

**PRESERVING PLAY: ARCHIVAL PRACTICE IN QUEER GAME  
STUDIES**

by

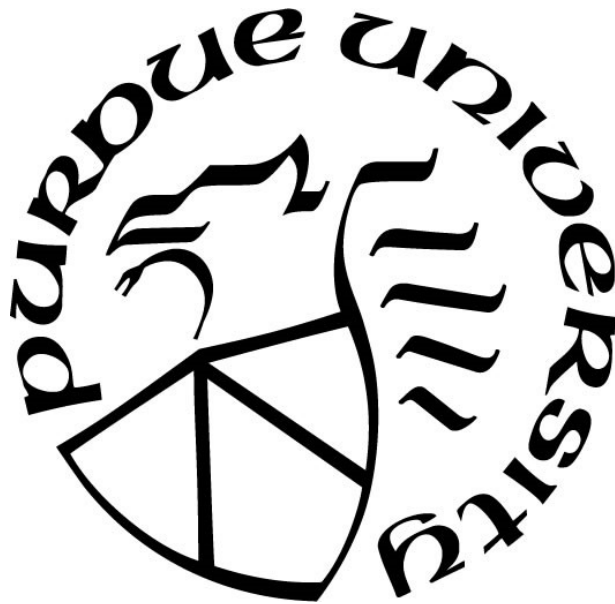
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*For Jean*

*My reason for recording a great unrecorded history*

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates archival work concerning the history and preservation of queer games and play experiences. Current scholarship in archival practice, queer history, and game studies focus on archival methods, the history of games in general, or the queerness of games in the present, without a specific focus on the intersection of archives and preservation of games and play experiences. This study therefore asks the following questions: What efforts are being made in game studies to preserve the history of games and those who play them? What do those methods look like in comparison to an archive of queer games constructed by and concerning the experiences of queer people? What can game studies do to more accurately preserve and lift up the voices of marginalized groups in gaming culture? To answer these questions I developed a six move methodology that interweaves interdisciplinary areas, including archival practice, queer theory, games history, and the lived experience of the author as a queer and transgender individual: 1) Weaving methodological strands together; 2) Defining a transparent method for insider research; 3) Decolonizing and redefining axes of marginalization; 4) Integrating queerness, game studies, and interdisciplinarity; 5) Turning to the archives; and 6) Enacting and maintaining activism, advocacy, and community. The study conducts two case studies examining efforts in archiving and preservation to lift up the voices of marginalized people, taking place at the Strong Museum of Play in Rochester, New York, and the all-digital LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive, respectively. The cases find that both archives engage in efforts to preserve queer gaming history to not only preserve history but look to the future and how to best serve marginalized populations. This occurs through collaboration between communities and sharing resources between archives and examining the interaction between the Strong and the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive provides insight into practical methods for preserving and lifting up marginalized voices in gaming history, including larger archives providing resources to assist smaller archives with access and long-term storage. Collaborative efforts to preserve specific queer video games such as *Caper in the Castro* provide specific examples of the two archives working together towards ensuring queer game history is preserved and accessible to scholars and gamers in the future. Highlighting the collaborative work and connections between the case studies demonstrates that the methods in use to preserve queer history rely on queer archival

practices like community interaction and collaboration to best serve marginalized communities in the preservation of their histories and experiences.

## QUEERNESS ACROSS TIME: FRAMING THOUGHTS

*Someone will remember us*

*I say*

*Even in another time*

-- Sappho (trans. A. Carson) *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*

*When I am with him, smoking or talking quietly ahead, or whatever it may be, I see, beyond my own happiness and intimacy, occasional glimpses of 1000s of others whose names I shall never hear, and know that there is a great unrecorded history.*

-- E.M. Forster (ed. M. Lago and P.N. Furbank) *Selected Letters of E.M. Forster I: 1879-1920* (London 1983), 269.

## **INTRODUCTION: MYSPACE, DATA LOSS, AND QUEER INVISIBILITY**

This project finds its heart in two key concepts: invisibility and loss. Both of these notions are part of historical erasure, but they interplay particularly in queer spaces, and it is in one of those queer spaces that this project was initially developed. On March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019, breaking news reported that former social media giant Myspace had experienced a massive data loss during a server migration. The company issued an apology and specified that “any photos, videos, and audio files you uploaded more than three years ago may no longer be available on or from Myspace” and revealed that data corruption during the migration resulted in the loss of everything uploaded between 2003 and 2015 (Doctorow 2019). While the social media site was mostly defunct, BBC correspondent Zoe Kleinman (2019) made the point that users who were on the site in its prime still made use of the website as an archive of their experiences during those years. This highlights a significant detail about digital data loss in the event of hardware failure: that the internet is fragile, and its contents are ephemeral. Conversations on Twitter echoed these fears but also emphasized the consequences of such data loss, and that Myspace’s users just had twelve years of formative digital experiences erased. As noted by at the time PhD Student Krystin Gollihue, the incident is a huge loss for information surrounding young women’s engagement with technology (2019), and she and others, including Kickstarter co-founder Andy Baio, speculate as to whether or not the deletion of over 350 terabytes of data was deliberate: “Flagrant incompetence may be bad PR, but it still sounds better than ‘we can’t be bothered with the effort and cost of migrating 50 million old MP3s” (Baio 2019). While the significance of the lost data impacts many who used Myspace to jumpstart their careers, those most profoundly affected are the people who used Myspace in their youth as a space for digital identity discovery. As Gollihue notes, Myspace was a significant space for queer people, people of color, and

teenage girls, and was one of the first places online where they had agency over their own data (2019). The total loss of twelve years of digital history, and the teen years of a generation of internet users, thus effectively erases a decade of people's lives in a digital space. The loss serves as a recent representative example of some of the issues surrounding digital archival study, data preservation, and the erasing of people in marginalized groups whose histories are already fragile and frequently destroyed. While any loss of historical information is a tragedy, losing the traces of queer history represents an even greater impact on an already invisible population, for losing the traces of one's history, ultimately, makes it impossible for that population to ever become visible. Losing twelve years of queer identity discovery via this Myspace data migration serves as a recent instance of a collection of queer histories that now can never be recovered, never made visible, and are forever lost in the shuffle of digital data fragility.

The presence of queerness in history is ephemeral: that is, it exists primarily in a theoretical, even nebulous fashion, often assumed or considered as a possibility without concrete evidence. Members of the LGBTQ+ community in the 21st century know through various forms of word-of-mouth and fragmented remains of the past that their existence is not a new or recent phenomenon, but locating specific historical documents or incidents becomes difficult when much of it is either invisible or erased. To find evidence of queer history, scholars have to investigate the history that already exists and contextualize it through what is missing, through historical clues, or through foreknowledge of queer culture. This method is true of a wide variety of historical and cultural spaces, even those that seem unlikely to hold any kind of connection to queer roots. The field of game studies in this case serves as an object example due to both its broad reach (in that games and play as a whole span vast years and cultures) and its frequent focus on the dominant cultural perspective of games played and created by the majority:

cisgender heterosexual able-bodied white men. As a queer person and a gamer, my own personal experience told a different story than that presented as the pervading narrative, and my time interacting with other queer gamers combined with recent scholarship into the inherent queerness of games served to further solidify my curiosity. This dissertation therefore began with a simple question: ‘Where is the queer history in games, and how is it being preserved?’ This question led me to investigate the inner workings of archives, in the hopes of uncovering sites of historical queerness connected to games and play.

### **Discovering Dani Bunten Berry**

The Strong Museum of Play, located in Rochester, New York, is home to dozens of collections based around the history and exploration of play, and seeks to serve families and scholars alike with their exhibits and research sites. One such site, the International Center for the History of Electronic Games (ICHEG hereafter) collects, studies, and interprets video games and other electronic game materials in the interest of studying how these games impact the ways people play, learn, and connect with each other ([museumofplay.org](http://museumofplay.org)). As I began outlining my research parameters for one of the two case studies I planned to undertake for my dissertation project, I knew I needed to look at the Key Holdings present at the Strong Museum’s archives so I could better plan for a future archival visit. The Key Holdings listing for the ICHEG, located under the ‘about’ page on the main website, provided me with a snapshot of the collections I could potentially study, and as I considered the listings, one name and its format on the page caught my eye (see figure. 1).

## Key Holdings of Publications and Personal Papers

In keeping with ICHEG's interest in the broad cultural history of electronic games, The Strong's electronic game and related collections encompass not only games and game platforms, but also a wide variety of other materials such as packaging, advertising, [publications](#), electronic game inspired consumer products, literary and popular inspirations of video game imagery, [personal and business papers](#), and other associated artifacts and documents that represent or illustrate the design and development of video games and other electronic games and their impact on people's lives.

- Cort and Barbara Allen Atari Packaging Design Collection, 1976–1984
- Atari Arcade Design Collection, 1973–1991
- Ralph H. Baer Papers, 1968–2010
- Bill Budge Collection, 1971–1985
- Dan Bunten (Dani Bunten Berry) Papers, 1949–1998

### *Figure 1: Discovering Dani Bunten Berry*

The Dan Bunten (Dani Bunten Berry) Papers immediately stood out to me because of that name in parentheses, which indicated not just that Bunten Berry went by two different names, but that both of those names had distinctly gendered characteristics. As a transgender person, I am no stranger to seeing these kinds of naming conventions deployed in news and historical documentation concerning transgender people, and this compelled me to dig deeper into who exactly Dani Bunten Berry was and why her papers were part of the ICHEG's key holdings. My cursory investigations revealed to me that Dani Bunten Berry was a pioneer of the American game design world, developing some of the earliest multiplayer video games, specifically the Atari game M.U.L.E. in 1983 ([atariwomen.org](http://atariwomen.org)). Despite being a self-identified gamer and a budding scholar in the field of game studies, I had never heard of Bunten Berry before, and had never seen scholarship or research into who she was or her transgender status. It's easy to attribute this to the times; Bunten Berry was active in video game development in the 1980s, and the public view and discussion of transgender people was very different then compared to the current social climate. However, seeing her name and discovering who she was spoke to me deeply as a transgender game studies scholar whose major research investigations concerned the involvement of queer people in early video game development. I found that learning of her existence provided me with a concrete instance of what I had been so certain of even before

discovering her -- that video games have always involved queer people, and our interest in games is far from new. My method of uncovering her -- noticing a double name that shifted visibly from a presumably male name to a decidedly female one -- further emphasized the complexity of queer history, and how it's easy to miss small instances of queer culture and contribution without the tools or context to notice them. Finding Dani Buntten Berry was both an act of archival serendipity and an instance of queer recognition -- though a chance discovery in some ways, the primary vehicle through which I noticed her was my own queer knowledge and personal experience. Queer archiving is a complex intersection of the interplay between uncovering queer history, utilizing personal queer context, and identifying information within gaps and absences that could easily be missed.

### **Archiving in the Gaps: Finding the Queer History in Games**

The study of archival practice in rhetoric and composition has recently made a turn towards acknowledging how current methods are affected by the gaps and silences found in traditional historical documentation and narrative. Morris (2006) notes that archives have yet to be subjected to sustained critical rhetorical reflection despite being among the “inventional sites of rhetorical pasts” (p. 113) and specifies that this impacts the “recognition, retrieval, interrogation, and articulation of queer historical voices” (p. 116). These concerns surrounding who has been left out of the dominant cultural narratives are compounded in an era that produces, writes, and rewrites historical narratives rapidly in the communal digital space of the internet. The information age made concerns about archival gaps and silences more urgent than they have been in the past, and even as archivists and researchers make moves to preserve



history in the making, the sheer amount of information available online makes an already difficult process seem nearly impossible, and only serves to widen the gaps that already exist.

One such instance of archival silences occurs in the area of games and gaming culture, where people who do not fall within a very narrow paradigm of what is considered a ‘mainstream’ gamer (usually a white, middle class, cisgender, heterosexual male) are relegated to the margins of game design, development, and play (Shaw 2014 p. viii, Shaw et al. 2019 p. 10). Since those voices are seen as natural experts of the medium while others are seen as less proficient compared to the “assumed boys club” of gaming culture (Malkowski and Russworm 2017 p. 1), disparities of representation, research, and knowledge are magnified in an already starkly divided cultural landscape. Despite the stereotypical image of ‘gamer’, the statistics surrounding identities of people who play games tell a different story. Games generate over \$45 Billion in revenue worldwide and over 65% of adult Americans play video games an average 5 hours a week (Ćwil and Howe 2020), and when that percentage is broken down, the numbers denoting gameplay habits across gender are frequently within just a few percentage points; for instance, in a survey of gamers aged 18 to 34, 75 percent of men surveyed played games regularly, while 77 percent of women did the same (Entertainment Software Association 2020). The key difference lies in the types of games played: men reported most commonly playing games on a console, while women were more likely to play games on their smartphones<sup>1</sup>. This division of women playing ‘casual’ games leads to them not being considered ‘true gamers’ due to their chosen platforms or genres of game (Shaw and Chess 2016). While the term ‘gamer’ has no singular definition, the commonplace interpretation of the term evokes a particular image, and

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this context, the usage of ‘male’ and ‘female’ refer specifically to cisgender male and female, though the very fact that studies such as this one maintains a binary is another issue entirely, one that serves to emphasize the point regarding queer erasure in the area of games and play.

concrete data surrounding the identity of gamers often has huge gaps in numbers concerning points such as race, gender identity, and sexuality, making it difficult to disprove the ingrained perception of gamer identity as one affiliated solely with cisgender heterosexual white men.

Current efforts in game studies to unearth the history of queer people in the design and play of video games reveal that games have more intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality than the mainstream usually sees, and queer people have been involved in games and gaming culture for far longer than the often reported idea that women, queer people, and people of color are only “recently” getting involved in games and gaming (Ruberg 2019 p. 2). In a cultural and political era of violence and silencing of anyone who does not fit a certain status quo, the need to bring marginalized voices to the forefront revolves around finding methods to highlight the contributions those voices have made to major cultural phenomena such as games and gaming. Game Studies’ recent moves to lift up the voices of marginalized people who game and make games (Ruberg & Shaw 2017; Malkowski & Russworm 2017) indicates a clear need to design and enact research methods that aid in this goal of bringing to light the rich history queer people have despite their historical silencing and relegation to the margins.

### **Enacting Queer Archival Practice in Game Studies**

This study analyzes archival work being done in game studies to preserve digital and physical media surrounding video games and video game culture. By placing conversations in archival practice about preserving histories of marginalized identities in context with game studies, I seek to highlight the work being done in one sub-field to uplift the contributions minority identities, particularly queer identities, have made to that culture. New methodologies established within the field that feature qualitative study of games (Consalvo and Dutton 2006) provide groundwork for creating new theories and research paradigms to further games’

scholarship, as well as creating space for scholars to bring other disciplines into conversation with the study of games. I therefore draw from archival rhetoric and practice, queer theory and methodology, feminist activism, and indigenous research paradigms, with the intent of crafting a new research paradigm specifically designed for queer history in game studies. Drawing on the precedent for this, found at the intersection of queer games research (Ruberg 2019, Shaw 2014), rhetorical archival research and practice (Ramsey et al. 2010), and the archiving of queer games (Shaw et al 2019), I create a methodology for queer archival game studies that interweaves interdisciplinary methods and praxis. This methodology presents a flexible toolkit other marginalized scholars can engage with and use to develop their own methodologies, methods, and studies in order to continue working for social justice and advocacy of marginalized groups and experiences. I build upon the current work being done in queer game studies by scholars who have brought to light the queer histories already present in games, and use the scholarship being done in archival game studies as a foundation to build a methodology that seeks to enact paradigms present in queer theory and social justice advocacy, with the goal of engaging in research that ultimately serves the community which it is studying - namely, queer gamers.

Interwoven within this methodology and scholarship is my own voice as a queer and transgender scholar, and I make use of my own lived experiences and knowledge throughout this project to contextualize existing literature, develop a methodology, and engage with the results of my case studies. Including this perspective allows me to not only integrate my own queer experience, but to queer the experience of creating a dissertation document, emphasizing and including the facets of my life that are both scholar and human, and highlight the way my identity and my scholarship are inextricable from one another and how they provide a richer context and insight into the subject of queer archival practice in game studies.

Chapter One examines existing literature and scholarship in the intersecting fields of archival rhetoric, game studies, and queer theory, and uses three major cultural moments as a framework for crafting a conversation that integrates seemingly disparate areas of knowledge. Using examples from both current events and historical incidents, including institutional censorship in the National Archives, the historic Nazi book burning at the Institute of Sexual Science in 1933, and the use of *Minecraft* to circumvent 21st century journalistic censorship, I craft a literature review that examines the need for a conversation to take place that brings together games, archiving, and queerness to lay a foundation for this dissertation.

Chapter Two crafts a research paradigm for queer game studies that interweaves my lived experience as a queer and transgender individual with the scholarship and methods of a wide variety of knowledgeable areas to create my three research questions, establish a flexible methodological toolkit for studying marginalized histories, and maintain my focus on ensuring my work uplifts marginalized voices first and foremost. By presenting an exigence for investigating queer gaming experience via a discussion of GamerGate, I contextualize my methodology within both current and recent events to solidify a need for robust and adaptable methods that integrate the experiences of the researcher with the subject of the research. I discuss my methodology and the six moves I made -- 1) Weaving methodological strands together; 2) Defining a transparent method for insider research; 3) Decolonizing and redefining axes of marginalization; 4) Integrating queerness, game studies, and interdisciplinarity; 5) Turning to the archives; and 6) Enacting and maintaining activism, advocacy, and community -- to bring different strands of scholarship together in context with historical precedent for the need to engage with and preserve different facets of queer game studies.

Chapter Three is a case study of the Strong Museum of Play in Rochester, New York, including its methods of preservation for games and play experiences. I chose this case study due to the Strong Museum having one of the largest collections of archival and historical game and play materials in the world and the expertise of its staff at preserving game hardware and software. I interviewed two staff members of the museum, Dr. J.P. Dyson, the head of ICHEG, and Mr. Andrew Borman, the Strong's Digital Games Curator, to gain their perspectives on the methods the museum undertakes to preserve games as a whole and the experiences of marginalized people involved in the gaming community in particular. Both Dr. Dyson and Mr. Borman shared details of the Strong Museum's archival systems, preservation methods, and current efforts into outreach and inclusion across multiple marginalized identities, including race, gender, and sexuality, and discussed their goals for the future of the museum and its preservation efforts. These conversations highlight the direct efforts the Strong Museum and its staff make to preserve marginalized histories by engaging in community outreach, actively seeking out new collection opportunities, and collaborating with smaller archives and archival efforts by contributing their resources and access to robust storage infrastructures and tools.

Chapter Four is a case study of the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive, a digital archive of games identified as queer in some capacity and run by Dr. Adrienne Shaw. I selected this archive due to its specific affiliation with LGBTQ+ game content and preservation for a comparison point between those efforts and the efforts of a larger general archive. My case study involves an interview with Dr. Shaw which examines her methods for maintaining the archive as well as gaining an understanding of how the archive was founded. Dr Shaw shared her experience creating and maintaining the Wordpress site that houses the archive, her metadata and selection criteria process, and her goals for ensuring the archive remains a robust curated resource for

researchers and scholars. Dr. Shaw shared both her own efforts to preserve game content as well as her collaborative efforts with other organizations, including the Strong Museum, to preserve content that was difficult to access or needed specialized hardware to be played, and discussed her thoughts on what it means to queer an archive and how the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive embodies queerness through its methods of preservation, which focus more on being a scholarly resource for researchers and gamers as opposed to a direct preservation of the games themselves.

Chapter Five discusses both case studies in context with each other, examining the similarities, differences, and overlaps between their areas, methods, and resources. This discussion touches on the significant differences between a large archive with a broad focus and a smaller archive with a narrow one, and the ways the two archives have collaborated and intersected in their effort to preserve game and play experiences. The two case studies differ in the scope of the archives, but aspects of their mission -- to preserve people's stories and play experiences -- overlap and interact, something evident in specific instances of preserving queer games such as one of the earliest video games, *Caper in the Castro*. I discuss the unexpected blending of the two case studies and go into detail about the implications of both these points of collaboration, different levels of access between a large-scale museum archive and a small digital curated collection, and the ethics surrounding archiving queer game experiences.

This dissertation makes use of a blend of academic scholarly research and personal experience, working to directly interweave the experiences and life of the researcher into the research being conducted. It is my belief that this method of crafting a dissertation, while decidedly a queer one, also provides a deeper insight into the questions at hand surrounding queer history, archiving lived experiences, and studying communities of marginalized people

from the inside rather than the outside. The insights I can provide as a queer and transgender gamer enrich the contents of this dissertation and queer the notion of an academic text, encouraging and integrating the personal and the scholarly as inextricably connected phenomena that create a more in-depth and knowledgeable piece of scholarship.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Literature Review: Archival Rhetoric, Queer History, and Game Studies in Conversation**

The current state of the intersecting fields of archival rhetorics, queer scholarship, and games is one that brings together multilayered notes of passionate and valuable research all working towards a common thread of social justice, with each field seeking to emphasize marginalized voices along different lines of inquiry. By placing current events and scholarly discourses in archival rhetoric, queer history, and game studies into conversation with one another, I highlight the state of scholarship in these fields and how their interweaved aspects create space for developing and enacting my research into archival work taking place in games and game studies.

I make use of real-world examples within each major section of this literature review, both from current events and relevant moments in history. My goal in making use of these instances is to both demonstrate the cultural impact of each of these conversations about archiving, queer history, and game studies, and to emulate the rhetorical archival scholarship that frames its deep dives into the archives around stories and narratives and highlights the benefits of choosing subjects to which scholars are personally drawn and that lead them down paths of discovery, curiosity, and intrigue (Kirsch and Rohan 2008, p. 8). Using these examples provides a reference point for the scholarship I engage with in this review and allows me to further frame the research around my own interests and knowledge moving forward with this dissertation project.

The first section, concerning archival rhetoric, focuses on the gaps and silences evident in archives and archiving both at present and in history. I frame the section around a recent current event - the NARA censorship of the Women's March - and use that moment to highlight the



conversations in archival scholarship and rhetoric regarding the erasure and silencing of marginalized voices in historical contexts. The second section takes this discussion of gaps and silences and uses a specific historical event - the Nazi book burnings of the Institute of Sexual Science - to discuss the specific impact historical erasure has had on queer and LGBTQ+ people's lives. This historical event will be placed into conversation with current moves towards both the erasure and preservation of queer and LGBTQ+ lives and history, primarily in the culture of the United States, and examine the impact of archival erasure and silencing on those lives. The final section of this literature review will shift the discussion to Game Studies and gaming culture and use a specific archival project - The Uncensored Library - to discuss how games themselves function within the cultural conversation surrounding archives, curation, and information access. By examining the archival potential of games and technology for protecting and uplifting marginalized voices, I provide a clear context for scholarship that examines archival practice in games and contextualizes it within the conversations currently taking place in the field of Game Studies about the experiences and scholarship of marginalized people.

The narrative moments I present in this chapter are not meant to be monolithic or definitive examples of the scholarly phenomena I engage with, but are selected major examples that speak to my understanding and knowledge of the work being done in these areas without overloading the section with cultural context. I further explain the relevance and importance of interweaving narrative in my methods chapter. In addition, I approach the work in this chapter discussing archives from the perspective of an archivist, as opposed to the perspective of a historian. Rather than approach this scholarship from the perspective of someone who makes use of archives, or an archival user, I approach this work as an archival scholar, or someone who works with the infrastructure of archives to create and design archival content. This distinction

matters as the knowledge I collect in this literature review is focused on the meta-space surrounding archives rather than the contents of archives themselves -- my work is invested in the mechanisms surrounding archives and their contents, rather than using archival contents to craft an argument, and the distinction defines my approach as an archivist and archival scholar rather than a historian and archival user.

### **Part 1 - Censoring History: The Women's March and Archival Silencing**

In January of 2020, the National Archives and Record Administration (NARA hereafter) faced backlash over altering a promotional photograph of the 2017 Women's March placed in the National Archives lobby as part of the exhibit "Rightfully Hers: American Women and the Vote", which highlighted the centennial of the 19th Amendment. Portions of the 2017 photo, in particular signs that criticized President Donald Trump, were intentionally blurred out to render them unreadable. Examples of blurred signs included a sign reading "God Hates Trump", where the word "Trump" was obscured, and a sign reading "This Pussy Grabs Back", which had the words referencing anatomy blurred or erased (Peet 2020). The photograph, while displayed in its intact form in the exhibit proper, was reportedly changed for publicity use so as "to not engage in current political controversy" in regards to the censoring of Trump's name and in order to ensure the presence of references to genitalia were not visible due to the museum frequently hosting groups of young people, as the words "could be perceived as inappropriate" (Peet 2020). NARA spokesperson Miriam Kleiman also said that NARA "only alters images in exhibits when they are used as graphic design components" and the decision to edit the photograph was both made by NARA managers and staff members and approved by Archivist of the United States David S.

Ferriero (Peet 2020). The resulting public backlash against the decision led to NARA responding with an apology both in a statement and on social media, which stated the following:

We made a mistake. As the National Archives of the United States, we are and have always been completely committed to preserving our archival holdings, without alteration. In an elevator lobby promotional display for our current exhibit on the 19th Amendment, we obscured some words on protest signs in a photo of the 2017 Women's March. This photo is not an archival record held by the National Archives, but one we licensed to use as a promotional graphic. Nonetheless, we were wrong to alter the image. We have removed the current display and will replace it as soon as possible with one that uses the unaltered image. We apologize, and will immediately start a thorough review of our exhibit policies and procedures so that this does not happen again (archives.gov).

The incident, along with NARA's reaction and apology, provides us with a timely example of the kind of archival silences currently being investigated by scholars of archival rhetoric. It is my intention to refer back to this incident, NARA's response, and further responses from the Society of American Archivists (SAA hereafter) and the American Libraries Association (ALA hereafter) to frame scholarship on archival gaps and silences in history with reference to their current impact on cultural conversations and the evolution of ethical archival practices.

### **Moments of Silence: Archival Ethics and Narrative Construction**

Archival theory refers to the "gaps" and "silences" present in archives, concepts concerning the methods by which collections are constructed. Trouillot (1995) explains archival silences as being an inherent part of historical production tied to power and constructivism (p. 25), in that the contents of archives are dependent on who is in a position of authority and who is constructing the historical narrative. The silences in archives echo cultural anxieties concerning history as a whole and serve as a concrete example of how historical 'reality' can very easily be altered, hidden, or rewritten (p. 22). Trouillot identifies four major sites of silence in historical production:

- The moment of fact creation (the making of sources)
- The moment of fact assembly (the making of archives)
- The moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives)
- The moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance) (p. 26).

Trouillot uses examples of the historical narrative surrounding the Haitian Revolution to demonstrate these sites of silence, emphasizing the power dynamics present in the production of alternative narratives (p. 29) to note the pieces of the historical narrative that were omitted, changed, or forgotten.

This issue of silence in the archives remains clear in archival practice<sup>2</sup>, as Ramsey notes in her discussion of the hidden nature of unprocessed archival materials (2010). While Trouillot emphasizes the ways that silences are constructed in archives, Ramsey notes the other key issue surrounding those silences: collections remaining unprocessed (p. 83). Collections remaining hidden due to lack of resources and time to process them resulted in the creation of a special task force by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in 2001, which worked for four years to study and report on the number of hidden collections (p. 81). Their work highlighted three major issues surrounding hidden collections:

- 1) Unprocessed collections (thought to be almost 70 percent of collections overall) were at a higher risk for being lost or stolen, more difficult to recover from legal authorities, and were especially vulnerable if they contained unique or rare materials.

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<sup>2</sup> The usage of the term ‘archival practice’ here refers to the methods used by archivists to organize and preserve archival material, as opposed to the use of archives, which is how archives are accessed and navigated by researchers and scholars.

- 2) Unprocessed collections were inaccessible to the scholarly community, thus hindering research, and even though those collections were sometimes made available to scholars, their lack of processing made them almost impossible for researchers to locate.
- 3) The lack of access most heavily impacted undergraduates, graduate students, and junior faculty who lacked the resources to travel to other institutions, particularly when there was no guarantee the sought-after materials were available or even present. (p. 81)

The task force highlights concerns within the archival profession regarding the inadvertent gaps and silences present in collections, an anxiety which stems from the historical issue of narratives being hidden and erased, or rewritten by those who have power over the creation and preservation of records.

Work that counters these gaps and silences, such as the ARL task force, seeks to put in place resources and practical methods for acknowledging and preserving hidden or erased historical narratives and archival collections. The report highlights the importance of archival materials not only being collected and preserved, but processed for use by researchers, students, and historians (Ramsey 2010 p. 83). Part of this processing is tied inherently to archival ethics, which operate through a series of evolving and living documents collected by organizations including the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and the International Council on Archives (ICA) (Danielson 2010 p. 40). These documents shift and change depending on the legal statutes of different countries and are therefore frequently re-assessed to account for new developments in archival methods (p. 41). The ICA maintains a strong (and as Danielson notes, moralistic) set of provisions established in 1996 that exist to ensure archives operate ethically concerning matters of material integrity, selection and appraisal, records maintenance, and authenticity (p. 41-42). While having a code of ethics archivists can use and adapt to individual collections

allows for more accurate and well-maintained archival materials, the provisions are professional standards that reinforce codes established by groups such as the SAA but fall short in that they lack any kind of method for the implementing of those codes beyond “mobilizing public pressure” (p. 43). While the goals of archives are made clear in these codes - to act as “trusted witness to what really happened” (Danielson p. 46) - the codes do not contain concrete strategies to avoid unethical behaviors that contribute to the silences and gaps of historical interpretation. As these gaps have the potential to arise in the most essential areas of archival practice, as outlined by Trouillot (1995) and noted above, uncovering the silences and filling the gaps necessitates concrete action even as archivists make moves towards more comprehensive and transparent practices and methods.

### **Archival Metaphors: Making Methods More Transparent, Accessible, and Replicable**

Archivists and their role in historical preservation have been the subject of interdisciplinary scholarship seeking to make transparent a previously mysterious profession. Jimerson (2009 p. 18) refers to stereotypes of archivists in fiction, which present an image of “knowledgeable but ineffective toilers in dark, mysterious basements”, and these images contribute to a professional anxiety concerning how archivists appear to the public. The move toward informing and being more transparent about the process and methods of archival work has allowed for non-archivists to gain a deeper insight into the inner workings of archives. Using three different metaphors, Jimerson (2009) describes the inner workings of archives as part temple, part prison, part restaurant (p. 3). The temple metaphor highlights key aspects of navigating archives and their contents, including their physical structure being akin to shrines and religious sanctums, which in turn influences the contents to be appraised with a certain

reverence and care for the “momentous implications” seen in selecting and preserving pieces of history (p. 4-5). Other archival scholars and researchers echo this temple metaphor in their description of work within the archive by referring to the fortunate moments of serendipity that arise in archival work. Gaillet (2010) refers to archival research with metaphors such as locating a “holy grail” (p. 29) for those moments of investigating an archive’s contents, and this additional religious concept echoes the initial temple metaphor: archives are sacred, reverential, and contain mythical wonders. The prison metaphor Jimerson uses emphasizes one of the key differences between libraries and archives, which concerns the importance of the security and protection of archival spaces and their contents (p. 6). Archivists have a distinct level of power over both archival contents and the meanings and interpretations of those contents, which Jimerson compares to the notion of the Panopticon (p. 7). Citing Ketelaar (2002), who refers to the archival reading room as a constantly surveilled prison space, this metaphor emphasizes the inherent levels of control present in archival work, where archivists in a reading room supervise and track what artifacts and documents are viewed and by whom they are viewed (p. 7). The final metaphor, that of the restaurant, more deeply engages in the idea of the archivist as being responsible for interpretation of an archive’s contents, referring to both the ability for the archivist to distill and explain complex “menu items” present for researchers to investigate and the way that much like a restaurant, the most intense work takes place out of sight of the customers, behind the scenes in the kitchen, or in this case, the archive’s construction and maintenance (p. 8) Jimerson’s metaphors provide context for how archives function, what to expect in an archival space, and how the dynamics of archival research and access can be complex, contradictory, and multi-layered.

Other archivists collaborate with researchers and scholars to make more transparent the work they conduct in archival spaces. Morris and Rose (2010) emphasize the importance of working together as archivist and researcher to get the most use out of an archive and its contents, highlighting the role of the archivist in the processing and interpreting of collections (p. 52-53). Using an unprocessed collection - the James Berlin Papers - as an example, Morris and Rose walk readers through the process an archivist goes through in the intake and organization stage of reviewing archival materials for future research, bringing to light previously “invisible” work concerning the methods by which archival materials go from intake to accessible to researchers (p. 53). Ramsey (2010) echoes this call for transparency by discussing the issue of “hidden” archives - collections that have not yet been processed or have only been partially processed - and how archival materials exist in different states of organization that researchers need to be aware of (p. 79). Her investigation also makes transparent the sheer amount of materials that remain unprocessed, providing a clearer picture of how archives function as sites that work to organize and arrange materials for access rather than letting them sit in their hidden state (p. 81). The collaborative and expository scholarship archival scholars and researchers conduct therefore focuses heavily on this notion of access and distinguishing archives as complex sites of research that require knowledge of archival practice to be successfully navigated by patrons, as well as detailing how researchers can benefit from an archivist’s knowledge and expertise.

### **Archival Ethics in Practice: Applying Archival Theory to the NARA Incident**

If we consider the NARA incident within the context of these ideas of archival practice and knowledge, the issues with the archivist’s decision to blur out portions of the images of the



display increase in their severity and magnitude. To demonstrate this, I will engage with some of the articles and material surrounding the incident, including NARA's social media statement, and juxtapose those recollections of the incident with the archival theory the parties involved in the situation did not adhere to. I will also make note of the SAA's response to the incident and how their statement demonstrates the archival rhetorical items they noticed were not followed. In doing this, I hope to use this practical example to make archival practices, and the violations thereof, more transparent, and thus highlight the importance of this transparency in terms of cultural historical narrative making practices.

Initially the point worth highlighting in how the NARA incident was handled is how it appears in the context of Trouillot's sites of silence. The moment of fact retrieval, or the point of constructing and sharing a narrative (p. 26) stands as the instance that applies in this circumstance, where NARA edited the image for display and placed it in the archival exhibit, though other moments Trouillot mentions could easily apply to the circumstance in the future, particularly the moment of retrospective significance. NARA's editing of the image is however a clear instance of a narrative being adjusted and framed in a certain context in a fashion that alters the original intent of the source document, changing the narrative and, effectively, altering history.

Worth noting also is the framing of the incident on NARA's social media page (see figure 2), where they posted a statement apologizing for the action undertaken that is identical to the statement on the National Archives website. Quoted above, the key element of this statement lies in the way it begins - with NARA saying, 'We made a mistake'.



*Figure 2: Screenshot of a tweet from the US National Archives.*

The implications of the term ‘mistake’ here serve to undercut the deliberate nature of the action NARA took in doctoring the image of the 2017 Women’s March, which serves to alter the narrative further to the point that the silence being established becomes the final two of Trouillot’s moments: the moment of fact retrieval and the moment of retrospective significance (p. 26). By framing their decision as a mistake, NARA implies their doctoring of the image was something done by accident, that their intent was not to alter anything, and that the incident was a careless error instead of a calculated decision. This phrasing, preserved in screenshots and in their official statement, thus serves to change the moment in retrospect, meaning that the further away the moment is in history and time, the less likely people are to have a reference point beyond this official documentation of NARA’s apology. The rhetorical move here of shifting the blame of the incident to careless action rather than calculated decision serves to alter the historical narrative and ultimately silence the truth of the situation - that NARA willfully censored an image in an archival exhibit to remove material that was deemed ‘unacceptable’ for public consumption.

The response to NARA's apology included statements from the Society of American Archivists, and their addressing of the issue includes important references to archival codes of ethics that make the incident both more clearly a violation of archival practice and ethical historical work. They specifically quote the Code of Ethics in their statement concerning authenticity:

Archivists ensure the authenticity and continuing usability of records in their care. They document and protect the unique archival characteristics of records and strive to protect the records' intellectual and physical integrity from tampering or corruption. Archivists may not willfully alter, manipulate, or destroy data or records to conceal facts or distort evidence. They thoroughly document any actions that may cause changes to the records in their care or raise questions about the records' authenticity (SAA Executive Committee 2020).

The statement further defines the incident as a violation of the archivist's responsibility to be objective and a fraudulent and deceptive action (SAA Executive Committee 2020), specifically noting that while the argument made by NARA sought to justify the action in order to prevent young people from seeing "disturbing words" and avoiding making partisan statements, the purpose of public demonstrations is to make those statements. Finally, they note that "at a time when honesty and integrity of government agencies and public officials have been called into question by many Americans, the National Archives must set an example of accurate representation of the nation's history" (SAA Executive Committee 2020). The SAA's statement stands in stark contrast to the tone of NARA's apology, and functions to contextualize the historical moment as a deliberate and deceptive one rather than the accidental error NARA describes. As per the archivist's code of ethics, the SAA seeks to hold NARA responsible for their decision, both in their insistence on a policy and procedure review of NARA's methods and their issuing of a statement that insists upon the deliberate nature of NARA's actions (SAA Executive Committee 2020).

Responses from other organizations such as the American Library Association (ALA) echo these censorship concerns, specifically referencing the Library Bill of Rights and how NARA's actions violate its stringent policy against "deletion, excision, alteration, editing, or obliteration of any part of a library resource by administrators, parent institutions, or third-party vendors when done for the purposes of censorship" (ALA in Peet 2020). One final response, from project director of Documenting the Now Bergis Jules, highlights a key aspect of archival practice that gets overlooked -- that practicing neutrality is impossible in archival work, yet this is what the National Archives attempted to do (Peet 2020). NARA's insistence that they were trying to be nonpartisan in political issues mistakenly assumes that archival work should function in a position of neutrality instead of as archivists and their archives truly function - as complex contextual sites of narrative creation, fact retrieval, and meaning making (Trouillot 26). The SAA and ALA's responses stand out as examples of archivists and librarians seeking to make transparent their work by directly citing codes of ethics and bills of rights. The particular provisions outlined by both organizations highlight the express condemnation of censorship and the importance of not using the human influence of archivists to doctor or change materials in a way that alters their meaning.

In reflecting on the NARA Incident, I provide here a timely example of concerns surrounding archival practice in the 21st century, which in turn highlights the rhetoric surrounding archives both in public spheres and academic conversations. The concerns highlighted in theory by archival scholars regarding censorship and silencing of historical voices are made material and concrete by the statements made by archival organizations in the wake of the NARA Incident, and both facets of the conversation serve to emphasize the overarching state

of the field of archival studies and the concerns surrounding the consequences of archival silencing, censoring, and modification of primary source materials for public consumption.

## **Part 2 - Historical Revisionism: The Third Reich's Raid on the Institute of Sexual Science**

Concerns about censorship and historical erasure permeate discussions of archives and their contents throughout history, and highlighting the damage done by incidents of such erasure provides insight into the stakes at play in studying and advocating for ethical archival practice, particularly concerning the preservation of marginalized voices. Consider one such historical instance of erasure: the raid of the Institute of Sexual Science during the height of the Third Reich, an event that would become the first of many book burnings conducted by the Nazi party in Berlin. The materials contained within this archive, including some of the earliest instances of 20th century gender confirmation surgery procedures, auto-ethnographic stories of LGBTQ+ life in Berlin, and social moves to more clearly scientifically define and observe instances of non-heterosexual relations (Bauer 2017), were destroyed in a move purported to set the LGBTQ+ rights movement back more than fifty years. Using two recent incidents, the landmark 2020 civil rights hearing at the Supreme Court about protections for LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace, and the revelation of popular children's author J.K. Rowling to be staunchly anti-transgender, I will examine the rhetorical moves used in dissent cases and statements that demonstrate the authors' assumption of a lack of LGBTQ+ historical precedent, showcasing the lasting damage that acts of historical destruction and erasure have had and will continue to have as long as LGBTQ+ history continues to be erased. By then looking at two specific archives -- the Lesbian Herstory Archive and the Digital Transgender Archive -- I examine the strategies scholars and archivists have undertaken to counteract the loss of historical documentation of marginalized voices such as the burning of the Institute of Sexual Science. This work emphasizes both the

tragedy of the loss of information while also holding out hope for the future of preservation, pulling together the threads of tragedy and hope to paint a picture of the state of the current conversation surrounding queer and LGBTQ+ archiving projects.

### **Destruction and Erasure: The Institute of Sexual Science and the Nazi Regime**

Historical revisionism concerning the erasure of marginalized identities has roots that run deep within archival practice, and the specific instances of queer historical erasure serve as examples of both past silences in archival work and sites in which historians and community members are now working to make effective change. Trouillot's work to uncover these silences is taken up by Fowler (2017), who examines ways in which archival construction has the potential to impose silences on records and historical accounts (p. 2). Fowler cites incidents such as political conflict, selectivity of sources, and destruction as the causes of enforced silences, the final instance of which can be applied to historical instances of queer erasure. When contextualizing this current situation with the past forced silences concerning the lives and history of queer and transgender individuals such as the destruction of Hirschfeld's archive, it is clear that the repercussions of historical erasure last for decades and must be both acknowledged and countered.

While the destruction of seditious materials by the Nazi party in the 1930s holds significance as an attack on political opposition to the Third Reich, one of the earliest incidents of the removal and burning of materials included the archives from the Institute of Sexual Science (Bauer 2017 p. 92). The materials, acquired in a raid on May 6th, 1933, were subsequently destroyed in the first of a series of book burnings four days later, and the materials included detailed research conducted by Institute founder Magnus Hirschfeld on topics related to

human sexuality, including homosexuality and treatments for transgender individuals (Bauer p. 88). Hirschfeld's life's work included an extensive archive of research, data, and photographic materials depicting the lives of queer individuals living in and around Berlin in the early 20th century. These materials, as Bauer notes, served not only as an archive of medical practice but also as an early auto-ethnographic document of modern queer and transgender lives (p. 90). Bauer also notes the complexity of terminology surrounding historical Queer lives, citing Rawson's (2015) helpful definitional work concerning transgender histories in particular. While it is tempting to impose an identity category in an anachronistic way, the term transgender in this case serves as a term that indicates a shared realm of experience among people who "do not maintain the gender they were assigned at birth" rather than a discrete identity category (Bauer p. 84). Hirschfeld himself made use more commonly of the term 'transvestism', but the term transgender here becomes an umbrella term for the people who resided in and around the Institute of Sexual Science who moved away from their birth genders, and Bauer notes that the work done by Hirschfeld serves as an example of some of the earliest scholarship and research into the experiences of transgender people (p. 84). His first written work on the subject, *Die Transvestiten*, written in 1910, led ultimately to the institute being one of the first major institutions to offer gender reassignment surgeries in the 1920s (Bauer p. 86). While Hirschfeld himself held gender essentialist and even eugenicist views, most of them the norm at that time, his work in binary gender reassignment was groundbreaking and unprecedented and can be acknowledged as such even within this context.

The raid on the Institute of Sexual Science was one of the earliest points of attack on dissenting thought after the Nazis rose to power in the 1930s. The attack, seen by Bauer as the inauguration of a new phase in the intensification of Nazi terror (p. 92), happened in three stages.

Nazi students entered the institute in the morning and began destroying its interior. In the afternoon, members of the SA (or Sturmabteilung) joined in to conduct a more systematic search of the premises. These two groups removed large parts of the Institute's library, which were then loaded onto trucks. The materials on those trucks were destroyed in stage three of the attack, which occurred four days later and was the first of a series of infamous Nazi book burnings (Bauer p. 92). This act marked the beginning of historical violence against queer people under the Third Reich, leading ultimately to Gestapo directives that placed men convicted of homosexuality under paragraph 175 in concentration camps, in numbers estimated to be around ten thousand, with number of deaths uncertain (Lautmann 1998 p. 345). The raid and destruction of institute materials, while initially an act of indiscriminate vandalism by students, reportedly became more methodical when the SA joined in, with officers removing books and manuscripts including material belonging to the World League for Sexual Reform and the whole edition of the journal *Sexus* (Bauer p. 93). Whether selection and destruction was fully systematic and deliberate remains in debate, but the contents of the archive that were destroyed included much of the work by Hirschfeld and his contemporaries on gender and sexuality, marking what Bauer refers to as the end of the first phase of European sexology (p. 92). While Hirschfeld and his colleagues were undoubtedly under scrutiny due to their Judaism, the homophobia and conservatism of the Third Reich is a contributing factor in the Institute becoming a target for Nazi destruction and violence. Both aspects of Hirschfeld's life made the institute a target, and as a result his life's work and the accounts of contemporary Queer lives were destroyed, effectively erased from the historical record. Most relevant here is the erasure not only of records and medical research, but the lives housed within the Institute, which functioned as a home and haven for many at the time. While the Institute was in many ways the first LGBTQ+ Archive, it



was an archive that existed in concert with the activities, both private and political, of those who went about their everyday lives within its walls (Bauer p. 100). The overlap means that the loss of materials is also the loss of personal stories and livelihoods, taking not only archival and historic documentation from the residents of the Institute, but the place those people called home. The destruction, therefore, marks an erasure of a major historical source of early 20th century LGBTQ+ lives, research, and knowledge, all enacted under a dangerous fascist regime determined to stamp out sedition and ideals that went against their status quo.

### **Erased History and Future Consequence: Queer Medicine and Denial of Rights in the 21st Century**

As the rhetoric surrounding the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals in the United States remains in the spotlight, much of the discussion involves those opposed to the civil rights movements that allow for equal protections often cite the sudden appearance of transgender individuals as a rationale for it being either unimportant or some kind of new trend amongst young people (Barkin 2017). The discussion of the Institute of Sexual Science above is an obvious counter to this notion, but despite this, the erasure of Hirschfeld's work and other avenues of research into the history of LGBTQ+ lives has a lasting impact on the rights and lives of Queer people in the 21st century. What follows here are two contemporary instances of LGBTQ+ rights, specifically transgender rights, being denied from a legislative and a cultural standpoint, and are currently developing as of the drafting of this chapter in the summer of 2020. I share them to emphasize not only their impact on LGBTQ+ and transgender lives as a whole but to also provide my own lived experience witnessing and processing these events, in the hope that this current example will take the theoretical concerns of archival destruction and erasure

and demonstrate current consequences of such historically violent moves against a marginalized group to which I belong.

The 2019-2020 Supreme Court Session featured a landmark case for LGBTQ+ Rights: *R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes Inc v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*. The case, concerning the wrongful termination of employee Aimee Stephens after she came out, ruled in the favor of transgender individuals, citing violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights act of 1964 and thus providing transgender Americans with protection from wrongful termination in the workplace. The case, argued in October of 2019 and decided on June 15th of 2020, represented a landmark victory in LGBTQ+ workplace rights and was decided on a 6-3 vote in favor of the defendant (oyez.org). The case connects to historical examination and discussion of LGBTQ+ lives through examination of the dissenting opinions presented by the three justices who ruled against the case: Samuel Alito, Brett Kavanaugh, and Clarence Thomas. By examining the dissenting statements made by these Justices, it is my goal to demonstrate the lasting impact of the destruction of LGBTQ+ history, both in general and specifically incidents that occurred at the Institute of Sexual Science in the 1930s, on 21st century legal proceedings on the rights of LGBTQ+ and particularly transgender people.

While both Justices Alito and Kavanaugh penned dissents (with Thomas joining Alito's dissent), I am choosing the focus on the language present in Justice Alito's dissent for the purposes of this argument, as particular arguments Alito makes stand both as examples of popular 21st century misconceptions about transgender history and evidence of the lasting damage of queer historical erasure. Alito's main focus in his dissent against the case comes from his objection to the Court operating from an updated definition of sex discrimination, which he argues against in the following paragraph:

In 1964, ordinary Americans reading the text of Title VII would not have dreamed that discrimination because of sex meant discrimination because of sexual orientation, much less gender identity. The ordinary meaning of discrimination because of “sex” was discrimination because of a person’s biological sex, not sexual orientation or gender identity. The possibility that discrimination on either of these grounds might fit within some exotic understanding of sex discrimination would not have crossed their minds. (590 U.S. 2020).

Alito goes on to highlight the classification of homosexuality and other similar conditions as mental disorders at the time of the Title VII ruling, directly citing the DSM to account for his claims that the non-heterosexual ‘condition’ was heavily pathologized in the 1960s. His insistence that the court adhere to the societal norms of the ‘times’ that the original ruling was written, thus meaning that discrimination concerned with gender identity would not fall under the original Title VII ruling. He refers specifically to the term ‘transgender’ in his ruling as a 21st century term that would be unfamiliar or nonsensical to average Americans, noting that they would “have been bewildered” to hear that the law forbids discrimination based on decisions that would “have left people at the time scratching their heads (590 U.S. C (2020)).” While Alito cites Drescher’s assertion of the definition being coined in the 1970s, he fails to take into account the extensive scholarship conducted that specifically discusses the malleability of terms related to the trans experience, as discussed above in Bauer’s citation of Rawson’s discussion of the subject. In this fashion, it becomes clear that Alito’s view is focused on a particular set of sources and assumptions that do not take into account the voices of transgender people or the history of sex reassignment across the world. He notes that the first publicized sex reassignment surgeries were not performed until 1966 and that physicians surveyed in the 1960s thought that individuals who sought sex reassignment surgery were either neurotic or psychotic, citing documentation from the era (Dhejne et al 2014). While his focus on the United States is reasonable from a legal and judicial standpoint, it makes his assertion that discrimination based on a concept that was essentially unknown to the public dependent on the assumption that the

only knowledge citizens of the United States had in the 1960s came from the United States. To focus solely on the United States from a historical perspective as opposed to a judicial one requires willful erasure of transgender experience, as does the citation solely of cisgender medical professionals. Alito's dissent therefore focuses heavily on a rhetorical assertion of definition that most transgender scholars have considered malleable for the last century, and rather than address the difference in terminology, Alito doubles down on the necessity of static terminology to attempt to prove his point about the newness and incomprehensibility of 21st century transness to the drafters of Title VII in the 1960s.

Most notably, Alito's assertion of the inability of Title VII's drafters to understand the terminology and notion of transgender people and gender identity takes on a troubling tone when juxtaposed with the willful destruction of research and records concerning the lives of early trans people in 1930s Germany. Alito states that the concept was "essentially unknown to the public" in the 1960s, and while this may be true, the reason for the concept being essentially unknown becomes obvious when placed alongside the destruction of the Institute for Sexual Science. Historical precedent for Queer and transgender lives is difficult to locate when evidence of those lives, be it through scientific research conditions or records of lived experience, is destroyed, and erased in a direct and violent fashion. While it would perhaps be a stretch to assert that there is a direct link between the destruction of Hirschfeld's work and Alito's dissent, what I present here is less about concrete evidence and more about something insidious that pervades 20th and 21st century history: the notion that Queerness, in particular transgender lives, are a new and fashionable phenomenon that is only as old as the 1960s. Alito's America-focused and late 20th century focus allows him to make claims about the existence of transgender lives that directly contradict history. Even though the erasure of this history provides a rationale for Alito's

assertions, it stands as an indirect cause and effect that speaks to the lasting impact of the destruction of the Institute of Sexual Science in the 1930s. Only the barest shreds of evidence surrounding Hirschfeld's life and the Institute's goals remains to indicate any other historical narrative concerning transgender lives.

### **Death of the Author: Harry Potter and the Blatant Transphobia of J.K. Rowling**

An examination of Queer archival practices cannot function without acknowledging the consequences of the loss of past archival moves to preserve queer history. While the legal battles concerning LGBTQ+ lives hold significance in 21st Century day-to-day experiences of Queer people, the overarching cultural conversation also impacts the lives, wellbeing, and safety of LGBTQ+ people. A specific demonstration of this, taken also from 2020, concerns infamous *Harry Potter* author J.K. Rowling, who publicly aligned herself with Transgender Exclusionary Radical Feminist (hereafter referred to as TERF) values in a series of tweets, multiple public statements, and controversy surrounding a new book published under her pen name. By examining both this statement and the cultural climate of the United Kingdom in the 21st Century, I demonstrate the lasting cultural impact the erasure of LGBTQ+ and especially transgender history has had on current transgender experiences, as well as demonstrating the impact Rowling's turn to TERF values has had on myself, a transgender individual who grew up reading Rowling's work. Examining the pain and loss of this kind of rejection serves as an object lesson and personal instance of the lasting and damaging impact this kind of erasure can have on transgender lives, and I share it as an instance of one transgender person's experience with a contemporary timely situation of cultural violence against my identity.

J. K. Rowling, author of the *Harry Potter* series, has historically come under fire for multiple aspects of her work, including criticism of retroactively including LGBTQ+

representation in her novels, use of antisemitic caricatures, and creating an entire fantasy species that reportedly enjoys being in eternal servitude (Romano 2016). She has also come under fire for the works she has penned under her pseudonym, Robert Galbraith, due to at least one novel's direct hostility towards transgender women, and an upcoming novel that includes an antagonist who is a cisgender man preying on women by dressing up as a woman (Smith 2020). Rowling came under fire in 2019 and 2020 for a series of liked Tweets that indicated her support of anti-trans and TERF organizations and people, and she excused them as a 'senior moment', claiming to have liked the tweets by mistake (Romano 2019). In June of 2020, however, Rowling directly aligned herself with transphobic values by commenting on a tweet that discussed the health concerns of people who menstruate. Her comment in response to this, (see Figure 3) implies that the only people who can menstruate are women, something that actively erased nonbinary people who were Assigned Female at Birth (or AFAB), as well as transgender men (Romano 2020).



*Figure 3: Tweet by @jk\_rowling on June 6, 2020.*

In the wake of the backlash concerning this tweet, Rowling doubled down on her views by posting what some referred to as a transphobic manifesto on her blog. The piece, which is nearly 4000 words long, lays out Rowling's stance on the transgender community, and features a

number of rhetorical indicators of transphobia that require further interrogation to fully document not only the extent of the transphobia present in Rowling's views, but the insidious and misleading language in which those views are couched. She addresses the origins of claims to her transphobia, which lie in her support of Maya Forstater, a tax specialist who was fired for tweets that were seen as anti-transgender (Rosenblatt 2020). The Forstater case is just one example of Rowling demonstrating allegiance with anti-transgender views, which also include multiple past instances of her liking transphobic tweets on Twitter, something which her representatives initially attempted to pass off as a 'middle-aged moment' or a mis click due to a lack of technological savvy (Duffy 2018). With the rise of transphobic sentiments and activism in the United Kingdom (Burns 2019; Bachman and Gooch 2018), Rowling's boldness and comfort in directly expressing anti-transgender rhetoric is an indicator of a societal movement that has allowed for public figures to use TERF rhetoric under the guise of concern for women and feminist values. In her blog post, she refers specifically to a "huge explosion" of young women wishing to transition, something heavily leaned upon in anti-trans circles to the point that a book by known right wing pundit Abigail Shrier on the subject, called 'Irreversible Damage: the Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters' was released in 2020 (Greenesmith 2020). The cultural phenomenon both Rowling's essay and Shrier's book reference is specifically concerning transgender men, whom TERFs would still consider young women and daughters. TERF rhetoric engages in two focal points: the manipulation of young women and the predatory behavior of men, and both points seek to strip agency from transgender people. Rowling's major point in her essay relies on the inaccurate data surrounding rates of "detransition", or a phenomenon wherein a trans person transitions back to their assigned sex at birth, citing it as an indicator of the dangers of encouraging transition in young people. However, her words are

conjecture and directly contradicted by multiple research reports, including a 2015 survey of nearly 28 thousand people conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality (James et al. 2015), and a longitudinal Swedish study conducted in 2010 (Dhejne et al 2010). Rowling also shared her history of domestic abuse and sexual assault as a reason for having concerns about the consequences of trans activism, directly linking those events to one of the more commonly expressed concerns about men who could potentially pretend to be women to get into women-only spaces and enact violence and sexual assault against women:

So I want trans women to be safe. At the same time, I do not want to make natal girls and women less safe. When you throw open the doors of bathrooms and changing rooms to any man who believes or feels he's a woman - and as I've said, gender confirmation certificates may now be granted without any need for surgery or hormones - then you open the door to any and all men who wish to come inside (2020).

This claim of bathroom predators has been proven to be concocted, as demonstrated by empirical research conducted by the Williams Institute in the wake of a Massachusetts anti-discrimination bill in 2016 and published in the peer reviewed journal *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* (Persio 2018). A few months after this ruling, Massachusetts-based anti-trans group MassResistance admitted that the bathroom predator myth was fabricated, concocted to “avoid an uncomfortable battle over LGBT ideology, and still fire up people’s emotions” (Persio 2018). In essence, MassResistance engaged in a common TERF tactic: appealing to the cultural concern for the safety of women by demonizing trans people and insisting that allowing trans people to use the bathrooms that align with their genders would result in more violence against “natal” or cisgender women. What this ultimately demonstrates is Rowling’s focus on common TERF talking points, as noted by the use of terminology such as ‘natal girls’ and referring to men who ‘believe’ they are women, as opposed to empirical evidence or hard science. The language of



TERF rhetoric focuses on alarmist tactics and unsubstantiated pseudoscience that preys upon confirmation bias and works to disguise itself under a veil of feminist concern. What this ultimately achieves is an air of distrust surrounding transgender healthcare rhetoric, cultural norms, and the weight of trans people's voices in the conversation. Trans women as painted as sexual predators who wish to gain access to private women's spaces, and trans men are cast as confused autistic young women who are preyed upon and taken advantage of in order to give up their womanhood in favor of delusionary notions of being the opposite gender (Rowling 2020).

Much like the Alito dissent, the connections between erasure of transgender history and Rowling's TERF standpoint are not one for one, and require some interpretation. Once again, it is my intent to demonstrate the lasting cultural impact of the stifling and destruction of Queer history rather than draw direct lines of cause and effect between the 1930s and the 2010s. What we can see in this connection between the loss of the Institute of Sexual Science and the virulent transphobia of a popular children's book author is the lasting cultural impact of Queer historical erasure, both along medical and social lines. Many of the items destroyed in the raid on the Institute included auto-ethnographic accounts of German LGBTQ+ lives, effectively erasing the evidence of Queer German historical figures in the early 20th century. While other acts of erasure and violence undoubtedly occurred across the world, the extreme violence enacted against Queer people, especially Queer Jewish people, in 1930s Europe, provides a concrete example (Lautmann 1998), even if much of the historical evidence for the association between Queerness and violence has only come to light within the last 30 years.

While the impact of cultural events like the revelation of J.K. Rowling's ascribing to transphobic values is difficult to measure, I wish to end this section with a reflection on how her words and actions have caused specific harm and distress to me, a transgender person raised in

the United Kingdom during the height of the *Harry Potter* craze. I do this to provide one brief ethnographic datapoint that demonstrates how this kind of exclusionary and hateful perspective can impact a trans person's life. As someone raised in the United Kingdom in the late 1990s and early 2000s, I began reading *Harry Potter* books as a pre-teen and followed the series closely throughout high school. My friends and I saw the films together, I owned multiple *Harry Potter* themed games and memorabilia items, and my family used to read the books aloud together on vacations and listen to the audiobooks on road trips. It is safe to say that the *Harry Potter* series was formative for me, particularly as an aspiring writer and fantasy genre enthusiast, and like many others in my generation, I knew my Hogwarts House, what my wand would be made of, which character I identified most with, and so on. As someone who came out later on in my life, many of the friends I made in elementary and middle school knew about my being transgender only through social media, where I was never afraid to share my vocal support of transgender rights. The revelation of Rowling's TERF ideologies in the summer of 2020 impacted me at multiple points and areas of my life, causing an overarching point of psychological pain that stands to make interacting with any of Rowling's properties distressing for me. One particular instance stands out as an example of the personal impact Rowling's transphobia has had on me, where an argument on social media resulted in me severing ties with a person I had been friends with since the two of us were in the Fourth Grade together. The now former friend, whom I'll refer to as Ann here, posted on Facebook that she was looking forward to picking up J.K. Rowling's latest children's book, *The Ickabog*. I responded that it might be a good idea not to support Rowling in light of her recent blatant transphobia, and Ann's mother commented to inform me that she felt like accusations against Rowling were blown heavily out of proportion and that Rowling's words in her blog post were really just about protecting women from

predators and allowing all women to be safe. When I pointed out the dog whistles and transphobic comments in Rowling's piece, Ann's mother stated in response that we could agree to disagree. I blocked her, and Ann responded to me that she considered it unethical of me to block someone on a public post (which it was not) rather than have a debate. After informing her that trans rights weren't a debate, I unfriended her and removed a friend of 20+ years from my life. While this may seem like an extreme response, it is a move that most transgender people, and indeed people of other axes of marginalization, must make regularly for their own safety and wellbeing.

The significance of Rowling's stance and shift towards making her views more public reflects and demonstrates how much sway she has in the public eye. A few days after Rowling's transphobic comments, Harper's Bazaar released a letter signed by over 150 influential thinkers and authors, including Noam Chomsky, Salman Rushdie, and Margaret Atwood, as well as Rowling, denouncing the silencing and censoring of their voices in cultural affairs (2020). It is also important to note Rowling's influence in the British public eye, something often unobserved by American audiences who are most familiar with her through the lens of her creative works. As one of the richest people in the United Kingdom, Rowling is viewed by many as a national treasure who represents the best of British people's ability to triumph over adversity and become self-made. In 2016, Rowling's argument with MP Natalie McGarry led to the MP making a public apology for accusing Rowling of encouraging a misogynist social media troll (Revesz 2020). This combined with Rowling's targeting of small accounts on Twitter run by trans people to fight against in the transphobia situations demonstrates that her influence is not merely that of a popular children's book author, but a major political and cultural touchstone who isn't afraid to weaponize her fanbase or her political allies to avoid responsibility for her bigoted statements.

While it's easy to write off the influence of an author in the court of public opinion, Rowling's connection to politics and the ubiquitous nature of *Harry Potter* should not be discounted and strongly contribute to her influence and the significance of her using her platform to promote bigotry and harass trans people.

In considering the current cultural moves against transgender individuals, and the historic erasure that has contributed to this violence, I share these current events to highlight the continued relevance of the information to the current historical moment. The erasure of LGBTQ+ lives is not an abstract concept but rather a current event that sees new moves and acts of violence on a daily basis. My goal here is not to draw direct links between the current political cultural climate and the loss of the Institute of Sexual Science, but to construct a rhetorical moment that acknowledges the abstract connection between an act of violent erasure and a world that goes out of its way to further erase and push down those who were impacted by that act of destruction almost a century ago.

### **Reclaiming Lost Narratives: Marginalized Histories and Lifting Up Queer Voices**

Members of the queer community have taken matters into their own hands to preserve and maintain records of their own histories. While many major archives including the National Archives contain some queer-centric or queer-adjacent holdings, few archives maintain contents with the specific curatorial theme of queerness in mind, and as a result I intend to highlight two current moves in archiving to preserve and share the stories of members of the LGBTQ+ community, the Lesbian Herstory Archive, and the Digital Transgender Archive. These two archives specifically collect and curate facets of queer history livelihood, both in analog spaces and digital, and highlight queer archiving practices and efforts being made by queer communities to preserve their own histories. The act of reclaiming and reviving narratives has also made

headway in popular culture, and despite over a century of media that does a disservice to queer stories, it is easy to make a case for acknowledging and engaging with that media. To further explore this, I examine the Netflix documentary *Disclosure* (2020), which examines archival footage of queer people and presentations in cinema and interviews transgender performers and historians to present their views on representation in popular culture. My sharing of these examples provides some current insight into what Queer communities are doing to preserve their own histories, an act that could be seen as a continuation of the Institute of Sexual Science's work to document queer lives in a particular moment in time. As it stands, I thus present three moments in recent queer studies, history, and culture that engage in work that could be seen as a 21st century version of the archival, autoethnographic work done by Hirschfeld and his colleagues in the early 20th century.

Queer activists in the United States have been engaged in work to preserve historical events, people, and movements despite the frequent erasure and violence enacted against their communities. To combat the erasure in particular, activists worked to maintain and locate objects and materials that uncovered historical events and people that were previously buried and hidden, and this reflects directly in the mission statements of these archives. In her work with the Lesbian Herstory archives (LHA), Kate Davy (2008) notes that the work of the archive's founder, Joan Nestle, was focused on bringing invisible lives and untold stories to light (p. 134). Judith Schwarz (1992) echoes these concepts in discussing her work with the LHA and highlights one of the goals of historical records preservation is often to affirm the identity of a certain group and convince others of its legitimacy in eras where people with those identities may have been (or continue to be) erased (p. 83). Schwarz also highlights the importance of queer people advocating for their own historical preservation in archival practice, citing an

incident referred to as “the Box Ten Affair” of the 1970s (p. 87). The situation, which concerned personal correspondence between Rose Elizabeth Cleveland (sister to President Grover Cleveland) and Evangeline Marrs Simpson, involved an anonymous note sent to *Gay American History* author Jonathan Katz concerning a lesbian relationship the letters supposedly revealed (p. 88). The letters, part of the Whipple-Scandrett Papers collection housed by the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), were processed but not part of the official archive, as only nine boxes were listed as part of their archival material. The MHS reported that the letters were requested closed until 1980, but the inquiry allowed them to be open to scholarly research, and as Schwarz notes, many of the members of the Gay Liberation Front involved in the incident wondered if the letters would have ever been listed without Katz’s inquiry into their existence (p. 88). Schwarz’s example here provides a positive rationale for the work queer individuals have done with historical and archival documents to preserve those histories for future study and use and is only one instance of a queer archive present in the United States. Often the personal queer histories of the scholars and archivists working with the documents provides a deeper insight into the materials present and allows members of marginalized groups to have a say in how their stories are told.

One such example, the Digital Transgender Archive (or DTA), was conceptualized by K.J. Rawson and Nick Matte in 2008 and became the largest digital collection of transgender-related historical materials to date. The stated purpose of the archive is “to increase the accessibility of transgender history by providing an online hub for digitized historical materials, born-digital materials, and information on archival holdings throughout the world” (Overview, 2020). The archive, based in Worcester, Massachusetts at the College of the Holy Cross, is an international collaboration between over sixty colleges, universities, nonprofit organizations,

public libraries, and private collections, and seeks to digitally localize a wide range of trans-related materials from varying historical periods (2020). The DTA “expands access to trans history for academics and independent researchers alike in order to foster education and dialogue concerning trans history,” and the majority of the collections focus on materials created before the year 2000. The DTA’s history and purpose overview shares some of the challenges the archive continues to face as it works to process and share archival materials concerning transgender lives. Most of these challenges lie in the complex language surrounding historical instances of transgender people and the nature of older materials concerning transgender history. Since the term ‘transgender’ is only a few decades old, the DTA has to make use of the term in a more broad and inclusive sense rather than a fixed identity term, since while it is broadly used as such in the United States in 2020, this is not the case for the past or indeed for the world as a whole. The term “does not adequately capture the gender diversity that exists around the world” (‘Overview’) but can function as a framework for collections and a point of departure to allow for a deeper understanding of transgender and trans-ing gender on a global scale. The emphasis on this poses a sharp contrast to the language seen above in Alito’s dissent, which is focused heavily on strict and fixed identity terminology. For the research that is being done by transgender scholars into transgender history to be clear about defining the term in a broader and inclusive fashion rather than insisting that a fixed identity definition makes the very existence of transgender people to be a new concept is just one way in which a brief overview of the DTA provides an example of the ways in which transgender voices are able to be uplifted in archival work if that work is being done both for and by transgender people. The DTA provides an answer to one of the biggest concerns in the archiving of transgender histories: that much of the trans-related historical material in the world is dispersed throughout the world and housed in

many different repositories, from university holdings to grassroots activist archives. As an online hub for digitized materials, born digital materials, and information on archival holdings across the world, the DTA is an international collaborative effort to provide resources and historical materials for academics and independent researchers alike. The archive's starter guide page gives points of reference for people exploring the DTA's contents, and includes sections with titles including "Want to be an ally?", "Want to Know More About Prominent Trans People?", and "Want to Know More About Gender and Psychology?" ('DTA Starter's Guide'). Each section provides an entrance point into specific collections and holdings concerning each area, in this case including links to the GLAAD website's pages on being an effective ally to transgender people (glaad.org), files on Christine Jorgensen, the woman who received the world's first publicized case of sex change in 1951, and educational materials from the Erickson Educational Foundation concerning psychiatric management of trans patients. The DTA continues to grow and expand its collections and is thus an invaluable resource for transgender scholars, researchers interested in Queer history, and trans people interested in learning about their own histories.

The collection of archival materials provides only one facet of the ways Queer people are working to use their own voices to share their histories and experiences. In the summer of 2020 Netflix released a documentary about the experiences and portrayal of transgender people in Hollywood. *Disclosure* takes clips from films, television, and Hollywood events to show something unusual for media surrounding transgender people: the experiences trans people have had in their own words. In considering the ways in which trans people have been erased in history, and the way their stories are often told through the lenses of cisgender people, moves being made in the 21st century to recenter those narratives around the people who are most impacted by them has led to the creation of documentaries such as this one. *Disclosure* features



not only discussions of accurate and positive portrayals of transgender lives but gives transgender performers and creators the opportunity to examine the influence Hollywood's portrayal of transgender lives has had on them and culture as a whole. The film features archival footage of some of the earliest portrayals of transgender and gender nonconforming people in film and on television and gives transgender people the space and opportunity to unpack the problematic, revolutionary, and personal impact these films and portrayals had for them personally. What makes *Disclosure* unique as a documentary is how much it focuses on the transgender experience and how much it relies on the voices of trans people to share that experience. Most fictional portrayals of transgender people are either played by cisgender performers or seen through cisgender lenses, with the creators and producers of the content operating off of impressions of trans people that rely solely on the view from the outside looking in, rather than how those things impact trans people personally.

Watching *Disclosure* as a trans person was a very affective experience, one that put me face to face with other people who knew in some fashion the struggles that I had gone through as a transgender man and nonbinary individual who rarely saw representations of myself in any capacity in film, or if I did so had to contend with the erasure of my identity for the sake of a narrative of female empowerment. For these pains and concerns to be addressed was an intense experience of solidarity and affirmation that brought me to tears, feeling for once that my emotions were not being ignored, that my experiences were valid and worthy of discussion, and that others like me had the right to speak up about our histories and futures.

*Disclosure*'s focus is not only on the issues surrounding transgender representation, but the often-paradoxical nature that representation holds. Often the representation trans people were able to recognize or identify with was far from positive, with transgender or gender

nonconforming people in film and television often being either the butt of an extended joke or the victim of brutal and vicious violence. The documentary interviews trans people who cite films with representation that could potentially be seen as problematic in the eyes of a 21st century audience. However, this paradoxically provides a trans person growing up with an example of the person they are or could be, and the result is often negative. When transgender and gender nonconforming characters are restricted to the sidelines, or as villains, or as victims, trans people often either internalize this perspective or find themselves pushed further into the closet. However, when asked about that representation, the formative nature of witnessing and experiencing those popular culture models results in trans people holding some affection for the films that gave them at least some of the language to describe their feelings and experiences about their own gender identities. For transgender women, the stereotypical image of a man in a dress played for comedy provided both insight into the societal window of trans violence while also providing a space for trans women to question their gender in secret. For someone like me, the popular culture references were more subtle and not as evidently directly trans.

Transmasculine narratives rarely made it into mainstream popular culture when I was growing up in the 90s and early 00s, and so the representation I was left with included, again, stories of female empowerment. The narratives of young women being driven to disguise themselves as boys to infiltrate armies were popular, particularly through Disney movies like *Mulan*, and they tended to end with the disguised hero(ine) returning to a feminine appearance. As *Disclosure* notes, transgender representation's scarcity has led to a paradoxical archival practice - in order to preserve and understand our histories as transgender people, we cannot solely look at positive representation. We must engage in culture across all fronts, and acknowledge how the

representation has harmed as well as helped trans people throughout the ages, particularly in the context of scarce historical evidence and historical erasure.

Examining the state of both the past and the present of Queer representation reveals a complex, rocky past, and uncertain future for LGBTQ+ representation, particularly the futures of transgender people. From the burning of medical documents and autobiographical materials in 1930's Berlin to the denial of transgender rights by a famous children's book author, from the rhetoric employed by the supreme court of the united states to debate the very existence of trans people to the diverse and often problematic representations of those same people in popular culture, the main point I wish to make as this section comes to a close is the presence of queer and especially transgender people in the fabric of 20th and 21st century society. Despite erasure, queerness has persistently refused to disappear, and the erasure of history is seen as a tragedy and a setback, but not a deterrent for those who fight to bring rights to marginalized people. The archival work being done in Queer Studies across multiple identities provides some evidence of the moves historians have made to seek out and preserve a complex and patchy past to allow future generations of scholars and queer individuals to become aware of and learn from their roots. The fight is far from over and must remain a fight as long as there are those who seek to silence and oppress marginalized identities across cultural and legislative bounds, and indeed go so far as to destroy and erase the history that is already present.

### **Part 3 - Technological Advancement: A Queer Reading of the Uncensored Library**

The final section of this literature review will shift the discussion to Game Studies and games culture and use a specific archival project - The Uncensored Library - to discuss how games themselves function within the cultural conversation surrounding archives, curation, and information access. I will then further contextualize these archival aspects with Queer theory that

concerns both archiving and games to demonstrate the inherent queerness that appears at the intersection of games and archival practice, making games and Game Studies an ideal location to investigate the nature of archiving marginalized experiences. By examining the archival potential of games and technology for protecting and uplifting marginalized voices, I aim to provide a clear context for scholarship that examines archival practice in games and contextualizes it within the conversations currently taking place in the field of game studies about the experiences and scholarship of marginalized people.

### **Providing Access Despite Censorship: *Minecraft* and the Uncensored Library**

“Prepare for an adventure of limitless possibilities as you build, mine, battle mobs, and explore the ever-changing *Minecraft* landscape.” These words, present on the game information page of Minecraft.net, describe the experience players can have when they buy and download classic *Minecraft*. Created in 2009, *Minecraft* has become a cultural gaming phenomenon that most consider to be on par with the creation of early game consoles in terms of impact. It’s self-described limitless possibilities have given players the opportunity to explore digital worlds, build incredible structures and creations, and collaborate with friends to go on adventures. It even has an education edition that allows young people to learn basic coding and computer science, leading to it being used in classrooms all over the world (Davis et al. 2018). People also have the ability to create structures and maps in *Minecraft* and share them with other players all over the world, and *Minecraft* has a vibrant online community, both officially and unofficially, that gives players the opportunity to connect with each other and share their plans, ideas, and creative pursuits. *Minecraft*’s ubiquity means that it is available all over the world, even in countries that currently experience heavy censorship and restrictions such as Saudi Arabia,

Russia, and Egypt (Uncensored Library 2020). As a result, the organization Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has created a work-around for the heavily restricted journalism laws and oppression in their countries: creating a library in *Minecraft* that contains the information many journalists died to uncover and share with the world. This self-confessed loophole has allowed this organization to share information that is inaccessible in the countries in question, and the Uncensored Library's mission allows that information to be shared, despite the journalists who originally shared it being exiled, jailed, or even killed for their attempts to share the truth (Uncensored Library 2020). The Uncensored Library is available for free online as a downloadable *Minecraft* map, and anyone with the base game and an internet connection can visit this crafted world and interact with the stories of these censored journalists. One example of this is the life and works of Saudi Arabian Journalist Jamal Kashoggi, who fled the country in 2017 in an act of self-imposed exile (Uncensored Library 2020). His outspoken criticism of the imprisonment and persecution of journalists in Saudi Arabia, a country that permits no independent media and often persecutes and tortures journalists who are held as prisoners of conscience, is noted on the Uncensored Library's Website:

Journalists who voice criticism or analyze political problems are liable to be fired or detained under criminal code provisions or under the terrorism or cybercrime laws on charges of blasphemy, "insulting religion," "inciting chaos," "jeopardizing national unity," or "harming the image and reputation of the king and the state." (Uncensored Library 2020).

Known to surveil journalists even when they are abroad, Saudi authorities continued to monitor Kashoggi's work even when he was writing for the Washington Post in 2017, wherein he criticized the policies of Prince Mohammad bin Salman and the imprisonment of journalists. In 2018, Kashoggi died in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, which he had visited to get documents needed for his upcoming marriage. His body was dismembered, and the Saudi Prince, though denying any direct involvement or awareness of the murder, accepted political responsibility for

Kashoggi's death (Uncensored Library 2020). Kashoggi's works have been preserved and made available via the Uncensored Library, and people in Saudi Arabia are able to access his work via downloading the *Minecraft* Map of the library and navigating within it. A unique and clever work-around for combatting censorship, the Uncensored Library gives us a current example of the intersections of games and archiving, the real-world implications, and the potential contained within games and gaming for historical exploration, preservation, and knowledge distribution.

### **Archiving Within Games: How Play Presents Opportunity for and Examples of Preservation**

The archival nature of games falls under several disparate categories: the data capacity of games, the information that can be displayed in games, and the accessibility of games. The discussion of historical preservation and game mechanics therefore requires examination of multiple layers of work being done in games, Game Studies, and game archiving, and for the purposes of this conversation about games and archiving, I have chosen to focus on two distinct elements: how games incorporate archives, archival material, and historical documents into their play mechanics and worlds; and the accessibility of game content, storytelling, and knowledge distribution. I will look at examples from specific games and use current archival scholarship to examine the nature of these archives, as well as highlighting the importance of broad access for historical knowledge-making.

Games that feature archives usually do so in ways that don't specifically refer to the system in play as an archive, and so for this purpose I will here clarify that I am operating under the definition of archive as laid out by the Society for American Archivists as a collection of permanent records, including letters, reports, accounts, and manuscripts, that are kept because they have "continuing value to the creating agency and other to other potential users" (Millar

2009 via archivists.org). I also am examining instances of paratextual material, paratext here being defined as materials that exist surrounding the narrative elements of a game and do not need to be engaged with in order for the player to get the full game experience, a concept that comes from literary interpretation and defined as the liminal material that surrounds a body of work and provides context for that work (Genette 1997 p. 2). Games that feature archival content usually do so to enrich the world in which the game takes place, provide tutorial information, or impart plot-relevant data. Examples of this in AAA games include the use of audio diaries in the *Bioshock* Universe to share more in-depth stories of the citizens of Rapture and Columbia. This extraneous diary function, be it audio or written, also appears in games such as the *Borderlands* Series, and one thing both game settings have in common is that while some audio diaries (or ECHOs as they are referred to in *Borderlands*) are required to advance the plot, those required audio instances are usually ones that play automatically. As an example, in the first *Bioshock* game, Jack (the protagonist) is tasked with creating a chemical formula, called the Lazarus Vector, to halt the destruction of Rapture's sub-nautical oxygen farm, a formula created by the NPC Julie Langford, who dies on-screen after being gassed with the same toxic substance killing the trees (2007). Upon entering Langford's office and cracking her safe, one of the items within is an audio diary that plays automatically upon pick-up, imparting to Jack what items he needs to collect in order to create the Lazarus Vector and proceed through the game. Though there are 122 audio diaries in total in the first *Bioshock* game, only a handful are required or relevant to the plot, thus providing us an example of archival content within a game that the player need never interact with to complete the game's main storyline. Since an archive is often characterized by its scope and materials being beyond the ability of a person to easily engage with them in a linear fashion (Schmidt 2016), however, this example only gets across the nature of extraneous

and paratextual storytelling. The audio diaries in *Bioshock* are easily discoverable in a standard playthrough of the game and players need not go too far out of their way to locate them, making them archival in nature but less reminiscent of a true archival and curatorial experience. Looking at another AAA game title, *Skyrim* (2011) provides an instance of game-adjacent material discoverable in the world of the game that players need never interact with to get a full gameplay experience. As outlined in the video essay “I Read all 337 Books In *Skyrim* So You Don’t Have To” (2018) by Polygon’s Brian David Gilbert in his Unraveled series of game analysis, the sheer amount of writing that is extraneous to the plot of *Skyrim* is reasonable for the game’s open world format, but it still an extensive amount of written material that is present for players to only engage with if they are interested. As Gilbert points out in his video analysis, the books provide historical information, tutorials, fictional tales, and ephemera about the universe, but the fact that all of this content (Written by eight specific writers on the team) could be avoided entirely and players could still receive a satisfying game experience speaks to the nature of games as archives or at least worlds with enough space and rich environmental opportunities for archival content.

Games that contain archival material in some context also provide an opportunity to examine the inherent accessibility of games compared to physical archival structures. Gaining access to archives is not always a simple experience, with many archives requiring users to adhere to strict rules for the sake of preserving the materials within. Questions of provenance, original order, and interaction with materials lead to most archives being very heavily regulated spaces that feature institutional or accessibility barriers for the average visitor (Schmidt 2016). An archive that exists in a virtual world, such as a game world, provides users more access than they would otherwise have to a variety of materials. While the average researcher or scholar may



not have the direct need for access to all of the books in *Skyrim*, for example, such incidental worldbuilding is invaluable for fans and creators who engage with the content and seek to do so in more in-depth capacities. Returning to the example of the Uncensored Library, games and archives working together to bypass censorship provides another level of accessibility to information through games. As objects of play, games exist in a liminal space where their value as meaning making and change making vehicles is repeatedly brought into question (Malkowski and Russworm 2017 p. ix). Extensive scholarship on the value of games beyond and through play directly counters this notion, however, and it is becoming more widely accepted in academic and social circles that games have an inherent value to culture and forward societal development, even if their avant-garde positionality still exists, which it does as a function of allowing users to gain previously censored information in unassuming packages able to fly under the scrutinous radar of oppressive governments.

The experience of archives and games presents a look at a technological development that engages with the endless possibilities games provide for players, scholars, and developers, and demonstrate the potential for innovative game systems as well as virtual archival systems.

Examining the archival potential of games provides just one avenue of research for games scholars and designers as they consider what the intersections of archiving and technology look like.

### **Queering Archives: Defining a Medium**

Engaging in the act of queering an archive requires that I address what it means to use queer as a verb in this particular context. Drawing on work being done on the evolution of archival theory as outlined by Gabriella Giannachi and placing it in conversation with work in queer archival practice by Alana Kumbier, I use this section as a brief overview of what the

changing face of archives looks like in the 21st century and how ‘queering’ an archive can interplay with expanded iterations of archival infrastructure that decenter traditionalist models, thus providing a theoretical framework for the interplay of games, archiving, and historical preservation.

In considering what it means to queer an archive, it helps to engage with archival methods that are moving away from traditional definitions of archive and understanding the moves being made in archive theory and practice to evolve with the ever-changing digital landscape of archival practice. In her book *Archive Everything: Mapping the Everyday*, Gabriella Giannachi addresses the shift in the archival world to archives that account for more recent instances of technological development as well as the overarching historical frameworks archives exist within, and she provides a model with which to discuss the evolution and shift in archival structure. Giannachi’s model begins by adopting the theorization set up by Michael Shanks, which defines Archives 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0. The first, Archive 1.0, sees bureaucracy and the early stages of civilization in the archive, where inscription is used as an instrument of management (Shanks in Giannachi 2016). Archive 2.0 features mechanization and digital archivization, which aims towards “fast, easy and open access” as well as statistical analysis of data (2016). Finally, Archive 3.0 is the animated archive, which creates and accounts for “new prosthetic architectures for the production and sharing of archival resources” (2016). Giannachi builds on these archival stages and creates two new categories: the initial urge towards archival curation, Archive 0.0, and the idea of archives being a pervasive part of the digital economy, Archive 4.0. Archives 2.0 and 3.0 account for the digitization of an archive, while Archives 4.0 returns to aspects of the 1.0 archive by acknowledging space and place again. Giannachi traces the inception of Archive 4.0 through the digitization of archival work seen beginning in archives

2.0, where the archive becomes a generative tool that positions its user within different configurations, allowing users to interact with archives that were not necessarily physical (2016). Archive 2.0, Giannachi concludes, demonstrates that the *topos* of an archive is no longer associated with a physical site or particular set of records, but is instead an adaptable ordering mechanism that can “shape the way we interface with and document ourselves in the everyday” (2016). Giannachi discusses Archives 3.0 and 4.0 together, noting that both of them bring physical and digital environments together, much as Shanks defined them in the past, as mixed reality archives that facilitate the creation, dissemination, and preservation of different ideas and values in a digital economy (2016). However, Giannachi’s distinction between Archives 3.0 and 4.0 lies in the way that Archive 4.0 is not just the ordering system used to design and act out our different roles in the digital economy, but also the instrument or apparatus “through which our bodies are (re-)programmed inside out” (2016). Archive 3.0 facilitates users having multiple identities as users of the archive, as producers and spectators, performers, and subjects. This carries over into Archives 4.0, which takes things a step further by creating adaptive and transitive archival networks that become indistinguishable from the environments that produce them, becoming our environment (2016). Archives 2.0 and 3.0 have always been intrinsically connected, and what Archives 4.0 achieve is that acknowledgement of the infrastructure behind digital archival practices, the view of interconnected adaptable platforms as the future of archiving, and the way that digital archival texts need not be (and in many cases cannot be) separate from their environments. In looking at archives in the digital age, Giannachi’s expansion of Shanks’ model accounts for the shift to digital archiving and the importance of viewing the digital economy as both ephemeral and physical, data and infrastructure.

As archives as a concept evolve, so too does the way we interact with them. While traditional archival practices adhere to a strict set of guidelines and models involving concepts such as provenance, original order, and finding aids, archives that exist in less formal capacities are often structured very differently. Queer communities have engaged in archival practices that have both allowed for the preservation of queer history and the existence of a new kind of archival practice, one that queers the concept of archiving as a whole. In defining the notion of ‘queering’ something, I make use of Alana Kumbier’s definition of queerness as a verb, which “suggests a disruptive, transformational, or oppositional practice designed to challenge normalizing systems and structures” (2014 p. 3). I also draw from Kumbier’s examples in her book *Ephemeral Material* to present an example of the evolution of archives along a lateral trajectory, and rather than developing new technology or systems as per Giannachi’s archives 2.0 and 3.0, I place Kumbier’s examples of queered archives in conversation with the 4.0 models of archival apparatus used by Giannachi to consider how the two interact, and indeed differ, in terms of their place in the evolution of archival infrastructure.

Kumbier’s examples provide instances of an archive that exists both as a queering of archival practice and also as an archive OF queer practice, demonstrating what queer archives and queering archives can look like from the outside and the inside. Investigating the queering of archives comes from a position of reimagining the possibilities of archives from the position of both structure and content. Kumbier (2014) notes that archives are often associated with “over and doneness”, that their position is often viewed as a place where projects or organizations go when they are ended or disbanded (p. 45). This view is troubled by what is absent in those archives, however, and Kumbier cites sociologist Avery Gordon to discuss the notion of archives that are haunted by the absences of certain content, which unsettle the over-and-doneness.

Kumbier calls for recognition of what is absent from historical records and documents the people who have pushed back against traditional archival structures, instead working to actively construct their histories, demonstrating that “the absence of material evidence can be a haunting force” (p. 47) and that the methods people have undertaken to see archives beyond their traditional infrastructural and social positions can queer the very notion of archival methods. Kumbier details instances of these methods and focuses on the ways these nontraditional archives and methods queer traditional archival structures and spaces in order to demonstrate the ways in which historical absences can be acknowledged and filled by those traditionally left out of the dominating narrative. Kumbier’s queered archives vary in scope, content, and medium, but all work to address a common theme:

These projects are also exciting because they suggest that *we can do this too*. Many of us (especially those of you who care enough to have picked up this book and read this far) live in communities with histories we want to document, but we aren’t in archival institutions or don’t have official archival training or education. We can use the examples in this book to inspire and inform action, to create our own documentation projects, to critically engage, access, and collaborate with established archives, and to bridge gaps between queer and archival theoretical discourses -- to find ways of making these conversations relevant to each other, and to understand why they matter. (p. 35).

Each example Kumbier makes use of fills a particular demonstrative niche in the discussion of what it means to have queered archive, and each ties back to this common notion of queering as a verb, an active interpretive method that pushes back against the definition of traditional archiving. Kumbier addresses the concept of ‘counter-archives’, archives that “draw attention to the limits of the archival record housed in dominant cultural institutions by collection materials that represent experiences and populations not documented elsewhere” (p.64). Often founded in response to traditional archives and what has been left out of those archives, counter-archives document under-represented narratives and histories, making them an ideal form for queered archival experiences. This context of queering archives is placed in conversation with the

invented queer history of *The Watermelon Woman*, a film that investigates the life of Fae Richards, a fictional African American Lesbian actress (Kumbier p. 51). Using the film as a narrative thread, Kumbier investigates some of the biggest questions surrounding archival silences in the context of feminist activism and history, asking how individuals can produce historical knowledge without material evidence, and considering how one might displace the archive as the authority on historical documentation (p. 51). The answer, complex and far reaching, delves into the methods a researcher might use to search for hidden or forgotten records, create invented narratives that hold truth within them, and tell a story familiar enough to provide insight into the past despite it being fabricated. Another of Kumbier's examples considers the affinities between different intersections of archival silence, interpreting the film *Liebe Perla* through a queer lens. The film, which details the life of Perla Ovitz, a person of short stature and holocaust survivor who was subject to the medical abuse and investigation of Nazi physician and SS officer Josef Mengele, involves Perla's search for the film Mengele recorded of the time she and her family spent at Auschwitz (Kumbier p. 75). Knowing that the film exists and could potentially be viewed by anyone who locates it in an archive drives Perla's quest to locate and destroy it, and Kumbier's examination of the film focuses on the ways in which archival content that is about but not created by marginalized groups haunts those people who are subjects of the historical record through coercive means. While *Liebe Perla* does not have any focus on queer or LGBTQ+ subjects or history, Kumbier notes that the film "enacts a kind of archive activism that could be taken up by queers (disabled and otherwise) confronting a limited, pathologizing, or absent historical record" (p. 79). The points of resonance Kumbier observes between queer and disability experiences and the recognition of the similar barriers queer and disabled subjects have faced in regards to social participation and recognition lead to a kind of

queering that focuses on the subject's history being out of their control, held by others and inaccessible because of oppressive and violent circumstances. Being haunted by absences of records, or knowledge of records in abstract or pathologizing and negative histories, queers the neutrality of an archival space, positioning it as hostile to the needs and wants of the subjects housed within that space through no choice of their own. As Kumbier further investigates archival practices in activist communities, she considers the way archives and archivists function in a relational capacity. Community-based and activism-based archiving does not abandon traditional archival methods but instead integrates those practices with a shift toward participatory and community-oriented archiving, recalculated as such with the goal of creating archives that are empowered and representative of their subjects (p. 132). Archiving, Kumbier highlights, can be relational, that is, members of under-documented communities can benefit from gaining access to resources, and archivists and those in the public who also gain access benefit as well. As the archive in question (the New Orleans project, in this case, which works to document Drag King culture) gains a new collection, the community gains more knowledge, the archive is better informed, and so on. This archival methodology, which is akin to 'documentation advocacy' as defined by Sturgeon, focuses on documenting the lives of ordinary people and identifying records that are most vulnerable to disappearing (Sturgeon in Kumbier p. 131). In response to concerns about archival bias, documentation advocacy focuses on underrepresented groups, in this case a queer group, in order to archive from the ground up, sharing the stories and documentation of a specific queer subculture phenomenon in New Orleans.

Placing Kumbier's queered archives in conversation with Giannachi's notion of archives 3.0 and beyond creates a context for nontraditional archives that specifically accounts for

queerness as an archival evolution and extension of standard notions of what archives can or should do for their subjects and users. Just as the queered archive takes into account both the material circumstances of the archival experience, so too does Archive 4.0 consider the archive beyond its contents, considering the networks that archives make use of and the infrastructural architecture that allows them to be accessed by users in different physical and digital contexts. While Kumbier's case studies focus on physical archives and material archival projects, the ways those archives queer traditional archival structures and traditions can be applied to descriptions of archives 4.0 that Giannachi describes. In defining archives 4.0 as the apparatus "through which our bodies are re-programmed", Giannachi describes a posthuman notion of archives that takes into account the ways archives become the environments in which they are produced, acknowledging the role that space and place can play in more recent archival evolutions. By acknowledging the physical infrastructures and constraints of an archive, the examples Kumbier uses align with Giannachi's archives 4.0 principles, acknowledging the role that infrastructure plays in queer archival practice and the significance of interconnected availability of platforms in the future of archiving. Just as digital archival texts cannot be separated from their environments, so too can queer archives, archives of queer experience, and queered archives never be fully separated from their material circumstances. They are haunted by the incidences of violence, silence, and erasure that prevented them from rising into the mainstream narrative. In this fashion, Kumbier's queer(ed) archives are as much archives 4.0 as any other archive that acknowledges its material infrastructure, and the implications this has for the future of archives, especially queer archives, provides insight into how the materiality of archives is intrinsically connected to the contents of those archives.



Contextualizing Kumbier's work with the theoretical unpacking of archives as apparatus provides a lens through which we might view queer archives, and indeed queered archives, as an evolutionary stage of archival practice that goes beyond the traditional methods, forms, and standards of archives theory and organization. While not every instance of Giannachi's Archives 4.0 constitute queer(ed) archives, the term provides a perspective on queering archives that helps solidify a definition of what it means to 'queer' an archive, and how that queerness can come through in the archive's contents, structure, outreach, or any combination thereof. Where the queering of archives deviates from Giannachi's model is in the removal of digital infrastructure from the requirements. As seen in Kumbier's examples of physical archives, film footage, and community organization, the 4.0 approach of seeing an archive beyond its contents and being aware of the networks that surround its creation, maintenance, and infrastructure allows for a view of archives that focuses on erased and marginalized voices and the contributions they make through community organization, invented history, and pattern recognition. Queer and queered archives always exist in a state of Archives 4.0, in that they are more than their contents and are instead defined by the spaces and places in which they operate, in communities and in haunted history, in careful recollection and whisper-networks, in apartment rooms stacked with boxes of other people's stories and the careful observation of something that goes against the structures archivists, and indeed digital scholars, are trained to observe. *To queer archives is therefore to move towards new discoveries, new knowledges, new ways of understanding and building histories that go beyond the power structures that so often silenced and erased them, allowing for a queer(ed) archive that uses those nontraditional networks in its narrative constructions.*

## Queer Game Studies: Connecting and Preserving Nontraditional Play

Continuing our investigation of the verb form of the word Queer, the opportunity to investigate specific sites of queering provides an avenue that leads towards the interweaving of queer game studies and applications of engaging in that queering process. While Game Studies as a whole has historically suffered from a lack of representative work concerning perspectives that extend beyond the white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied man (Chang 2017 p. 15), recent moves in scholarship and game creation have given rise to opportunities for game studies scholars to push back against the heavily gendered and restrictive boundaries of games criticism and scholarship. In their anthology collection *Queer Game Studies*, Bo Ruberg and Adrienne Shaw interrogate the application of queer studies to games and vice versa, demonstrating the flexibility and iterative nature of this particular field by highlighting the potential it has to bring together many disparate fields of study:

To reach its fullest and richest potential, queer game studies must build not only on queer literary studies, but also on queer film studies, media studies, sociology, anthropology, political science, and all of the interdisciplines. It must emerge as an area of research that does not limit itself to the status of a sub-discipline of either queer or game studies, but provides space for seeing how these existing fields of research intersect. (Ruberg and Shaw 2017 p. xvii).

Engaging with queer game studies scholarship creates an open space for bringing together the fields of archival practice, queer histories, queer games, queer archives, and every other iteration of these seemingly separate areas of scholarship. Queer game studies has provided insight into scholarship surrounding queer theory, sociology, and digital rhetorics, and has created an entire discipline that can thus be applied to and brought together with other areas of study and scholarship. In Ruberg and Shaw's collection, the contributors provide insight into what queer games look like when placed in conversation with queer theory concerning the body (Burrill 2017 p. 30), social justice and communities (Wonica 2017 p. 45), and game design and coding

(Yang 2017 p. 102), to name a few. One in particular, Zoyander Street's piece "Queering Games History: Complexities, Chaos, and Community", specifically addresses the challenges and moves made to preserve the histories of play and games from a queer perspective (p. 35). Street's work directly addresses the link between games and queerness, noting the ways in which games have given players permission to explore queerness in themselves and in thematic elements of games (p. 35). Street's application and discussion of history applies strongly to the notion of how games and archiving can connect and integrate, particularly regarding the discussion of queerness as being "fundamentally about that pushback against prescriptive assumptions" (p. 37) and "a resistance against that coercive attempt to claim knowledge of other people's experiences" (p. 38). Street's piece highlights the ways in which queerness can redefine and rework historical methodologies and emphasizes the importance of individual and community queer history, and alludes to the troubling, biased nature of historical curation and distribution:

When we collect these objects from the community, only to hide them from view, heritage serves the same authority that traditional history would. Likewise, collecting personal accounts of queer histories of games only to then have them mediated by the priorities of the historian, or whatever theories happen to be in vogue in the dominant class of thinkers at the time, does not necessarily serve the marginalized stories that I'm trying to re-center. (p. 40).

To queer histories, in this case game histories, requires an attention to the complexity of the medium, and one of Street's major takeaways -- that the history of games cannot really be 'known' -- pushes for a more in-depth reading of games as a medium where we focus on the moves games culture makes trying to push for normativity despite the "strange, private experiences people have when testing the boundaries of a liminal space" (p. 41). To queer history, be it the history of games or any other instance, requires challenging normative structures and creating flexible and less authoritarian practices, and embodying the historian

authentically, abandoning the essentiality of knowledge and turning instead towards embracing complicated and uncategorizable instances of people's lives and experiences.

The wide variety of disciplines and applications of different queer readings and actions serves as a demonstration of their guiding ethos: that queer game studies is its own creation, and can be applied to and brought together with any other discipline. The rationale presented by Ruberg and Shaw at the beginning of their edited collection therefore provides just one precedent for the bringing together of disparate fields and considering the intersections of games, queerness, and archiving, and further examinations of this application in action demonstrates that there is a rationale and a conversation surrounding the applicability of queer games and queergaming to a discipline such as archival studies.

### **Apparatus of History: A Queer Reading of the Uncensored Library**

To read a game queerly is to acknowledge the boundaries it pushes against and breaks in order to create a new and iterative experience. The term queergaming, coined by Edmond Y. Chang (2017), presents a series of questions and notions that expands ideas of play and queerness interposed as experiences that go against the norm (p. 15). To queer something is to turn it on its head and present it in a different context, most often in ways that highlight a particular shift or difference that redefines or re-presents ideas, decentering them and creating something new. To read games queerly is to look beyond the medium's standard iterations and uses and examine what is being done beyond the base play mode (Clark 2017 p. 4). In this vein, what follows is a queer reading of the Uncensored Library, specifically both a reading of how the Uncensored Library queers games as platforms and mediums and also how the Uncensored Library queers archives and the interaction people have with them. After providing descriptions and screenshots that trace a particular path through the Uncensored Library, I will retrace those steps from the

perspective of what makes the interaction a queer play experience and then what makes it a queer archival experience, and how both take advantage of advanced technology and digital interconnectivity to circumvent (or indeed queer) the political censorship that oppresses marginalized voices in countries under restrictive regimes.

The Uncensored Library was created as a collaboration between 24 builders from 16 different countries working with Blockworks, a collective of over 60 designers, animators, artists, and developers that use *Minecraft* to “create experiences, communities, and learning environments” (2019) and provide interactive opportunities for learning and knowledge acquisition. They in turn worked in tandem with Reporters Without Borders to design an in-game building that maintained the neoclassical architectural style found in museum and library designs, including the main dome of the rotunda (Delaney 2019). While home to over two hundred books with more being added frequently, the main features of the library are the wings designed to house the works of five specific nations: Saudi Arabia, Russia, Mexico, Vietnam, and Egypt. Each wing has been carefully designed to represent certain aspects of each nation’s struggle to share the truth through journalism, and the consequences faced by those who were held accountable by unjust governments. A sixth wing specifically details the work of Reporters Without Borders, and a new wing created in 2020 shares journalism that specifically details acts of censorship surrounding the COVID-19 crisis.

*Minecraft*’s built-in functionality allows players to download maps from servers and upload them to their own machines, and to access the Uncensored Library all a player (or for the purposes of this exercise, a visitor) needs to do is go to the library’s website and download the listed map (See Figure 4).



#TRUTHINISAWAY



### Minecraft Map

Get The Uncensored Library Minecraft Map and invite your friends.

Download



### How to Play

You never played Minecraft before? Here is a guideline how to play, how to install maps and access our server.

Download



### Press Kit

Get the full package: press releases, royalty free pictures and further contact details.

Download

Figure 4: Screenshot from the Uncensored Library Website

From here, the process for uploading the map to a person's own *Minecraft* game is simple, and in a manner of minutes, visitors can enter the library through their own games. Visitors arrive on the map a short distance from the library itself, and while they can teleport straight to the library using an in-game transportation system, first time visitors can take in the sheer scope of the library by climbing a set of stairs made of white blocks. At the top of the stairs is a statue of a hand clutched in a fist holding a pen (See Figure 5). Visitors can reach the library by passing through the gardens, and upon arriving at the main entrance, stylized with the words 'The Uncensored Library' emblazoned across the upper level (See Figure 6), they can enter the main hall, which is a massive rotunda. The rotunda is decorated with flags surrounding the upper domed area, and each flag corresponds to a nation of the world (See Figure 7).



*Figure 5: Screenshot of the entrance to the library garden, a statue of a fist holding a pen*



*Figure 6: Entrance to the Uncensored Library*

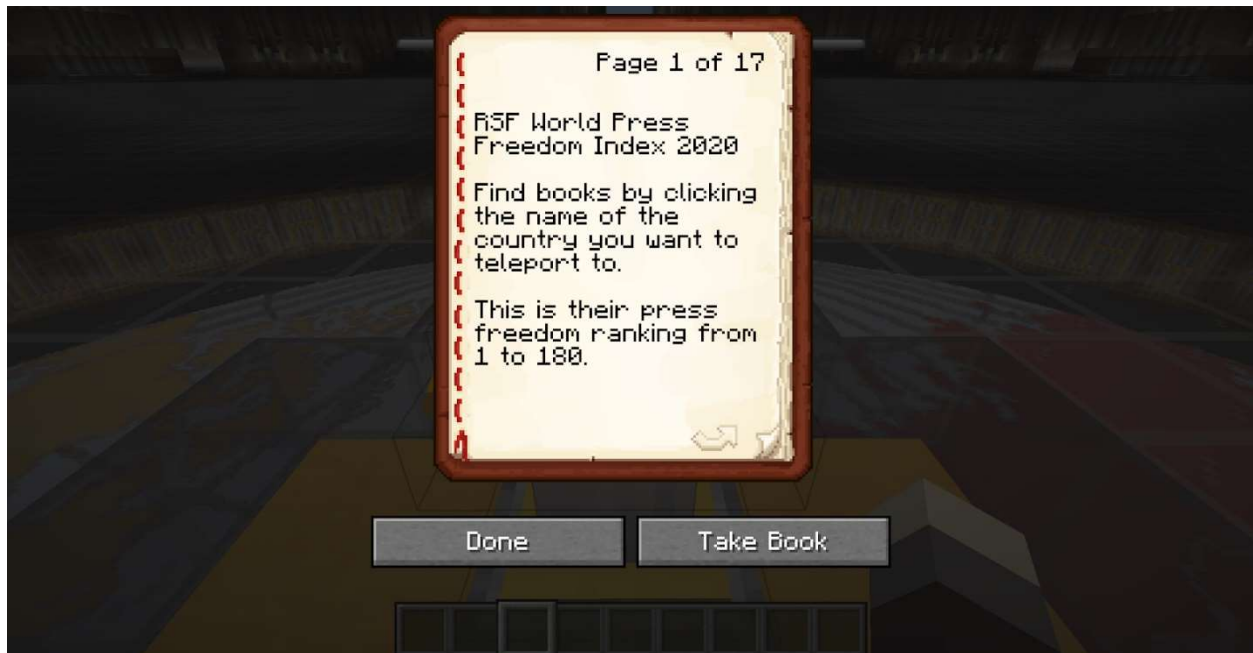




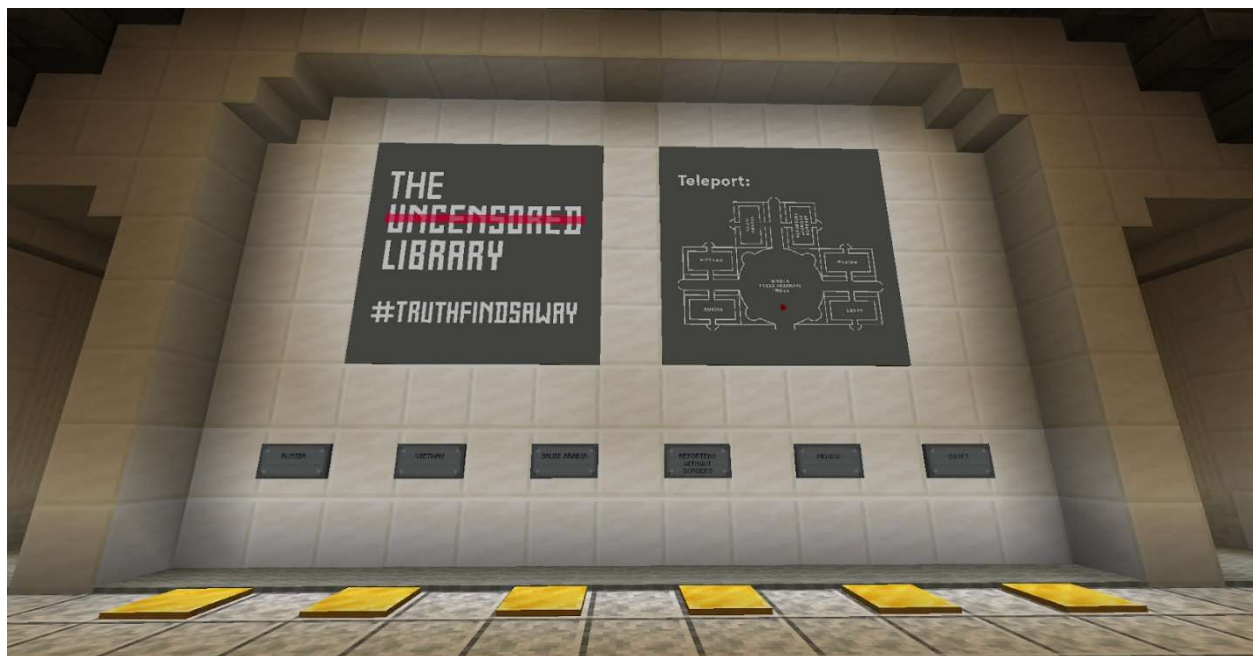
*Figure 7: The rotunda, featuring flags from 180 countries*

Below the dome is a massive map of the world, with each country depicted in a certain color that corresponds to the ranking that country has in the Reporters Sans Frontiers World Press Freedom Index, which is listed in a book on a pedestal in the center of the map (See Figure 8), which is covered in glass to allow for visitors to walk across the map and view it more closely from above. The upper level of the rotunda contains books that detail the journalism situations in each of the 180 countries listed in the World Press Freedom Index. A map on the lower level of the rotunda depicts the layout of the library and features teleport blocks so visitors can travel to each area more expediently (See Figure 9). Different sections are designated for different countries, and visitors can go to each section and experience not only a different country's censored materials, but a series of uniquely designed wings with different physical in-game designs and characteristics. Entering each wing treats viewers to a unique architectural experience, each one designed specifically to reference the situation journalists face in the countries in question.





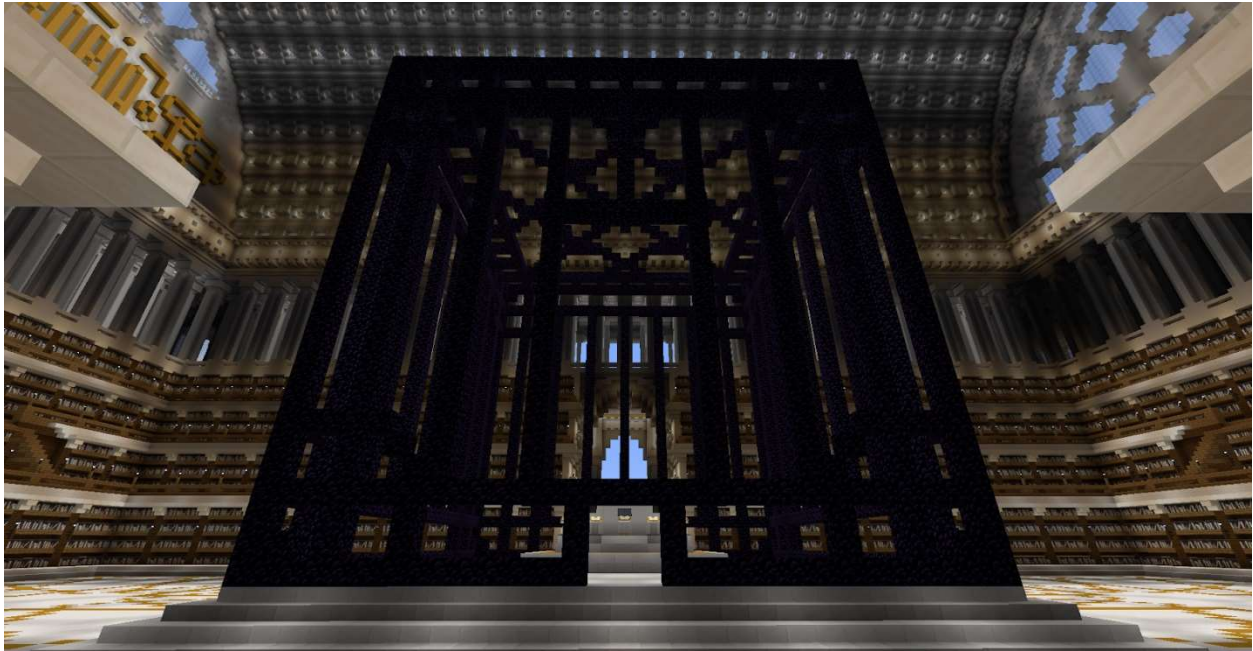
*Figure 8: Minecraft book containing the RSF World Press Freedom Index*



*Figure 9: The Map and teleport stations for the Library*

The Saudi Arabia wing, for example, contains books featuring the journalism of Jamal Kashoggi, presented within a stylized cage made of obsidian (See Figure 10), designed to

represent the fact that Saudi Arabia is among the world's top three countries with the most journalists in prison (Uncensored Library 2019).



*Figure 10: The Obsidian Cage in the Saudi Arabia Wing*

As well as written English reports, the Saudi Arabia room features recordings of Kashoggi's work in multiple languages, playable on the in-game jukeboxes placed within the room. The Russia wing features the 'data kraken' (See Figure 11), a stylized octopus that symbolizes "Russia's immense effort to control the internet systematically" through website blacklists, forbidden online activities, and systematic mass surveillance (Uncensored Library 2019). I will engage in further deconstruction of each section of the library below. The library is also constantly evolving and gaining new resources, as is evident by the inclusion of a new mini-wing that contains journalism specifically related to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and the ways in which censorship has impacted the spread of information about the Coronavirus.



*Figure 11: The 'Data Kraken' in the Russian wing*

The Uncensored Library provides a queer archival experience particularly through the lens of its medium and examining what this *Minecraft* Archive experience does for the material and archive experience within it provides a view of archives that pushes the boundaries of what is usually considered a repository of knowledge by standard archival definitions. Though not traditional, the Uncensored Library falls under these definitions, albeit in a particular interpretive fashion. Returning to Giannachi's notions of archives 4.0, the spatial nature of the Uncensored library fulfills the criteria she sets out for the evolution of archival practices and concepts of archival spaces that maintain notions of space in their structure even if their digital construction is beyond the scope of a traditional archival instance (2016). As a digital archive, the game nature of the Uncensored library fulfills the parameters of archives 2.0, or archives that use traditional archival notions in digital spaces (2016 p. 9) but becomes a 4.0 instance of an archive due to its return to the spatiality of archives, presenting itself as a classical architecture space in the style of a museum. The structure of the Uncensored library also bears resemblance to queer

archival spaces in that despite its name, it does not hold the traditional structure of either a library OR an archive in its design or use, adhering more closely to the queer archives of Kumbier's case studies. These archives, adapted for a different group of identities, marginalized voices, and spaces, bear a strong resemblance to the Uncensored Library's overall appearance and design, with the traditionalist architecture containing rooms that almost function more as art installations than archives, all of which make use of a kind of unsettling, provocative queerness inherent to queergaming as a whole. Navigating the Uncensored Library requires applying the framework of archiving 'from the ground up,' which Kumbier mentions in her book and defines via her conversations with queer historian Christa Orth, who defines archiving from the ground up as a process of collaboration via community interest, rather than being directed from conventional archival practices, or top-down archiving (p. 117). As a collaboration between an organization like RSF and Blockworks, the Uncensored library exists as the combined efforts of a passionate community of journalist and professional *Minecraft* creators, creating a play experience that queers both journalism and *Minecraft* as a whole.

From a queer play perspective, the Uncensored Library provides visitors with a game experience that differs from the standard uses of *Minecraft* as a game. While *Minecraft* by design has a wide variety of play styles and markets itself on this adaptable application of its mechanics (Minecraft.net), using the game less as a game and more as a repository for knowledge presents a way of interacting with the game's structure and mechanics that queers its overall purpose as a play engine. While the map itself does not feature specific Queer-as-Adjective materials, it's queering of the medium - using a play engine for educating, circumventing censorship, and social justice - aligns this reading of the Uncensored Library with Queer Game Studies scholars that posit the inherent queerness of games as mediums and engines of meaning. If we place the

context of the Uncensored Library in conversation with queer games scholarship, we can engage with the ways in which the Uncensored Library exists as a queer play instance. Understanding the queerness of games goes beyond representation via narrative instances, as the queer principles inherent in games can lie in other areas, such as the game's mechanics, imagery, controls, or how it "creates a platform for emergent and transgressive forms of play" (Ruberg 2019 p. 15). The queerness in games exists beyond the representation within them and can be embodied in as simple a manner as being placed in the hands of a queer player (Ruberg 2019 p. 15). Identifying with a video game rarely applies solely to queer players relating to queer characters on screen and can further encompass the mechanics and nature of the games in question (Shaw 2014 p. 7). Applying these notions to *Minecraft* as a whole and specifically the Uncensored Library therefore presents the opportunity to understand how the game operates in a queer context, and what this means for the intrinsic connections between games, archiving, and queerness.

As far as a gaming experience goes, *Minecraft* itself exists in a queer narrative space in that it does not require a specific story for players to become engaged and invested. We see this demonstrated in the Uncensored Library through the lack of any overarching narrative thread to guide visitors, something it has in common with physical museums that sometimes have guidance but not in such a way that mimics the traditional western conflict-rising action-denouement-climax structure. Shira Chess highlights this in her discussion of the inherent queerness of games and notes that this nontraditional narrative structure is inherent to games as a whole, as even games with linear narratives maintain a queer element, that element being the player's ability to move through the experience with some level of autonomy and self-determination (2017 p. 84). She emphasizes that the queerness of games lies inherently in their



non-normative structure and that this structure more accurately reflects a process-based narrative, one that defies hetero-narrative patterns in storytelling and seems to go against our hetero-ideological impression of storytelling and narrative exploration (p. 89). Since games are self-guided and focus less on the conclusion of a narrative and more on the mode of traveling through a narrative, Chess uses a sexual metaphor to explicate the queerness of game narratives and gameplay, where the pleasure of exploring a video game narrative is less about reaching a final climactic moment and more about a journey that provides small victories and rewards. The queer narrative “exists in a never-ending middle that is dependent on alternative pleasures and is unconcerned with the reproductive act”, operating in defiance to the heterosexual narrative of “climax and reproductive orgasm” (p. 88). In its most base form, *Minecraft* functions within this queer narrative, as players can completely ignore the narrative embedded in the game in favor of mining blocks, building complex creations, and exploring. Early versions of *Minecraft* HAD no narrative and players were therefore focused on creating their own stories, models, and ideas throughout their experiences. We see this reflected in the existence and appearance of the Uncensored Library, an instance of queergaming that functions as a demonstration of Chess’s overall principle of queer gameplay experiences, that “when video games tap into their queer structural framework, there is infinite potential to expand the meaning, style, and form of the medium” (p. 92). There are some guiding notices and directions to allow visitors to navigate the library, but the lack of a guiding traditional narrative permits visitors to experience the different wings of the library at their own pace and in any order they see fit. For all intents and purposes, the Uncensored Library is a virtual museum and visitors are encouraged to treat it as such. It is, at its core, also a *Minecraft* map, and visitors to the map can easily edit and mod that map as they see fit, like they could any other *Minecraft* world they create. What the library provides is a use

of the game as a shared community experience, as this is a map anyone can download at any time and can be updated at any time. This results in the library existing in a queer game space as a nontraditional archive, nontraditional game, and nontraditional use of a game engine, tapping into the infinite potential of games as queer vehicles to share information, encourage play, and push the boundaries of what games can be and enact in the world.

I doubt that the makers of the Uncensored Library considered their work a queer expression, but their intent to circumvent censorship and share the stories of reports and news about current events places their work within a social justice context, something that aligns itself closely with queer political motivations. It is no coincidence that of the five major countries whose censorship acts are highlighted in the library, four have massive restrictions on LGBTQ+ rights and have a history of treating the queer people within their borders in violent and punitive ways (Flores 2019). By acknowledging the ways in which a project that already subverts the normative power structures present in society holds common ground with other subversive ways of being in the world, the queer reading of the Uncensored Library becomes as political as it is theoretical. The inherent queerness also arises when considering the library from a practical standpoint and examining the logic of RSF's presenting the information they seek to share with censorship-heavy countries further exposes the queer undertones of the Uncensored Library project. Rather than merely finding a way to upload the censored information into a game space that allows for immediate access, RSF and Blockworks built a massive architectural structure to house extensive information about not only the censored journalists from five specific countries, but the state of journalism as a whole across the world. The goal of the project is not just to share the censored information with an audience that has unequal access, but to do so in a way that allows for audiences to contextualize that work within a certain cultural context. Presenting the

information in an environment that adheres to the familiar layout and tradition of a western Museum primes visitors for receiving a certain kind of information, the way of moving through the virtual space immediately placing them within the mindset of receiving data that is considered culturally important enough to be on display. Rationales and overarching context for the use of space and place exist in the grandiose design and artistic architecture. The Uncensored Library is more than just a repository of censored documents and stories, it is a spectacle, a sight that is designed to be remembered, to inspire awe even among the most veteran of *Minecraft* players while still being accessible to people who have never played *Minecraft* in their lives. Queerness reaches out across history to make impressions despite erasure, and these moves to do just that in a virtual library place the Uncensored Library in a visibly queer context and gamespace.

As the library queers the *Minecraft* experience, so too does it queer the experience of engaging with museum spaces, archival spaces, and galleries. The Uncensored Library falls into a blend of these three aforementioned categories that assigns it a liminal existence, functioning as both a combination of these three spaces of museum, archive, and gallery, and thus as something entirely separate. Doing so again places the Library into a queer context, where it takes the familiar and turns it on its head, pushing its boundaries into a new form. The Uncensored Library has the characteristics of a museum: visitors can move freely around the space and engage with objects of interest that are on display, including maps, flag displays, and different exhibit wings. These overlap with the characteristics of an archival library space, as many of the displays of interests are books and written material of some form, and the library has an organizational cataloging system that makes it navigable for visitors who familiarize themselves with the materials and space. The very nature of the Uncensored Library is archival,



in that it is more restricted than a classic library by virtue of it being difficult to access from the outside. Much like archives as a whole, the library requires specialized knowledge and tools to be accessed by the public, though they are free to visit if they know where to look and who to ask. Finally, the properties of each exhibit room for the five major countries that are the subject of the library's mission as well as the wing that discusses RSF function more as art installations that represent the metaphorical circumstances each country must grapple with to make their information known. In addition to the aforementioned displays in the Russian and Saudi Arabian wing, the library has a labyrinthine installation set up in the Vietnam wing, an elaborate sculpture of the scales of justice in the Egypt wing, and a memorial to twelve murdered journalists in the Mexico wing. Presenting each wing in this manner highlights the individual struggle of each country and their goals for sharing information and works to provide an affective impact as well as share information with visitors at large. The goal of the Uncensored Library -- to emphasize not only the information that has been censored by the oppressive governments of multiple countries, but how that information's censorship impacts the people of those countries -- exists in an inherently queer space through its direct action against the traditions of censorship and information restriction found in those countries and reading it as a queer experience serves only to further highlight that oppositional political motivation.

Preserving information in an oppressive regime requires creative solutions, something that queer communities are no strangers to doing, and by applying principles of reading games queerly beyond their surface content, The Uncensored Library provides us with a play experience that is queer across multiple axes of interpretation. Politically subverting the status quo, taking a game engine and repurposing it for different forms of play, and blending multiple museum and digital spaces means that RSF and Blockworks have inadvertently created a game

experience that is inherently queer, and engaging in such a reading of the Uncensored Library provides an example of how games and archiving can come together via queer applications and methods.

### **Interspersed Mediums: Bringing Games and Archiving Together Under Queerness**

The Uncensored Library's function as an archive within a game creates a queering of the medium that provides an example of just one use of games within an archival context. While there are other instances of archives that appear within games, it helps to return to the overall purpose of this comparison, which is to demonstrate the interplay between archives, games, and queerness, something that provides this dissertation project with both precedent and motivation for in-depth examination of what archival work is being done in the world of games and gaming to preserve the lives and voices of marginalized people, particularly queer people, at this point in time. In particular, this serves as an opportunity for archival practices concerning queer histories to be placed at the forefront, making use of the inherent queerness of game narratives and environments to give players the chance to explore the possibilities and importance of understanding how archives can lift up queer voices. By examining both queer archival practice and queer gaming experiences, I suggest here that the inherent similarities between the two cultural spaces implies an inherent queerness to the interplay between archiving and games, and that the combining of games and archiving creates an inherently queer preservation space that must operate beyond the bounds of both traditional archival work and traditional gameplay conventions. In engaging with scholarship across multiple axes of queerness, archiving, and games, I seek to draw the three together to highlight the intrinsic interplay between them. Drawing on scholarship that engages with these principles and applying it to specific gaming

instances allows for a scholarly conversation about games and archiving to take shape, and my goal is to contribute to this conversation by taking these strands of queerness, archiving, and games, and to further draw them together with an urgent need to consider historical context and identity.

### **Conversations on History, Queerness, and Games: Some Conclusions**

I draw together many intersecting threads in this literature review, many of them disparate, with the goal of presenting facets of a conversation that led me to an interest in queer archival practice in games. As a queer individual and a scholar whose journey is heavily informed by how my identity interplays and interacts with the world, I intend for this chapter to provide some context and background on my path forward into a deeper examination of games archives and the moves those archives make towards preserving the history of queer gamers and providing a rationale for the importance of that work. I began this chapter with a look into current events, and writing this chapter during the constant flux of 2020's political and cultural landscape has provided a number of object lessons that have made the construction of this chapter both easier and harder, and I think that if I were writing this dissertation even a single year earlier than I am would have drastically changed the nature of the work I have laid out here. As it stands, the state of the world and particularly the United States provides a snapshot into the relevance and urgency of conversations surrounding historical erasure in marginalized communities. 2020 saw a rise in open political conflict across the continental United States and the incidents mentioned earlier in this chapter such as the NARA censorship case and the Supreme Court Ruling surrounding workplace discrimination make for a compelling rationale for the importance of historical record keeping and awareness of the rhetorical positioning of those keeping the records. As a time of unrest that is particularly stressful for queer people, I

chose to highlight both current events and events that had a direct impact on me to demonstrate how wide-reaching and affecting these circumstances are, their timeliness a particular reminder of how dedicated I am to doing work that strives to preserve history for people who have already lost so much and will continue to lose more if there is not significant social change. I combine these experiences with my passion and knowledge surrounding games and their inherent queerness and analyze one queer archival game instance both as an example and as a beacon of hope living in a country that rapidly becomes more dangerous for me and the people I love. Preserving play is not just an archival move, it is a revolutionary one, one that points towards actually having a future despite all evidence to the contrary. As LGBTQ+ experiences and people face erasure and oppression, particularly those people along multiply marginalized axes such as Black people and People of Color, preserving historical experiences and moments in a time of fear and unrest makes the conversations surrounding games, archiving, and queerness not only relevant but necessary. While this literature review focuses primarily on archiving and queerness, I use this work to foreground the rationale for my methodology and methods and how heavily they are influenced by current events in games culture, continuing to draw together the disparate threads of historical preservation, LGBTQ+ erasure, and the power of games to inspire change in a world that desperately needs a paradigm shift towards inclusion, equity, and justice.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Methodology and Methods: Crafting A New Research Paradigm in Queer Game Studies

#### Introduction

The work I present here is rooted in an intricate web of personal experiences stemming from my queer identity journey. Since this is the case, I begin discussing my methods for this research study with a story intended to highlight the stakes for this work. This narrative serves not only as an introduction to my processes for developing my study but also to present context for the research and methodology I have developed for this study.

I came out as transgender in January of 2015, at the age of 27. I distinctly remember the time leading up to the moment I finally admitted to myself that I was not the woman I had assumed I was all my life, and many of those moments were based in the identity exploration and experimentation I engaged with in the games I played. From the first *Dungeons and Dragons* character I made since I moved to Alabama for my Master's Degree (a male goliath wizard named "Arseth Vantas"), to considering the options in the opening screen of *Pokemon Alpha Sapphire* and responding to the first character I interacted with, Professor Birch, that I was a boy instead of a girl, 2015 was the year I began to step outside of my comfort zone and interrogate years of confusion, discomfort, and questioning surrounding my gender identity through a safe exploratory place: tabletop and video games. My experience, while not universal, is also not uncommon among trans people (and indeed cis queer people) who explore their identities through cross-gender play in video game contexts in order to push back against societal norms (Street 2017 p. 35). Playing Pokemon with a male avatar instead of a female one gave me the space to play with the idea of being a man without threatening to disrupt relationships I feared

weren't sturdy enough to handle my emerging identity. In the almost five plus years that have passed since my coming out, my identity, which continues to shift and evolve, has informed my scholarly pursuits, personal life, and creative work. Further, I have found that the nature of my queer identity echoes that of Sara Ahmed's exploration of orientation in her work *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), where the notion of "Orientation" is described in the context of material and spatial interaction with the world at large, and how a queer life experience shifts one's movement through space, directionality, and adherence to (or lack of adherence to) societal lines (p. 14). As a result, my identity journey has been inextricably associated with the primary goal of this study: to draw from my own lived experience in order to examine the current moves in archival practice and game studies to more accurately preserve and uplift the voices of marginalized people in the gaming community, something others who have gone on identity journeys similar to mine can engage with in their own work and lives.

My experience navigating my identity through the lens of games and play reflects the diverse opportunities games present for scholarship and research. As a field, game studies is multidisciplinary, making the integration of research methods and principles from a broad range of paradigms not only possible but beneficial (Ruberg & Shaw 2017 p. xxviii). Current scholarly moves in game studies integrate complex new research methods at the same time as they provide ample space to build upon nascent growth already present. New methodologies established within the field featuring the qualitative study of games (Consalvo and Dutton 2006) provide groundwork for creating new theories and research paradigms to further games' scholarship, as well as creating space for scholars to bring other disciplines into conversation with the study of games. Thus, in concert with this methodological ecumenism, I draw from archival rhetoric and practice, queer theory and methodology, feminist activism, and indigenous research paradigms,

with the intent of crafting a new research paradigm specifically designed for queer history in game studies. Drawing on the precedent for this, found at the intersection of queer games research (Ruberg 2019, Shaw 2014), rhetorical archival research and practice (Ramsey et al. 2010), and the archiving of queer games (Shaw et al 2019), I conduct a study of archival practice and preservation in game studies that turns attention to the specific efforts being made to preserve and work alongside queer gaming communities to preserve historical evidence of queer games and queer gamers.

My guiding research questions are therefore the following:

1. What efforts are being made in game studies to preserve the history of games and those who play them?
2. What do those methods look like in comparison to an archive of queer games constructed by and concerning the experiences of queer people?
3. What can game studies do to more accurately preserve and lift up the voices of marginalized groups in gaming culture?

My strategy for addressing these three questions begins with two case studies, which serve both as examples of current moves being made in games culture and game studies and also work to bring attention to the histories of games and queerness both separately and in conversation with each other. I begin with conducting a case study at the Strong Museum of Play in Rochester, New York, which features the world's most comprehensive collections of historical materials related to play. This case study provides insight into the first of my research questions, as the Strong Museum's collections seek to document game and gameplay histories via methods including an extensive archive housed in the Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play,

as well as the International Center for the History of Electronic Games. I use the information and ideas I uncover there to craft and enact a second case study, a strategy that follows Yin's (1994) work on multiple case design. The second case study focuses on a specifically queer archive, the LGBTQA Game Archive, known also as the Rainbow Arcade, originally housed at the Schwules Museum in Berlin, Germany, from December 2018 to May 2019 and currently available in digital format. This second case study serves to engage with my second research question, and the data from both case studies serves to develop strategies for answering the third research question I pose in this chapter. The overall goal of the study focuses on preserving and lifting up the voices of marginalized groups in gaming culture, marginalized groups here being defined via Linda Tuhiwai-Smith's definition of the term, which is "groups who have little access to power" (2012 p. 207). I expand upon methodologies designed by and for marginalized groups to create a research paradigm specifically oriented towards the work those groups and individuals are doing for and within their own communities. My focus in particular on queer gaming comes from my own involvement and personal connection to that movement as a queer gamer. Thus, my lived experience serves as a valuable lens that informs my scholarly moves, one through which I can construct and build upon the findings from the case inquiries that serves the queer gaming community as well as the academic field of queer game studies.

### **Why a New Methodology? A Queer Archival Game Studies Research Paradigm**

The development of a research methodology for queer archival game studies comes at a time where preserving and acknowledging the histories of queer communities is a necessary and important component of social justice activist work. This methodology provides tools for scholars interested in game studies, social justice, and community building, ensuring that the future of games acknowledges and builds upon its diverse history to lift up the work being done



in game design, development, and analysis to bring those marginalized voices to the forefront in both academic and cultural spaces.

The surge in game studies towards acknowledging, preserving, and building upon the queerness of/in games is an at-risk research paradigm that is regularly combated by the games industry and community as a whole. A recent example of this concerns GamerGate, the online movement that stemmed from a harassment campaign conducted against women in the gaming industry, which took place primarily in 2014 (Hathaway 2014). GamerGate took place primarily on Twitter through the use of the hashtag #GamerGate and grew rapidly into a cultural movement reportedly concerned with “ethics in game journalism” but ultimately more focused on the ongoing problem in gaming culture with diversity, identity, and social justice (Kidd & Turner 2016). The harassment suffered by multiple prominent women and minorities in the gaming industry included doxing - the public release of private information online (Quinn 2017 p. 81) - death threats, and rape threats. The self-described “patient zero” of the #GamerGate Movement, Zoe Quinn, refers to the GamerGate experience as “a flash point for radicalized online hatred” (Quinn 2017 p. 4) and a major catalyst for the cultural shift that allowed for, among other things, the election of Donald Trump. However, as the vitriolic hate and harassment died down, the games industry (and the field of game studies) began to talk about a “post-GamerGate” era in early 2017, something Karabinus takes to task in her discussion of the #GamerGate movement as a whole:

How do we measure a movement that wasn’t a movement, an organization that wasn’t an organization, an era that wasn’t so much an era but an outgrowth of something else? We can find a specific origin here; we can unpack the particular ecologies it inspired—the flow of information from Eron Gizoni’s blog and outward, through moments like Internet Aristocrat’s accusatory video, through the GameJournoPros reporting and calls of collusion around the turn away from “gamer.” We know exactly when Adam Baldwin coined the term “GamerGate” and what was happening before, and after. But as I sat in a room with other

academics and watched a slide flash with a beginning and end date for GamerGate... well, it stuck with me, that time marker. Who gets to say when GamerGate is over? (Karabinus 2017).

The idea that #GamerGate is “over” attempts to put a neat bookend on a scattered and chaotic movement that continues to have cultural impact in politics, online culture, the game industry, and society as a whole. The reality is that the repercussions of the movement continue to impact the digital social justice movement, and one of the most disconcerting aspects of that impact is how eagerly people seem to be attempting to rewrite the #GamerGate narrative.

On February 5th, 2019, Escapist Magazine Editor-In-Chief Russ Pitts posted a piece discussing the topic of ethics in games journalism with the tone of reflecting on #GamerGate and its impact on the games industry. The article, while primarily condemning the harassment of women and the alt-right rise that the movement contributed to, also contains language that seems to “throw GG a bone” in its description. The original piece by Pitts was taken down and replaced with an apology, but Twitter users, including user @CaseyExplosion, retained screenshots of the article in question, which highlighted Pitt’s article as a revisionist take of the #GamerGate movement, focusing on the ethics in games journalism rather than the fact that the entire movement was centered around targeted harassment of women and minorities in the games industry (@CaseyExplosion 2019). After the piece was published, Zoe Quinn responded to Pitts tweeting an assertion that his article was not him being on the side of GamerGate, informing him that since he didn’t contact anyone who was at the center of the phenomenon for his article, clearly he wasn’t on the side of the people who were hit hardest by it (Quinn 2019). The response, also deleted and also captured in screenshots by Quinn, included Pitts stating “I genuinely thought you’d probably be over this being all about you” (2019). The article, the reactions, the quick removal of the article to be replaced with an apology, the deleting of tweets,

all point to the ways in which the games industry and those involved in it have truly started to believe that 2019 is a long enough period of time for the internet to go through in order to forget the specifics of GamerGate and attempt to rewrite history in an effort to situate the movement in ethics in games journalism instead of violence, harassment, and misogyny. Revisionist history is not a new phenomenon by any stretch, but the timeframe of this incident is a rapid one that points to a major issue with both the historicizing and archiving of the internet -- time moves so rapidly in online spaces that major cultural movements can be rewritten just a few years after they took place, can be seen as being “Post”, and can be used to continue to try to erase the people it impacted most. As Quinn puts it in their book *Crash/Override*:

GamerGate has hit the most marginalized people the hardest, from being blacklisted in the gaming industry to being driven from their homes, even framed for a terrorist attack in Paris. Every time we speak out about this abuse, we receive hundreds of gleeful messages in reply, simultaneously insisting that none of this is actually happening and that we all totally had it coming. (2017)

GamerGate and its continued narrative serve as an instance of rapid digital historical revisionism, where the rapid flow of information online makes it easier to rewrite history than it has been in analog space. At its core, the people impacted most heavily by GamerGate, as Quinn notes, are the marginalized voices present in the games industry who already lacked the voice necessary to speak out against inequality. The methodology developed and enacted in this study therefore seeks to build upon the current work being done in queer game studies by scholars who have brought to light the queer histories already present in games and gaming culture. It uses the current work as a foundation to build a methodology that seeks to enact paradigms present in queer theory and social justice advocacy, with the goal of engaging in research that ultimately serves the community which it is studying - namely, queer gamers.

As a queer person who has been a gamer since childhood, my engagement with games (and game studies) has often echoed the experiences of others in the field who found themselves feeling like outsiders in the gaming community, participating in a subculture that did not market to them as the primary audience (Shaw 2014 p. ix) My early experiences with video games, which I engaged with while still thinking myself a cisgender woman, told me that games were made for and by men, and were entirely the purview of men, where everything from the scantily clad female characters to the masculine power fantasies held this to be true. My transition to a more masculine identity did not shift this perspective, rather serving to put me at an even further distance from the primary audience of mainstream games, which focus on a very heterosexual and traditional cultural narrative paradigm, and I found myself remaining a stranger in the subculture through which I had been able to explore and push the boundaries of my identity. Since my experiences playing games directly impacted my identity journey and understanding of my own queerness, this alienating experience created a cognitive and cultural dissonance between my experiences and the primary audiences of mainstream games. Part of my scholarship is therefore about helping others interrogate this dissonance, helping them to reconcile their lived experiences with the reported mainstream gaming paradigm. Another source of this dissonance was digging further into the queer history of game design, gameplay, and game creation, where the more I investigated current moves in game studies to examine archival materials, the more I saw that games history had much firmer roots in queer elements than I had previously seen. In the written catalog for the Rainbow Arcade, Shaw (2019) interviews C. M. Ralph, creator of the 1989 game *Caper in the Castro*, a gay and lesbian themed computer game that was originally released as charityware, meaning anyone downloading it would be asked to donate funds to an AIDS organization of their choosing. Ralph also made a “straight” version of the game and sold

it through the Heizer Software catalog, knowing that that particular audience may not be interested in a gay and lesbian themed game (Shaw et al 2019). This example of an early LGBTQIA+ video game was a concrete example of an entire world of older indie games designed by and for queer people that I had never heard of, let alone played. Unearthing the history of games has the potential to provide grounding for future game studies scholars, gamers, and game designers to develop more games and scholarship that benefits and serves queer gamers in a politically and socially hostile environment (Ruberg 2019 p.13).

At this point in time, while the building blocks of this methodology are present, it is my goal to tie them together and create a research paradigm that has the primary focus of serving the community in which it is situated. The current social environment of game studies and gaming culture as a whole provides a timely example of why such a methodology is relevant and important. This methodology builds upon work being done in game studies regarding social justice, intersectional advocacy, and combatting the erasure of lived experiences to create a paradigm that is primarily concerned with practical applications of social justice work that can give back to a community of queer gamers seeking to preserve their history and situate themselves in a future where they are more visibly present.

## **Interweaving Scholarship: Constructing a Queer Archival Game Studies Methodology in Six Moves**

### **Move 1: Weaving Methodological Strands Together**

Much like game studies as a whole, a methodology for the study of queer games, the study of game archives, and the study of archiving queer games requires an interdisciplinary approach that draws upon multiple base theoretical concepts and weaves them together to expand

their work into a new paradigm. As Shaw (2014) expresses in her citation of Elizabeth Bird, “Methods matter because the choices made, along with the very characteristics of the researcher, play into and ultimately shape the conclusions of any research” (42), and the choice to draw from multiple theoretical methodologies and frameworks provides future scholars with flexible tools they might build upon and the ability to bring multiple methodologies together to enact their own work. As such, my methodology for investigating queer archival game studies weaves together recent moves found in feminist scholarship, in queer game studies scholarship, and archival research methods enacted by archivists and rhetoric scholars alike. In the interest of creating a methodology that can be adapted and built upon by other scholars interested in investigating their own experiences as marginalized people, I engage with methodological principles enacted in indigenous methodologies, intersectional race studies, and social justice work. My goal is to create a flexible paradigm that may be applied across diverse experiences and account for the histories and lived experiences of marginalized experiences different from and beyond my own. It is my aim to engage with these theoretical paradigms respectfully as an outsider while also drawing from my own insider knowledge of an alternative axis of oppression. The engagement with these methodologies allows me to develop a flexible paradigm that can help other marginalized scholars draw from their own experiences and knowledge to adapt this methodology to their own research.

## **Move 2: Defining A Transparent Methodology for Insider Research**

My starting point was to solidify what developing a methodology would actually mean. I felt that in order to adequately create a methodology, I would need to begin with definitions and paradigms that aligned with my own ethos and goals. I therefore use Wilson’s (2008) definition

of methodology as “the theory of how knowledge is gained”, and an attempt to answer the question “How do I find out more about this reality?” (p. 34) This framing of methodology gives me a space from which to understand how my approach towards investigating a small subfield of game studies could contribute to both my understanding of reality and the understanding I could share with others. I further contextualize this with Sullivan and Porter’s (1997) view of methodology as invention and as “the construction of a rhetorical design that contributes to an understanding” (p. 13). Using methodology to rhetorically develop understanding gives me the room to construct flexible research goals and consider the aims of a research paradigm rooted in finding out more about the reality of the seemingly niche but surprisingly broad intersection of game studies, queer theory, and archival practice. The interweaving of these areas relies upon the unifying factor of passionate attachment, something Rohan (2010) engages with Royster about in her chapter on conducting archival research into individuals (p. 232). Rohan also visits this with Kirsch (2008) when the two discuss the need to make the research process more transparent through describing it, making research “a meaningful collection process that has helped [writers] better understand their own historically situated experience” (p. 2). Further detailing the extent of the research and its impact on the researcher provides a richer insight into how the passions and interests of the researcher feed into more meaningful and in-depth scholarship, with an eye towards sharing the methods in order to help build scholarly connections. While most major methodologies seek to disengage with the personal (Tuhiwai-Smith 2012 p. 138), this archival feminist scholarship seeks to highlight the personal connection between researchers and participants and is something Kirsch and Rohan consider an essential component of archival research in particular, which requires a lot of extra time working with materials in a researcher-guided context (p.8). I take this notion a step further by bringing in indigenous methodologies

shared by Tuhiwai-Smith (2012), who notes that feminist research has made insider methodology more acceptable in qualitative research and highlights that the major aspect insider researchers must consider is the consequences of their research, which they will have to live with as members of the communities that are being studied (p. 138). Insider research must be “as ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical, as outsider research” and must be humble, as the researcher is a member of the community with a different set of roles and relationships than those on the outside of the researched community (p. 140). Instances of this in game studies often connect directly to a scholar’s personal play experience in a particular game (kopas 2017), or connection to a particular character in a game (Harper 2017). Their experience as a gamer intersects with their scholarly knowledge as they articulate how they engage with unique games like *Gone Home* (kopas) or complex characters like *Mass Effect’s* Commander Shepard (Harper). While insiders, both kopas and Harper engage with the texts they study with a critical eye, ensuring their personal experiences are intertwined with the scholarship they conduct. The role of the insider in a research methodology therefore intrinsically connects to the idea that a methodology for research does not just contribute to an understanding but also affects positive action through rhetorical practice (Sullivan and Porter 13). In rhetoric and composition research, scholars make use of praxis, or the informed and conscious practice that goes beyond the theory-practice binary, to present a new critical positioning that is informed and politically conscious (Miller in Sullivan and Porter 1997 p. 26). This praxis combined with notions of insider research creates the foundation for a methodology that is rooted in awareness and accountability, where the researcher’s first priority is the reflexive consideration of their position as an insider in relation to the community they are studying. That is, the researcher is engaging with their own



community, but with the same critical approach they would lend to a topic or subject in which they are less personally involved.

### **Move 3: Decolonizing and Redefining Axes of Marginalization**

Continuing the construction metaphor, I build upon this methodological foundation by continuing to draw upon indigenous research methodologies that concern themselves with decolonizing and redefining how research can and should be conducted. Since history has been defined and popularized from the perspective of colonial and imperialist forces (Tuhiwai Smith 2012 p. 30-31), that history must be revisited in order to redefine and deconstruct the relationship history has to power. I find myself drawn to this approach due to the quasi-textual elements of histories that fall outside the scope of Eurocentric views of the past and how indigenous scholars seek to honor and reshape academic approaches to preservation. Coming to know the past or learning of the histories that have been suppressed by the colonialist majority, involves indigenous people sharing their stories to resist the primary narrative and seek justice for the wrongdoings of the past (p. 36). Developing this methodology involves seeking common threads with other research paradigms, something Wilson (2008) engages with regarding feminist theory and relational psychology and the ways these disciplines operate under the same space as an indigenous worldview as they work to challenge the cultural outlook of mainstream society (p. 16). One of the guiding principles Wilson defines in his work is the Indigenous axiology and methodology of relational accountability, or the notion of research as a ceremony, something that exists with the purpose of building stronger relationships, bridging the distance between aspects of the cosmos and the self, and allowing for a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world (p. 10-11). Redefining the methods and possibilities for research in this way establishes a precedent for methodologies that seek to engage with communities in similar fashions,

particularly for insider researchers interested in studying and working with their own communities. While Indigenous history and oppression exists along its own axis of power dynamics in colonizer/imperialist society, the principles shared by Indigenous scholars share common threads with the experiences of those who exist upon other axes of marginalization. For this reason, I engage with indigenous methodology to acknowledge and honor the important work being done rather than using it as a direct model, as I see it as a paradigm that can and should inspire other marginalized groups to develop theoretical paradigms and ethical active praxis to lift up their own communities. Indigenous methodology therefore provides invaluable insight into methods scholars can use to engage with respectful and ethical research in their own communities that exist along other axes of marginalization and power.

#### **Move 4: Integrating Queerness, Game Studies, and Interdisciplinarity**

I now turn to my own axis of marginalization and my own community, drawing inspiration from the work of Indigenous scholars and interplaying those principles with the methodologies being enacted in queer scholarship. Joseph Pierce encourages this move in his own work which considers the need to dismantle the traditional frameworks of queer theory, which are built upon the same colonialist white frameworks as other major theoretical paradigms, and question how queerness circulates and how queer academia can expand the roots of their discipline (Small 2019). As queer game studies moves forward, it needs to do so with awareness of this need to decolonize queer theory. In their 2017 collection *Queer Game Studies*, Ruberg and Shaw posit that queer theory as a paradigm can cause a dramatic rethinking in game scholarship due in part to its versatility as a lens but also a paradigm that allows for the flexibility and intersection of multiple disciplines also seen in game studies as a whole (p. xvii). Queer game studies is another major building block of a queer archival game studies methodology

because of how much it works to remain engaged in intersectional thinking, always keeping its interdisciplinary aspects at the forefront of the scholarship (p. xviii). Ruberg and Shaw put out a call in the introduction of their book that forms one of the major driving forces of developing a queer archival game studies methodology, which is to encourage future work that “even more explicitly puts issues of queerness and games into dialogue with these fundamentally interrelated concerns of access, visibility, subjecthood, agency, and voice” (p. xviii). They encourage the evolution of a queer game studies paradigm which maintains roots in queer activism and moves away from narrow definitions and taxonomies of play and players, and it is my goal to embody this evolution in development of this methodology. Ruberg further engages with this methodology in their individual work (2019), where they use a queer game studies methodology rooted in principles of the inherent queerness of games and their players (p. 7). I cite and use their definition of queerness here to solidify the roots of my own methodological paradigm, particularly due to the often shifting and complex definitions that exist of the term “queer”. Ruberg defines queer as an umbrella term for people and experiences that “do not conform to mainstream norms of gender and sexuality”, including those described by the acronym LGBT and many others that exist outside that main representation, including genderqueer, asexual, and intersex (with the acknowledgement that not everyone in the listed categories self-identifies as queer) (p. 7). Ruberg draws from queer theorists to consider how queerness operates definitionally as a way of being, doing, and desiring differently, and is thus simultaneously “a term for the lived experiences of LGBTQ subjects and a term for reimagining, resisting, and remaking the world” (p. 7). This definition of queerness also interplays with the definition of what makes for a “queer” game, where Ruberg defines queer games not only as games that contain explicitly queer characters, but as games that should be understood as falling under a

queer experience, especially when placed in the hands of queer players (p.15). Ruberg's work builds upon Shaw's studies of play amongst marginalized people (2014), which focus less on representation of identities and more on experience and how players with marginalized identities engage with games rather than how those games present marginalized themes on their own (p. 9). Shaw's study of identity and identification complicates notions of what it means for a game to have queer representation and in doing so provides a broad space for queer game scholars to build upon this work. Queerness in games is fundamentally not about categorizing or creating a prescriptive ideology of what makes a queer game, but about pushing back against those assumptions (Street 2017 p. 37), and understanding that at its core, queerness operates as a resistance against coercive attempts to claim knowledge of other people's experiences (p. 38). This is where I see the strongest parallels with Indigenous methodologies, which also push back against traditional historiographic methodology in the interest of redefining research, scholarship, and knowledge for the marginalized (Tuhiwai-Smith 2012, Wilson 2008). A methodology based in these principles therefore focuses on the resistive core of queer methodology, drawing upon scholarship and knowledge that seeks not to create a totalizing or unified methodology for studying games, queerness, or archiving, but to create a flexible paradigm that allows for these notions, and indeed others, to blend together as decided by the researcher.

### **Move 5: Turning to the Archives**

In order to further build this flexible methodology and orient it towards one specific form of historical research, I now turn to current rhetorical archival research methodologies to more firmly define the overall paradigm in which I intend to work during this project. Moves to further

emphasize the passion embedded in archival research projects (Schultz 2008 p. ix) provide the groundwork for a methodology that allows for a level of flexibility required to become fully invested in the narratives and histories an archive can contain. When archival research is presented not only as using the past to construct new narrative histories but also as a lived research process (Schultz 2008 p. ix), it provides a framework for rhetorical scholarship in historical materials that accounts for both the researcher and the subject of the research. Kirsch and Rohan emphasize this in the introduction to their *Beyond the Archives* (2008) collection, where they emphasize the role of serendipity, family connections, and cultural memory in historical research, a form of scholarship that requires a researcher to “give their game away”, or make their research process more transparent, thereby highlighting how using archival resources have the potential to enrich our understanding of history, culture, and rhetoric (p. 2). Tapping into our passions as researchers and allowing “creativity and intuition” to enter the research process allows for new insights into historical research and introduces flexibility into what ‘counts’ as an archive, and indeed as archival research (p. 9). Research conducted for the Rainbow Arcade collection reflects this notion and provides an example of how these principles are being enacted in queer game studies and the work queer games scholars are doing to uncover and preserve the previously invisible facets of games history, including games such as Ralph’s *Caper in the Castro* that was thought to be lost until 2014 (Shaw et al 2019 p. 27). Mastrangelo and L’Eplattenier (2008) agree with Kirsch and Rohan upon the need for flexibility, noting that researchers prefer working with “complete” texts, whereas archival research requires working with fragments, full of “rough and bumpy” stories that can mislead or diverge in confusing and counterintuitive fashions (p. 164). The archival researcher must rely on making educated guesses and adapt their instincts, rejecting assumptions about historical time periods and instead

immersing themselves in the materials and considering how best to hear the stories of the archives (p. 162-164). The researcher must become the filter and lens of the archival material in which they operate, and consider honestly how their personal goals, research, and preconceived agenda impacts the scope of their research and methodological choices (Gaillet 2010 p. 37). This need for the consideration of the personal and material aspects of archival research leads Gaillet to a discussion of both rhetorical methodology for archival research and practical method for engaging in archival research materials, encouraging scholars to critically reflect on their methods and adapt them to the materials and circumstances surrounding the archive in which they operate (p. 31). The final rhetorical building block of a flexible archival methodology involves communication and collaboration with archivists themselves to best pinpoint the cultural context surrounding the materials a researcher wishes to study (Morris and Rose 2010 p. 53). A rhetorical understanding of archival principles and practical archival construction provides the researcher with additional tools to engage with archives both as history-making sites of discovery and as rhetorical objects themselves constructed by (invisible) human hands and impacted by their contexts (p. 70). Integrating these archival methodologies with the principles found in queer, feminist, and indigenous paradigms gives me practical researching tools to enact a queer archival game studies methodology, blending the rhetorical work of archival scholars with theoretical principles to create a practical and flexible research journey.

## **Move 6: Enacting and Maintaining Activism, Advocacy, and Community**

My final interweaved thread in developing a queer archival game studies methodology lies in the pervading need to maintain the connections between historical archival research and the importance of enacting social justice and advocacy in my scholarship, turning the focus of

the work towards a study that, at its core, seeks to give back to the communities and audiences being studied. The exploration of queerness in games, particularly as it relates to representation, is a social justice issue (Flanagan in Ruberg 2019 p. 3) and the “linear progress narrative” present in queer discourse often runs the risk of erasing the complexities of LGBTQ people’s lived experiences (Ruberg 2019 p. 2). Explorations of queerness in games must “remain grounded in the realities of the LGBTQ players, game-makers, and scholars who call games their own” if they are going to serve a community of queer gamers who seek a retelling of games history that accounts for their involvement in games from the beginning, rather than the predominant notion that LGBTQ players, game-makers, themes, and meaning are a relatively new phenomenon in gaming culture (Ruberg 2019 p. 2). With this notion in mind, the methodology I have developed here focuses heavily on what queer archival game studies can give back to queer gamers and help bring the lesser-known aspects of queer games history to the forefront of game studies and game history. As a queer gamer, I choose to continue to inhabit the margins of the field of game studies, a scholarly move highlighted by Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) that allows the researcher to draw from insider knowledge to commit to enacting social justice in a community to change the conditions and relations of the margins (p. 205). Committing to building a career from that place is a move that requires creating strategies that enable researchers “to survive, to do good research, to be active in building community capacities, to maintain their integrity, manage community expectations of them and mediate their different relationships” (Tuhiwai-Smith 213). My positionality along certain axes of marginalization (a disabled, visibly out transgender individual) interplays with the affordances I am granted as a white, often cisgender male assumed individual at a land grant institution with access to health care, resources, and advocates for my safety. The privileges I am able to access present me with

the opportunity to build my career from the margins in the interest of working towards methodological strategies that others who inhabit the margins of game studies can build upon and work towards their own goals. I return again to Tuhiwai-Smith's notions of researching social justice, which should expand and improve the conditions for justice, something that "is an intellectual, cognitive, and moral project, often fraught, never complete, but worthwhile" (p. 215). A queer archival game studies methodology therefore needs to remain grounded in principles of social justice and community advocacy, using tools from a variety of theoretical spaces in such a way that adapts to the lived experience, knowledge, and background of the researcher in order to act first and foremost as a research paradigm that serves the marginalized community to which the researcher belongs.

### **Queer Archival Game Studies in Practice: Application and Research Design**

In order to conduct research based in a methodology that highlights queer archival game studies practices, I selected two archives to examine as case studies. I selected these two archives - the Strong Museum of Play and the LGBTQ Games Archive - due to the work both archives do in terms of preserving specific instances of video game history. The Strong Museum houses extensive archives of games hardware and software and collects papers and documents from noted game designers and historical figures. The LGBTQ archive focuses on collecting games that feature specific instances of LGBTQ representation in video games. This focus on two specific examples allows me to investigate granular instances of archival practice in each archive, examining particular example artifacts to serve as examples of the contents of those archives. It also gives me the opportunity to speak directly with specific archivists and curators who are responsible for maintaining and building upon the collections pertaining to my research questions in a way that a broader, multi-archival study approach would not be able to provide.



The first case study, of the archival holdings of the Strong Museum of Play in Rochester, NY, will provide baseline answers to my major research questions, helping provide me with an understanding of current archival practices being enacted in game studies and game history. I will then use this first case study to build upon the second case study, of the LGBTQ Games Archive, that I might compare and contrast the holdings, strategies, and actions taken by that archive with the work being done at the Strong Museum. Examining these two archives in comparison and in tandem provides a grounding in current archival practice being enacted in game studies and provides a foundation for future examinations and applications of queer archival game studies.

I developed my case study method both from a rhetorical research and an archival research perspective, making use of resources I gained from a graduate level seminar I took in the Spring of 2019 with Sammie Morris, the head of the Archives and Special Collections at Purdue University. I had the opportunity to conduct archival research and learn more about current theory and practice in Archival work. Sammie volunteered to assist me in the development of my case studies from the perspective of an archivist, helping me develop strategies for selecting archival materials to examine and questions to ask specific archival scholars involved with my case study archives. Our collaboration, echoing the work Sammie conducted with Shirley K Rose on the archiving of the James Berlin Papers (2010), highlights the importance of rhetoric scholars consulting archivists in order to get a more comprehensive understanding of both general archival practice and the expertise of archivists as a whole (p. 54). Their assertion that archivists and other staff might have access to additional and more specific information pertaining to the history of a collection led me to work with Sammie to develop a strategy for contacting the archivists and scholars responsible for the collections I wanted to

focus on and the archival case studies I chose. I also made use of Gaillet's (2010) guidelines for archival research in the development of a rhetorical strategy for analyzing the contents and specific artifacts I wanted to investigate. The guidelines, which include conducting extensive research before even setting foot in the archive, consulting the archivists for more information, and becoming familiar with the policies of the archival facility, were familiar to me after a semester taking a practical archives class at Purdue, and served to give my experiences a strong theoretical rhetorical background I could build upon (p. 32-33, see Appendix I for more details).

My first case study, the Strong Museum of Play, involves me specifically investigating the International Center for the History of Electronic Games (or ICHEG), the Director of which is Jon-Paul C. Dyson. The ICHEG focuses on collections based in video game and electronic game history, while also engaging in current research in how games impact the way people play, learn, and connect with each other. My strategy for conducting research into this collection originally involved investigating what materials related, even cursorily, to queer games history, may be contained within the museum's archival holdings. After selecting three to five collections for initial inquiry, I will consult with Strong Museum archivists on acquiring access to these materials. I am also applying for travel grants that would allow me to visit and study at the Strong Museum in the Spring of 2020, and I am to request a period of at least three weeks to allow for enough time to examine the archival holdings I pinpoint in my pre-research, investigate any new leads into the archival materials present in the collection, and conduct interviews with archivists who work directly with those collections. For notes on how this plan was necessarily revised due to the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, see Limitations and Adjustments in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5.

The interview questions I have developed (see table 1) are based upon my initial research questions and include asking about the general intake and selection procedures at the Strong Museum, outreach work being done by archivists to request collections and artifacts relevant to the archive's message, and their plans for the future of their archives and collections. My case study procedure involves investigating the archival materials I select for study, and then conducting interviews with archivists that my findings during the archival research may inform any additional questions I ask. After conducting this case study, I will review and codify the information I glean from both the artifacts I examine and the archivist interviews I conducted. The data points noted in table 1 serve as the base codification of the information I receive, and I will use the answers to refer back to my research questions and my overall goal of ensuring my methodology serves its primary purposes of serving queer gaming communities and engaging with ensuring the visibility of queer history in game studies.

Table 1: Initial Interview Questions for Archivists, Strong Museum of Play

<b>Questions/Data Categories</b>	<b>Strong Museum Archives</b>	<b>LGBTQ Game Archives</b>	<b>General Archival Practice</b>	<b>Game Studies</b>	<b>Gaming Culture</b>	<b>Queer History</b>
What is the standard intake procedure for new archival materials?	X	X	X			
Where do archival items or entries most commonly come from?	X	X	X			
What kinds of outreach does the archive engage in to preserve games and artifacts of play?	X	X		X	X	
What special preservation methods need to be enacted for electronic games and hardware?	X	X		X		
What major challenges do you see in the future of preserving games and play-related materials?	X	X	X	X	X	
What holdings do you currently have that concern games and queer people?	X	X		X	X	X

Re-evaluating and triangulating my work using the constructed queer archival game studies methodology tools I have developed will allow me to then develop strategies for conducting my second case study on the LGBTQ Game Archive, which will follow a similar pre-

research procedure to the Strong Museum case of selecting specific artifacts, tailoring interview questions to the archive's collection and mission, and reaching out to the Adrienne Shaw, primary curator of the archive, for initial questions and interview scheduling. Since the LGBTQ Game Archive is a digital archive, travel would not be required for selecting the contents or conducting interviews, though I currently aim to conduct my primary research and interviews in the summer of 2020.

My primary goal throughout the enacting of my case studies is to repeatedly return to my methodology, checking the paradigm to ensure that my questions and the information I gather and analyze serves to forward the goals of queer archival game studies: to support and uplift marginalized voices, to preserve queer games history, and to engage in ethical and intersectional research methods that adapt to and work alongside the lived experiences, passionate attachments, and goals of people like me who want to ensure the survival of their history.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Case Study 1: The Strong Museum of Play**

My first case study begins with an overview of the Strong Museum of Play as an institution, archive, and site of historical significance. Going into detail about the Museum provides a baseline for my rationale in including it in this dissertation study and provides specifics for the characteristics the Museum holds that make it an ideal location for considering the history of archiving games and their paratextual materials. After this overview I detail my selection criteria and rationale, as well as the application of my methods to the case study. I interview two staff members of the museum, Dr. JP Dyson, and Mr. Andrew Borman, and include highlights of our conversations covering details surrounding a set list of questions. These interviews combined with background information about the Strong Museum provides an in-depth case study of the work the museum has undertaken to preserve the history of games and play.

#### **The Strong Museum: Mission and History**

The Strong Museum of play advertises itself as “a highly interactive, collections-based museum devoted to the history and exploration of play” (‘About’, [museumofplay.org](http://museumofplay.org)). Housing the largest and most comprehensive collection of historical materials related to play, the Strong Museum is home to an array of exhibits, research, educational and interpretive activities, and focuses on serving families in presenting diverse play and education experiences. In examining the mission statement of the Strong Museum on their website and the history of the museum as a whole, I achieve an initial impression of the Museum’s goals and ethos that will better inform the initial crafting of my case study.

The Strong Museum has three major mission statements present on their website: Collecting and Preserving, Interpreting and Educating, and Reaching Out. All three of these goals are focused on the ways play as a concept encourages learning, creativity, discovery, and the illumination of cultural history ('Mission', museumofplay.org). As the institution that has the most comprehensive collection of "toys, dolls, board games, video games, other electronic games, books, documents, and other historical materials related to play," the Strong amasses resources and items that serve visitors interested in play from casual, academic, and archival perspectives. Considered an institution with "unparalleled resources for study", the Strong offers exhibitions, programs, publications, online content, research opportunities, and other experiences driven by their mission that "engage, entertain, and enlighten through the exploration and interpretation of play". The Museum includes multiple libraries and a school to provide educational resources for visiting students and scholars, and also publishes the *American Journal of Play*. Finally, the Strong partners with community organizations to ensure the museum is accessible to a wide variety of guests and scholars, and they operate under the guiding mission for reaching out that "seeks to ensure that present and future generations understand the critical role of play in human history, social, and intellectual development and the ways in which play reflects cultural history" ('Mission', museumofplay.org). The Strong's missions and goals make it an ideal candidate for investigating the role it has played in the preservation of games and their history.

Founded in 1968, the Strong Museum was initially the Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum of Fascination, launched by the eponymous Mrs. Strong to house her collection of everyday objects, including dolls and toys. After bequeathing her estate to support the museum upon her death in 1969, the Museum opened 13 years later built upon 13.5 acres in Rochester,

New York ('History', museumofplay.org). The Museum's original mission focused on Mrs. Strong's collection of primarily mass-produced items, examining them as artifacts of the ways industrialization changed everyday life. Over the course of a few years, this focus expanded into an examination of "the consequences of progress, the rise of the middle class, and expressions of identity" ('History', museumofplay.org). In the nineties and early two thousands, the Museum shifted its scope and message to become the space it is today, redefining its mission in 2002 to focus on its core collection of toys, dolls, and other artifacts of play, as well as expanding in size to become one of the United States' largest history museums. Further expansions of its mission included publishing the *American Journal of Play* in 2008, launching the International Center for the History of Electronic Games (ICHEG hereafter), and building the most comprehensive collection of electronic games and related material anywhere, numbering at over 55 thousand items as of the website's most recent reckoning. At the time of this case study, the museum, rebranded specifically to be The Strong, encompasses over 100 thousand square feet of exhibits, activities for schools and children, ICHEG, the national Toy Hall of Fame, the Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play, the Woodbury school, a preschooler program that gives children direct access to museum activities, and the *American Journal of Play*. In 2019, the Museum entertained over 600 thousand guests, launched multiple new exhibits, and hosted events including the annual Women in Games event ("2019 Annual Report Highlights," museumofplay.org). The Museum's website also hosts multiple online exhibits, something partially facilitated via the Museum's partnership with Google Arts & Culture. The Strong's collections, noted in more detail hereafter, and its overarching ethos of preserving and sharing play artifacts, makes it an ideal location for investigating the history of games, electronic or



otherwise, and the resources made available online alone are evidence of the museum's dedication to archiving, preserving, and educating around the subject.

### **The Strong Museum: Key Sections and Initiatives**

The Strong Museum is home to multiple facilities dedicated to the history of games and play as well as their preservation and education surrounding them. I want to specifically highlight three sections of the Museum and the initiatives these sections frequently undertake to provide additional detail on the background and ethos of the Museum before fully delving into what makes the Strong Museum a key case study in the discussion of preserving games in the context of marginalized groups.

The Strong Museum's major archival component is the Brian Sutton-Smith Library & Archives of Play, a "multidisciplinary research repository devoted to the intellectual, social, and cultural history of play" ('Brian Sutton-Smith Library & Archives of Play', [museumofplay.org](http://museumofplay.org)). The archive is home to over 220 thousand volumes of primary and secondary sources, scholarly works, journals, periodicals, books, comics, manuscripts, and business records. Many of these holdings focus specifically on the history of Video Games and are preserved and maintained via working closely with ICHEG. Still others reflect the work of scholars and educators in the fields of childhood education and play behaviors, the archive including information and history pertaining to play materials such as puzzles, board games, and dolls. The catalogs for the Library and Archive are available online at the museum's website, and visitors to the website may investigate the catalogs and garner more details about the collections through an extensive collection of finding aids, detailed notes, and blog posts featuring interviews with donors and collection holders. Among the publications released by the Strong and the Brian Sutton-Smith Archive is the Play Stuff blog, which collects interviews, reviews, and discussions of topics such

as interviews with donors, detailed accounts of the history of specific games, and digital resources for various initiatives enacted by the Museum and its surrounding Sections. Example recent posts include a discussion of the induction of popular game Jenga to the toy hall of fame, a discussion of newspapers and play, and a guest post by Research Fellow Aria S. Halliday about the history of Black Barbies ([museumofplay.org/blog](http://museumofplay.org/blog)). The blog updates regularly, with at between two and five new posts a month. The Brian Sutton-Smith archive and library goes out of its way to share extensive details about its holdings on its website, and researchers and scholars can extend inquiries to view documents and visit the museum to view key holdings relevant to their research and scholarship.

The International Center for the History of Electronic Games, or ICHEG, is the Strong Museum's location for the collection, study, and interpretation of video games, electronic games, and materials otherwise related to the study of how these games change the ways people play, learn, and connect with each other across boundaries of culture and geography ('About: ICHEG', [museumofplay.org](http://museumofplay.org)). The Center's efforts in game preservation and historical scholarship have resulted in ICHEG contributing to the Strong Museum maintaining and expanding the most comprehensive assemblage of video games, electronic games, and related historical materials in the United States, and indeed the world, housing 60 thousand items with new items being added regularly. ICHEG's other major mission statements include developing exhibits, such as the eGameRevolution exhibit that allows guests to "play through the history of video games" ('egamerevolution', [museumofplay.org](http://museumofplay.org)), featuring an arcade that includes history games ranging from classic games like Street Fighter and Tetris and more recent mobile games like Angry Birds. ICHEG also maintains a timeline of key moments in video game history, an interactive website space that allows users to navigate to different decades, starting with the 1940s and the

design of a computer that plays the game *Nim*, designed by Edward U. Condon ('timeline', [museumofplay.org](http://museumofplay.org)). While there is a PDF version of the document that records information on games history up to 2011, the website's timeline tracks events up to and including events in the year 2019, indicating it is updated regularly. The timeline includes technological patents, programming milestones, classic computer games, consoles, and mobile games, providing a deeper understanding of how the gaming industry began and evolved. ICHEG is also responsible for supporting activities related to the World Video Game Hall of Fame (see below), and all of the projects and activities they enact focus on ensuring that present and future generations can learn about video game history, understand their beginning and evolution, and understand the impact electronic games have on society as a whole ('ICHEG', [museumofplay.org](http://museumofplay.org)). Like the Brian Sutton-Smith Archive, ICHEG offers research fellowships and provides access to collections both in person and online. They also regularly and actively solicit donations of game hardware, software, and other materials pertaining to electronic games history and preservation.

One of ICHEG's major projects is the Women in Games Initiative, a project that documents and celebrates the contributions of women to the electronic games industry. Launched in 2017, and considered a key program for ICHEG, the initiative "builds on the Strong's already extensive holdings of artifacts and archival records ... that illustrate the impact of women working in the video game industry" ('Women in Games Initiative', [museumofplay.org](http://museumofplay.org)). The items and artifacts, which include prototypes, games, design documents, marketing materials, presentations, and photographs, provide insight into a rich history of games rarely examined or discussed in mainstream gaming culture, and delve into the contributions women have made to games as a whole, both in recent years and the past. The

archives in the Strong contain hundreds of years of contributions women have made to the realms of board game design, including the two best-selling games of the 19th century, and 20th century titles like Candy Land ('Women in Games Initiative', [museumofplay.org](http://museumofplay.org)). The Museum and ICHEG also host events, like the 'Women in Games: Inspire' program in 2018 and the Women in Games: Create! Program in 2019. The Inspire program was an evening of dialog between female trailblazers and innovators in the video game industry, with the Create! Event following in the same vein the following year. There are multiple exhibits geared specifically towards women in games, including an interactive exhibit within the Strong titled Women in Games, and an online exhibit titled 'A Brief History of Women in Gaming: the 1980s'. While the Strong has taken part in numerous initiatives designed to share the experiences of gamers from diverse perspectives, the Women in Games Initiative is a permanent fixture in the Strong Museum's collections and is a testament to the importance of highlighting the lesser-known aspects of games history.

While the Strong has extensive collections, archival holdings, and exhibits, the final highlight I will make here is the World Video Game Hall of Fame, which recognizes individual electronic games that have "enjoyed popularity over a sustained period and have exerted influence onto the video game industry or on popular culture and society in general" ('About', [worldvideogamehalloffame.org](http://worldvideogamehalloffame.org)). The inductees are on display in the museum's eGameRevolution exhibit and include electronic games from the entire span of video gaming history, including *Pac-Man*, *The Sims*, *The Legend of Zelda*, *World of Warcraft*, and *Minecraft*. Anyone can nominate a game to the hall of fame, and selection criteria is based on four listed factors: Icon-Status (game is widely recognized and remembered), Longevity (game is more than a passing fad and has enjoyed popularity over several years), Geographical reach (game meets

above criteria across international boundaries) and Influence (game has exerted significant influence on design and development on other games, other forms of entertainment, or popular culture and society in general). Games can be inducted based on fulfilling the final criteria without necessarily fulfilling the first three ('Nominate a Game', [worldvideogamehalloffame.org](http://worldvideogamehalloffame.org)). Tracking and preserving the influence of games that have existed in the cultural sphere in this way means the Strong maintains a record of games based upon their popularity, influence, and reach, and the Strong has published a book, titled 'A History of Video Games in 64 Objects', which features discussions of various game objects and their influence on the history and evolution of games as a whole.

### **Selecting the Strong Museum: Rationale**

The Strong Museum's holdings and extensive archival contents led me to consider it as a case study for investigating the work being done preserving games and game-related content. As my study began to take shape, I looked through some of the initial holdings that could help me delve deeper into the materials the Strong Museum had in their collections that were related to queer history specifically. This led to the Dani Bunten Berry papers, which I use as my initial entry point for this dissertation in my introduction, and my interest in further digging into the procedures the Strong underwent to include the documents and ephemera associated with the lives and creations of queer people. I was also compelled by the amount of holdings the Strong Museum had in their various collections, knowing that a wider variety of materials to investigate and examine would make a case study more productive and provide more usable data for answering and considering my research questions. As a centralized location, both physically and online, for games-related materials, the Strong stood out as an ideal location to conduct a case study on preservation methods and processes for games and game-related objects. I was also

encouraged by the numerous initiatives towards diversity and inclusion advertised and discussed on the Strong's website, and the Women in Games Initiative in particular stood out to me as evidence of the museum having content that I could study further, as well as preservation methods and procedures that would be relevant to questions about preserving games and materials that concern marginalized populations.

### **Case Study Process and Methods in Practice**

I initially planned to apply for a research fellowship that would allow me to travel to Rochester and visit the Museum, gaining more in-depth access to the collections and their contents so I could integrate the artifacts present in the archives into the study. However, limitations to the study caused by the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak made this impossible, see Limitations and Adjustments to Original Concepts below. I also reached out to several archivists and specialists at the Strong Museum and its affiliates to set up interviews discussing the Strong's initiatives, methods, and holdings. I contacted over half a dozen listed archivists and museum curators in the hope of speaking to them concerning my research questions and other details surrounding them. Two individuals responded to my request: Dr. Jon-Paul C. Dyson, head of ICHEG, and Andrew Borman, the Strong Museum's Digital Games Curator, and I arranged interviews with the two of them separately via Zoom call. After securing interviews with both Dr. Dyson and Mr. Borman, I revised my interview questions (initially outlined in my Methods chapter) to more specifically target each participant's area of expertise within the Strong's system. I had to modify my methods and conduct virtual interviews, but the questions and lines of inquiry remained largely the same, as discussed below regarding each individual interview. Though the interviews and the case study as a whole look different from my initial conception of the research due to the unforeseen circumstances of 2020, I was able to gather

information pertaining to the Strong's archival policies, initiatives for inclusion and outreach, and methods for preservation and collecting.

## **Interview 1: Dr. Dyson**

### **Introduction: Questions and Context**

The questions I asked Dr. Dyson, modified slightly from my original questions, were as follows:

1. What does the intake procedure look like for new archival materials?
  1. Does the intake process for materials look different depending on whether the materials are physical or digital?
  2. How long does the intake process traditionally take, and how does that vary depending on the particular materials?
2. What do some of the current collaborative and outreach plans with gaming communities look like at the Strong?
3. In your interview in the *American Journal of Play* you mention the Women in Games Initiative. What does that initiative look like now in 2020 as opposed to in 2017?
4. The archive has some holdings that concern games and the LGBTQ+ community. Are there currently any initiatives in place to expand these holdings?
5. Does the museum have any specific interaction with the LGBTQ+ community of creators and researchers? If yes, what kinds of interactions? If not, what kind of interactions do you think would be beneficial to the museum's collection?
6. Archiving as a profession is always shifting and changing, especially with technology. What challenges do you see on the horizon for preserving games and play-related materials?

7. What's on the horizon for the Strong Museum and ICHEG? What are you most looking forward to in the museum's plans for the future?

The interview took place over Zoom on June 19th, 2020 and lasted for approximately 90 minutes.

Beginning with the first question, Dr. Dyson shared some background information about the Museum's collections and their organization for helpful context regarding materials. There are three major holding segments: the physical collections, library materials, and archival materials. "To make it even more confusing, the library archives are part of the Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives (00:02:04)," Dyson noted, referencing the collaborative yet divided aspects of the Strong Museum's multiple centers and areas. Collections may not always end up in a single collection "bucket", but instead end up divided into separate spaces depending on the category of the material. Dyson referenced a specific collection as an example, the Brøderbund collection, donated by company founder Doug Carlston. Brøderbund was one of the leading producers and distributors of games for home computers, including titles such as *Myst*, *Prince of Persia*, and *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?* ("Archival Collections," [museumofplay.org](http://museumofplay.org)). Donations in this category included games, other kinds of software produced by Brøderbund, archival materials concerning Carlston's work with the Software Publishers Association, and some published books. These materials, while in a singular collection, were divided into separate catalogs based upon the types of material, a process that allows researchers outside the museum's spaces to search them in the same way internal researchers could. The multimedia nature of games and play artifacts, as well as materials and ephemera associated with games, means that the materials are housed across multiple platforms and areas. The internal database, the ARGUS database, houses digital materials including games



and ephemera, and the Strong uses an external portal to store metadata. The museum also partners with Google Arts and Culture to digitally allow public access to over seventy-two thousand items that are considered part of the museum's holdings.

### **Acquisition: An Overview of Archival Intake at the Strong**

After providing context, Dr. Dyson went on to discuss the intake procedures for new materials, which he noted were usually part of a longer process that involved not only getting materials to the museum proper but also cultivating and fostering relationships with people and companies that may have materials that fall under the Museum's collecting parameters. Dyson noted that this part of the process was something people don't always appreciate, as some collections come together very quickly while others may involve relationships cultivated over the course of many years. Some of these relationships do not result in successful acquisition of materials for a number of reasons, including four factors Dyson listed that he and his colleagues might be counting on:

- a. The fact that they have something.
- b. That they're willing to donate it to the museum.
- c. That they actually do the work of organizing it and sending it to you.
- d. That you can overcome any barriers to actually entering the materials into the collection.

Dyson noted that a significant amount of invisible work goes into soliciting and cultivating relationships to access new materials and collections, which he referred to as "the classic cliché about the iceberg: about ten percent above the surface (00:10:13)." Dyson also mentioned fishing as a metaphor, noting that sometimes you can cast a line on a collection, but some things never

hook. The process of locating new items therefore plays a major role in the intake procedure, as a significant amount of work goes on before materials are even added to the Museum's holdings.

Once something reaches the next stage of intake procedure, it arrives at the museum through a variety of methods. One is that materials are shipped to the museum, other times a team of museum archivists are sent to pack things up and ship them. The Strong gives the owners a property deposit pass, ensuring some record of donation has been recorded and including stipulations regarding what will be done with the materials if the Strong has no use for them. The example Dyson gave here was of someone donating one hundred copies of a game when the Strong only needs three for their processes. Ideally, things of this nature are sorted out before materials arrive at the museum proper. From there, someone goes through and catalogs each item via the ARGUS database system, and the person who does this work can be a curator for collections objects, or an archivist working in the archival database, or library staff in the library database. Regardless of who does the cataloging, they always create a computerized record that has the relevant metadata for the items, and each donation has a specific activity number, ensuring everything is linked. After items have been entered into the database, they are also added to a spreadsheet that indicates new items that have been added to collections, which is reviewed at a monthly meeting to approve and review contents. After things have been catalogued, a deed of gift is generated and sent to the donor to sign and return, and these deeds of gift vary depending on the contents of the collection. This is relevant if the question of Intellectual Property is involved, as companies and individuals almost never donate an entire IP and therefore need to retain rights to the overall IP while still providing archival material. Once this lengthy process is complete, the museum takes the item as part of its collection. "We have full ownership of it. We also then have full responsibility for it (00:13:22)."

## **Holding for the Long Haul: Archives as Cargo Ships**

The timeframe for this process varies widely depending on the specificity of the created metadata. As an example, Dr. Dyson mentioned a collection of games for the Commodore 64 system, which could only take a few hours of processing time due to minimal variance in the descriptions of the games given as a list. If it's an individual item that requires more research, it may take longer. Intake and processing run on a monthly rhythm, and this results in a certain amount of internal pressure and accountability to maintain processing numbers. Dr. Dyson estimated that the Strong processes between five and fifteen thousand items a year into the ARGUS database. This is a massive amount when compared to other collecting institutions -- Dyson mentioned that the average art museum processes fewer than a hundred new acquisitions per year, so the Strong operates on a completely different scale. There are also backlogged archival items, which have a different flow to them, and often require coordination with donors. As an example, Dyson references the Atari Coin Op collection, which came in with a full tractor trailer's worth of materials that required the museum hire someone specifically to process the materials for a full year. Unloading and cataloguing those materials doesn't involve examining and inserting individual pages most of the time, but rather cataloguing folders and groups of items, resulting in a finding aid. Cataloguing is an extensive amount of work, but necessary work. Dyson referred to a metaphor of cargo ships when discussing the archives: "They're not going to turn on a dime, necessarily. But they're holding things for the long haul (00:17:27)." The processes set in place for the Strong museum's collections are designed to ensure that if the current staff were gone in twenty years, you could still find the same objects with the documentation created by the institution. The museum keeps track of these by having both external and internal audits to maintain the usability of the archive. Dyson also cited this procedure as a reason some museums are reluctant to start collecting, because the amount of

work and processing required means a significant amount of time and personnel must be dedicated to that work. The Strong's process focuses on gaining materials with a purpose. Dyson noted that they "don't want to collect things willy-nilly just to have something (00:21:02)." The space and time costs mean that every item that comes across the museum's radar is given consideration under specific parameters, including what use the museum will get out of it in terms of exhibitions and sharing, how much space it will require for storage and preservation, and how it is documenting the history of games and play. The archiving process is extensive, and the museum's procedures do everything they can to keep things running smoothly.

### **Building Relationships: Human Interaction in Archival Collection**

The museum's collections and outreach operate on a series of formal and informal relationships and partnerships. The Strong and ICHEG have partnerships with groups including the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan, the Internet Archive, and the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences (AIAS). Some of these partnerships are extensive and formal, involving collaborative measures to preserve and display game artifacts, while others are internal partnerships that operate on the more individual level. Dyson notes that a formal partnership is essentially meaningless unless you have partnerships between individuals who work well together, citing his personal collaborations with Akinori Nakamura at the Ritsumeikan University and then contrasting with another partnership, the Nexon Computer Museum, where there are formal relationships but no individual partnerships at this point in time. Dyson also mentioned partnerships outside of games, such as Sesame Workshop.

Dyson also mentioned informal relationships with individuals or groups who collect in specific areas, referencing Dr. Adrienne Shaw's work with the LGBTQ+ Game Archive and

collaborative efforts on the part of the Strong to preserve that content. This individual informal collaboration is a key aspect of the Strong's philosophy, as Dyson notes that the people involved, be they scholars, researchers, or collectors, will get a fine grain expertise in an area that a generalist collector in the museum context won't have. Many of the partnerships that arise from this kind of collaboration focus on the Strong's ability to help preserve and "guard" the collection in question so it can be preserved and maintained over time in a way that wouldn't be possible without intervention from a larger organization with more resources.

### **A Certain Level of Intentionality: Museum Initiatives Towards Social Justice and Inclusion**

The events of early summer 2020 became pertinent to the interview and provided timely context for the subject of collecting areas related to racial justice, diversity, and inclusion. The Strong began doing "quiet collecting" concerning racial justice, and Dyson referred to his colleague, Jeremy Saucier, who was working on collecting materials related to Black people in games. He specifically referenced Jerry Lawson, a Black engineer who created the interchangeable game cartridge.

The Women in Games Initiative, one of the most prominent collecting initiatives undertaken by the Strong and its affiliates, started as one of five collecting areas articulated to the board of the museum. "As an organization, you need some sort of road map to guide you moving forward," Dyson said. "They're not blueprints, they're road maps, and if there's an opportunity or you run into a roadblock, you need to take a detour (00:37:34)." Originally conceived as a collecting opportunity, the nature of video games and the perceived male dominance of the genre meant that Dyson felt it was important to bring a certain level of intentionality to the collecting initiatives. In 2017, beginning with a collecting initiative, the Strong created an exhibit and a series of public programs related to Women in Games. This work

still continues in 2020 and will carry on beyond that timeframe, and involves collecting items related to women in games, bringing in speakers from the game industry for workshops and events, and fundraising.

Regarding the museum's work with the LGBTQ+ community, Dyson referred again to Dr. Shaw's work and how the Strong can collaborate with her to ensure the archive is preserved. He further mentioned the work done on one of the earliest LGBTQ+ video games, *Caper in the Castro*, created by C.M. Ralph and restored to playability via collaboration with the Strong. Dyson spoke specifically about the overlap within communities and how they collaborated and worked together to restore and display content related to the specific area of LGBTQ+ in video games. The history of video games has a lot of facets and one of them is the LGBTQ+ community, and Dyson noted that "If you want to talk about the history of video games, then I think you need to tell that story as well, and that means also collecting around that story (00:46:12)." He referenced Bo Ruberg's work on the inherent queerness of video games and mentioned that from his perspective as a historian he tended to listen to his gut, which told him that this area was important to examining and sharing the overall history of games and play. "As we collect, or as we determine what to collect, we're always making judgements about what's important (00:49:01)," Dyson said. Important in this case could refer to several concepts, including what is of use to people, what is involved in the history of the medium, and what's of use today versus fifty years ago. Dyson also mentioned a specific partnership with Gordon Bellamy, former head of the International Game Developer Association. As a gay black man, Bellamy coordinated with the museum to help organize a Gay Gamers Pride weekend, in collaboration with GGP, or Gay Gaming Professionals, an online community with eighteen hundred members on Facebook and discord. Dyson also noted that perspectives from the gaming

industry could be useful insight into the history of LGBTQ+ gaming, as he astutely observed that the Game Developers Conference (GDC) and other similar industry organizations play a significant role in shaping how the industry develops, and therefore have a lot of sway and information about how the industry is shaped in terms of what is included and what is not. The moves the Strong is making towards inclusion initiatives reflect their overall philosophy of fostering collaboration and conversation with the communities themselves.

### **The Future: What it means to Preserve History**

The landscape of archives and preservation, ever-changing, means the Strong has to consider both technological and industry advancements as they move forward with projects and collections. Dyson specifically noted that digital collecting is one of the major priorities for future collecting initiatives. He also specified his position on what it means to preserve history. In talks given to larger audiences he's referenced the history of sports as a useful analogy:

What does it mean to preserve the history of baseball? Are you actually preserving baseball itself? Or are you preserving the history of baseball? In the same way, are you preserving video games themselves? Or are you preserving the history of video games (00:57:56)?

Sometimes preserving the history is priority, other times it's the game itself, and beyond that it could be a player's experience or even a full community's experience. Discerning what needs to be preserved is a major priority in terms of collecting, and it becomes a larger issue in terms of content and curation. "We won't be able to collect everything," Dyson said. "So we're always making these judgement calls. What's important? What's doable? It's a humbling experience, because sometimes you guess wrong (01:12:33)." Collecting, in Dyson's eyes, is an active conversation with different communities, be they scholarly, institutional, or the citizen

community. The resources available in the fan community, the industry, and the people involved in all facets of games, are at their disposal, and the role of the archivist and curator is to build relationships with those different groups to determine what to collect and ensure the history that is being preserved will be useful and reflective of the wishes of those communities, especially marginalized ones.

## **Interview 2: Andrew Borman**

### **Introduction: Questions and Context**

The questions I asked Andrew Borman, modified from my original questions and the questions I asked Dr. Dyson, were as follows:

1. Tell me a little bit about your position at the Strong Museum and ICHEG
2. What does the intake procedure look like for new archival materials?
  1. Does the intake process for materials look different depending on whether the materials are physical or digital?
3. Tell me a bit about where archival items and collections most commonly come from.
4. Do archivists collaborate with gaming communities to get new collections and materials for the archive?
  1. If they do, what do those collaborative and outreach activities look like?
  2. If they don't, are there any plans or ideas for reaching out to those communities?
5. A lot of the museum's holdings are game hardware. What do the preservation and archival methods look like for hardware in the collection?
6. What does the preservation process look like for electronic games and software? What kind of specialty equipment is needed to process those materials?



7. The archive has some holdings that concern games and the LGBTQ+ community. I'd like to know more about any kind of outreach programs the museum engages in to increase diversity and inclusion of items relating to and concerning marginalized groups.

1. Does the museum have any specific interaction with the LGBTQ+ community of creators and researchers? If yes, what kinds of interactions? If not, what kind of interactions do you think would be beneficial to the museum's collection?

8. Archiving as a profession is always shifting and changing, especially with technology. What challenges do you see on the horizon for preserving games and play-related materials?

The interview took place on August 20th, 2020, and lasted approximately 70 minutes.

In answering my first questions, Mr. Borman provided some specific context for his position and role at the Museum. His official title, Digital Games Curator, refers to his role of thinking about what it means to preserve digital video games in the long term, not just in the present, but decades in the future. His duties involve both considering the preservation of digital spaces for games that require online servers or exist in digital spaces, and also considering the digitization of materials that are already present in the museum's collection. The physical aging and failure of certain kinds of technologies are a major point of consideration in Borman's day-to-day work, and the accessibility of hardware so that researchers in the future have access to those games regardless of hardware availability. He also specifically referred to the facet of his job that involves collaborating and speaking with communities to know what's going on in the video game world, as well as museum-oriented tasks that are focused on planning and executing exhibits, events, and online spaces that showcase the Strong's materials.

## **It's in the Data: Intake and Processing on the Digital Side**

Much of Borman's discussion of the intake procedure for materials aligned with Dr. Dyson's take on the same procedures in the interview above and provides useful triangulation as well as additional details about the intake procedures at the Strong. Borman also mentioned a part of the process that involves taking each new object to be added to the catalog and having them photographed at the museum's photography studio, to ensure that every object will have a picture with it. This is much the same as the process for digital items, though Borman noted that rather than noting down the artifact's physical location, he makes note of where the item is downloaded from, such as the Steam or Epic store, as a note so that somebody could find it in the future if needed. He also backs up a copy into the local server. Even if some of that data isn't accessible because of digital rights management and other restrictive factors, just having the data matters because something can be gained from it even if the game itself isn't accessible. This can include art assets, music assets, and even just knowing the size of the file. Borman will also take screenshots of the game working and what version number of the game that image is associated with. Occasionally he will go back and download updated versions, but that isn't considered a priority due to the issue of storage space being both expensive and also limited.

New collections and items come from a wide variety of places according to Borman, the majority of them coming from donations or from the museum's limited purchase budget. Some collectors donate materials over time, and many of those donors come from the games industry. Borman's discussion of building connections with potential donors and collaborators echoes Dr. Dyson's thoughts in his interview, corroborating the notion that a significant portion of the museum's expansion of various holdings stems from building connections with collaborators and donors. He also noted that some collections came from unexpected places, noting that the museum's location in Rochester, New York meant there were opportunities for collaborations

with companies that don't immediately seem affiliated or relevant to video games and games culture. The two companies he specifically mentioned were Kodak and Xerox, both of them having local studios in Rochester. Borman noted that the technology that came from these companies, while not necessarily seeming immediately relevant, involves digital interfaces like jpeg and image compression, scanners, cameras, and photography, which are all technological items that are intrinsically connected to games and play technology. Many of those programmers and technicians were also part of the gaming community during its earliest iterations in the 1970s, playing games on the old hardware mainframes or printed materials. The connections to games and play, Borman noted, can therefore come from surprising places: "It's this weird web of connections that still blows my mind sometimes (00:16:30)."

### **Growing up Gamer: Archivist Passion as Motivation**

In discussing the contributions and projects that involved community outreach, Borman took the opportunity to discuss in more detail the history and journey he experienced becoming the digital preservation expert for the strong.

"My interest in game preservation goes back to the mid-90s, with Resident Evil II," Borman said. "Which, if you don't know the story of, they designed the game, it was nearly done, and then they said 'oh, this isn't quite what we wanted to do', so they essentially scrapped the whole thing and rebuilt it over the course of about a year, and that became the Resident Evil II that we got. In the meantime, me being in elementary and middle school walking around with my magazine looking at the screenshots, I was like 'this isn't the game I played! It's completely different!' So I always had this interest in playing that version someday (00:17:33)."

While this particular game hasn't been available to play, the draw of playing a version of the game that is no longer available fueled Borman's path into college, where he studied computer science and information science while also starting a YouTube channel, which he named Past to Present Online, or P to P Online, which looked at early cancelled games and development history. Since there were no specific jobs in video game preservation, he got a master's in library science while also still remaining a member of gaming communities. "I barely remember a time when I wasn't part of a gaming community," Borman said. "My first websites back in 1998 or 1999 were for Pokemon. So like, this is part of who I am. I'm out there in these communities just being a part of them (00:18:45)." He considers this a key part of his role in working at the museum, as it allows him to not step into communities as an outsider but rather connect with the communities as a member who happens to also be connected to the museum. He also notes that many of the connections he makes are for the purpose of conversation rather than specific solicitation for materials. "Just listening to their story," he said. "Not necessarily asking for anything. But just sharing, both what they did and what we're doing. And sometimes there's an overlap. Someone you talk to may not have anything to give you. But they know a friend who knows a friend, and so all of a sudden, again, you've created that web of connections (00:20:12)."

### **Lending Personal Expertise: Preserving Game Hardware**

In discussing the preservation of hardware and the methods the museum uses to ensure machines and consoles remain usable, Borman noted that the Strong has a collection that contains over five hundred thousand objects, with sixty thousand of them being related to video games in some form. Borman is one of the point people for collecting video games, so if a

researcher comes, if a collection is being built, or if an exhibit is being prepared, he is the one who handles a lot of the hardware. If a researcher arrives and wants to play a specific game, he is responsible for ensuring that game is playable in a safe way that is fairly accurate to its original iteration, since it's difficult to maintain some of the older consoles. "We can't replace thirty years' worth of wear on an Atari controller (00:22:23)," he noted as an example. He also cited testing and census work as part of his job, referring to a twice-yearly test of one hundred random objects in the museum, generated via random automatic report and then using the collections database to pull one hundred random objects for Borman to find, test, and ensure they work, and that the museum has the hardware to make them work. He shared an example of some of the weirder behaviors and patterns that are observed as a result of these tests:

"Madden 2004 on the Xbox. For some reason, half of our copies don't work. And they all look fine. And that's something you only get from testing a bunch. Only one of those copies was one that I was supposed to test. But I got very curious about it, and I don't have a good answer for it other than the fact that 'media fails' right now. It's also a little concerning, and it teaches us a lot about our collection. Because that comes from 2003 or 2004, that's not your number one priority most of the time. You're usually thinking about older things (00:24:11)."

He also referred to technology that the museum doesn't have but would need to play certain games. "We didn't have a SegaMegaDrive, the Japanese version of the Genesis, despite having essentially every MegaDrive game," he said. "Sometimes things get overlooked, so the census gives us an opportunity to fill some of the holes in the collection prior to actually needing them (00:25:33)." These kinds of census testing allow for a better grasp of not only what materials the museum has, but their viability for researchers and preservation status. Borman also noted that often this work comes from his own interest, which is something he has in common with everyone else who works at the museum, that they all have specific things they're good at. "I notice things that others wouldn't," Borman says. "One example that I bring up for that is one of

our SegaSaturn consoles that had a switch on the back. And I immediately knew it was a region switch, to switch between US and Japanese games. But it wasn't noted in any way, so, now it's noted. Because it's good to know that it's been modified in some way that's not unrecorded because you know, I probably won't be at the museum in the future (00:25:12)." Some of the work on hardware involves lending expertise, knowing what they're looking at, and improving records to make them more findable.

Finally, Borman mentioned collection maintenance, noting that he works with the museum's conservator to rehouse some games in the collection. He specifically referred to putting PC games into specific spaces to keep them safe, as well as identifying endangered media, such as things on rewritable material like floppy disks. Identifying items that need to be backed up more quickly than other things is an important part of the process, and requires a blend of expertise, knowledge, and attention to detail that exemplifies Borman's position with the museum.

### **Preservation and the Process: RAVE Categorization**

Borman described the storage process the museum undertakes across multiple vectors, including environmental conditions, selecting specific items, and cost. Climate-controlled on-site storage keeps holdings under appropriate temperature regulations, which need to both be not too hot and not too cold. "There's a variety of temperatures and each comes with a cost," he said. "There's a limited amount of space, but also keeping something cooler is more expensive (00:27:01)." They try to find a happy medium for their objects so that they can slow down the process of failing over time. "That's really important because there's absolutely no way with sixty thousand objects - about twenty or thirty thousand are video games themselves, and we can't preserve them all digitally right now (00:28:32)." The museum's original priority,

collecting and getting objects, meant that the size of the collection was created with this principle in mind rather than preservation. In order to designate priority for items that need preservation, the museum has created an acronym, called R-A-V-E, which stands for Rare, At-risk, Valuable, and Engaging. Describing them further, Borman clarified the definitions of each, beginning with Rare, which he notes differs from the standard definitions used by general video game collectors: “Rare isn’t necessarily one of the ten thousand copies of whatever is sold in stores. It’s the one prototype disk we have in our collection (00:28:19).” At-Risk media is anything considered endangered media, including floppy disks, VHS tapes, and other magnetic media, anything considered more likely to fail and subsequently fail in a way that won’t allow archivists to get a shot at saving it. “At the end of the day, if a PC game sold a hundred thousand copies, they’re not all going to fail in the same way based on manufacturing or how they’re restored. One could fail at the beginning of a disk; one could fail at the end (00:30:19).” The specific instances of failure being varied makes At-Risk media a high priority for cataloging and preserving, as does Rarity. Valuable as a category is less about monetary worth and more about research and historical points of view. “It may be valuable for us to preserve a digital copy of Super Mario Brothers, even though there are millions of copies out there. It’s really not at-risk, and it’s not rare at all, but there’s values to it in research use and what I can do with it by having a digital copy, so that may be pushed ahead in the line (00:31:01).” Engaging is the broadest of the categories, being defined as content that’s considered interesting in some way, be it from an exhibition point of view or a research point of view. All four of these factors contribute to the digitization process and what ends up in archival collections. Borman referred to specific examples of the materials in collections that fall under these categories in ways that may seem unexpected. The museum has a collection of tapes from Atari’s offices and their content includes

everything from office parties at the headquarters to behind-the-scenes footage of the production spaces. “Other than a time machine, you get no better look at what Atari was like in the 80s (00:32:44),” Borman said. He also mentioned that one of the videos was a video of the Atari parking lot where they placed a camera in a car and just drove around the parking lot. “Pretty boring if you’re just watching it without context,” he said. “But then you realize they’re trying to figure out: what would a first-person camera look like in a driving game? Because nobody had done it before (00:33:02).” The significance of different materials is determined by contextual knowledge and expertise that the staff at the museum holds and utilizes to ensure materials that fall under at least one part of the RAVE acronym are preserved at some point in time.

Borman also discussed hardware in the sense of preservation being necessary for devices and players for tapes, games, and disks. The players for magnetic tape-based recording devices need to hold up since the materials preserved on those tapes need to be watched in real time to be transferred to digital tapes and records. Digitized items, after being prioritized for preservation, are backed up multiple times for redundancy and the materials that have yet to be digitized are kept in colder storage so that, if the technology improves over time, they might be able to get some data off of them. “They’re not just going to suddenly stop working one day,” he said. “More likely that it’s just going to sort of slowly fade over time. If we keep it in the right storage, that can add decades to its potential life (00:35:32).” The physical and the digital always interplay regardless of the method or means of preservation, especially as new technologies are developed and implemented. Borman mentioned some of the specific special equipment he makes use of in his digitization and preservation work, including projects that bypass the need to look at analog conversion and instead get right to the data in the tape. The Strong has many custom readers and prototypes they can use to back up everything from archival tapes to arcade



games via prototype cartridges. Borman again referred back to the community during this discussion, noting that one of the more reliable ways he and his colleagues are able to find technology and custom interfaces made in small numbers is to pay attention to the things for sale in the community and what is being talked about. He also nodded to the fact that the community shares the Strong's interest in maintaining these items, since they also want to be able to revisit old games, they might not have access to without the hardware. The interest in emulation serves both the gaming community as a whole who wants to play those older games and the Strong who focus on preserving those games for the long run. Borman again referred to his personal passions and talked further about purchasing or acquiring new technology for himself just to see how it works. "I'll buy it for myself, to make sure it works, and then I start to make the recommendations to the museum. I don't want to waste money and no one tool is perfect, and unfortunately while a lot of these tools do a lot of what they do very well, we're dealing with a lot of odd cases and prototypes and they don't always do the job (00:40:01)." This still holds use as he sees it as an opportunity to communicate with the developers of those prototypes and see if they can offer any insight or assistance in ensuring the technology works, further encouraging the cycle of give and take between the museum and the community.

### **Telling Other People's Stories: Working with Marginalized Populations**

Regarding the museum's initiatives towards diversity and inclusion, Borman spoke about some of the projects already mentioned by Dyson, including the restoration of *Caper in the Castro* and the work done with Dr. Adrienne Shaw regarding the LGBTQ+ Game Archive. In terms of how the museum views the movements towards diversity and inclusion, he was very clear about the Strong's dedication to the cause. "We really pride ourselves on being the International Center for the History of Electronic Games, and that goes for everybody that's a

part of those communities. We want to get those stories out there, available to researchers (00:43:33).” Borman mentioned community initiatives towards inclusion and the LGBTQ+ community, highlighting the Gay Gaming Professionals pride event that occurred during the summer before this interview. While he is not a member of the LGBTQ+ community, Borman refers to himself as an advocate and a supporter and is eager to not only participate but listen to what the community is asking for. In terms of specific collections, Borman mentioned the Dani Bunten Berry collection, which includes a copy of *Wheeler Dealer*, the game that is potentially the first boxed piece of software ever created. Because of the nature of archival work, Borman also noted that there are still lots of potential LGBTQ+ adjacent items in the museum’s archives and collections waiting to be uncovered, because of the scope of the contents. “We have to find those things,” he said. “And the first step is to have the materials to be able to save them (00:45:33).” Referring again to *Caper in the Castro*, Borman mentioned the initiative that got the game up on the Internet Archive, which was with full support from the developer, C.M. Ralph. “We don’t have the rights to any of these games we have, even if it’s development materials. So we can’t always put things online in a way that is immediately accessible all over the world (00:46:01).” Materials only being available at the museum proper is a significant limiting factor, so Borman and his colleagues are always thinking about ways of making the museum’s collections more accessible. “We give out different sorts of grants so people can come to the museum and do research. All those things are important to give the ability for people to come and use the collection that we have (00:46:27).” This mentality also goes towards determining who the museum hires employees and interns, and Borman mentioned that the intern who worked with him last year was a trans member of the speed running community online. “That brings a perspective that I wouldn’t have as just a casual watcher of speed running... The

lens is so different than if I or anybody else would go out and try to find that collection (00:47:02).” Having those voices in the collection process as well as in the collections themselves provides more varied and inclusive perspectives on the gaming community as a whole. “We’re always trying to do more (00:47:23),” Borman said, and went on to mention, once again, the web of connections accessible through social media and the internet. “If I wasn’t on twitter, would Dr. Shaw have realized that I was out there at the museum with the capabilities of restoring *Caper in the Castro*? I found out about this museum job by being on twitter! It all goes back to the weird web. The strong is doing a great job finding these kinds of stories and I believe in our mission of preserving play and making that accessible for people (00:48:12).” Borman further discussed the idea that the museum’s mission, of demonstrating that gaming and play is something for everyone, by highlighting that the employees of the Strong all pushed for that message to be at the forefront of their work. “We all have the same goal of showing that gaming is for everybody,” he said. “And that gaming history needs to be accessible to everybody (00:51:13).” The stories that have been hidden over the years need to be shared, and Borman also noted how the museum’s mission included the stories that hadn’t been heard. “What are the stories of everybody else? That’s really what we’re starting to see with our Women in Games initiative and some of the other initiatives. We’re able to tell those other stories that aren’t the ones you would hear first (00:51:55).”

### **“We Need to be Preserving these things now.” Digital Games Archiving and the Future**

When discussing what challenges he foresaw for the future of digital preservation at the Strong, Borman first referred to the fact that so many items start off digital. “It’s not the data I’m worried about,” he said. “I can back that up any day of the week. But things start to get larger and larger. You know, I think the newest Call of Duty: Warzone is like two hundred seventeen

gigabytes. That's a lot of data to have to back up three times to do it the proper way (00:52:23)."

Borman then went on to say that the data in question is essentially useless in addition to being of increasingly larger sizes. Buying the games in physical form means little when the data all comes from an external internet cloud service. Buying physical copies of the games means nothing if you can't download the updates needed to run them. He noted that this is a point of concern for developers as well as archivists, referring to a specific VR game that made use of Facebook as an example: "I talked to a developer who was making a VR-based game that used Facebook speech recognition. That was all well and good until Facebook pulled the plug on it. So now they can't use their early prototypes anymore, which did interesting things in their own right. But they're useless. Even the development data is useless (00:53:03)." He also mentioned that many developers don't back up everything they've ever made for the game, mentioning how some phone games have weekly updates that probably aren't backed up. Looking at the history of games and how much is being created, the thousands of games being made require services that may not exist moving forward. "That's the scariest thing to me right now," Borman said. "Because even if I do my job one hundred percent perfectly and I can devote every hour of the day to it, that's still a lot of games that are going to be lost over the years (00:56:22)."

Borman is compensating for this frightening reality by doing everything possible to preserve the games in question. He backs up data, records gameplay, works with communities to back up their experiences, and finds ways to make the games playable for those who want to keep playing them. Borman also mentioned work being done by people outside of the archival system and how the museum has attempted to work around the DMCA rules that prevent everyday gamers from creating servers for old games. The museum has the ability to do this, but the average player of the games could not do the same thing, due to the current laws in place.

The Strong builds relationships with console developers to maintain access to development tools and old hardware and does what it can to compensate for all-online activation materials for newer consoles. As Borman noted, the hardware being made currently and within the last ten years has a shorter shelf-life than most of the old floppy disks and similar items being held in storage so he and his colleagues have to consider how to preserve the experience players can have with that particular game. In addition to this, some developers have begun being cognizant of the need for digital preservation and what it means to do something with the original data in a different context or in a re-release. “All of a sudden this isn’t just a floppy disk,” Borman said. “It’s potentially thousands of dollars on a shelf that I can put out or re-release in some way (01:05:34).” The developers are starting to see the value in what archivists have seen as valuable for decades. “This preservation is more than just old papers and old discs that are pieces of plastic. They’re cultural history that can provide a lot of meaning and value to gamers and people who aren’t gamers (01:06:30).” The future of the Strong holds a lot of complex projects and positive moves for change, and Borman noted that the very nature of the museum’s mission means they have to operate differently from most archives. “You’ll see a lot of museums trying to preserve the past or things that have already happened,” he said. “Whereas in current video game technology, we need to be proactive. We need to be preserving these things now, because we may not have the chance to do it again in the future because it will be gone, that moment will be gone (01:07:50).”

### **Limitations and Adjustments to Original Study Concepts**

The original intention for this Case Study involved physically visiting the Strong Museum of Play and conducting multiple in-person interviews with archivists and staff, as well as engaging with relevant artifacts. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions on travel and need for safety,

my study was severely restricted to conducting interviews virtually over Zoom. I reached out to multiple other staff members and archival affiliates at the Strong but due to limited availability I was only able to speak to Dr. Dyson and Mr. Borman about their experiences working with the Strong's archival collections. In the future I would love to expand this study and actually visit the Strong in person to speak with archivists, look at archival collections, and learn even more about the processes the museum is undertaking to preserve the voices and histories of marginalized people through artifacts of play.

### **Conclusions and Allusions to Case Study 2**

The Strong Museum is taking concrete steps to expand its scope beyond merely preserving artifacts of play, and actively seeks the experiences of marginalized voices to better understand their contributions to the cultural field of games. The interviews with Dr. Dyson and Mr. Borman provided valuable insight into the work that archivists are engaging in to preserve the stories, games, and play experiences of marginalized groups, and they spoke of active and current outreach work being done to further continue this project. The implications of their work, further discussed in Chapter 5, provide evidence of positive moves forward in not only the archiving of game hardware and software as a whole, but in the preservation of play experiences affiliated with marginalized groups and their experiences.

Both Dr. Dyson and Mr. Borman specifically referred to the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive project, discussing their interaction with Dr. Adrienne Shaw, who is the subject of my second case study. This connection between my two case studies has significant implications for notions of archiving in games, particularly the communal and collaborative aspects of archival work discussed in the Literature Review of this dissertation. In accordance with my proposed methods, the connections between the two case studies means that my discussion of my findings

in Chapter 5 will focus on the two case studies not as discrete instances of preservation of queer games and play, but as interplaying experiences and projects that demonstrate both the importance of maintaining a flexible methodology in qualitative research and the intrinsic collaborative nature of archiving marginalized histories.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Case Study 2: The LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive**

My second case study begins much in the same way as the first, with an overview of the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive and its recent physical exhibit, the Rainbow Arcade at the Schwules Museum in Berlin. This will provide context for my rationale in including this archive in my dissertation and introduce the characteristics that demonstrate the inherent queerness present in the archive's structure, design, and contents. This will also provide context for the remaining contents of the case study, which is my interview with archive founder Dr. Adrienne Shaw, details from the Rainbow Arcade archive catalog, and notes on what it means to 'queer' an archive.

#### **Archive Mission and History**

The LGBTQ+ Video Game archive, first made public in May of 2016, is listed on its home website as being "a resource for researchers, journalists, critics, game designers/developers/publishers, students, gamers and/or people who play games and anyone else who is interested in learning more about the history of LGBTQ content in video games" ('about-archive', [lgbtqgamearchive.com](http://lgbtqgamearchive.com)). The term "archive" in inverted commas is used because the website is not a traditional collection of primary sources like a traditional archive would be. It functions more specifically as a "curated collection of LGBTQ and queerly read game content", but due to the unwieldy nature of that particular title the term Archive serves as a functional replacement, even as the 'about' page of the website assures visiting archivists that they are fully aware that the contents of the "archive" are not yet an Archive. The archive contains synthesized information about LGBTQ content in digital and non-digital games that



dates back as far as the 1970s, and is in a constant state of being updated, including working lists of academic sources, published research, videos, and data visualization. The archive contains over 1200 games as of June of 2020, though only about 400 of them contain complete research ('about-archive,' [lgbtqgamearchive.com](http://lgbtqgamearchive.com)). The scope of the project has shifted and evolved since its creation due to the increase in LGBTQ+ game content over time, and the primary goal of the archive is less about discerning how much LGBTQ content there is in games overall and more with recording the fact that this context does exist and has existed for as long as games have been around. The archive was founded by Dr. Adrienne Shaw of Temple University and is maintained by Shaw along with a rotating and changing list of assistants, dependent upon funding and interest, and community members can submit games for consideration via a questions and comments form on the Archive's website, which is hosted on Wordpress. Game creators are invited to write entries about their own games, and examples of this content include the entries for the visual novel *Spade Memory* and indie RPG *A Closed World*.

### **Exhibits: The Rainbow Arcade**

In 2018 the LGBTQ Video Game Archive had content on display at the Schwules Museum in Berlin. Titled 'Rainbow Arcade', the exhibit was the first exhibit of LGBTQ Video game history, covering the years 1985 to 2019. The exhibit featured games present in the archive and was designed to focus on "preserving fleeting histories of queer games, texts, makers, and players" (Shaw 2019). The exhibit and its subsequent catalog were funded by a Kickstarter project and Shaw has mentioned future goals of potentially turning the Rainbow Arcade into a traveling exhibit. The exhibit, which ran from December 2018 to May of 2019 (discussed further below) has its contents preserved via Shaw working in partnership with the Strong Museum of

Play, something she has done for multiple projects (see Chapter 5 for further discussion of this collaboration).

## **Rationale**

Selecting the LGBTQ Video Game Archive for further study lay primarily in the fact that the archive is the first and most specific project of its kind, with other LGBTQ video game content existing outside of any explicit categorization or organizational system. Other than lists on internet browser pages, no other major archive of specifically queer games exists, and while some projects such as the Represent Me project (formerly Queerly Represent Me) go out of their way to seek and investigate representation in games, their goals are less specifically about preservation of queer history and more about nonprofit advocacy and resource support for marginalized gamers and members of the games industry. While this is a worthy goal, and the LGBTQ Video Game archive has worked in partnership with Represent Me in the past, their main goals differ, leading me to focus on the LGBTQ Video Game Archive exclusively for this case study. Having learned of the archive via discussions with members of my committee including Dr. Samantha Blackmon, I was fortunate to be a part of the Kickstarter Campaign to allow the Schwules museum exhibit to come to life, and further fortunate to meet Dr. Shaw during a Queerness in Games panel at Purdue University in February of 2020. After speaking briefly in person, I was able to reach out to Dr. Shaw to request an interview, which took place in August of 2020 over Zoom. While I had full access to the LGBTQ Video Game Archive and its contents via the website, I wanted to hear more from Dr. Shaw herself on the creation and mission of the archive, as well as questions about how the archive existed queerly. After conducting my research on the Strong Museum, which yielded interesting data about how much collaboration the archivists at the museum had with other collections, I was able to tailor my

questions more specifically to Dr. Shaw's work and the LGBTQ+ archive, using the triangulation methods outlined in Chapter 2 of this dissertation and adjusting as needed to account for COVID-19 restrictions that impacted my research.

### **Interview with Dr. Adrienne Shaw**

As mentioned above, my interview with Dr. Shaw occurred in August of 2020 and took place over Zoom. I revised my research questions to account for the new information I had gleaned from my work researching the Strong Museum and speaking with my two participants, and my interview questions for Dr. Shaw were therefore the following:

1. Could you give me a brief overview of how the LGBTQ+ archive came to be?
2. What was the most challenging aspect of assembling and constructing the LGBTQ+ Game Archive?
3. What does the intake procedure look like for new archival materials?
4. What kind of outreach and collaboration does the LGBTQ+ archive currently do with gaming communities? What sort of plans does the archive have to continue this work?
5. Tell me a bit about the collaborations you've done with the Strong Museum of Play. What was that experience like, and are there any plans to collaborate further?
6. I'd like to know your thoughts on what it means to 'queer' an archive. What in your perspective makes the LGBTQ+ Game Archive an archive of queer games but also a queered archive of games?

## **Archive Creation: Making Research Public**

Dr. Shaw refers to the archive as truly starting back in 2007. She was doing a project on LGBTQ Content in video games that involved interviewing game designers or people working for companies that had produced games with LGBTQ+ content. She started by producing a master list of games at the time that she could compile in order to contact people, and that list mostly just existed as an artifact of that particular research project. She kept the list a while and noted that she thought for a long time that she assumed somebody else would write that history, as she was focused on industry practices and audiences for a long time. “But I found myself in 2015 with a sabbatical coming up, a bunch of projects had wrapped up, and my book had come out,” she said. “And trying to figure out what my next project would be (00:00:20).” Due to her workload at Temple, she couldn’t commit to a long-term audience or industry project at the time. “Seeing as nobody had written the long history of LGBTQ+ content in video games, I figured that’s something I could do, it’s a project I could start over a sabbatical (00:00:33).” She took the original games list of roughly 51 games she had compiled before and worked with an undergraduate independent study student and a graduate research assistant to produce a longer list. This reached around one hundred and fifty games, and from there she and her assistants began doing the research on each game. Pretty early on in the process, she decided it would take a long time to produce publishable research on it, but that the research could be useful if it were posted online in a public space and other people could see it, benefit from it, and even offer corrections and specifics about representation in games. The WordPress site that exists as the LGBTQ Video Game Archive today was launched in 2016 and since then the master list of games has grown to approximately thirteen hundred games. Dr. Shaw noted that this means the project is never really going to be done. “I had to accept that that’s just part of the process,” she said. “It will not be a complete process, it’s more about sort of collecting the information that I

can, moving forward over time, and hoping that someday there will be magical pots of money that can get the rest of it done (00:04:01).”

### **Making Metadata, Updating Entries: Creating and Maintaining an Archive from Scratch**

The hardest part of assembling the archive, according to Shaw, was a combination of the use of Wordpress, due to its rigid structure, and the very nature of an archive that concerns a subject that frequently defies categorization. “Trying to identify a tagging and categorization scheme that would make it possible for somebody going to the site to find the kinds of examples they’re trying to find, while also trying not to be too categorizing about LGBTQ+ identities (00:04:22),” Shaw said, identifying one of the major challenges associated with the archive. Having to create a metadata scheme that would work with the contents was a major challenge, as was the question of accessibility. “Creating something an everyday person, from like a teenager through to a professional archivist, so they could find what they’re looking for while also not being too rigid in what we’re calling character’s identities (00:04:45).” Associated with this, Shaw noted that one of the biggest challenges is training new volunteers or research assistants in the importance of complex language associated with queer identities. “The word you use in 2019 isn’t a word somebody would have used in 1980 but also, you have to think about what words somebody would use in 2030 (00:05:12).” Shaw sees the importance of not labeling things too rigidly as a significant factor in the archive’s organization. This means often characters in games who have somewhat ambiguous sexualities often end up in multiple categories. “There are reasons we think this character is a queer woman, and they’re implicitly suggesting she’s a lesbian, but it’s also possible she’s bisexual. Having each of those ticked off means people who are looking for any one of these three categories can find the characters they’re looking for (00:05:55).” Shaw notes that she’s grateful for being able to work with her own metadata scheme

and not have to apply anyone else's method, but also acknowledges that having to develop that scheme from scratch was definitely one of the harder parts of constructing the archive.

When adding new content to the archive, Shaw highlights the fact that most games that are submitted via the website's comment form end up on a to-do list. "Which is literally just a word doc where we just add in the games and say when the email came in (00:07:08)." Since Shaw currently has no research assistants, the to-do list is just a running list. "I usually spend a month each summer going through and moving all of those entries into our Excel file, which has tabs of all the games and then tabs by decades for the individual instances of content in each game (00:07:12)." When Shaw has research assistants, she lets them work on the games they're most interested in and familiar with, as a lot of the research relies upon knowing where the fan spaces are and knowing the complex virtual histories surrounding those games. Shaw tends to select the oldest game and then work forward chronologically, because she's most interested in getting full documentation of earlier examples. Volunteers are given a tutorial regarding the format, which is individual game pages, entries for each instance of content, and then specific formatting methods. Shaw also noted that indie designers often want to write their own entries for their games, and she allows that as long as they adhere to the format. "There are sometimes when people will submit research they've done on a game and it's not in my format, and so it's not in the to-do pile, but it's something I have to wait until I have some free time to do so I can reformat to keep things relatively consistent (00:09:21)." Shaw referred to the process of adding entries consistently as a constant battle with herself. "If people want to write long entries about a single game and don't divide up the instances of content, sometimes I'm willing to put those up and add a lot of tags," she noted, laughing. "Rather than try to find ways to divide it up narratively (00:09:42)."

If entries require updates due to new information concerning the game's LGBTQ+ content, Shaw noted that she usually requires a specific citation to go along with an update. "If it's something like a developer coming out and saying something, for example, in 2014 one of the Nintendo designers said the Toads were asexual or agender, then we write the dates on the entries where the character first appeared, not when they were first mentioned to be LGBTQ+," she said. "In that entry I added in when the developer said that and also said 'this interview on this date is why this character is being listed here', so if more information is revealed about a character, then we go back and add it (00:10:44)." Requests for updates are apparently a common part of the process of running the archive, and Shaw noted that people will often reach out to point out that entries should be updated, but volunteers often don't get back to her to write the entries or update them. "It's as simple as taking the article and updating the entry and saying here's a new citation about this' (00:11:54)." She also referred to working in coordination with game developers such as Ryan Best, creator of GayBlade, and how she held off on updating that entry until the documentary about the game was released. The list's nature is never-ending, she noted, as more content is frequently being discovered or in need of being updated. "It would be sad if I was done," she said. "So I'm happy to never be done (00:12:51)."

### **Collaborations, Coexistence, and Control: Maintaining the Archive**

The LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive has a number of informal partnerships and collaborative efforts in play, most of them related to signal-boosting, cross-referencing, and promoting content. Shaw referred to the website Queerly Represent Me, now Represent Me, as their website launched within the same month and same year as the archive. Represent Me links remain prevalent across the archive's website for this reason. The two differ in that Represent Me's content is generated by surveys and collecting entries from people that are then gathered in one

space. “They actually don’t go through the research process we do and collect all the information about each game, they just sort of put up what came back in the survey about that game,” Shaw said, noting that the two sites were never at cross purposes. “They’re trying to identify games that people might be interested in looking for representation, and ours is much more about documenting what is known about the content (00:14:11).”

Shaw also referred to queer gaming communities as a valuable resource for the LGBTQ+ video game archive, noting that Gaymer X signal-boosted the Rainbow Arcade and that the Gay Gaming Professionals group has always been supportive. “A lot of it is relying on people to signal boost,” Shaw said. “And then that signal-boosting helps get more people submitting comments about potential entries or suggestions for games we’ve missed (00:14:21).”

Apparently, there are often organizations or people who reach out to ask for partnerships rather than the archive reaching out to other people, and this frequently ends up generating more work for Shaw and her few research assistants. She noted that people suggested from the beginning of the project that it might be a good idea to make use of a Wiki format where more people can edit content. “From my perspective, that doesn’t do what the site’s trying to do, which is to try to actually do some research and support those entries (00:15:12).” Shaw also mentioned that the site’s launch being so close to Gamergate also contributed to her pause in sharing the site’s access. “I’m borderline not willing to give my research assistants the password to the site. I’m definitely not going to make it open to the public in the same way (00:15:22).” Shaw noted that this related to the concern of researcher control as well, and that the impressions of the archive don’t always align with reality. “People do treat the site as though it’s somebody’s full time job to update entries. And it’s not. There’s a reason it takes a long time to get updates (00:15:44).”



Ultimately, even with assistance, Shaw is one person, and that impacts the archive's ability to be updated in a timely manner.

Discussions of collaboration led to more specific conversations relating to Dr. Shaw's work with the Strong Museum of Play, a connection made in part over social media. Shaw's recent interview with C.M. Ralph involved their discussion of rediscovering the two diskettes *Caper in the Castro* was on and so Shaw reached out on social media to see if anyone had any way to get them open. Andrew Borman (interviewed in the first case study of this dissertation) responded and attempted to talk Ralph through the process, and then suggested they send the diskettes to him to attempt to open. Part of the issue was the original software CM wrote the game on was a proprietary version of HyperCard that could only open on a 1980s era Mac computer. Borman found one in the Strong Museum's archive and was able to get the files imaged and opened up again. This allowed Shaw, and indeed Ralph, to play the game for the first time in thirty years, something Shaw found thrilling:

There was this window of like a week where I was the only person in the world playing this game, and the only person who had played it in decades, and just figuring it out by myself. That was actually really exciting. You know, as somebody coming from a sociology and media studies background, that's not something I usually get to experience (00:18:35).

During this time, Jason Scott of the Internet Archive worked to get the game up on the site so people could play it, which led to streamers and Youtubers attempting to solve the game themselves. Shaw mentioned back channeling with a Youtuber named Puck at this time, the two of them attempting to solve the final parts of the game. It ended up being a process that was both long and short in different stages, where the getting of the diskettes to Borman took a long time but once he had them the process of getting the information off of them and making sure it was playable and getting it uploaded to the Internet Archive was relatively short, taking place over just a couple of weeks. "It was one of those things where it was just sort of serendipitous that

everybody came together,” Shaw said. “It wasn’t a long elaborate partnership of coming up with decisions about who’s doing what, it was a community event of like ‘yeah, let’s solve this problem, how do we get this game up?’ (00:20:08)”

Discussion of *Caper in the Castro* brought up issues surrounding the media attention the game received and how that impacted the life of its creator, C.M. Ralph. “I know C.M. is really bothered that this is the only thing anybody contacts them about, because they do make art and they do make other things,” she said. “I don’t know if exploited is quite the right term, but there are a lot of people using that game or talking about that game or using images from that game, so there’s a lot of attention, but not a lot of income (00:21:03).” An analogy used by Jason Scott when referring to *Gayblade* creator Ryan Best felt applicable to Shaw when she discussed it:

It’s as though Ryan were in a really obscure band in the 1980s that nobody had ever heard of and suddenly people had rediscovered and now people were constantly interviewing him about. And he’s like ‘I don’t really remember it, guys, that was like, several careers ago (00:21:45).

Shaw also compared it to instances of queer game creators taking their own content off the internet and highlighted the inherent complexity of archival work and consent. “If people want their games taken down, I’ll take them down (00:22:33),” she said, while also acknowledging the importance of marking queer games history in a way that doesn’t go against a creator’s wishes. She also made comparisons to queer Zines, many of which exist in a collection at Temple University. If the creator of the Zine ever reaches out to request work be taken down, it’s taken down, and portions of collections are digitized but only with permission from the creators. The issues with saving content remain fraught, and Shaw is profoundly aware of this across multiple areas. She recently donated a hard drive full of archival material related to the archive to the Strong Museum, in part due to websites related to the research going down. Sites like gaygamer.net have disappeared and the files affiliated with them have been lost. “Thinking about

the future and people wanting to see what this video from this game looked like, having a place where it can be housed as part of a research collection was important to me (00:25:32).”

Realizing that so many of the sites related to queer game media content were at risk motivated Shaw to ensure that the aspects of LGBTQ+ game history she could preserve were preserved as internet communities shift and change.

### **Queer Archives, Queering Archives: Making Meaning and Collecting Queerness**

When asked about what it means to queer an archive in terms of how the LGBTQ+ video game archive functions, Shaw referred to the impetus for a game becoming a part of the archive, which is simply for someone to say there’s something queer about it. Whether it’s a character, a storyline, or something else about it, Shaw makes a point not to arbitrate what goes on the master list. “I research every game before I put an entry up, but I don’t arbitrate what goes onto the master list, because somebody identified something queer about it at some point (00:28:10).”

This can sometimes take the form of offering corrections, and Shaw used the game *It Came from The Desert* as an example of a game that was identified on the surface as queer but had content that, upon further investigation, may have just been a misunderstanding of the colloquial use of the word ‘girlfriend’ by cis women. “I don’t think it was meant to hint at some other relationship. But enough people did, and even when I use it as an example, people try to push back (00:28:22).” Since it was an example that people claimed some queerness about, Shaw included an entry on it. “I think that not being draconian and deciding what does and doesn’t count is part of the queer approach to it (00:28:44).” Other methods Shaw identified as queer in relation to the archive included being liberal with what counts as a source and not being particularly interested in the canonicity of queer characters:

I'm interested in what the fans say, I'm interested in what the producers say, I'm interested in what's in the game, and my entries will reflect all three of those. But like, if there are fan communities that identify these characters as queer, I don't care what the designer said. In both a political sense and also just in a historical sense. They can say whatever they want, this is what people are saying about these characters and the game and like their relationship to these characters, so like at the same time, if fan communities are like 'no there's no way that character's queer' and the designer's like 'they totally are' then I don't care what the fans say. Whoever claims queerness wins for me (00:30:45).

Shaw pointed out that this approach reflects her urge to document the complexity of queerness. As there's no secret label in games to determine if something is queer or not, it highlights that queerness is an interpretive thing at its core. The interpretations can also depend upon things like cultural or translation related situations, something Shaw highlighted when mentioning work done by a volunteer who lived in Japan and was well versed in how queerness in Japan functioned. "It's one thing for American fans playing translated games to say, 'this is what this relationship is', it's another when you go back to the game itself, as released in Japan," Shaw said. "The language is intentionally ambiguous, but there's a vague statement that's basically these two male characters declaring their undying love for each other. If you translate it, it just sounds like 'you're my friend, but in the original Japanese it's much more meaningful and multi-layered and complex than that (00:32:13)."

The queerness of the archive lies in definitions of queerness that extend across international and cultural boundaries, and Shaw noted how important it was to consider queerness outside of the perspective of someone living in the United States in the 21st century, and to consider queerness as a bigger range of experiences across time and space and culture. "It's hard to classify and it's hard to find people who are experts in all those things," she said. "But I feel like it helps make it a richer history if it can consider that these things aren't just things happening in one part of the world (00:32:54)."

This of course results in new complex issues, like finding funding that can support documenting queer game cultures across countries. The subject matter expertise that would be needed on such a subject would make assembling a team exceedingly difficult. “This has been an ongoing problem with this project, is finding anyone who wants to fund it (00:33:54).” The ongoing nature of the archive makes it difficult to attract people interested in funding it, as most funding opportunities are looking to give money to things with concrete end dates. Since the archive is an unending project, funding for a year won’t result in something being done in a year, it will merely result in Shaw getting as much done in a year as she can. “The whole point of the project is it won’t be done (00:34:42),” she said. The archive also doesn’t fall into major categories for archives or projects because of its queer nature as well as its content. Trying to get funding is difficult since the project is both not narrow enough for many grants, but also too specific because of the queer subject matter. In some ways, Shaw appreciates the freedom of running the project herself and being selective about funding sources and resources allocated to the archive. “I’m not particularly indebted to anyone if I continue to work on it for free (00:36:01),” she says, and seems grateful for the opportunity to be doing the research rather than writing reports back to funders about the research.

It is clear in the conversation I had with Dr. Shaw that her investment in maintaining the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive will remain the primary driving force in ensuring its continued maintenance and updates. Though the archive’s structure and process differ from most traditional archival models, it is this very difference that allows it to exist in a queer space that compliments its mission, message, and contents.

## **Limitations and Adjustments**

Much like my first case study, aspects of this chapter had to be adjusted due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. While my initial intent for an interview with Dr. Shaw had been a virtual discussion, the prospect of an in-person visit was completely removed from possibility due to travel restrictions and safety concerns. I also faced limitations due to my interaction with the archive being purely through its Wordpress site -- the existence of the Rainbow Arcade Exhibit at the Schwules museum in Berlin meant that my timing in terms of crafting my dissertation prospectus meant that an invaluable resource -- the ability to travel to Germany and experience the exhibit firsthand -- was not an option. The Rainbow Arcade catalog I received as part of my backer rewards for the Kickstarter campaign sufficed as a stand-in for this information, but as with my first case study, pales in comparison to the opportunity to experience the exhibit firsthand. It is my hope that future iterations of the exhibit, whenever and wherever they may be put on display, would be available for me to revisit this work and get even further in-depth into the archive's contents and their relevance to the archive's mission. How this aligns with other resources such as the Strong Museum is discussed further in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

## **Conclusions: LGBTQ+ Games, Archiving, and History**

While visibly being a labor of queer love and dedication on the part of a singular driving force, the LGBTQ+ Video Game archive also symbolizes the importance of gathering and interpreting queer history as it applies to game design, game studies, and game players. As Shaw notes in her introduction to the Rainbow Arcade catalog, “games have long been talked about as a place where LGBTQIA\* people are non-existent, are harassed, do not belong, and/or have only recently ‘arrived’,” (2019). The examples and evidence gathered via her hard work and the work

of other contributors to the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive provides proof of the exact opposite phenomenon: in the words of Bo Ruberg, *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*, and every entry in the archive's catalog is proof to counter the notion that queerness is a recent arrival to games. The arguments for this idea, which echo the sentiments present in the queer community at large, indicate that the gaming community presents a microcosm of queer denial, acceptance, and backlash that reflects cultural moves as a whole and makes the moves in queerness and games a broader reflection of current cultural events, the implications of which will be further discussed in chapter 5. Despite all this, queerness in games is seen as a surprising phenomenon, and the fact that queer people make games, play games, and are in games calls common narratives about who games are for into question (Shaw 2019). The LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive's very existence challenges the status quo, making it an archive that queers expectations, and its mission and message both aligns with and diverges from the Strong Museum's archives and methods in ways that imply more complex interrelations in historical research than initially anticipated. The LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive does work that other archives do not in terms of its research methodology, its lack of restriction or gatekeeping of identity, and its dedication to highlighting how queerness in games looks across a multitude of perspectives and ideas of what it means to be a gamer, and what it means to be a game.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

#### Framework: Discussion Introduction and Goals

In conducting two case studies of current archival practice concerning the preservation of queer games and game experiences, my research has yielded findings that demonstrate that efforts to highlight and save the histories of marginalized peoples are underway and those conducting them are making positive moves forward in the goal of ensuring those histories are not lost. To further examine this in the specific context of both case studies in their part and also in tandem with each other, this discussion will focus on examining specific aspects of the case study data in chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation and use that information to revisit my initial research questions, extrapolate key findings, and contextualize them within the bounds of what it means to archive queer content and queer archival content. In doing so, I demonstrate how my research is an evolutionary process in and of itself, as the study has grown and been shaped by its contents more than initially anticipated. I will revisit the methodology I established in chapter 2 to thoroughly examine how this evolution of the study aligns with the flexibility scaffolded into my methods for research and scholarship. I will also use this discussion to engage with the notion of the importance of not engaging with case studies in a vacuum and instead allowing their contextual intersections and overlaps to be visible, effectively queering the case study and engaging with methodology that allows for this intersection. My findings should demonstrate the importance of closely examining archival practice and what it can do for preserving marginalized histories, as well as provide options for how to move forward.



## **Research Questions Revisited**

As noted in chapter 2, my research questions are as follows:

1. What efforts are being made in game studies to preserve the history of games and those who play them?
2. What do those methods look like in comparison to an archive of queer games constructed by and concerning the experiences of queer people?
3. What can game studies do to more accurately preserve and lift up the voices of marginalized groups in gaming culture?

The first question is most directly related to my first case study of the Strong Museum of Play, while the second works to directly compare that study to the second study of the LGBTQ+ Video Game archive. The third question examines both archives and the work they are doing to preserve marginalized groups and voices in games and gaming.

### **Case Study 1: The Strong Museum**

The Strong Museum's collecting initiatives focus on preserving both games as physical objects and as experiences enjoyed by people who play them. In reviewing the case study, I use this section as a discussion of key findings concerning the Strong's initiatives related to both physical and digital game preservation, the Strong's initiatives to preserve play experiences, and how those methods of preservation can highlight and uplift marginalized voices. I will highlight some of the most important actions the Strong takes towards preservation, which include community outreach and collaborative efforts with marginalized communities, as well as share their goals for engaging with these ideas in the future.

## **Key Findings**

### ***Game Preservation***

The Strong Museum can be counted on to exert considerable effort and resources to preserve games and game-related materials, both the physical hardware of games such as old arcade machines and current console systems, and the ephemera surrounding games such as legal and business documents from gaming companies. The museum's focus on collecting materials with a specific purpose does not preclude them from receiving and processing thousands of items a year into their database. Using a combination of digital and physical preservation methods, the museum's process for intake includes digitization of existing materials, restoring and ensuring the functionality of hardware, and ensuring thorough metadata concerning each processed object or game. Archivists and curators consider everything from space in a digital and physical context to temperature controls and climate regulation, something especially important because digitizing every object in the museum - more than sixty thousand objects - is not currently feasible. The use of the RAVE (Rare, At-Risk, Valuable, Engaging) categorization allows archivists and preservation experts to make informed and precise choices about what is preserved and what priority level to place each item for different stages of preservation. While this acronym is most readily applied when discussing the preservation of games themselves, it also comes into play for hardware, as often it is the preservation of these devices that allows for access to games that have yet to be digitized. This includes prototype and custom hardware that is often located or developed from community sources. Using all of these resources, the Strong Museum is able to catalog and preserve thousands of games and associated materials, making them available for researchers, gamers, and scholars through their databases and archival infrastructure.

### ***Play Experience***

The museum operates within multiple collecting areas that reflect the interests and historical engagement of different groups of people, and archivists go out of their way to collect games and play materials from a wide variety of people who play games. This is evident through initiatives set up to collect from multiply marginalized groups such as the women in games initiative and collaborations with external archive initiatives such as the LGBTQ+ Game Archive. There is a strong focus on storytelling and sharing people's experiences so researchers and visitors can experience them too. This mentality extends to the people who work at the Strong, with interns and new hires coming from diverse backgrounds and play experiences, such as members of the LGBTQ+ community who have experience in specific gameplay populations like the speed running community.

### ***Marginalized Groups: Intentionality and Advocacy***

Both Dyson and Borman spoke about the importance of deliberately advocating for broader parameters of inclusion in the preservation of gaming history, mentioning specific initiatives dedicated to preserving the histories of marginalized people in games. This reflects in the museum's employment records, hiring not only members of gaming communities to do preservation work and research, but members of marginalized groups such as the LGBTQ+ community, something that provides more varied and inclusive perspectives.

Dyson indicated that the Strong's goals for including marginalized groups in their collecting initiatives was a long-term project, referencing the organization's road map forward, which has room to adapt and change as needed. The Women in Games initiative, beginning with a collecting initiative in 2017, is the key example of a collecting area that grew into a deliberate space for creating and implementing exhibits and public programs related to women in games.

Other partnerships and collaborative efforts such as working with Dr. Adrienne Shaw to preserve materials related to the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive (see Case Study Correlations below) indicate the Strong's commitment to working with marginalized groups to help them preserve play experiences they consider important, providing the resources and expertise in preservation to those who need it. As Borman notes in his interview, the museum's primary mission is showing people that gaming and play is truly for everyone, and that includes marginalized peoples whose stories are heard less often. Both Dyson and Borman also noted that the nature of the archives at the Strong means that there are still probably experiences left to be uncovered and providing access to researchers and scholars of diverse backgrounds and axes of marginalization allows for those stories to be found and highlighted.

### ***Community and Collaboration***

Both Dyson and Borman emphasized the role community and collaborative efforts play in the work the Strong does to preserve games and play experiences. Borman noted that his involvement in gaming communities from a young age was the very thing that led him to a position at the Strong, and his lifelong interest in games with limited releases or adjustments to their release such as Resident Evil 2 sparked enthusiasm for finding ways to save rare games or early versions of those games. His work relies upon being a member of gaming communities rather than an outsider, as his status as a member of those communities allows him access to both materials and preservation methods that would otherwise not be available. The community outreach is based in conversation, not solicitation, and focuses more on sharing information and experiences to create an unofficial web of connections, which in turn lead to preservation and research opportunities. One specific instance of this directly involves the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive, and I will discuss it further below.

On the more official side of collaboration, Dyson spoke about partnerships with other institutions such as Ritsumeikan University in Japan, the Rochester Institute of Technology, and the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences. He highlighted that many of these partnerships were formal, but others were informal, and clearly emphasized the importance of collaboration and community on the personal level, working with specific individuals to forge long-lasting collaborative efforts and partnerships. Many of these relationships, both informal and formal, specifically highlight the importance the Strong places on preservation and ensuing materials outside their collections, such as games in the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive, are preserved and maintained over time, using their expertise and resources for collections that lack that kind of access on their own.

### ***Goals for the Future***

The Strong plans to continue its mission of preserving games history while taking into account developments and changes in both technology as a whole and the games industry. Dyson refers to the collecting process as an active conversation and it is part of the Strong's overarching vision to ensure that those conversations include multiple facets of the gaming community, drawing from scholarly, institutional, and citizen sources. The issue of digital preservation is particularly relevant, as more and more games have updates to their software that are downloadable by consumers on a weekly basis, leaving many updates and versions as ephemeral objects that are sometimes but not always saved by developers during the update process. Borman's recounting of specific countermeasures he has in place to handle lost data and information provides a precise example of how the Strong, and indeed others interested in game preservation, can ensure the preservation of different versions of game hardware and software. Borman's final note, on what makes the Strong different from other archives, refers to how

museums usually work to preserve the past, while the field of game preservation has to be proactive to try to anticipate what needs to be preserved now, knowing that those things might be gone before anything can be done to save them.

## **Case Study 2: The LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive**

While the Strong Museum has a strong focus on preserving the physical or digital games themselves, the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive is more oriented towards being a resource for researchers and scholars. The LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive focuses specifically on the preservation of games and gaming experiences surrounding LGBTQ+ lives and stories. Like the section on my first case study, I use this section to detail the key findings that specifically concern the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive and the measures being taken to preserve the histories and experiences of queer games and queer gamers. I will highlight the archive's efforts towards game and play experience preservation, examine the archive's methods and infrastructure in comparison to the Strong (as per my second research question), and discuss the community and collaboration aspects present in the archive's current procedures as well as plans for the archive's future.

### **Key Findings**

#### ***Game Preservation***

The LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive's efforts towards game preservation lie primarily in keeping detailed records and enacting robust research to catalog games that are identified within some aspect of the Queer umbrella. Content consists primarily of researched articles that detail the history of each game, as well as extensive documentation of the games in question. The

archive contains information about games rather than the games themselves, though it also works with other organizations to preserve games in a more physical sense. The mission of the archive is more focused on experience and research than physical preservation and exists as an online resource for scholars and queer gamers to engage with and also contribute to over time.

### ***Play Experience***

The LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive weighs play experience as a significant factor of inclusion in the archive. Due to the interpretive nature of queer and LGBTQ+ content, the archive has a policy of including games along varied axes of the definition of queer, focusing on sharing and researching any game that includes any interpretation of queerness. This reflects in the archive's use of flexible metadata that allows for characters or games that lack canon representation to still be recorded and noted as significant in some form to the queer community. The lack of focus on canonicity demonstrates that the experience of players is one of if not the most significant factor present in determining a game's presence in the archive -- if players interpret any aspect of the game as queer, it can be catalogued in the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive. These rationales are part of what makes the archive not only an archive of queer content but a queer archive of content, something I will discuss further below.

### ***Archival Methods and Infrastructure***

The LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive maintains a small-scale infrastructural setup, with the vast majority of the work being done by a single individual - Dr. Adrienne Shaw - with intermittent assistance from interns and research assistants as funding permits. Content and updates come from request forms submitted through the archive's website and then end up on a working list housed in a Word document. The metadata and tagging systems are flexible and

adaptable to allow for cross-referencing within the archive and interpretive work on the part of both researchers and archival workers. The archive retains a level of queer flexibility to allow for multiple layers of interpretation of different sources and texts, which in turn allows it to acknowledge and honor the inherent interpretive nature of many instances of queer representation. The biggest factor impacting the archive's ability to be updated is time and number of researchers able to do the work, and while utilizing other methods of presentation, such as a collaborative wiki, could result in more frequent updates and content uploads, the primary purpose of the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive is to contain thorough research and supported claims, something more difficult to control and monitor on a community wiki or similar site. Much like many smaller queer archives, this archive began as a passion project, but like larger archives, the purpose and goals involve preserving content for the long haul, ensuring access to its contents not solely for the people in the current era, but those who come after.

### ***Community and Collaboration***

The LGBTQ+ Video Game archive has several partnerships, mostly informal and collaborative, that are focused on spreading the message and emphasizing signal boosting methods. Most of these efforts remain informal since official collaborative or partnership efforts can easily result in more work for the people working on the archive itself. While the disadvantage of this approach is that the archive is often updated slowly due to lack of hands, the ability to maintain researcher control allows Shaw and her research assistants to realistically monitor and govern expectations concerning the archive. Major collaborations have usually come about due to issues surrounding access, hardware, and serendipity. The collaboration with the Strong Museum on the recovery of the Caper in the Castro files is the most major example of this (see below) but other collaborative efforts, including the Rainbow Arcade exhibit at the



Schwules museum that came about as the result of a Kickstarter campaign, have given the archive more traction, more access to contents to add to the list of games involving the queer experience, and allowed for more signal boosting. The collaborative efforts, though informal and infrequent, are integral to the survival of the archive as well, as Shaw maintains a relationship with the Strong Museum to ensure materials are backed up and preserved in a space with a more formal and financially secure infrastructure. The LGBTQ+ Video Game archive relies on informal and small collaborative efforts to continue functioning, as it remains primarily the purview of its founder and the few research assistants who are intermittently assigned to assist her.

### **Case Study Correlations and Connections**

As noted above in the discussion of both case studies, I learned of multiple connections and correlations between the work and methods of the Strong Museum and the LGBTQ+ Video Game archive. In highlighting these connections, I engage in the first major interpretation of my data and findings, which indicates that the world of archiving games and play experiences is a relatively small one, and the lines between different game archiving projects are short and intricately interwoven between different organizations. By noting the connections between the two case studies, I demonstrate how my study evolved beyond its initial plan and was able to be adapted due to my flexible methodology, triangulation methods, and decisions to adjust research and individual questions as I worked. Had I not made these adjustments, my findings would look very different, and I would not have been able to draw the strong connections between the two case studies and the landscape of queer archiving and archiving queer experiences as thoroughly.

What follows is an examination of the connections I noted between my two archival case studies, as well as active collaborations between the two archives and the work they are doing to preserve marginalized voices, followed by more subtle observations about the way the two archives function together in terms of their philosophies and methods.

### **Collaboration: *Caper in the Castro* and Preserving LGBTQ+ Content**

Both Dr. Shaw and Andrew Borman spoke extensively on their work uncovering *Caper in the Castro* and finding a way to make the game playable again. Borman noted that the connection that allowed for this work to take place was the result of his community and social media presence existing in tandem with Dr. Shaw's use of social media to put out a call for assistance restoring and recovering the original *Caper in the Castro* files. This collaboration is also what allowed the game to become playable to the general public on the Internet Archive, as Borman and the Strong Museum had the resources and connections to reach out and give the game that additional exposure. The game, originally written for a proprietary version of the software HyperCard, could only be opened on a 1980s era Mac computer, something both CM Ralph and Dr. Shaw did not have immediate access to. Putting out a call on social media connected Dr. Shaw to the Strong and the resources Borman had, as he was able to find a Mac computer of the appropriate era in the museum's archives and use it to get the game playable for the first time in thirty years. Another aspect of collaboration that arose alongside the act of getting the game playable again was the nature of solving the puzzles and scenarios of the game after such a long period of time, something Dr. Shaw mostly did alone, something rare in the current era of guides and information being accessible immediately online when a game has a puzzle that stumps players. Once the game was made available on the Internet Archive thanks to Borman's contact with Jason Scott, streamers and Youtubers were also put in the position of

having to solve puzzles from a thirty-year-old game without the usual assistance afforded by the internet's propensity for providing guides and FAQs. Dr. Shaw ended up collaborating and consulting with youtubers playing the game to work through the puzzles together, an impromptu and informal but still inherently collaborative effort, something which heavily characterizes the entire situation surrounding *Caper in the Castro*. Rather than an elaborate or formal partnership, the process of getting the game off the diskettes and up online was a serendipitous moment of people coming together to collectively solve a problem. While the Museum has formal partnerships with other museums and programs and the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive has some collaborative ties to other programs and projects, the most significant collaboration between the two archives is a spontaneous and informal one brought about by a circulating post on social media and led to more formal partnerships and collaborative efforts between the two archives after this inciting incident. Dr. Shaw recently donated a hard drive of LGBTQ+ game-related materials to the Strong for the purposes of preservation of digital queer gaming experiences that were at risk of deletion from internet websites and materials that needed more robust backups. The Strong's ability to preserve content using tools unavailable to a smaller archival project is one of the major reasons behind this collaborative push and highlights the benefits of engaging in a collaborative principle on the part of both archives.

### **Archival Rhetoric: Collecting Areas and Content Preservation**

One issue that arose during my interview with both Dr. Dyson and Mr. Borman at the Strong involved the collecting area of content concerning marginalized identities, particularly LGBTQ+ content, and what kinds of initiatives the museum and the archives were involved in to better highlight the contributions and relevance of LGBTQ+ voices in gaming history. This discussion is linked to the collaboration the Strong Museum undertook with the LGBTQ+ Video

Game archive and Dr. Shaw's work, and the process undertaken to help Dr. Shaw access and preserve materials reflects one of the overarching philosophies held by the Strong Museum: if someone else is putting together a smaller collection, especially when it involves a community to which they belong, the Strong's job is to dedicate resources to assist that process rather than subsume it. While the Strong Museum has content relevant to the experiences and lives of marginalized people within its collections, both Dr. Dyson and Mr. Borman noted that one of the best things they can do as a large archive with robust resources is be a point of support for small collections like the LGBTQ+ Video Game archive, offering a place to back up files and provide resources to deal with technology, rather than absorb or integrate the collection completely. This method reflects another aspect of collaboration and archival philosophy that highlights the Strong Museum's notion that what they're most interested in preserving is people's stories, and that the people to whom those stories belong are the best ones to tell those stories.

### **Philosophies and Methods: The Size and Scope of Archives**

The Strong Museum and the LGBTQ+ Video Game archive share similar philosophies and goals in terms of wishing to preserve game and play experiences of diversely represented gamers and their lives, however the two institutions go about this process in different ways due to a number of institutional and environmental factors. The museum, being a larger organization, adheres to specific strict guidelines concerning the preservation and archiving process, record keeping, and metadata, whereas Dr. Shaw noted in her interview that the LGBTQ+ game archive operates within a more flexible categorization method that she can adapt and expand as needed according to different games, players, and identities. The other major difference between the two organizations is one of funding, where the Strong Museum, as a larger institution and organization, has access to significant financial support and capital, including grants, and is able

to give out research fellowships for scholars wishing to visit the archives. The LGBTQ+ game archive is smaller and digital-only, and grants given are distributed to the cause of getting more material up online, often through the form of hiring research assistants who then require training to follow the system created by Dr. Shaw. As she noted, many grants don't fit the criteria of the archive, since it is an ongoing project, and many grants require concrete evidence of materials created during a specific period of time or a set ending for a project. The inverse benefit of this of course is the autonomy afforded by running an archive without major financial intervention, as Dr. Shaw has control over content, organization, and timeframe. The Strong Museum, while a larger organization with more opportunities for funding and support, also adheres to the guidelines of the museum, of the overarching organization in charge of the Strong, and internal guidelines, all necessary but also all barriers to timely access of materials and information. Neither is a better or worse model of running an archive, primarily because they function in ways that are appropriate to each archival model. The Strong, as a larger institution with a broader scope of materials, requires additional stipulations to ensure a consistent preservation method, whereas the LGBTQ+ game archive can operate on a smaller scale that requires fewer regulations along the same lines that the Strong requires. Both archives retain a similar philosophy throughout, however: the significance of preserving and sharing games and play experiences so others can know and understand what those experiences entail, and looking to the future to ensure the histories of games and play are saved for the long haul, whether this is enacted through stringent regulations and organization or collaborating with a larger organization to use their resources to ensure access to materials remains possible in the coming decades.

### **Study Evolution: Enacting a Flexible Queer Methodology**

The evolution of my case studies serves as a useful demonstration of the flexibility of the methodology I developed for the purposes of studying queer archival practice in games and game studies. The nature of the two archives I examined and how their methods and projects overlapped meant that my study had to evolve and retain some flexibility as I worked, and to best demonstrate this methodology in action, I will discuss the evolutionary steps of the study and how it evolved as I worked, and then return to the six movements of the methodology outlined in my methods chapter. From there I will examine what precisely has shifted from the study's original envisioning to its enacting and why it matters that my methodology's scaffolded flexibility made my study not only more feasible, but more readily adapted to the shifts and moves of the information I learned from my case studies.

### **Study Evolution: From Discrete Archives to Collaborative Interaction**

My initial concept for my case studies involved a separation between the two chapters, archives, and data sets, as is evident in my initial research questions, which set up more of a comparison basis for examining the information I would gain from my case studies. As I began my conversations with Dr. Dyson and Mr. Borman at the Strong Museum, I quickly discovered that the separation I had expected between the two archives was much thinner than I had initially anticipated. While I had known that the Strong Museum had assisted Dr. Shaw in the recovery of the files for *Caper in the Castro* before conducting my studies, it was surprising to learn that this was not the full extent of the collaboration between the two archives. The Strong Museum's philosophy of using their resources to assist smaller archives with specific collecting areas was reflected in their work with the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive and Dr. Shaw providing them with a hard drive of backed up files and websites, providing a specific instance of the

collaborative nature of the work both archives engaged in. These correlations and collaborations required my study to shift and evolve to account for the work done between and around the two archives, rather than focusing on them as discrete spaces with vastly differing methods and resources. In making this shift, I was able to focus in on the underlying issue surrounding my dissertation, the preservation of queer histories in games and play, and not restrict myself to looking at two separate instances, allowing the ways the two archives overlap to take the study in an unanticipated but welcome direction. This insight let me to revisit the six moves I had made in enacting my methodology to make note of their points of flexibility during the study.

### **Flexible Methodology in Practice: the Six Movements Revisited**

My methodology covers six major movements in the planning and execution of the study, with the first four being focused on groundwork and theoretical study and the remaining two being focused on the application to the study and engagement with the cases. The first move, interweaving methodological strands, allowed me to consider my research from multiple points, considering not only the game studies perspective but other intersections related to marginalized experiences. Move two, defining a transparent methodology for insider research, allowed me to be precise about my definitions and intentions with the research, integrating within the theory the need to create reciprocal research that gives back to the communities that are the subject of the study. Move three, decolonizing and redefining axes of marginalization, builds upon this by ensuring the methods remain focused on the communities that are the subject of the research, in this case the queer gaming community, something move four further emphasizes to push for a specifically queer research paradigm that fully integrates the queer experience with the queer research agenda of ensuring a situational methodology that can be adapted and adjusted as it progresses. The fifth move, turning to the archives, engages directly with the two case studies

and was one of the most valuable points of flexibility in enacting my studies due to my inability to travel to engage with one of my archival spaces directly. Ensuring flexibility in the core of the methodology allowed me to still gain insights at a distance and not lose data despite having to make adjustments to my original plan and goal. The sixth and final step focuses on the community and what it can gain from knowledge about these archives, allowing me to maintain focus on the case studies not only as information gathering and data but as active projects that collaborate with and engage with communities, not static but ever shifting and adapting to the needs of their communities.

Following this methodology allows for a study that has flexibility built into its foundation, something I found extremely helpful as the events of 2020 required multiple adjustments and reworkings to still be feasible. Initiating the methodology in a theoretical context also contributed to a strong foundation, something reflected in my rationale and the literature review of this dissertation. The process I undertook, moving through the steps of theoretical concepts to practical execution, should serve as a useful blueprint for other scholars who can draw from their own theory and praxis to engage with qualitative research.

### **Study Adjustments: Changing Course Mid-Methodology and Other Observations**

The most significant mid-study adjustment, as noted above, was the need to consider the two case studies in the context of each other rather than as separate and divided entities with only minimal common threads. Observing the two studies in the context of this commonality has shifted the overall notion of the study, making it less focused on comparison (research questions 1 and 2) but more on the overarching reason for the study (question 3). Again, while it would have been simple to retain this division in the study and focus solely on difference and divisions between the two archives, my adjustment of the study to let the cases blend and blur led to far



more interesting data about the state of archiving in the world of games and play, emphasizing the significance of collaboration in the field. The core of this research and my dissertation as a whole is focused on the preservation of queer gaming histories, not necessarily the divisions between two separate archives, so I found that allowing the differences to be less of a point than the collaborations and fuzzy divisions that existed between the two spaces to be both more productive and more interesting than retaining an artificial separation between the two case studies. Examining and reflecting upon the two archives in conversation with each other paints a very specific picture of the landscape of archiving in the realm of queer game studies: collaboration is a necessary and invaluable aspect of the work being conducted in the realm of preserving queer game histories and is therefore a required context to fully understand the methods being used to engage in that preservation.

### **Queering, Archives, and Queering Archives: Connections and Intersections**

Connections I noted between the two archives I studied alerted me that both archives included queer contents, but that having queer content does not necessarily make an archive queer. Queering an archive is more complex than context, and I thus want to share my thoughts on what it means to queer an archive and how that relates to games, the inherent queerness of games, and how this applies both in and beyond the case studies I have provided. In doing this I demonstrate the significance of looking at games archiving through a queer lens and the importance of considering queer games and archiving together and as invaluable parts of the same method for preserving the often lost and destroyed histories of marginalized people.

To engage with archival practice in a queer manner, multiple avenues arise to demonstrate or present a queer archival method. Most notably in the instance of this dissertation, the case study of the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive highlights that one aspect of queering an

archive involves maintaining an open and flexible categorization system. If a game has any instance of queer content in it, whether it is canonical or perceived by an audience, whether it is an issue of a misunderstood translation or a casual connection, if a player of that game interprets it as queer, then the game earns a spot in the LGBTQ+ game archive. Some of this method lies in necessity but that too highlights an aspect of queerness -- it is defined differently across cultural boundaries, in different time periods, by different people, and to hold to a rigid definition ends up leaving out significant landmarks in queer video game representation. As a result, the LGBTQ+ Video Game archive presents itself not only as an archive of queer content, but a queer archive of content, maintaining characteristics that challenge traditional rigid archival structures and procedures. This is especially visible when examining the differences between the two case studies, comparing the methods outlined by the Strong Museum and those used by the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive. The Strong has a complex system of checks and balances that exist across multiple buckets of bureaucracy and organization, each of them reviewed by a Board and established for not only longevity but consistency. The multiple areas, which Dr. Dyson referred to as collaborative yet divided, account for different items within collections that could be divided based upon the categorizations those items belonged to, be they games, toys, bureaucratic documents, design schematics, or biographical material. The use of an internal database, the ARGUS database, allows for organization across multiple collecting areas, as does partnerships with digital spaces like Google Arts and Culture and the Internet Archive. This organization system paired with a robust intake procedure highlights the Strong Museum's processes as thorough and traditional, established across many years and designed for specific kinds of longevity, via the 'cargo ship' metaphor Dr. Dyson describes in the case study. The intent of the Strong Museum's collections is long-haul storage and preservation in a way that

adheres to specific scholarly and archival guidelines to maintain long periods of consistency in an official capacity. While this is an official and organized well-sanctioned method, it means that the Strong Museum's processes ultimately exist in a traditionalist framework, and while the collecting areas within the various different subsections of the Strong Museum contain some queer content, be it games by queer creators, records of queer creators, and historical collections of LGBTQ+ related content, the archive itself does not maintain the label of being a queer archive or a queered archive, either through self-admission or thorough examination in this study. The Strong presents to us a significant point in the discussion of queer archiving in games and games studies: archives can contain queer content, but that does not necessarily make them, by definition, queer. The LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive is explicitly devoted to only the queer content present in video games, whether it is defined exactly in the text or alluded to in interpretations. Queer games and queer play experiences that have variable definitions require the flexibility of a nontraditional archive like the LGBTQ+ Video Game archive, and while it has its own internal structure and metadata, the system surrounding and permeating the archive differs greatly from the one present in the Strong Museum's network of databases and rigid organization methods. This is of course by design and does not detract from the LGBTQ+ Video Game archive's message or content, most significantly because one of the Strong's major collecting areas, physical content, is not an area shared with the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive. This goes beyond the collection of arcade games and physical copies of games, but also much physical material in general. The LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive is a digital archive that only takes up physical space in terms of the material footprint of digital spaces, and the preservation process is less reliant on physical characteristics and more on backups and digital safeguards. In some ways this very aspect is one of the most notable queered elements of the archive, since

traditional archival views and models focus on the notion of an archive as a physical location that busies itself with the physical storage of materials and must be concerned with the safe preservation of those materials in terms of factors including but not limited to temperature control, weather safeguards, and catastrophic physical failure such as flood, fire, or similar natural disaster. While this is a concern for all archival content, even solely digital content, the prime difference between those concerns in the case of these two archives lies in control. The Strong Museum maintains close control over its facilities, temperature settings, weather proofing and environmental controls due to a robust physical facility and infrastructure. The LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive is ultimately at the mercy of whichever servers and services house the digital materials, or at least it was before Dr. Shaw made the active choice to collaborate with the Strong Museum and make use of the resources they had available for safe storage and preservation. With the nature of queer archival practice as seen in these case studies, it is easy to observe that the very act of willing collaboration in a world focused on sole ownership and strict regulation presents a queering of the status quo, a desire to be more concerned with the longevity of important historical materials versus a need to categorize and define everything into discrete and separate spaces for the sake of establishing ownership. This perspective alone provides an example of the idea that queerness is a mutable and shifting phenomenon that relies upon a shifting of the status quo, and acts of radical collaboration that are more interested in the collective benefits of preserving history than the notion of separation and ownership. While the Strong Museum's practices are not as overtly queer as those of the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive, the willingness to collaborate and provide space for queer stories and materials contributes to queer archival practice in subtler but still valuable ways.

## **Preserving Queer Gameplay: Queer Gamers and Queer Gaming Experiences**

While queer experiences of games and gaming vary as widely as expressions of queerness themselves, highlighting examples of how this queerness manifests within the two archives in my case studies provides some specific insights into what it means to go beyond simply preserving queer games but to also preserve queer gameplay, namely the experiences of queer gamers and the experiences players have in games that can be defined as queer along some defining axis. Preserving queer gameplay holds the same significance as preserving queer games since it is another avenue by which queer experiences and play can be observed and measured and it provides more information about the lived experiences of queer people and their relationship with games and play, something both the Strong Museum and the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive value highly.

In his interview, Andrew Borman made reference to the hiring practices when it came to selecting interns for positions at the archive. He referenced one of the interns from a previous summer, a transgender woman who was part of the speed running community, and specifically highlighted that her insider knowledge as a queer gamer and member of a specific sub-set of the gaming community. Her insights gave Mr. Borman the ability to better navigate a gaming space he was previous unfamiliar with, a fact that highlights the importance of collaboration with queer gamers to further examine queer gaming experience, something particularly relevant in the speed running community, a space frequented by members of the LGBTQ+ community. In the hiring and working with a member of the LGBTQ+ community, the Mr. Borman and by extension the Strong Museum are able to gain a deeper insight into what kinds of play experiences need to be preserved in order for queer voices to be heard in the archiving and preserving of that particular history. While this is just one instance of this occurring, it speaks to a positive pattern of hiring interns for their unique expertise and insights, not just their ability to do generalized work, and as

long as the Strong Museum continues to engage in this kind of work, those experiences will be factored into the preservation of not just queer games or games with queer elements, but those of queer gamers.

In terms of the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive, part of the archive's mission is preserving all facets of the queer gaming experience, going beyond simple representation to also include queer interpretations and perspectives that exist outside of a game's narrative canonicity, focusing on the philosophy that the game is relevant to the archive if players perceive any aspect of that game to be queer. In this sense, the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive is focused more heavily on queer gameplay experience than any other aspect of preservation, highlighting the importance of interpretation in the preservation of queer play. I also would highlight aspects of the archive's contents that further exemplify a queer play experience, in particular Dr. Shaw's experience with the recovery and restoration of *Caper in the Castro*. She spoke about her experience receiving this decades-old game and playing through it in a manner most 21st-century gamers would have trouble with -- she had to rely solely on her interpretations and skills to solve the game's puzzles, as the game had no walkthroughs or posted solutions to those puzzles. While she solved a significant number of those puzzles on her own, she also mentioned collaborating and working together with a streamer when the game was posted up on the Internet Archive, and that the two of them had to rely on each other to solve some of the more difficult puzzles. In terms of the ubiquitous nature of walkthroughs and game FAQ websites, the opportunity to play a game in this guideless way could easily be read as a queer experience, where the standard tools and structures usually available to solve puzzles and locate clues are no longer available and those attempting the action must work together to pool their resources and overcome the obstacles, the very thing that necessitated game FAQs and walkthroughs in the first place. This

experience of regression to a pre-walkthrough style of gameplay is a queer experience of a queer game and is just one example of how the queer gameplay experience can vary widely in scope and process.

The queer gaming experience is so broad that preserving those experiences will present a challenge to not only the two archives in these case studies, but the queer landscape as a whole. One person's gameplay experience can differ completely from another person's, just as their queer identities may intersect, overlap, and diverge. However, both the Strong Museum and the LGBTQ+ Video Game archive make use of specific strategies to include and integrate these experiences into the process of the archival systems laid out by both spaces. Accounting for the experiences of queer gamers, be it through the consultation and inclusion of queer employees and their knowledges or through factoring in the experiential aspect of queer gameplay, is an essential piece of queer games archiving, and holding space for this kind of work provides groundwork for other archival projects to face the challenge of including the broad spectrum of queer gameplay experiences.

### **Archiving Queer Games and Queer Game Experiences: Takeaways from Two Case Studies**

The experiences and actions of the two archives used in this dissertation for case studies provide insight into current efforts being made in the world of games and game studies to ensure fragile histories are preserved. The Strong Museum of Play is engaging in multiple initiatives to preserve games and game materials related to the stories and histories of multiple marginalized groups, including Black people and people of color as a whole through the preservation of games and materials made by Black designers, games designed and created by women through the Women in Games initiative, and queer and LGBTQ+ games through the preservation of materials and experiences both already within the archive and outside the archive via

collaboration with smaller specific projects. This directly connects to the work being done by Dr. Adrienne Shaw with the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive, as the Strong Museum has collaborated with her to both retrieve difficult to obtain materials and house the digital materials for long term preservation via their facilities and capabilities. This spirit of collaboration exemplifies what game studies scholars, archivists, and gamers should strive for as we move forward with looking to preserve the history of games, gamers, and marginalized experiences: our experience and expertise should not exist in a discrete context or a vacuum, it should be utilized across multiple spaces and experiences to ensure that the most good can be done to preserve the history of games and play, especially when it comes to examining the histories most easily lost or erased. The Strong Museum of Play is positioned as the most robust and funded site of preservation in the context of games and play artifacts, and the work it currently engages in demonstrates the importance of using resources, power, and privilege to reach out and uplift the voices and experiences of marginalized people. The work they have done in tandem with the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive highlights the importance of sharing resources while not overshadowing the work being done by smaller scale niche archives, using larger scale funding opportunities and expertise to amplify the work already being done by those who have the lived experience to more thoroughly and adequately explore and preserve the history of marginalized people.



## **QUEERING IN GAMES, QUEERNESS IN GAMERS, AND PRESERVING HISTORY: SOME CONCLUSIONS**

This project began with an interest in a niche area of rhetorical scholarship that has the potential to extrapolate usable information about archival practice, queer communities, and the need to preserve the history of marginalized people across multiple areas of interest and expression. As a final move in this project, I use this section to revisit my research questions and reconsider their findings in the context of the two case studies I've conducted. From there I go into more depth about options I have for considering the discussion of queerness in games and play beyond the initial steps of this dissertation, revisiting discussions established during my literature review and methods chapters regarding ethics, permissions, and archival rhetoric. I want to then use this set of conclusions to establish space for engaging in further work surrounding this dissertation's key topics and the moves I'm interested in making in this scholarship beyond the scope of my initial case studies and knowledge I have gathered. Finally, I contextualize my project with my own experiences as a queer person to re-assert that the scholarship I engage with is always rooted and sourced back to an ethic of care for my own community and is designed first and foremost to help people like me share their stories. By maintaining a research project that engages in a scholar-forward method that uses my own lived experience to enrich both the process and findings of my scholarship, I demonstrate the validity of conducting research in tandem with, rather than with removal from the life and personal experiences of the researcher.

### **Research Questions Revisited**

My first research question, ‘What efforts are being made in game studies to preserve the history of games and those who play them?’, is answered within this dissertation both via the literature review presented as the first chapter of this work and the first case study contained in chapter three. Both of these spaces highlight efforts being undertaken in scholarly spaces to emphasize attention to the history of games and those who play them, the rationale for preserving these histories, and important steps being taken to understand and acknowledge the importance of preserving games and their history. The Case Study of the Strong Museum of Play provides insight into the perspectives of two employees who are deeply involved in developing and maintaining preservation techniques for both analog and digital games, and their methods are focused on long term archival storage for scholarly use and using their resources to assist other communities invested in games and play preservation.

The second research question, “What do those methods look like in comparison to an archive of queer games constructed by and concerning the experiences of queer people?”, as noted in my discussion chapter, became less of a comparison and more of a highlight of the collaborative procedures in place between small archives such as the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive and the Strong Museum’s archival initiatives. As a smaller archive, the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive engages in more localized methods that are undertaken by a small handful of researchers at some times and a single researcher during others, and while the differences between this and the Strong Museum is primarily scope and size, the main difference lies in the content collection area -- the Strong Museum’s generalist strategy provides access to some LGBTQ+ content, but that content is not the focus of the archive the way it is in the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive.

The third and final research question, ‘What can game studies do to more accurately preserve and lift up the voices of marginalized groups in gaming culture?’, has answers that further emphasize the importance of collaboration and integration with gaming communities, and allows for the use of the two case studies as both examples of individual organizational efforts towards preservation and community collaboration to preserve marginalized voices. The collaboration between the Strong Museum and the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive provides a clear example of what games archives can do to preserve the voices of marginalized groups more accurately: collaborate with and listen to the people who are involved in those groups and give them the opportunities and resources needed to engage in that preservation.

### **Caveats and Considerations for Archival Work: Queerness, History, and Ethics**

This dissertation project has been focused on a realm fraught with pitfalls and complex questions surrounding ethics, disclosure, and erasure, and while I have addressed these situations to some extent in both my literature review and methods chapters, the reiteration of these points with additional context from and concerning the case studies can highlight an aspect of queer archival research that is an essential part of engaging with marginalized groups ethically and respectfully. When dealing with history, especially other people’s history, scholars often find themselves faced with questions of how best to share the stories of people who may not wish for those stories to be shared, a particular facet of the gaps and silences present in archival rhetorical work that is more complex than simple erasure and censorship. Whether the subjects of those stories are no longer alive to voice their consent, or they have concerns about how that history is shared, scholars and archivists alike need to take time and devote energy to ensuring that the work they are doing always serves the community it concerns and does not cause any undue damage or harm to those involved. One of the more obvious ways that this issue arises in queer

and LGBTQ+ spaces is the issue of outing someone or revealing their orientation or identity to the world without their consent. Historical queerness makes this an additionally complex issue since the way queerness is perceived in the 21st century is very different from the perceptions of not just a century ago, but even fifty or just twenty years ago. Ascribing modern queer language to people from the past runs the risk of erasing or overwriting that history, and thus archival methods such as those enacted by Dr. Shaw with the LGBTQ+ Video Game Archive are a necessary aspect of queer archival practice: remembering the ever-shifting aspects of language that impact the perception of queer lives now, in the past, and in the future. While no current best practices for engaging in queer archival rhetoric exist, we can begin the work by accounting for it and pushing for this work in future projects concerning queerness and archiving and considering how to queer archival practice to account for this information.

History is a malleable term, one that can cover any point in time from thousands of years ago to mere months in the past. However, the rhetorical context of the term history leads to past events being framed in particular lights that neglect both the recency of the event and the material impacts of that event. Dr. Shaw's interview in Chapter 4 of this dissertation highlights a specific instance of this, namely the situation surrounding C. M. Ralph and *Caper in the Castro*. The game, written and created over thirty years ago, has been hailed as one of the earliest queer video games, and the Strong Museum in collaboration with Dr. Shaw and the Internet Archive were able to not only extract the files from their original hardware, but digitize them and put them up online for anyone with access to the internet to play. A victory for access and queer history on one front, but an act that resulted in unforeseen consequences that could be deemed a byproduct of this rhetorical view of history. C.M. Ralph has spoken both to Dr. Shaw and on their own blog about the resurgence of *Caper in the Castro* and its being shared with the public,

and its sudden popularity has done little for Ralph's professional or personal life. The game, originally released as charityware, provides no revenue for them, and as a multimedia artist who is still very much alive and attempting to survive in the 21st Century, their thoughts on the rampant sharing of the game and its presence overshadowing their current work has been less of a victory for queer history and more of an inconvenience for the queer present. As noted on their website, (cmralph.com) use of any images from the game requires a licensing fee (Ralph 2021), something deemed necessary in the current culture of information online being rapidly shared with little regard for such things, and it serves as an example of the importance of remembering the material consequences and aspects of history that are often overlooked in academic scholarly work, especially with archives. Ethically engaging with archival sources means examining their context, particularly if that context involves still living people and their livelihoods.

The ethics of archival work also align with concerns surrounding people's livelihoods and their legacies, particularly in the context of transgender individuals. I return to my initial framing instance for this dissertation -- the discovery of the Dani Bunten Berry papers in the Strong Museum's holdings -- to note how this discovery ultimately came about through my making note of the presence of both a traditionally masculine and a traditionally feminine name listed in the catalog. Transgender individuals, particularly those of historical or social significance, are often faced with the fraught prospect of being remembered under not only their own chosen name that reflects their self and gender accurately, but their deadname, or the name that they used before coming out as transgender. Instances of this occur frequently in current online spaces when transgender public figures or celebrities feature in news stories, with reporters referring to people using deadnames in addition to (or sometimes in substitution for) the transgender figure's actual name. While I don't wish to get into the complex (and painful)

dynamics surrounding the issue of deadnaming, I do want to highlight the current issue in archival and historical spaces surrounding deadnames for transgender people and the issues of consent in archival scholarship. Uncovering queer people's stories can sometimes mean unearthing information that was created for a private audience or individual use, and archival scholars, even queer ones, need to be aware of the complex issues surrounding researching queer history and accessing information with dubious ethical circumstances surrounding the acquisition or cataloging thereof. The question of how to tackle trans names in both digital and archival spaces is part of an ongoing conversation about ethical queer reporting and best practices, and indeed queer archival practice, but it remains a complex issue without a simple solution, something no more readily evident than in the very example used at the beginning of this dissertation. Would I have discovered Dani Bunten Berry if not for the masculine name in those parentheses on the Strong Museum Catalog website? What other means would I have had to learn of her groundbreaking work in games besides learning of it in a context devoid of her queerness, her transness? How do I grapple with the knowledge that in order to recognize and acknowledge her as a transgender game developer and creator, I had to take note of her deadname, had it used as a marker of significance, a context clue, a rhetorical discovery? The ethics of queer archiving are just as important as the serendipity of discovering queer people using context clues, and I hope that this dissertation creates a space to continue the conversation of ethical archival practice regarding the identities and lives of LGBTQIA+ people in historical instances, and indeed the present and future.

### **Future Projects and Next Steps: Expanding on Queer Games Archiving**

Much of the work I conducted on this project had to be adjusted due to the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on travel during 2020. My original concept for examining the Strong

Museum of Play for my first case study involved a more robust in-person visit, where I would have the opportunity to spend at least two weeks immersing myself in the archives, the museum, and its holdings. I am very fortunate that my interview participants were as thorough as they were regarding their methods and procedures but hope to return to this project in the future to locate more examples of LGBTQ+ content in the archives, as well as witness specific methods of preservation and processing the archive uses. While I'm happy with the information I was able to gather in my case study, the opportunity to expand it would allow for more in-depth findings regarding both the methods of archiving in games studies and the content currently in the archives that relates to the preservation of marginalized identities.

In addition to being able to expand my research on the contents of the Strong Museum, I am interested in expanding my research on LGBTQ+ games as a whole, and taking the information this dissertation gained in regards to digital and analog preservation to develop guidelines to assist citizen archivists, or people who have an interest in preserving content but need education and knowledge to ensure they are engaging in the correct procedures and processes to accurately preserve historical documentation, games, and play experiences. The sheer volume of information present on the internet makes any initiative to assist people in preserving content a valuable one, especially when it is made explicitly accessible to marginalized people, and using the knowledge gained in this research project to educate and encourage specific methods for locating, preserving, and sharing marginalized history is something this study lays the groundwork for, and I am interested in enacting this citizen archiving via interaction within my own community.

Finally, this dissertation brings together scholarly threads and interweaves them with personal experience, storytelling, and emotion. The lived experiences of marginalized people,

and in my particular case, queer people, provide insights into research and scholarship that would be otherwise lost in the hands of someone who does not share the axes of marginalization on which I exist. In addition to continuing to use the flexible methodology designed in the second chapter of this dissertation, I want to continue to examine and define what it means to integrate lived experience and ethnographic work into serious empirical scholarship, and what it means to blend in-depth qualitative or quantitative research with both the stories of the researcher and the stories of others from the community being researched. Storytelling and narratives in particular are the purview of archival work as much as they are the day-to-day of a community and being cognizant of those stories opens doors to further archival research, historical research, and intercommunity knowledge-sharing. Understanding the interplay of archival work, marginalized identity, and ethnography provides an insight into historical events, current events, and the future in a way that a less interpersonal and blended research methodology could miss. When studying or engaging with marginalized identity, even if that identity is shared by the researcher, remembering the human side of sharing people's stories is an essential part of engaging in ethical and well-grounded scholarship, and it is the researcher's responsibility to constantly triangulate and reassess their relation to the project, asking and re-asking themselves and those around them 'who does this research serve? How am I giving back to this community? What do they gain from my engagement in this research process?' These questions can help me develop further methodological stances that I began working with in this project and help me engage in more in-depth research surrounding games, queer game studies, and archival practice.

### **Conclusions: Queer Game Studies, Archival Practice, and Writing Through History**

This study sought to investigate the methods being undertaken in game studies to preserve the history of games and play, and thus provides insight into a small but significant



portion of intersecting affinity groups: gamers, queer people, and archival scholars being just a few among them. Games archiving exists in an inherently queer space both in terms of the inherent queerness of games and the required queering of historical and archival methods to engage with game-related material. The use of a flexible methodological toolkit to examine two archives of games led me to the significant discovery that the two archives do not exist in discrete separation from each other, but rather interact and interplay along lines of access, collaboration, and shared preservation space. Examining these archives without a flexible research method would have led to this information being lost or ignored and ensuring its inclusion in this dissertation serves as a valuable note about the importance of engaging in queer research paradigms that are not afraid to shift and change as the study changes.

Crafting this dissertation during a global pandemic, during the final year of the Trump Administration, and during some of the most turbulent political decisions under debate regarding the lives and rights of transgender people, has been an experience unlike any other, both for my scholarship and research, and my existence as a human. Engaging in scholarship during this time has presented significant challenges as the work I conducted felt inextricably tied to the world around me, both fueling my progress and hindering it at any given point in time. Rather than omit this struggle and process, I feel it important to mention the influence writing through adversity had on this project, not as any kind of rationale or excuse for something in the work that is lacking, but to note what is gained by engaging in scholarship that directly aligns with current events. To study the history and implications of queer existence as a queer person while the rights of queer people are debated publicly, while also seeing similar conversations and struggles echoed among other marginalized groups, provided a stark but important backdrop for crafting a dissertation. Studying history as history is taking place makes for a writing process

composed of fits and starts, with some days drawing from direct occurrences and others unable to address the pain and trauma of the world beyond the words on a page. By choosing to integrate my own experiences, both current and past, into this dissertation, I enact my own queer research paradigm in tandem with the methodology and subject matter I have established, and I share my struggles and my joys as a writer and a scholar through every object example, my resources as an archival scholar and archivist, and knowledge as someone knowing other researchers, queer and marginalized and curious and tenacious, will come after me and after this study is concluded. We are always making history, be it through what we choose to preserve, what we study, what we omit, and any instance of events that makes meaning and identity is one of value, and one that deserves preservation in some context. My ultimate desire, to serve the community which I have studied, feels realized in knowing that my dissertation not only provides scholarly insight into archival methods, queer games, and advocacy, but a personal narrative that reflects the importance of storytelling to archives, to marginalized communities, and to queer people who know, be it consciously or through some sense of longing, what it means to lose track of their own history.

## APPENDIX A: GUIDELINES FOR RHETORICAL ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

From Gaillet, L. (2010) Archival Survival: Navigating Historical Research. In A. Ramsey, W. Sharer, B. L'Eplattenier, & L. Mastrangelo (Eds.), *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition* (pp. 28-39). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

1. Visit any collection of primary research materials or archives located nearby. Research the collection and become familiar with the procedures of archival research.
2. Select a site to visit or collection to examine, and conduct preliminary investigation online relevant to the research topic. Become familiar with online catalog.
3. Find possible funding sources to support your research and defray the expense of travel. Make hard copies of findings.
4. Practice grant application writing and include all requested materials for the grant.
5. Plan an itinerary and budget for visiting an archive outside your own geographical region. Account for transportation and other unexpected costs related to the regional area.
6. Make a list of and obtain the necessary documents. Bring a reference letter vouching for your institutional affiliation and validity of the research project from both your department chair and research advisors. Bring identification to the research site and a written description of the project, to let the librarian know you're 'sanctioned'.
7. Make a list of equipment needed onsite: laptop, cables, wireless cards, adaptors, pencils, pens, paper (if electronic note taking is not accommodated), sturdy bag
8. Before your visit, contact the librarian or curator to arrange specific times to visit the collections.
9. Become familiar with the rules and regulations of the facility ahead of time, via their website or asking the librarian.

### General Rules:

- Know what items are forbidden - could include permanent markers, cell phones, computer bags, bulky notebooks, etc.
- Wash your hands before handling documents.
- Don't hold materials while reading. Place squarely in the middle of the reading desk so edges don't get crumpled or stained.
- Use provided foam wedges to support documents and help best position materials for reading.

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