organizations and spaces in their local contexts.[74] In this respect, lesbian print activism shared strategies with the midcentury homophile movement's "sexual communication networks," which used print resources such as bibliographies, magazines, and travel guides to show isolated gay men and lesbians that they were not alone.[75] Information acts as a homing beacon, bringing the uninitiated into proximity with queer worlds they had only imagined.

Building on, but also departing from, this emphasis on communication networks, I study information activists who worked alongside burgeoning lesbian feminist publishing movements to create not just networks, but a broader information infrastructure undergirding lesbian-feminist social movements. Information matters differently to precarious populations, for whom reliable access is never guaranteed. For sexual and gender minorities, access to good information helps to determine a life that is livable. Think, for example, of trans communities finding support on Usenet in the 1990s, people living with HIV seeking out accurate health information via online Bulletin Board Systems in the 1980s, or men who have sex with men in the 1960s sharing countersurveillance knowledge via wallet cards that taught others how to avoid arrest for cruising.[76] In each of these cases, marginalized users facing various stigmas and threats to safety access vital information resources generated carefully and clandestinely by activists.

Information activism is part of this much larger twentieth-century infrastructure for sustaining LGBTQ+ life. Lesbian feminists have leveraged multimedia strategies to share otherwise precarious information about lesbian life through the telephone and online interfaces. They have drawn on indexing technologies, computer databases, and community-generated classifications to organize information gleaned from print materials. Thinking into the future, they have built archives to ensure this information has ongoing utility and digital reach. This movement-based topology shows how information-based communities work within scarce conditions to design knowledge-production methods consistent with their constituents' social and political orientations. Information's ethical aspects and vital, world-making potential become clearest within these high-stakes contexts. Beyond lesbian history, these activists have much to teach all of us about why, when, and for whom information comes to matter.

The Erotics of Information

Queer and feminist theorizations of archives and affect seek to account for information's emotional currencies. Archives provide present and future generations with access to information as an affective encounter with the past. Ann Cvetkovich's framing of queer cultural texts as "archives" that become unlikely "repositories of feelings and emotions" has laid tremendous groundwork for understanding "lesbian" as a shared horizon felt in relation to others.[77] Working across affect theory and information studies, Marika Cifor argues that LGBTQ archives are in constant flux because their

appraisal processes, spatial configurations, and reasons for being in the first place are guided by queer affects, including felt, material attachments to histories in which users might find themselves.[78] While scholarship on archives and affect has guided much of my thinking about how archives order or make sense of shared emotion, reading women of color feminism has helped me to think about the relationship between archives and the emotional register of accessing social movement information.

Information activism is motivated by desires for shared history and an erotics of being in proximity to a past organized by sexuality—a history built and occupied by others. The Black lesbian writer and theorist Audre Lorde uses "the erotic" to describe material, affective forms of power that emerge from creating vulnerable connection with others across difference.[79] Lorde's erotic is a way of knowing and being that thrives in the face of exploitative structures.[80] A range of everyday experiences offer erotic connection, "whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea."[81] The erotic "is a source of power *and information*" through which women can know the world differently in intimate collaboration.[82] Lorde's use of the term "information" is not generally remarked on in turns to her theory of the erotic. Information implies that the erotic is in part a communication practice: the erotic transmits actionable knowledge between a scene and a woman who has opened herself to this kind of knowledge. This use of "information," combined with Lorde's list of everyday activities, points to the erotic as a transformative, affective practice built out of seemingly unremarkable sites shared with others (information, a bookcase).

Recently, several scholars working at the intersection of critical race and queer studies have taken up Lorde's erotic in relation to affect theory in ways that have influenced my thinking about information and counterpublics.[83] Amber Jamilla Musser argues that Lorde's erotic provides a model for understanding what drives community formation: "Talking about affect helps displace identity as the basis for community formation and opens political possibilities. Lorde's discussion of the erotic touches on this potential because the most central component of the erotic, after all, is its creation of an affective community. . . . This formation of community through affective flows is one of the hallmarks of the plural subject."[84] Guided by the erotic, lesbian feminism's plural subject recognizes others and their distinct histories, joys, and struggles as openings to difference as a ground for knowledge. As an erotic practice, providing access to information is more than just helping divergent publics find what they are looking for; it is a world-making gesture constructed by specific media interfaces

and technologies to which users might open themselves. The plural subject brought into lesbian-feminist community often arrives by finding the information she was looking for: where to go, who to talk to, and how. As she arrives to this information, she also learns that others in community came with entirely different questions, histories, interests, and needs.

In media history, information technologies are often constructed as seductive, overwhelming, and powerful, especially when these technologies are new and their introduction promises to deliver new intensities and proximities via communication or information.[85] Brenton J. Malin explains that the "emotional power of communication technologies" is felt most acutely with "*developing* media that seem to be transforming a culture's abilities to connect in ways that can only be imagined."[86] As an active stance generating these kinds of erotic but also identity-based communities, information activism is affective labor that produces collectivity, or the spaces and contexts in which individuals might feel part of something.[87] Information work gives ground to nascent counterpublics by establishing new terms of reference and building shared infrastructures for encountering information.

Affective labor is intrinsically gendered. It is associated most often with domestic and care work's construction as women's work and with digital economies that celebrate the "flexibility" of working from home.[88] Feminist activist labor and volunteer work present another kind of "second shift," often done on the fly or in the margins of one's "spare time." Worked on within these temporalities, information technologies become sites of infiltration, appropriation, and resourcefulness for marginalized users. These are the tactics through which feminists usurp or appropriate technology toward collective ways of doing politics, out of urgency and love.

While affective labor is often understood as immaterial, particularly in its digital manifestations, information activists emphasize the hypermaterial aspects of activism performed with media technologies as they work across digital and "analog" forms.[89] Lesbian feminists who made print resources or sat at desks night after night, working the hotline phones, carved pathways through information that others without prior access might follow. Indexing is a material form of affective labor, whether it is performed with paper cards or computers, because the practice assembles people, information, and technologies toward social goals.[90] Information activism brings together people marginalized from access to these resources, pushing on the divisions that can bifurcate information and emotion in the first place.

When finding information means finding deeply needed forms of support, the experience can offer transformative invitation to community. But

lesbian feminism has also promoted and practiced painful exclusions, leaving behind legacies of white supremacy and trans exclusion that live on in the present. These conflicts in late twentieth-century lesbian-feminist organizing have been well documented by scholars studying histories of feminist theory, the institutionalization of women's studies, transgender organizing, and women of color feminism.[91] Unpacking these acrimonious histories matters because of how they persist in contemporary "LGBTQ" or queer women's activist spaces centered on whiteness and cis-normativity, or committed to homogenizing difference through an additive framework that simply invites more people to the same lousy table.[92]

This book asks how conflicts over difference are worked out through everyday decisions lesbian feminists make when they design and work within information infrastructures. Activist work with information can shore up what kind of lesbian life counts as a life worth serving on the phone or preserving in an archive. Work with information can put into practice antiracism, for example, through the *Black Lesbians* (1981) bibliographic project I examine in chapter 3. This text built an information infrastructure that centered Black women in lesbian history, making their leadership undeniable. As the Black writer Barbara Smith put it in her foreword, the bibliography generated "the excitement of finally having a substantial body of information on Black lesbians."[93] "From the bibliography it is historically verifiable that it was Black feminist/lesbian women who consistently and courageously raised the issue of racism from the beginning of the women's movement, finally pushing white women to make anti-racist work a priority in the late 1970s."[94] By organizing this history into a quick reference list of resources women could use for future research, *Black Lesbians* showed users another way forward, beyond whiteness as an unacknowledged center for lesbian history.

Smith wrote that the bibliography can "inspire us Black lesbians to write about and to manifest our lives in every way possible."[95] Sara Ahmed has described a "lesbian feminism of color" that recognizes "the struggle to put ourselves back together because within lesbian shelters too our being was not always accommodated."[96] Some information infrastructures have constructed uninhabitable shelters that ought to be torn down and rebuilt, while others have offered lesbians of color these tools of assembly.

Studying late twentieth-century lesbian-feminist social movement archives often means confronting transphobia and transmisogyny at the level of organizational policy or as regular speech acts made between activists. At their best, these movement archives also document the mundane

ways lesbian feminists carved out spaces for trans people with the choices they make about information. As Susan Stryker has argued, "There was nothing monolithic about second wave feminist attitudes toward trans issues. The feminist second wave simultaneously espoused some of the most reactionary attitudes toward trans people to be found anywhere while also offering a vision of transgender inclusion in progressive feminist movements for social change."[97] Recent transfeminist histories have developed less polarizing, multivalent studies about trans participation in "second-wave" feminist movements.[98] Finn Enke asks why stories of trans exclusion and abjection have been so "magnetic" and implores feminist historians to think about the cultural work these narratives perform and the "generations of scholars and activists who need more than easy critiques of exclusion."[99] Sometimes trans exclusion or solidarity happens in uneven, everyday ways, through seemingly minor choices about information design.

These choices include how to describe materials or people in a database or whether or not to help a trans woman in need who calls a telephone hotline. The purpose of accounting for trans people's places on the margins of lesbian feminist history is not to search out ways in which trans people might become politically aligned with lesbian community, a "habitual assumption" in social movement studies critiqued by Viviane Namaste.[100] Rather, I argue that understanding how radical feminist movements regard trans people through the design and provision of information can show us how particular ideas about gender inform infrastructure design and determine how care is provisioned at a technological level. Historicizing these decisions matters because the complex lineages between lesbian and transfeminist ideas still need to be fleshed out and because lesbian groups and spaces that want to do better must continue to learn from these histories at the level of their information design.

As Ahmed writes, "It is transfeminism today that most recalls the militant spirit of lesbian feminism in part because of the insistence that crafting a life is political work."[101] Ahmed's words insist that lesbian feminism has some kind of present-day urgency despite this movement's apparent untimeliness—what Elizabeth Freeman has called the feeling of "temporal drag" lesbians elicit in the present. Lesbian feminism is out of fashion, yet it's being revived through critical projects that include Instagram history accounts, contemporary throwback clothing, museum shows, and scholarly research. Information precarity motivated past generations of information activists but does not define these new projects in the same ways. In response to the threat of complete erasure, 1970s and '80s information ac-

tivists produced abundant archival conditions that facilitate enlivenments of lesbian feminist history via digital networks today. Put simply, young people are sifting through digital collections to discover and recirculate lesbian feminist iconography. While lesbian information is no longer so precarious, the fervor of these digital "archives" materializes an ongoing, urgent drive to imagine, critique, and repurpose information from the past.

Lesbian feminism is not a visible social movement with a firm set of aesthetic and actionable commitments anymore, yet it continues to guide these projects and the principles of organizations such as the LHA. Founded in 1974, this archives is staffed not only by women in their sixties and seventies who came to activism during the civil rights and women's liberation movements, but also by a growing contingent of young folks in their twenties born under the sign of queerness. This younger generation often brings commitments to transfeminism or queer politics, even as they revel in "deep-lez" desires to understand and embody butch-femme dynamics and terminologies or wear labrys necklaces without irony.[102] They are motivated by lesbian activist history even as they do not quite occupy its terms. Women who have worked at the archives for decades have their own, evolving relationships to lesbian politics and do not think about gender today the way they did forty years ago. As a queer history of information, this book shares with these volunteers a comfort with the messiness among feminist, queer, transfeminist, and lesbian-feminist histories and their surprising temporalities.[103]

How these ideals shape the organization's archiving practices is one example of lesbian feminism's ongoing effects on information infrastructures. This "historical" movement continues to exert affective pull on the present and on "queer" subjects.[104] This pull has been mediated, past and present, through lesbian-feminist work with technology as it shapes the ongoing stakes of access to information. An exciting body of literature has worked to historicize late twentieth-century feminist history from the present through the rubric of affect theory.[105] Put broadly, this scholarship asks what historical feminisms *do* in the present when we remember, study, or otherwise enliven them. Here, ambivalent feelings about feminisms of the past are held open: accusations of essentialism, normativity, single-issue politics, and racism leveled at lesbian feminism become potentially productive obstacles because of their continued relevance and pressure in the present.[106] As Victoria Hesford explores, it is precisely these antagonisms and the ambivalence they engender that give the women's liberation movement boundaries and contours, making it nameable as a phenomenon

both during its operation and from the present.[107] This work challenges the celebration of queer as inherently progressive and unmarred by these concerns and questions queer studies' search for only those historical objects that serve the field's political goals.[108]

I foreground ambivalence because to some extent my ambivalent identifications with lesbian feminism are at the center of this media history. As a researching subject bringing together a particular set of objects toward historiographic ends, I have tried to foreground my desiring attachments to this work, these women, and this political movement. Beginning in the LHA basement, I include my "archive stories" about coming to and moving among the objects and actors that make up my archive here.[109] Doing this work has asked me to reckon with my own attachments to lesbian feminism and even to the category "lesbian." I have moved through this research and the spaces it has brought me to with frequent uncertainty about how my nonbinary gender identity and commitments to transfeminist practice might fit—all this despite wanting to occupy some relation to lesbian and caring deeply about lesbian feminism's ongoing place in digital archives of the ever-unfolding present.

Chapter Outlines

Although the chapters that follow cover a range of media and a span of decades, they consider to some extent a relatively small—or, at least, overlapping—group of women based in the United States and, to a lesser extent, Canada, primarily on the coasts. These activists worked across lesbian-feminist archives, service provision, and publishing, and their paths sometimes crossed: for example, call logs documenting labor at the Lesbian Switchboard of New York show that sometimes callers sought information about the LHA. Figures whose work represents the subject of one chapter make cameos in others. Julia Penelope Stanley, who started the newsletter *Matrices* in 1977—the subject of chapter 1—for example, also helped to found the LHA three years earlier. When I spoke to these people during interviews, they often knew or knew *of* one another and seemed to enjoy telling me about what they remembered.

Similarly, when I have presented this work at conferences, there generally have been a few folks in the audience who came because they remembered being there: they subscribed to "that newsletter" or used "that index." This book's theoretical underpinnings are intertwined with the book's archival objects. For example, Susan Leigh Star's scholarly information stud-

ies work has deeply influenced how this book understands infrastructure and the embeddedness of technology in practice. Star's earlier writing on lesbian-feminist activism is also present in this book on another level: Star was one of the founding editors of *Matrices*. With *Matrices*, Star helped build a newsletter *network* grounded in her larger intellectual project, which was committed to understanding how information systems work at a deep level so that communities might build better ones together.

Information activism is often guided by feminist theory, just as feminist writers draw on activist-built information infrastructures to research, write, and share their work. While writing this book, I have sometimes found myself thinking about the technical aspects of digitizing cassette tapes that record the very materials—feminist thought—that inform my theoretical approach. Feminist media histories form complex webs that are difficult to pull apart: this book's argument about the entanglement of information, media technologies, and feminist social movements depends, to some extent, on leaving them tangled up. I hope that guiding the reader through these entanglements allows a picture of the larger infrastructure to emerge.

The book begins with newsletters as print-based movement infrastructure. Chapter 1 approaches newsletters as networked technologies that supported the lesbian-feminist history and archives movement and the scholarly field known as lesbian studies, focusing primarily on *Matrices: A Lesbian Feminist Research Newsletter*, published from 1977 until 1996. Using a range of communications media including photocopiers and letter mail, *Matrices* figured itself explicitly as a network that would facilitate what the editors called "interconnections" among anyone doing research related to lesbian feminism. *Matrices*' network operation was fairly typical of what feminist newsletter culture sought to do during this "pre-internet" era, so the chapter situates this publication among others, including the LHA's newsletter.

Matrices is approached through network theory rather than simply as a proper object of "print culture" to argue that networks have been critical to the construction of feminist histories. A feminist mode of network thinking can be traced through small-scale print newsletters that draw on the language and function of networks, including circulating models from computer engineering. Publications such as *Matrices* emerged into wide production and circulation in the early 1970s and had all but disappeared by the mid-1990s, an era that spans the nascent women's liberation movement and Women in Print Movements on one end and the emergence of the World Wide Web

on the other.[110] Newsletters, archives, and network models work together as interconnected social movement technologies. Newsletters enabled activist-researchers writing feminist histories to share difficult-to-access information, resources, and primary sources via photocopying and other modes of print reproduction. Network thinking has been a feature of feminist activism and knowledge production since before the consumer internet. Lesbian feminist also offered predigital feminist critiques of networks as egalitarian ideals that can conceal functional hierarchies and threaten the privacy of participants. Publications such as *Matrices* are part of a longer history of networked communications media in feminist contexts.

Chapter 2 builds on the book's engagement with how lesbian-feminist print cultures are enlivened through their entanglements with other information technologies, turning to lesbian telephone hotlines. Like newsletters, telephone hotlines connected lesbians at a distance using information. Hotlines sprang up in the 1970s to provide alternatives to generic crisis lines and gay switchboards staffed primarily by men. Run by volunteers and generally open in the evenings, these hotlines handled a wide range of calls, from suicide interventions, relationship advice, and emotional support for women who were coming out to requests for bar listings, roommate matching, and referrals to lesbian doctors, lawyers, carpenters and plumbers. Callers to these hotlines often felt isolated from access to basic information about how to live a lesbian life—how to meet other people "like them." Volunteer operators gathered and organized a wide range of print resources into filing systems they could use to give callers the information they needed, often desperately. Telephone information services drew on a combination of print and electronic technologies, troubling the telephone's position as a quintessentially "electronic" medium.

The chapter focuses most closely on New York City's Lesbian Switchboard (1972–97), a counseling and referral hotline that operated in the evenings out of Manhattan's Women's Liberation Center and, later, the Gay and Lesbian Center. The switchboard combined detailed, journal-like call logs, a paper database of referral information, and the telephone itself to connect individual callers with the wider communities they sought. To account for the switchboard's work, I rely primarily on the abundant collection of meticulous call logs volunteers kept to document each and every call made to the hotline over twenty-five years of operation. This paper logging practice describes how operators provided care to callers but fails to capture the actual audio of these calls, offering in their place short texts that elide the voices and embodied vulnerabilities of callers.

My reading of these call logs dwells in the tension between what they offer and what they withhold. I consider, for example, how operators blew off steam from handling angry or sad callers or managed the boredom that came from waiting for the phone to ring on a slow night by doodling and leaving notes in the logbook's margins for other volunteers to read. Some media practices are more readily archivable than others, and doing feminist media history means understanding that these affordances shape how activist labor is understood in retrospect. The switchboard's call logs attempt to document the intense tone and content of calls to record the emotional needs of callers and the economies of care that formed an emerging lesbian public. Telephone hotlines form a primal scene of information as care within lesbian feminist movements. Call logs point to the importance of studying media practices in theorizing the affective dimensions of feminism's archive.

Ultimately lesbian hotlines did not make the transition to online counseling and information referral evident in LGBTQ "hotlines" that operate today. By 1997, calls had mostly stopped coming in to the switchboard, and the organization closed. The switchboard never used a computer, even in the 1990s, though it wanted one and remarked often in meeting minutes about what a switch to electronic information management might offer the service. Chapter 3 turns to an organization that did attempt to transition its information activism to a computer program in order to frame a lesbian-feminist critique of "accessible" computing as it emerged widely in homes and workplaces in the 1980s. The chapter examines indexing projects, which share with telephone hotlines an ethos of using media to put actionable information at users' fingertips. The index is a genre that includes bibliographies, subject-based guides to whole runs of periodicals, and the familiar form of a topic listing by page found in the back of nonfiction books. Indexes gather and organize marginalized lesbian information to make it useful.

The chapter considers two lesbian feminist indexing projects: the Circle of Lesbian Indexers (1979–86) and its *Lesbian Periodicals Index* (1986), and JR Roberts's *Black Lesbians: An Annotated Bibliography* (1981). I focus on how these indexes were produced, working with paper records that document work processes and circulation strategies. These "behind-the-scenes" objects and procedures—everyday paper records such as letters, memos, and notes—are far removed in tone from the vibrant sexual subcultures they exist to serve. While published subject indexes and bibliographies look like simple lists of resources organized by theme, they start out as collections of paper index cards stored in shoeboxes and edited and reordered

as the "database" grows. Feminist indexers worked with thousands of little paper slips to manage material databases that became life-changing tools women used to find pathways through lesbian-feminist publishing. Indexers did this often-cumbersome work with paper when they could have been using computers, and this moment of computational emergence is key to developing a queer history of digital media in emergence.

Feminist indexing in the 1980s took place just as database computing and online search retrieval became standard in institutional information contexts. This lesbian-feminist history of database computing analyzes how indexers imagined and attempted to use new information management programs that were just becoming accessible to amateurs. Enticed by the promise of computing but critical of technological accessibility for their communities, feminist indexers practiced what I call "capable amateurism" in the computer lab: a fearless approach to learning and implementing new media technologies that emerges out of feminist commitments to craft techniques, collectively organized work, and figuring things out on the fly.[111] Capable amateurism rejects the negative associations "amateur" can carry; these activists benefit from a lack of professional baggage, including firm ideas about protocols, standards, and what we might call "best practices" today. They bring flexibility to how technologies ought to be used and confidence in their capacity to get things done.

The chapter also explores how activists manage the boredom and isolation that often accompanies organizing information. The routine, meticulous task of sorting cards or entering data is made meaningful by a larger political vision of what might be achieved through better access to information in an affective economy that characterizes feminist information activism. This queer history of indexing and emergent computing examines indexes as "predigital" interfaces facilitating access to marginalized information about sexuality through search and retrieval.

While the previous chapters both rely on feminist media archives and analyze their construction, chapter 4 turns explicitly to archiving processes through a study of the LHA's digitization work. The previous chapters are concerned with how lesbian feminist print cultures imagined and anticipated digital information technologies, putting pressure on the apparent distinctions between "analog" and "digital" media. The study of the LHA takes place in what is more clearly a digital moment, exploring these archives' ongoing digitization practices, which began in the early 2010s.

Complex technological politics emerge when information activists convert analog materials to digital environments. Through interviews,

observation, and documentary research in organizational records at these grassroots archives the chapter connects lesbian-feminist politics to the design and implementation of accessible digitization projects that sometimes counter archival standards. For example, the archives digitizes their audiocassette tapes using a commercial-grade analog-to-digital converter and the open-source software Audacity, creating files that are, above all, good enough, even though they might not meet the fidelity or digital preservation standards in place at many large institutions. These capable amateurs are guided by feminist values of resourcefulness in how they manage information. The LHA's approach to digitization is improvisational, self-reflexive, and willfully imperfect in its technological choices.

I situate close analysis of digitization practices within a longer media history of the archives to understand the deeper activist commitments that shape the organization's multiple digitization projects. They include digitizing oral histories tapes and other audiovisual materials and streaming them online; scanning photographs and offering public access through an online image database; and updating the archives' text-based catalog for eventual online access. The digitization protocols accommodate the unusual, queer cultural material and ephemera that constitute the LHA's unique collections. Digitization presents the archives with the opportunity to consider the ways their unfolding technological choices might challenge the normative imperatives that often accompany digital media practices, including the ways that lesbian-feminist lives, and diverse gendered ways of being, scramble the categorical logics of structured databases.

The archives must "clean up" their computer catalog by standardizing descriptive terms, but they resist framing this data-hygiene project in terms of "progress" and carefully maintain records of imperfect, volunteer-driven metadata. My analysis of how lesbian feminists write data also considers the status of archival records in transition. I consider how trans subjects within the archives' holdings are described in online databases, framing digitization as a process through which lesbian-feminist social movement organizations build trans-inclusive systems. Digitization presents the archives with the opportunity to consider how the historical representations of gender and sexuality they house challenge the normative imperatives that can accompany digital media practices, including sexuality and gender's difficult fit with structured databases.

The epilogue turns to images of information abundance. Whether it is talk of stacks of cards managed by indexers, the countless networked connections the newsletter facilitates, or the mountains of old lesbian stuff

trying to find its way from the shelves of the archives to the internet, there always appears to be too much information to manage. Information activism exists to address precarious access to information, yet it produces an economy of abundance where it is normal to feel overwhelmed and to keep working despite the fear that you might drown in paper cards. Beginning with Lauren Berlant's turn to cruel optimism, where the goal that is sought is precisely the obstacle in the way of its achievement, the conclusion examines the economies of information within which these projects take place.[112]

Lesbian history is always being made, and we are always catching up, working to document and provide ongoing access in a project that is paradoxically uncompletable. The impulse to archive, what Jacques Derrida called "archive fever," extends to a feminist practice of carrying on with the everyday work of managing information, despite the odds.[113] Here, the digital, with its promise of limitless management through compression, instantaneous access, immateriality, and Big Data rhetorics, might be made into fodder for the lesbian-feminist killjoy. She does digital media with the same kind of care, skepticism, and attention to the deep political implications of information she brought to all those decades of paperwork.

Information activists built life-sustaining infrastructures for themselves and their communities out of simple information technologies. They did this work, and do this work, because they must find standing where none has been offered.[114] Through imaginative, improvisational, careful work with information, lesbian feminists make a world, a movement, and a life lived in networks with others.