Little Big Stories: Case Studies in Diversifying the Archival Record through Community Oral Histories

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ABSTRACT

The use and development of oral history programs has become a popular way for archives to document events and communities, either as a supplement to traditional records or as discrete collections. In particular, projects that focus on involving groups traditionally underrepresented within the archival record are becoming increasingly common in both large institutions and small community archives. This article presents three case studies of oral history projects dedicated to forging ties in the community and increasing diversity in their collections. In these case studies, the authors discuss the inceptions of their projects and the ups and downs of developing community oral history programs, including building trust, engaging community members, participation of volunteers and students, consideration of alternative models such as story circles, establishment of processes and procedures that can be replicated and sustained, lessons learned and future steps. The authors also reflect on the impact of unexpected roadblocks, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic. By understanding the ways these elements shape oral history programs, archivists can find new ways to frame those programs around the communities in question, creating more inclusive collections and better serving both institution and community.

Introduction

For communities that have traditionally been marginalized in both the historical record and in historiography, oral histories can be a form of empowerment, a way in which community members can literally add their voices to the historical narrative. The process of a community sharing its stories can provide personal opportunities for self-reflection, an appreciation for the struggles endured, and a celebration of the community's accomplishments. As part of the 2020 Western Archivists conference, we planned to share our experiences working in collaboration with our local

communities to develop oral history projects across the west coast of the United States.[1]

Even though the conference was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and all of our projects were impacted by cancellations and postponements, the three of us were still able to come together to reflect and talk about our collaborative projects as three case studies. First, Heather Lanctot describes "The Stories and Voices of the Women of Yolo County" project which aims to collect, preserve, and provide access to stories from a group of female residents from Yolo County, California, to begin diversifying the Yolo County Archives. Then, Natalia Fernández discusses working with members of the LGBTQ+ community in Corvallis, Oregon to assist them in organizing a series of trans storytelling circles and a disability and queer identities story circle. Lastly, Beth McDonald shares California State University, Dominguez Hills' "The Fannie Lou Hamer Queen Mothers Oral History Project" which celebrates the stories of African American women who have contributed to their local communities in Southern California.

In each case study, we provide information about our repositories as well as ourselves, especially in the context of our identities in relation to the communities with whom we are collaborating, and we explain our projects' development, implementation, challenges, and next steps. We share our experiences building trust and engaging community members, managing the participation of volunteers and students, and the considering of alternative models such as story circles, as well as the establishment of processes and procedures that can be replicated and sustained. We hope that archivists, librarians, students, or members of any cultural institution with an interest in oral history can learn from our experiences and find new ways to engage with their communities with a focus toward encouraging and supporting them to share their voices while also diversifying archival collections and the historical narrative through their local communities.

Oral Histories and Community Archives

Oral history has existed as a tool of memory-keeping for millennia, from Greek and Chinese histories taken several hundred years BCE to the oral traditions of the griot in West Africa or the Indigenous peoples of North America. For most of that time, these oral traditions served as a way to document events of importance and to pass on the daily activities, spiritual practices, social structures, and cultural wisdom of a people; though not always seen as having a wider significance.[2]

In the United States, the use of oral history began to grow in the first half of the 20th century with the Federal Writers' Project, part of the Works Progress

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1. Our conference panel was to include projects within California, Oregon, and Washington. Kurtis Bullchild was an original panel member who intended to present on an oral history project within his tribal community, the Nisqually Indian Tribe in Olympia, Washington. Bullchild was unable to join us in co-authoring this article.

Administration. This project performed widespread interviews with farmers, laborers, and former slaves in the 1930s as part of an effort to record the diverse life stories of Americans.[3] The idea of memory as a viable historical record was gaining traction as an archival paradigm and oral history played an important role.[4] Oral history became a popular technique to complement the historical record with personalized accounts of events and institutional histories. Oral history programs were formed in universities and government agencies across the country; the Oral History Association was founded in 1966, and the Society of American Archivists created its oral history group three years later.

In the latter half of the 20th century, oral history came to be seen as more than just a supplement to official records. Historians and archivists spoke out against the disparities in oral history, which, like more traditional archival records, focused disproportionately on "the important and powerful people of the society, tending to ignore the impotent and obscure."[5] Oral history became a unique and effective tool for recording the process of memory-making and identity formation in underrepresented people and events such as people of color, women, immigrants, and social justice movements. They have also proved a powerful tool for framing the testimonies of survivors of traumatic events.[6] And they have been embraced when working with Indigenous communities for its mirroring of the oral traditions those communities have used for generations.[7] As these programs grew and developed, standards were put in place to govern the process. While oral histories do not qualify specifically as "research" and therefore often do not fall under the purview of Institutional Review Boards, the establishment of ethical practices and obligations

2. Rebecca Sharpless, "The History of Oral History," in *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology*, ed. Thomas L. Charleton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham, MD: Rowman Altamira, 2006): 9-10.

3. Jessica Wagner Webster, "'Filling the Gaps': Oral Histories and Underdocumented Populations in The American Archivist, 1938-2011," *The American Archivist* 79, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2016): 256.

4. Sharpless, "The History of Oral History," 13.

5. Howard Zinn, "Secrecy, Archives, and the Public Interest," *The Midwestern Archivist* 2 no. 2 (1977): 22.

6. Hannah Holtschneider, "Narrating the Archive? Family Collections, the Archive, and the Historian," *Shofar* 37, no. 3 (2019): 334.

7. Shailesh Shukla, et al. "The Odyssey of Oral History Interviewing in Community-Based Action Research: Exploring Indigenous Knowledges and Food Sovereignty in Fisher River, Manitoba, Canada," *SAGE Research Methods Cases* (2014).

(such as the establishment of informed consent) protect the narrator and put the interviewer and narrator on a more collaborative level.[8, 9]

As the creation and use of oral histories grew, libraries and archives became the de facto homes for them, with information professionals embracing the challenges of counterbalancing preservation and privacy with providing access for a wide audience.[10] Archives began to seek ways to diversify their collections in both scope and material, and oral history was uncovered as a powerful way for under-documented communities to see themselves reflected in the archival record.[11] As the notion of archives began to shift from that of keepers of evidence to preservers of memory, the archivist became a more active participant in the curation and creation of the archive.[12] Modern archivists are in an ideal position to either partner with oral historians or build their own programs, creating oral histories that speak to and for their communities, offering, as James Fogerty put it, "the opportunity to balance an archival collection by extending documentation to groups and individuals not normally possessed of papers."[13] Their unique expertise and (sometimes) greater resources place them squarely at the crossroads of memory-keeping and memory-making.

An archivist's decision on who, what, when, and how an oral history is created has a distinct effect on the finished product.[14] As the nature of oral history projects has evolved to meet the changing needs of the archival profession and more truthfully reflect the diversity of society and communities, archivists have begun exploring ways of conducting oral histories beyond the standard one-on-one interviewer/narrator format and methods to ensure the community feels in control of their narratives. As Terry Cook puts it, "there was no 'Truth' to be found or protected in archives, but many truths, many voices, many perspectives, many stories."[15] And not all stories can be told in the same way.

8.   "Information about IRBs," Oral History Association, updated July 2020, last accessed December 2020, https://www.oralhistory.org/information-about-irbs.

9.   "OHA Statement on Ethics," Oral History Association, last accessed December 2020, https://www.oralhistory.org/oha-statement-on-ethics.

10. Rebecca Ciota, "Alumni Oral Histories: A Collaboration Between the Libraries and Development and Alumni Relations at Grinnell College," *Collaborative Librarianship* 11, no. 3 (2019): 160.

11. Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez, "'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing': Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives," *The American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2016): 70.

12. Terry Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms," *Archival Science* 13 (2013): 108.

13. James E. Fogerty, "Filling the Gap: Oral History in the Archives," *The American Archivist* 46 (Spring 1983): 155.

14. Holtschneider, "Narrating the Archive?" 350.

15. Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community," 100.

Groundswell, a collective of oral historians, information professionals, and community organizers, explored the value of different methods of group interviewing including multiple narrators, multiple narrators and interviewers, group interviews, and story circles. They found that while these formats posed unique challenges, particularly with logistical and processing matters, the added layers of intersubjectivity made for rich and complex narratives. Group interviews allowed narrators to "jog" each other's memories, discover a collective identity, and reveal multiple viewpoints of the same event or movement.[16] Some group oral histories have been framed as informal discussions surrounding a group activity, with narrators discussing the cultural and community aspects of the task.[17] Others have used a more hands-off approach, employing modern social networks or community intermediaries to engage their narrators and bring the interview back to the archivist.[18] In all cases, group interviews require a relationship with not just a single narrator, but their community.

As stated above, archivists have recognized the need for the representation of marginalized or under-documented communities since the 1960s. F. Gerald Ham called for archivists to consider the archives as a "mirror for mankind" and to diversify their collections accordingly.[19] Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario Ramirez stress the power of community archives in combating symbolic annihilation and speak of the "profound personal implications" for individuals and communities in seeing themselves represented in the archival record.[20] As the archival profession began to explore how to include these communities in collections, oral history was promoted as a way to better document groups that might not have written histories or lacked the resources to maintain their own official records.[21] Marginalized communities are not always inclined to trust traditional archives because of archives' histories of exploiting and marginalizing them, and outreach efforts are not always met with the warmest welcome.[22]

16. "Reportback: Letting Go of The One-on-One Interview?" Groundswell, published September 25, 2014, last accessed December 2020, http://www.oralhistoryforsocialchange.org/blog/2014/9/25/reportback-letting-go-of-the-one-on-one-interview.

17. Shukla, et al., "The Odyssey of Oral History Interviewing."

18. Caroline Daniels, et al. "Saving All the Freaks on the Life Raft: Blending Documentation Strategy with Community Engagement to Build a Local Music Archives," *The American Archivist* 78, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2015): 239.

19. F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *The American Archivist* 38 (January 1975): 13.

20. Caswell, et al., "'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing'," 59

21. Fogerty, "Filling the Gap," 155-156.

22. Mark Winston, "University and Community Partners in Oral History Projects: Fulfilling the Urban University Research and Service Mission within the Complexity of Engaged Scholarship," *Metropolitan Universities* 24, no. 1 (May 2013): 88.

Community-based archiving evolved in response, shifting certain archival paradigms away from ownership toward collaboration. Partnership, rather than possession, became the standard for working with communities and their archives. The shape and goals of a project were viewed more as an ongoing conversation between archivists and communities, rather than a defined set of expectations. Archivists have found that treating community members as equals with each side possessing unique expertise and resources, and sharing authority over the preservation, description of, and access to collections leads to a sense of shared authority and a more complete and inclusive collective history.[23]

When discussing the notion of community, archivists must ask themselves how that notion is being defined in their oral history project. Does the community self-identify or is the archivist doing the defining? Though definitions of community and community archives tend to center around ethnic and racial minorities, sexual orientation, or religious denominations, a community can form through geographic location, shared trauma, or a variety of other experiences.[24] Linda Shopes warns against defining a community by only one point of identity at the expense of others. She advises that it is better to think of a community as being made up of people with multiple identities that intersect at a shared "sense of 'we-ness'" or framing a community oral history project to define a historical problem or event that has affected that community.[25] Andrew Flinn reminds us that even marginalized communities can be exclusionary, promoting certain narratives over others, and the archivist should consider who is speaking, and who is missing.[26] Embracing the broadest intersectionality of a given community will ensure that the oral histories are more completely representative of that community and its shared experience, knowledge, and relationships.

Engaging in oral history with a defined community requires the archivist to negotiate their status with that community as either an insider or an outsider. Neither position is innately good or bad, but both have their benefits and their pitfalls, and both affect the final form of an oral history. Indeed, it may require the archivist to step back from the role of interviewer entirely in favor of someone better suited. The archivist must understand what effect these relationships have on what narrators do or do not say, and what questions the interviewer does or does not ask. Insiders hear different stories than outsiders; archivists must acknowledge that and decide which ones they want to hear, while also respecting and empowering the story

23. Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd, "Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy, and the Mainstream," *Archival Science* 9. no 1-2 (2009): 83.

24. Daniels et al, "Saving All the Freaks on the Life Raft," 245

25. Linda Shopes, "Community Oral History: Where We Have Been, Where We Are Going," *Oral History* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 101-102.

26. Andrew Flinn, "Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 28, no. 2 (2007): 165.

sharers to construct their own narratives.[27] An interviewer's status as an outsider or insider is not concrete, but a fluid state. Concha Delgado Gaitan's studies show that an interviewer who is initially an outsider to the community can, over time, become an insider as the interview experience provides common ground.[28] Amy Tooth Murphy's work considers how an individual's intersectional identities (race, gender, age, sexual orientation, etc.) can make them both insider and outsider simultaneously.[29]

Outsider interviewers are sometimes seen as neutral parties, perceived by the narrators as coming to the interview with no agenda and no biases or stake in internal politics. However, viewing the interviewer as "neutral" can unintentionally put the interviewer in a position of privilege or power over the narrator. An insider should also take care not to place themselves as the expert on the subject or community or allow the narrator to do so. This can have the unintentional effect of silencing the narrator if they feel their experience runs counter to the researcher's expectation.[30] In either case, the power imbalance can lead to the interviewer imposing their own agency on the interview and the potential exploitation of the narrator and their community.[31] Interviewers and archivists alike come with biases and preconceptions about communities; self-reflection and self-awareness is a vital part of project development.

Outsider interviewers are sometimes seen as having a certain influence, providing a platform through which a community can tell their story to the wider world.[32] Internal boundaries that separate the community may be lowered, providing intersectional community access and information where an insider would not be permitted.[33] Narrators will often go into greater detail with background and establishing information than they would with an insider, who would be assumed to already know those things. Conversely, as an outsider, there will be internal connections, conflicts, and complications that the interviewer is unaware of that can cause tensions despite a previously amicable relationship.[34]

27. Amy Tooth Murphy, "Listening In, Listening Out: Intersubjectivity and the Impact of Insider and Outsider Status in Oral History Interviews," *Oral History* 48, no. 1 (2020): 29.

28. Concha Delgado Gaitan, "Researching Change and Changing the Researcher," *Harvard Educational Review* 63 (1993): 409.

29. Murphy, "Listening In, Listening Out," 17.

30. Fogerty, "Filling the Gap," 155.

31. Sofia Villenas, "The Colonizer/Colonized Chicana Ethnographer: Identity, Marginalization, and Co-optation in the Field," *Harvard Educational Review* 66, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 713.

32. Murphy, "Listening In, Listening Out," 21-22.

33. Margaret Strobel, "Doing Oral History as an Outsider," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 70.

34. Murphy, "Listening In, Listening Out," 20-27.

Interviewers from inside a community can be better suited to a project, due to their innate knowledge of relevant social norms and customs.[35] They come into the process prepared with an understanding of the culture and the challenges they face, and a "shared identity [that] is invaluable in overcoming many other social and cultural differences."[36] Additionally, an insider often has pre-established connections and an increased platform for visibility within the community. However, narrators will sometimes make assumptions based on shared experience and assume that some things go without saying, leaving out contextual information that they would not with an outsider.[37] Additionally, particularly with underrepresented or marginalized communities, an insider must consider their position in relation to both the community and to the institution or dominant power structure they may represent. As a "native" interviewer, it can be possible to inadvertently exploit one's own community while simultaneously being exploited.[38]

In working with their communities, the archivists in all three case studies below negotiated positions as insiders and outsiders to find the place in which the narrators felt most comfortable, even if that meant stepping outside the interview process entirely.

Heather Lanctot: The Stories and Voices of the Women of Yolo County

The Yolo County Archives (YCA), as part of the public archives tradition, helps Yolo County maintain and provide access to government records on behalf of its citizens.[39] With the majority of YCA's collection being government records, the voices that have historically been preserved are largely male and white. Even up until the 1960s, there was a lack of women working in government. According to a 1963 report by the United States Department of Labor, women were underrepresented in "highly paid professions, in industry, in business, and in government," making up only 32 percent of the United States workforce. Additionally, that same report shows that women only made up 20 percent of the workforce in 1920.[40] The women who were involved in politics in Yolo County reflected this national trend. Betsy Marchand, the first woman elected to the Yolo County Board of Supervisors, wasn't elected until

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35. Sandra Borger, "Coming from the Outside In: Being an Outsider in Oral Interviews," *Preteritus* 2 (2010): 10.

36. Murphy, "Listening In, Listening Out," 9.

37. Ibid, 15

38. Villenas, "The Colonizer/Colonized Chicana Ethnographer," 712.

39. James M. O'Toole and Richard J. Cox, *Understanding Archives & Manuscripts* (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 2006), 53-55.

40. United States Department of Labor, *American Women: A Report of the President's Commission on the Status of Women* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Labor, 1963) 28, accessed December 2020, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015016913678.

1972. In addition to government records, YCA also collects materials from local organizations, businesses, and families. Both the government and community records skew toward the perspectives and experiences of white men. This reality prompted me to pursue a more inclusive approach to collections development. The "Stories and Voices of the Women of Yolo County" was an oral history project that allowed us to explore how we might begin to work towards a more diverse and representative collection.

The YCA was established in 1985, in Woodland, California, as the official repository for the records of Yolo County. The repository has been run by both full- and part-time, professional and paraprofessional, staff. Additionally, volunteers, including members of the Friends of the Yolo County Archives (FYCA), have helped to process collections, create finding aids and box lists, perform research for patrons, research and develop exhibits, and conduct oral history interviews. The YCA currently has a staff of 1.5 FTE and is supported by several volunteers and one additional part-time library assistant. The YCA is part of the Yolo County Library system and the collection dates from 1850 to the present, with the bulk of the collection ranging from the 1860s to the 1960s.

Project Conception

In the spring of 2018, the YCA received a $1,500 donation from the Yolo County Women's History Month Committee to help support women's collections. As the Archives and Records Center Coordinator, I saw this as an opportunity to work on collection development and diversify the archival record. In the 1960s and 1970s, the homogeneity of archives began to be questioned when historians realized that archives lacked the stories of marginalized communities, including people of color and women. Oral history has proved to be a useful tool for injecting the historical record with a "multitude of perspectives and issues, [and] provide[ing] a vehicle by which new voices can be heard along with more familiar ones." Oral histories are also helping historians and archivists examine new ideas and established ideas through new lenses.[41] With an additional $800 of funding from the FYCA, YCA staff were able to purchase technology and fund a paid intern to pursue an oral history project that was aimed at collecting and preserving the experiences of Yolo County women. The goals for the "Stories and Voices of the Women of Yolo County" were to 1) collect, preserve, and provide access to stories from a group of female Yolo County residents in one attempt to diversify YCA's collection; 2) develop sustainable procedures for oral histories that could be replicated in future projects; and 3) provide oral history and archives experience for a paid intern.

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41. Mary A. Caldera and Kathryn M. Neal, eds., introduction to *Through the Archival Looking Glass: A Reader on Diversity and Inclusion* (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 2014), xix.

Project Inception

I began this project by conducting research into the department's legacy oral history processes, procedures, forms, and documentation. Additionally, information was gathered from a local colleague about their volunteer-run oral history program. Previous oral history projects at YCA had been conducted either by volunteers or by other community groups, independent of the Archives. Within the Archives' holdings are three distinct collections of oral histories and other one-off interviews that appear as parts of larger collections. Two of the collections were created by FYCA volunteers and the third was created by the Friends of the Winters Library. These three collections include stories from members of the Japanese American community, interviews with historically significant individuals including government officials, and residents of Winters, a town in Yolo County. These interviews, although informational and diverse additions to the collection, sometimes lack continuity and clarity in their execution. The accompanying oral history agreements do not always exist, transcriptions were rarely done, and recordings are sometimes missing because they were historically loaned out and weren't officially accessioned into the collection.

The next step in the pursuit of this project was the creation of procedures and documentation to avoid some of the legacy issues that were uncovered previously. Through research, including collecting documents and information from colleagues at the Placer County Archives and Research Center, I was able to develop some preliminary documents, templates, forms, and loose procedures for future oral history interviewers. A two-sided document titled "Yolo County Archives Guidelines for Oral History Interviews" was created to provide a quick, high-level document that synthesizes oral history theory into a format that is more quickly digested. This document included the following sections: Identifying the Interviewee and Gaining Approval, Scheduling Interviews, Interview Preparation, Conducting the Interview, and Completing the Interview. In addition to the oral history guide, templates for correspondence with the interviewee were created, and the oral history agreement form was edited, reviewed, and approved by Yolo's County Counsel. Lastly, YCA staff researched oral history equipment and decided to purchase two Zoom H1 recorders, SD storage cards, and carrying cases for the recorders. Staff decided to conduct practice interviews to determine if additional equipment, including microphones, was necessary.

With procedures and documents solidified, I turned my attention to developing a job description and recruitment for an intern through the County's Human Resources Department (HR). The recruitment was publicized through the Yolo County Library's social media accounts, San Jose State University's School of Information Facebook page, Society of California Archivists listserv, and through colleagues at local colleges and universities. After initial screening by HR, Archives staff scheduled and conducted interviews that included questions and a presentation component. I have found that presentations are extremely beneficial when finding interns. They provide an opportunity for the interns to talk about projects that they

are both excited about and very familiar with. It is enlightening to learn about the candidate's approach to projects and see their passion shine through. We selected an intern for this project based on her background in Museum Studies and Art History and her interest in archives and libraries. During her onboarding, I provided our intern with an introduction to the history of Yolo County and the Archives, as well as additional books from our Reading Room and Professional Development libraries about county history and conducting oral histories.

Yolo County has a population of 220,500 residents with 74 percent of the residents identifying as white, 32 percent identifying as Hispanic or Latino, 15 percent identifying as Asian, and 3 percent identifying as Black. The County also has smaller percentages of residents who identify as Native American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and as being from two or more races. Additionally, 51 percent of Yolo's residents identify as female.[42] As a cisgender, heterosexual, white female, who grew up in a Northern California county with a population similar in size to Yolo, there are many aspects of my identity that help me to be an insider with Yolo County community members. However, elements of my identity, the identity of our female intern, and the intersectionality of those identities make us outsiders to the stories and experiences of the women we interviewed for this project. Some of the ways in which the project intern and I had outsider perspectives with some of the interviewees' lives and experiences included not being artists, not having grown up in Yolo County, not being business owners, and not identifying as LGBTQ+ or as members of ethnic minority groups. We have some insider perspectives as well, including currently being residents of Yolo County, working within the county; we are college graduates; we are women, mothers, daughters, and granddaughters. These insider and outsider perspectives and identity intersections helped us to both support the women that were involved in this project while also acknowledging our biases.

In developing our list of potential interviewees, we solicited FYCA Board Members, local historians, and members of the county's historical societies for suggestions of women to interview. Additionally, our intern reached out to two of her friends in the LGTBQ+ community for suggestions for participants. Our intern organized the list of suggested women, based on the area of the county that they each best represented. Her strategy was to reach out to potential interviewees from different parts of the county with a mix of backgrounds and experiences, with the goal of building an inclusive project that was representative of a diverse group of women. Inquiries to potential interviewees were personalized, and our ability to reference the name of a friend who recommended them for the project helped to build trust. She then developed a pre-interview survey and potential questions for each woman who was interested in participating. The pre-interview survey and the prepared questions were additional tools for building trust and establishing boundaries for the interview. The interviewees were able to provide feedback on the

42. "QuickFacts, Yolo County; California," United States Federal Census Bureau, last accessed December 2020, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/yolocountycalifornia,US/PST045219.

interview questions and make changes and additions to suggested interview questions and topics prior to the interview. Lastly, interviews were scheduled for two-hour sittings and were conducted in locations that the participating women selected.

Through the course of this project, our intern worked with eight women who are part of the agricultural, artist, LGBTQ+, Latinx, Spanish American, Japanese American, and Native American communities. These women graciously agreed to share their stories about the different regions of our county, including Woodland, Winters, Knights Landing, West Sacramento, Guinda, Davis, and Clarksburg. Through the course of the project and the interviews, our intern learned about the lives of some very interesting women and their contributions to the culture of the county. Through the interviews, our intern documented the histories and stories of these women and their families. Some of the themes that were revealed included: women working in male-dominated professions, what brought people to Yolo County, raising children in the county today, and the work and lives of previous generations of women (mothers and grandmothers).

Jody Bogle, the Director of Public Relations for the family-run Bogle Vineyards in Clarksburg, discussed her feelings concerning female leadership in the wine industry. When asked if Jody thought it was important for women to hold leadership roles in the wine industry, she responded by saying that it was important for women to have leadership roles in all industries. She also "hoped that that was what she was conveying to [her] daughters."

Julia Luckenbill and DD Levine of Davis were also interviewed for this project. Luckenbill and Levine were the first same-sex couple to get married in Yolo County after Proposition 8 was struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2013. In their interview, they discussed how their ability to get married ensured that they would both be able to take care of their daughter if something happened to one of them. They also discussed, at length, the process of becoming parents as a lesbian couple.

Gloria Lopez, an author, supporter of local history, and resident of Winters, spoke about her experiences as a descendant of Spanish immigrants and growing up in the Spanish immigrant community. She explained that she has become who she is today because of her ancestor's hard work; "[she] is [standing] on their shoulders." Gloria also talked about the hard work that women traditionally performed on the farm. Her grandmother's generation would not only work in the fields, but they would also cook the meals and tend to housework.

Linnea Wong, a glass artist and teacher with a studio in West Sacramento, spoke a lot about the future of the glass industry, especially with regard to energy use and recycling. Additionally, she spoke about the cost associated with sustaining studios and how to make the art more accessible to everyone, including younger people. Wong also explained that, although she worked in male-dominated fields like glass work and graphic design, she did not experience the level of discrimination that other women may have because of where she was living in the United States while doing this work.

Project Challenges

There were a number of lessons learned from this project that will inform the next steps for this and future oral history endeavors. This project, and its completion, was unfortunately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although eight women were interested in participating and were scheduled to be interviewed, only four interviews were completed before the implementation of the shelter-in-place guidelines by the county. This, in addition to the challenges involved with communicating with multiple interviewees and scheduling interviews, has been one of the biggest lessons learned from this project. It is not always possible to fit an oral history project into an internship timeline. In the future, it would probably be a better use of time to have interviewees on board with a project prior to hiring an intern. Although the project encountered a very large hurdle, in the form of a pandemic, our intern is thankfully available to continue when it is safe to do so.

Other lessons learned during this project have to do with selecting interviewees. Reaching out to the community of local historians and historical organizations for recommendations for interviewees was ultimately very successful. Not only was this list of names helpful for this project, it can also be used for future oral history projects. Something enlightening about the project was learning about other potential interviewees during interviews. Many of the women being interviewed were very excited to recommend their friends who had interesting backgrounds or stories to share about their time living in the county. It may be a good idea, in future projects, to ask for recommendations for potential interviewees as part of the primer questionnaire. Lastly, as interviews were completed and our intern started to explore ways to more easily transcribe the interviews, we were confronted with the reality of how time-consuming and daunting this task was. She ultimately decided to play the recordings and run them through the "voice typing" function in Google Docs and then make the necessary edits. If transcriptions become too cumbersome and our intern starts to run short on time, transcriptions will be restructured and timestamps with references to interview content will be used in place of full transcriptions. To date, none of the interviews have been transcribed.

Next Steps

The next steps for this project include completing interviews and transcriptions and uploading the entirety of the project onto YCA's digital asset management system for long-term preservation and access.[43] The use of culturally competent metadata that accurately reflects current norms will be another opportunity to provide more inclusion and accurate representation for our interviewees. In addition, once the project is completed, it will be publicized through a press release, social media, local

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43. As of July 2020, the Yolo County Archives and Yolo County Historical Collection are implementing an integrated content and digital asset management system through Axiell. The anticipated completion for this implementation is December 2020. When the database is live, the link to the website will be located here: https://yolocountylibrary.org/locations/archives/.

historical newsletters, and other outlets including listservs. Lastly, the processes and procedures that were developed for this project will be reviewed and revised before being utilized as a foundation for future YCA oral history projects.

Natalia Fernández: Story Circles with the LGBTQ+ Community

I have been the curator of the Oregon Multicultural Archives (OMA) since 2010 and the curator of the OSU Queer Archives (OSQA) since its establishment in 2014. Both the OMA and OSQA are a part of the Oregon State University (OSU) Special Collections and Archives Research Center (SCARC).[44] My mission for the OMA and OSQA is to work in collaboration with Oregon's African American, Asian American, Latinx, Native American, and OSU's LGBTQ+ communities to support them in preserving their histories and sharing their stories. My work includes collection development, instruction, exhibit curation, public programming, and the development and management of OMA and OSQA oral history projects. While the OMA was established in 2005, I co-founded OSU Queer Archives with OSU Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Professor Bradley Boovy in 2014 based on community desire and interest. In collaboration with the local community, we established the collection scope for the archives and developed a network of contacts, with a focus on both the university and local county communities.[45] As a Latinx cisgender woman who does not identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, but strives to be an effective ally, it is essential for me to develop relationships with community liaisons and follow the lead of community members to determine project and activity priorities. One such ongoing activity is gathering oral histories.

Soon after the establishment of OSQA, I created the OSU Queer Archives Oral History Collection, which consists of interviews and event recordings that document the experiences and perspectives of members of the LGBTQ+ community and its allies who have spent at least portions of their lives at Oregon State University and/or in Benton County, Oregon.[46] The majority of the OSQA oral history collection is

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44. The Oregon Multicultural Archives (OMA) and OSU Queer Archives (OSQA) are accessible at http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oma-osqa.html.

45. For more information regarding the establishment of OSQA, see the 2016 article "Co-Founding a Queer Archives: A Collaboration between an Archivist and a Professor" by Natalia Maria Fernández and Bradley Boovy in *Archival Practice*, available at http://libjournal.uncg.edu/ap/article/view/1365.

46. The OSU Queer Archives Oral History Collection (http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/findingaids/index.php?p= collections/findingaid&id=2934) is made available via the LGBTQ+ Voices website http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/multiculturalvoices/lgbtq.

indexed with some recordings fully transcribed.[47] The bulk of the OSQA interviews are the product of an annual collaboration with the OSU history course Lesbian and Gay Movements in Modern America. I train the students to conduct one-on-one interviews which are then donated to OSQA. I have also worked with the OSU Pride Center and SOL: LGBTQ+ Multicultural Support Network, to train students to conduct interviews for inclusion in the collection.

Project Conception

During the 2019-2020 academic year, I partnered with LGBTQ+ community members, who were also student staff at the OSU Hattie Redmond Women and Gender Center, to assist them in organizing a series of trans storytelling circles. I also partnered with OSU Pride Center student staff, who were members of both the local LGBTQ+ and disabled communities, to organize a disability and queer identities story circle. The purpose of the story circles was to give these communities at Oregon State an opportunity to come together in a shared space and hear one another's stories. While OSU does not collect data on the demographics of the university's LGBTQ+ and disabled communities, and the US Census does not collect data on the state level, information included in a 2018 Oregon Health Authority report notes that in Oregon, 0.65% of adults identify as transgender and 24% of adults along with 30% of high school age youth report living with a disability.[48] Although the transgender community is just a fraction of the population and the disabled community is a substantial portion of the population, I knew that both communities are underrepresented within the archives, especially stories shared by community members themselves.

The student staff, who would also act as the story circle facilitators, expressed a desire to share their own stories as LGBTQ+ and disabled community members, as well as give participants in the storytelling circles the opportunity to have their stories archived within OSQA. These student staff acted as my community liaisons for the project. Throughout this case study, when referring to the "student staff", "facilitators," or the "community liaisons," I am referring to the same individuals, my project partners who engaged in various roles throughout the project timeline.

What is a story circle? A story circle typically consists of a relatively small group of individuals who share stories based on a common theme. The group of participants sits in a circle, with a facilitator who ensures each participant has the opportunity to

47. The OSQA oral history collection is one of many within SCARC. SCARC has a robust oral history program, with close to 50 oral history collections and over 2,000 interviews as of mid-year 2020. In 2017, SCARC began using the OHMS (Oral History Metadata Synchronizer), a web-based system to time-correlate transcripts or indexed interviews connecting the textual search term to the corresponding moment in the recorded interview online. OHMS was created by the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky Libraries.

48. Oregon Health Authority, "Oregon's State Health Assessment," 2018, https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/ABOUT/Documents/sha/state-health-assessment-full-report.pdf.

share their story. The facilitator keeps time, with each person having equal time to share, without interruption. The facilitator can also share their own story as a community member, as well as to model the structure of the story circle format for the other participants. After each participant shares, the group thanks them for sharing and takes a deep breath together before moving on to the next story. Those who are not sharing (and not all participants have to share), actively listen to the stories shared. After all who desire to share have had the opportunity to do so, the story circle may continue with another prompt, open conversation between participants, and continued facilitation as needed.

The U.S. Department of Arts and Culture has a page titled "Story Circles: Tool for Community Dialogue" with information regarding principles, guidelines, and an explanation of how story circles work, along with information for facilitators, recorders, and a sample schedule for a story circle.[49] Before being approached by the students for this project in 2019, I had worked with one other group to record a story circle. In 2016, two OSU students conducted a story circle as part of their project entitled "Voices Without Borders" for their Arts and Social Justice Practicum course. The story circle, which documents the stories of Latinx and Hmong students, is now a part of the Oregon Multicultural Archives Oral History Collection.[50] Based on this collaborative experience, in combination with the information on the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture website, I worked with the students to brainstorm ideas and plan for the trans story circles and the disability and queer identities story circle. Through the partnership, I offered my expertise as an insider to the archival process, specifically the logistics and planning for conducting oral history projects, and the student staff offered their expertise as members of the LGBTQ+ and disabled communities. Notably, the insider/outsider lines are not firmly drawn as some of the student staff had conducted oral history interviews in the past and were able to draw from those experiences. Additionally, because the student staff were also planning to act as both the facilitators of the story circles as well as participants, they also offered their thoughts on the type of participant experience they hoped to have.

Project Inception

In my meetings and communications with the story circle facilitators, we discussed a variety of project elements including the overall project goals, timeline, format, consent process, community access via the archives, recording process, editing and transcription, promotion, and other related ideas. Since the goal of the project was to offer community members a space to come together and share their stories, they planned for a series of story circles to allow for more individuals to

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49. "Story Circles: Tool for Community Dialogue," U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, last accessed December 2020, https://usdac.us/storycircles.

50. For more information, see the Oregon Multicultural Archives blog post "Voices Without Borders ~ Stories of Latinx and Hmong Students," http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/ oregonmulticulturalarchives/2016/03/19/voiceswithoutborders.

participate. The original goal was to host five trans story circles during the months of January-May 2020 with a different theme for each gathering. A disabled and queer story circle would be hosted during the winter months with a potential second gathering in the spring. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were only two trans story circles, in January and February, and one queer and disabled peoples story circle in February.

We made sure to talk through the logistics of the story circles, including the location, format, and the process to obtain consent. For the location, we went to the space together to create a few mock setups to see which would work best, and importantly, how the circle of chairs would be configured so that the participants could be seen on camera. The plan for the format of the circle included an introduction to the project and the topic(s) for the gathering, a group understanding of the consent process, participant introductions (names, pronouns, and an ice breaker), and then the prompt for the circle. For the consent process, I shared our oral history consent form and explained that the consent form allows the archives to make the recording available online. If a participant did not want the recording made available online, I would need to know. I also shared that if a participant wanted to remain anonymous, they could, but I would still need a signed consent form. We implemented a color-coded process via the use of lanyards, stickers, or nametags, depending on the supplies available. The facilitators shared that the color-coding was a previously used and effective technique in other group settings, and the participants appreciated the various options for levels of participation. Green signified "yes, I can be recorded and use my name", yellow meant "yes, I can be recorded, but wish to remain anonymous", and red meant "I want to participate, but then be edited out of the recording completely." In practice, this worked well for the story circles. We also color-coded the consent forms so the participants' decisions were documented. As participants entered the space, the facilitators welcomed them and explained the plan for the gathering, including the consent forms, and prior to leaving, they ensured all consent forms were signed. To ensure future archivists are aware of what the color coding means, the release forms are stored with an explanation of their meaning.

We then discussed the recording and editing process. I recommended an audio recording for the archives and a video recording to make the editing and transcription processes easier. I offered them the archives' equipment but shared that they could also rent equipment from the university's Student Multimedia Studio; they chose to use the archives' equipment. I then offered to participate in the recording process at various levels of participation, depending on what worked best for them. I said I could help do a mock recording to get the space set up and determine possible locations for the equipment; I could help set up and take down the equipment the day of the event, but not stay for the story sharing; or I could attend the event as the equipment person and handle the recording equipment. For the trans story circles, the facilitators decided that I should not be present during the recording as they wanted the space to be occupied only by members of the community. In this case, I helped get all the equipment set up and trained one of the facilitators to use the

camera and audio recorder. In contrast, the facilitators for the disability and queer story circle said it was fine for me to be present, so I managed the recording equipment. Concerning the recordings, I explained that I do not edit recordings unless requested by the donors. I explained that they would be most welcome to edit the recording themselves and submit the final version to me, or that they could review the recording, send me the time stamps for the pieces to edit out, and the archives could do the editing. In both cases, they reviewed the recordings and gave me the timestamps. Because of my positionality as an outsider to the LGBTQ+ and disabled communities, the facilitators also offered to act as the community liaisons between myself and the story circle participants, so if there were questions, concerns, or requests for edits from the participants regarding the recordings, the facilitators would let me know on the participants' behalf.

We also covered what level of access they wanted for the recordings. I shared that if donated to the OSU Queer Archives, the recordings would become part of the OSU Queer Archives Oral History Collection, and if the recordings were made available online, they would be made available as part of the LGBTQ+ Voices site. I explained that if the recordings were added to the archives, but not made available online, the following note would be included with the recording information: "This recording is only available in the SCARC reading room" which means patrons would need to physically come to the archives to access the recording. I also expressed that once content was made available online, our policy was to make it freely available to anyone and that we did not require people to ask us for permission to use the content. I also cautioned that just because someone chose to remain anonymous, that did not mean they could not still be identified depending on what information they chose to share. Both sets of facilitators decided that the recordings should be made available online so that more people could access them, unless any of the participants objected to this. The facilitators made sure to explain to the participants the pros and cons of the levels of access to better inform the participants' desired level of availability. For example, they explained that the benefit of online access would mean more community members would be able to listen and learn from the stories shared, but the draw back could be privacy concerns for the participants. All participants agreed with providing online access, with some choosing to remain anonymous. Another component of access was the transcription of each story circle. I shared that they would be most welcome to transcribe the recordings themselves; or SCARC had student workers who could do this. I also explained that we typically only index recordings, but could complete a full transcription, if requested. Upon request, all the recordings were transcribed.

There were several other considerations I discussed with the story circle organizers including developing promotional activities and offering participants support. While I was not involved in the promotional activities, we talked about the story circles being open to all who self-identify within the community and the use of social media as well as personal invitations to spread the word. Because RSVPs were accepted but not required, we discussed various scenarios to account for if a lot of people came, scenarios such as a modified room set up, less time per participant, or

"worst-case scenario" creating two smaller story circles. In all three cases, less than 10 people participated in each gathering, so our planned setups were unchanged. Also, in all three cases, light refreshments were offered since the circles took place in the late afternoons or early evenings. Additionally, to offer participants the support they needed, for the trans story circles, the facilitators worked with the university's Counseling and Psychological Services to ensure a counselor was present during and after the story circle. The facilitators of the disability and queer identities story circle worked with the university's Disabilities Access Services to address the participants' accessibility needs. These thoughtful considerations helped participants feel supported and helped create the safe spaces the facilitators desired.

Additionally, an idea that I offered the facilitators was to incorporate an arts-based component to the story circle experience. The idea was based on my previous story circle experience in which the facilitators asked participants to draw or collage the stories they shared in the circle. In that case, I photographed the pieces and the participants kept the originals (I added the photographs to the transcript). For the first trans story circle, the plan was to take time at the end for the art-making, but the conversations were so wonderful, they ran out of time. So, during the second gathering, the participants were asked to create their art pieces at the start of the event. This worked very well as it prompted an informal conversation between participants, allowed for late-comers, and enabled facilitators to more easily share information regarding consent and the circle process with each participant. The disabled and queer story circle used the same format. For these circles, the facilitators took photos of the pieces so the originals could be added to the archives and while not fully developed, the idea was to create a zine using the images and quotes from the stories shared.

The participants for all of the story circles were predominantly OSU students and staff, however, some non-OSU community members also participated. Because the story circles were open to all who self-identified within the community, some of the participants knew each other and the facilitators, while others met for the first time. Before beginning the recording, those who did not know one another had the opportunity to meet each other briefly. Depending on the desires of the community, a story circle can be by invitation only so that all the participants have pre-existing relationships, or as in the case of these story circles, the invitation was purposely an open invitation. A potential benefit of an open invitation story circle is for participants to engage in community building by meeting new community members and hearing the stories of others not normally heard within their own social networks.

For each of the story circles, the participants were asked to respond to a prompt or set of prompts instead of a specific set of questions. All of the story circles were structured so that the facilitator, who also acted as a participant, kept time, with each person having equal time to share, without interruption. This ensured each participant had the opportunity to share their story and helped lessen potential imbalances between participants who are naturally more verbal than others and those

who are not. In my role as the archivist, I was either not present for the story circle, or only when requested, acting as the video recorder but not as a participant. The first trans story circle featured six participants, including the facilitators, and the theme for the circle was "coming in vs. coming out" in which participants reflected not only on the traditional coming out experience, but their experiences coming into the LGBTQ+ community.[51] The second trans story circle included eight participants, some of whom participated in the first gathering. The participants were asked to respond to the prompt "How do you experience gender?" through illustrations. Once they were finished drawing, they shared their illustrations and talked about how their artwork related to the prompt. The queer and disabled story circle focused on the intersection between queerness and disability, and also featured about eight participants (though a couple arrived late or left early). This story circle also included a crafting activity prior to beginning the recorded story circle. There were three prompts that participants could respond to including 1) talk about a time when you have been cared for when you needed it, 2) talk about a time when you felt heard or seen in your identity, and 3) talk about a time when you advocated for your own bodily or cognitive needs and autonomy.

Project Challenges

The main project challenges for the story circles included developing the project logistics, the transcription review process, and of course, the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike one-on-one interviews or even group oral history interviews, open call story circles mean that facilitators cannot always plan for the number of participants nor the need for people to arrive late or leave early; therefore, backup plans and flexibility are key. As previously mentioned, oral history interviews within OSQA are not typically transcribed prior to being made available to the public. Instead, they are indexed and timestamped using the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer as this allows for more immediate access for community members to hear the stories shared, with the ability to create transcripts at a future date.[52] However, the facilitators, who were also story circle participants, requested transcriptions for the story circles before being posted so I made sure to have the labor required to create the transcripts. I sent them the transcripts so they could review them to offer editing requests. In addition to the transcriptions taking time to complete, the most time-intensive component was the time needed for the facilitators to review the recordings and the transcripts to request edits as needed. In this case, the facilitators were students who, of course, had other priorities. The transcriptions are complete, but two of the three are still out for review by the facilitators. The three completed story circles occurred prior to the major lockdowns that took place in Oregon in mid-March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The in-person story circles planned for April and May did not occur, however, I was able to discuss the pros and cons of conducting a story circle via Zoom with one of the co-facilitators of the trans story circles.

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51. "Trans Story Circle #1," OSU Multicultural Voices of Oregon, recorded January 22, 2020, http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/multiculturalvoices/item/34951.

Next Steps

As of the summer of 2020, one of the three story circles is available online, and I can make the other two available once I hear back from the facilitators regarding the transcript reviews and requested recording edits. As discussed, only the audio recordings will be made available, and the recordings and transcripts will be added to the LGBTQ+ Voices website. The plan for future story circles is to develop new themes and invite participants to attend as many or as few as desired. My plan for the 2020-2021 academic year is to reconnect with the story circle facilitators and potentially work with other members of the LGBTQ+ community who are interested in organizing story circles. Because of continued physical distancing measures that will be in place throughout the year, I plan to encourage the use of Zoom for virtual story circles and hope there is interest in donating those to the OSU Queer Archives.

Beth McDonald: The Fannie Lou Hamer Queen Mothers Oral History Project

In November 2019, archivists from the Gerth Archives and Special Collections at California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) conducted oral history interviews with members of the Fannie Lou Hamer Queen Mothers Society (FLHQM). The four interviews totaled nine hours of recorded video, and covered topics including narrators' personal histories, their lives in the context of their communities and within the larger national history, their connection and activities with the FLHQM, and their support of CSUDH programs and students. The interviews were considered to be a hugely successful first step in a project aimed at establishing an oral history program that would span university and community alike. They were also a victory in a project that had faced some growing pains from its initial formation to the first proof of concept.

The Gerth Archives and Special Collections at CSUDH are home to the university archives, digital and special collections, rare books and periodicals, and the archives of the California State University system. One of the major collecting focuses of the Gerth Archives is the local history of southern Los Angeles and surrounding areas, including Long Beach, Compton, Carson, Watts, and San Pedro. Their holdings contain primary historical materials documenting the Japanese American incarceration of World War II, the Watts Riots, the 1910 Los Angeles International Aviation Meet, the Tradeswomen Archives, and many more. The Gerth Archives actively pursues local collections in its mission to document the diverse communities they serve.

The Fannie Lou Hamer Queen Mothers are a social and service organization dedicated to promoting and supporting higher education and social justice for African Americans. The group has deep ties to CSUDH. Their members are African American women in their 50s through their 80s who have contributed significantly to their local communities and CSUDH. Many of the women hold one or more graduate degrees. The society was founded in 1996 with the mission of promoting "an

appreciation and respect for African Culture, Worldview, and Humanity."[53] The name of the society was chosen to honor 1) noted activist, community organizer, and civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer; and 2) the traditional Queen Mothers of Africa—women of political and social power, influence, and leadership found in tribes across the continent of Africa. In keeping with those themes, the FLHQM is dedicated to supporting and promoting scholarly and cultural programs at CSUDH, particularly within the Africana Studies program, and representing the campus and surrounding community in social justice endeavors, including voter registration and public awareness campaigns.

Project Conception

This project, like many oral history projects, began with a death. In late 2018, Presiding Queen Mother Mary Anne O'Neal, one of the longest-standing members of the FLHQM, passed away, taking with her both her own history and a significant chapter of the society's shared memory.

In response to this, the dean of the CSUDH Cain Library, Stephanie Brasley, conceived the need for an oral history project with the FLHQM and approached one of my colleagues, Summer Espinoza, about doing oral histories with the remaining members to preserve some of their unique collective memory. It seemed appropriate and in keeping with our collection policy that the Gerth Archives manage this project. Summer had worked for several years with the Go for Broke National Education Center on the oral histories of Japanese American World War II veterans and her experience there and familiarity with the coordination and flexibility required to manage and preserve community oral histories made her uniquely qualified to organize the project.

Summer asked me to be part of the project partly due to my own experience with oral histories, but also because of my relationship with Dr. Hansonia Caldwell. I have been the Music Archivist for the African Diaspora Sacred Music and Musicians Archive (ADSMM) since 2017. The lead donor for the ADSMM collections is Dr. Caldwell, who, in addition to being an Emerita Professor of Music at CSUDH, is a leader among the Queen Mothers. At the time of the project's inception, I had been working with Dr. Caldwell for a year and a half, and my relationship with her provided a point of connection and trust between the FLHQM and the Gerth Archives.

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52. A silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic was the need to provide our student workers with remote work projects and oral history transcription makes for excellent remote work. As a result, numerous OSQA oral histories have been transcribed.

53. Mary Anne O'Neal, "The Fannie Lou Hamer Queenmother Society," last accessed December 2020, https://sites.google.com/site/queenmothersorg1/.

That point of connection was essential, as was our endorsement by the dean. Having "gatekeepers" to provide access to the group smoothed the way for the early stages of the project.[54] Still, Summer and I were aware of the care we would need to exercise as outsiders to the group, both racially (as Latina and white, respectively) and generationally (we are both more than 20 years younger than most of the Queen Mothers). Since the stories told to outsiders during oral history interviews tend to be different than the ones communities tell amongst themselves, we sought to find intersecting identities through which we could establish bonds with the Queen Mothers: as educators, as members of the CSUDH community, and as women.[55] Throughout the process, we were as transparent as possible with the FLHQM, answering questions about ourselves as well as the project. Leaning on these feminist methodologies for oral history, we were able to develop a rapport that allowed for a sense of give and take, even as we sat in opposition as interviewer and narrator.[56]

Project Inception

When we first sat down to frame this project, we gave ourselves both a short-term and a long-term goal. Our short-term goal was the pilot project: documenting the lives, experiences, and contributions of FLHQM members. In the long-term, we wanted this pilot project to serve as proof of concept, providing tangible evidence that an oral history program would benefit both the Gerth Archives and the entire university. That evidence would be utilized to develop a full community oral history program, interviewing and documenting other communities with connections to the university and the surrounding areas.

The short-term goal was attainable: it was with a discrete group of individuals of manageable size, and in a pinch, we could come up with the resources and technology to record the interviews ourselves. The long-term goal would require outside help, in the form of institutional support and funding. We learned through the dean that our provost was interested in an oral history project documenting CSUDH emerita professors. We drafted a proposal that highlighted the fact that several members of the FLHQM *were* emeritus professors, and also proposed a "from the beginning" oral history project that focused on faculty and staff who had been with CSUDH since its founding in 1969, two projects that dovetailed nicely with the provost's concept. We remained committed, however, to prioritizing the needs and wants of the FLHQM (and any other community we should work with) over those of

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54. Borger, "Coming from the Outside In," 13.

55. Murphy, "Listening In, Listening Out," 7-8.

56. Verta Taylor, "Feminist Methodology in Social Movements Research," *Qualitative Sociology* 21, no. 4 (December 1998): 371.

the administration. Tricky waters to navigate, but essential if we wanted to stay true to the community partnerships we envisioned.[57]

For our first meeting with the FLHQM, we prepared a "Frequently Asked Questions" handout to give to the group, addressing not only the broad concept of what an oral history is and why it is important, but also how the interviews would be conducted and questions of privacy and ownership. The Queen Mothers had several questions about how and when recorded interviews would be made public, if they had a say in what parts of the videos would be made public, and if they had "editorial" privileges over the videos. Over a long discussion, it was decided that each narrator would receive a copy of her interview before it was published, and edits and omissions would be made according to their wishes. We agreed that while the full, unedited interview would remain in the Gerth Archives collections, only their approved edited version would be made accessible. We also included this language in the deed of gift/release form that was part of their pre-interview packet.

In the months leading up to the interviews, we had several meetings with the FLHQM to discuss logistics and answer questions. The Queen Mothers expressed early on that they wanted to be involved in certain elements of planning, and we incorporated their suggestions into the development of the project. Specifically, the ladies wanted to decide the order in which members were interviewed, feeling that those who had been members longest had the "right" to be interviewed first. We found that some Queen Mothers were hesitant to participate, not because they were uninterested or apprehensive, but because they were unconvinced of the merit of their own stories. It took time to convince them that we wanted to speak to *ALL* of them and that "everyone who belonged, in however humble a capacity, had an equal right to be heard."[58] We made packets for each narrator that included a deed of gift/release form, a pre-interview questionnaire, the original FAQ sheet we had used when pitching the project, and a folder for photos or documents they wished to feature during their interview. During the scheduling process, we had a "point person" with the Queen Mothers, a single person meant to relay information between the FLHQM and the interviewers. This caused a disconnect that led to delays in scheduling and retrieving the documentation. We realized that moving forward we would need to engage in more active communication with all of the narrators.

Over two days, we conducted interviews with Queen Mothers Mary Chitty, Dr. Gayle Ball-Parker, Dr. Wilma Wilson, and Saundra Willis. These ladies come from a variety of backgrounds (from rural Louisiana to suburban Chicago) and a wide range of careers including publicity and PR, sociology and psychology, tours in the United States Army, and education. Each brought unique perspectives on the FLHQM, the

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57. Gloria H. Cuadraz, "Ethico-Political Dilemmas of a Community Oral History Project: Navigating the Culture of the Corporate University," *Social Justice* 38, no. 3 (2012): 23.

58. Nick Osmond, "The Growth of a Community Oral History Archive," *Oral History* 26, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 33.

relationships they had built with their fellow Queen Mothers, and the roles of the society. The interviews were lively from the outset; the rapport we had developed over the previous months helped to quickly overcome any tentativeness with the interview process. Each of the Queen Mothers we interviewed later expressed her pleasure with the experience, praising Summer and me for being both personable and professional. Their glowing endorsements acted as encouragement for members of the society who had previously expressed reservations about being interviewed and increased enthusiasm for the program overall. Summer and I thought the interviews were an unquestionable success and were excited about the possibilities for the future.

Project Challenges

Another vital element of the project was finding ways to involve students. We did not want to simply use students as unpaid labor; we wanted to engage them in ways that leveraged educational or service-learning outcomes. We hoped to involve a faculty member from the Africana Studies, History, or Ethnography departments, and incorporate the project into their curriculum. Alternatively, we envisioned working with the CSUDH Center for Service Learning, Internships & Civic Engagement (SLICE). SLICE's mission to create and support student interaction, research, and engagement with their communities seemed like an ideal partnership for our project.[59] What we hadn't accounted for were the realities of initiating new curricula on a university timeline. Many of the faculty members and staff we spoke to had lessons planned and learning goals established well in advance and in ways that were incompatible with the few months we had to work with. Student-led oral histories were shelved, but the inclusion of students was such a fundamental element of the project we remained committed to finding a way to involve them.

Ultimately, four students were brought into the project. Working with a professor from the digital media department, we engaged two digital media students to serve as our videographers and sound technicians. They provided the equipment and technical skills for the project, and we served as their "clients", fulfilling a required class assignment for them that semester. Through the history department, we found two volunteers to take field notes during the interviews for extra credit in their classes. We received positive feedback from all of our students and were very pleased with their engagement and response to the project.

One of our narrators has expressed to us that though she thoroughly enjoyed the experience, she was disappointed in her own "performance". She said she told several stories that she did not consider important or relevant (on this point her interviewers respectfully disagree). She felt she had neglected to relate certain things she wanted to talk about when she came into the interview. She has requested a "redo", a new

59. "SLICE," California State University Dominguez Hills, last accessed December 2020, https://www.csudh.edu/slice/.

interview to replace the original one. We would be extremely disappointed to lose the original interview and hope to find a middle ground where a new interview is conducted but the old one is retained, and approved elements of both are made accessible.

Next Steps

After the interviews were completed, Summer added the recordings to our servers and made copies for the ladies we had interviewed. There was some difficulty in getting those copies to the Queen Mothers; we had not accounted for different levels of technological savvy or capability. We attempted to provide copies on Dropbox, flash drive, and DVD, with varying levels of success. In the future, other options will need to be explored to make the recordings available to the narrators. Next steps include processing the interviews, editing where appropriate/necessary, compiling and organizing field notes into an index for each interview, and transcription. We are exploring using the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (OHMS) to increase accessibility to the final products.

Shortly after the initial interviews, another Queen Mother passed away, one whom we had not had an opportunity to speak with at all. This loss has generated some discussion, both internally and with the Queen Mothers, on ways to commemorate those Queen Mothers who have passed and document their stories. Inspired by the use of story circles in other repositories, I floated the concept of a "memorial circle", a sort of multi-narrator oral history where several of the Queen Mothers could come together to tell the stories and history of one of their members who is no longer with them. Though these oral histories will be secondhand accounts, I believe the memorial circles would give valuable insight into both the ladies who are the subject of discussion and the collective memory and history of the society as a whole.

As 2020 began, I had high hopes for the program. A second round of interviews with members of the Queen Mothers was scheduled for the first week of April 2020, with a third round and two "memorial circles" in the works. We were working to create a service-learning or classroom-based student program for the fall quarter. All of these plans were, sadly, indefinitely postponed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as of this writing, there are no firm plans to renew them. I briefly considered conducting oral histories with some of the members of the Queen Mothers via video chatting services such as Zoom, but the logistics of organizing those meetings, plus the technological requirements and support, proved untenable. The public health situation has also put a hold on the development of additional projects until the provost can reevaluate per new CSU system budget constraints. Summer moved on to another position, and I found myself the sole keeper of this nascent oral history program. As of this November, I have also accepted a new position, and I am concerned that the Queen Mothers project and the oral history program at large will become orphans, lost in the shuffle of "pending projects." However, the Gerth Archives is currently engaged in a search for a University

Archivist, and the dean hopes to recruit them as an ally to the project. With a little help, and a little luck, the full scope of the Gerth Archives Community Oral History Program may come to pass.

Shared Challenges and Successes

The COVID-19 pandemic that shut down libraries, archives, and museums in the middle of March 2020 was a universal roadblock for all three projects. By nature, oral histories and story circles rely on in-person conversations that require individuals to be comfortable sitting in rooms with each other and speaking for multiple hours; the very environments and circumstances that could spread COVID-19. As a result, all three projects had to cancel scheduled interviews and were unable to complete the scope of their work within their established timelines. Future funding for staff time on projects like these may also be uncertain as a result of the pandemic's economic impact on our institutions.

Scheduling and shifting timelines as well as personnel availability and staff turnover were both challenges that had to be overcome. An attempt to partner with faculty members at CSUDH was ultimately incompatible with the Gerth Archives' timeline for their project because professors already had lessons planned and learning goals established far into the future. Nonetheless, the Gerth Archives staff were able to pivot and, instead, worked with two digital media students who served as videographers and sound technicians. Similarly, YCA's intern was very pressed for time within the larger context of her overall allotted hours for the project as a result of juggling interviewee schedules and interview cancellations.

The OSQA story circles were very successful in their partnership with students from both the Hattie Redmond Women and Gender Center and the Pride Center. Undoubtedly the success of this collaboration came from OSQA having done a similar collaboration in the past, but also in OSQA's training and preparation of the students to be effective facilitators. Nonetheless, as a result of the school year ending abruptly, OSQA is still waiting to receive reviewed transcripts from two of the three story circles. Both archivists working on the Gerth Archives project have since left CSUDH, compounding the difficulty of sustaining future oral history projects with the challenge of completing the current project. As time progresses, YCA may find it difficult to retain their intern and complete their project as well.

Challenges with technology and interview logistics were also shared by these projects. OSQA's story circles struggled with the logistics of participants arriving to recording sessions late or leaving early. Additionally, the task of creating, and reviewing the transcriptions of the recordings was both time-consuming and sometimes difficult to complete. To combat some of these challenges, YCA did not promise full transcriptions of the oral history interviews as part of their project. Although full transcriptions are the desired final product, transcriptions may consist of references to specific content in the interviews with corresponding timestamps. Similarly, the Gerth Archives has not been able to begin their transcriptions yet

because the range of technological literacy within the Queen Mothers hindered the staff's ability to make copies of the interviews available to the participants for review.

Despite these challenges, all three projects had successes and can apply changes based on lessons learned during the inception and conception of these oral history projects to current and future projects. Our institutions were able to successfully collect interviews from some of our participants, and work toward broadening the representation in our repositories. Additionally, these completed interviews will undoubtedly help with our ability to move forward, when we are able, with both confidence and some of our stored momentum from the beginning of our projects. Processes, procedures, and documentation that were developed, implemented, and honed during these projects can inform future projects in our institutions.

Collaborations with professors, students, and interns were one favorable outcome from all three projects. We were each able to find ways to work together successfully with individuals in the creation of these projects and provide opportunities for shared learning and mentorship. Although each of our projects had to be flexible with the ways in which we included others in the projects, we were ultimately able to create more robust and rewarding experiences within each of our projects through collaborations.

In our work so far, we were able to build relationships and trust with individuals and communities that will hopefully propel us forward with these and future projects, navigating our insider and outsider perspectives with regards to the communities that we were working with. We achieved this through relationship building, collaboration with interviewees on interview questions and topics, and flexibility in both choosing interview locations and developing interview processes. The Gerth Archives developed a months-long relationship with the Queen Mothers which helped to establish a feeling of empathy and support. The OSQA staff navigated these divides by providing opportunities for the story circle facilitators to take the lead in setting the project scope and expectations. And the YCA developed relationships early on with their interviewees through having recommendations from mutual friends, pre-interview telephone calls, and surveys. YCA also incorporated feedback from the interviewees on interview questions and topics and allowed interviewees to select their interview locations. For all of the projects, boundaries were established through the use of tools such as community-led story circles with no archives staff present, pre-interview surveys, introductory letters that described the project and the reasons for wanting their stories included, and very clear procedures and expectations for the interviews. These steps helped to ensure a more comfortable interview and provided an opportunity for interviewees to have some agency over how their stories were told and documented.

As we move forward with these and future projects, it will be important for us to continue to be aware of the limitations that we may encounter including institutional timelines and priorities, academic calendars, turnover in personnel, and funding sources. The ability to create projects that are sustainable regardless of these limitations will be paramount in the continuation of these projects. We also need to

continue to be aware of our individual biases and personal identities and how those may affect our ability to connect with future interviewees. Our insider and outsider perspectives as interviewers, although neither good nor bad, do have the potential to create both barriers to, and opportunities for, building trust with interviewees. Additionally, acknowledging our personal biases and the elements of our identities that contribute to our insider and outsider perspectives allows us to more easily support and provide opportunities to empower groups and individuals in their efforts to capture their stories.

Conclusion

Oral histories, community conversations, and story circles continue to be important ways for repositories to collect and preserve the histories of people and groups who are historically underrepresented in archives. Through the work of projects such as the YCA's "Stories and Voices of the Women of Yolo County," OSU Queer Archives' trans and queer disabled story circles, and CSUDH Gerth Archives and Special Collections' interviews with members of the Fannie Lou Hamer Queen Mothers, we can begin to shift our collections towards a more accurate representation of the communities that we serve.

Working together with diverse communities to ensure that their stories are collected in a collaborative and accurate way will continue to be an opportunity for our repositories to develop and preserve a more inclusive history. We worked to establish creative and flexible approaches to traditional oral history in an attempt to develop more participant-driven interviews that were reflective of our diverse communities. Our projects ultimately brought stories into our collections from women, LGBTQ+, African American, female artists and business owners, children of immigrants, and people with a variety of intersecting identities. As a result, these projects are contributing to the difficult and important work of filling gaps in the archival record of our academic and government repositories. Increasing the diversity of the archival record is crucial. This work has moved our repositories forward and helped to right the wrong of historically excluded stories due to overt, covert, and status quo archiving agendas.

Archivists begin oral history projects with desired goals, objectives, and outcomes; however, these projects have illustrated that prioritizing collaboration and community needs, and embracing the concept of shared goals, helps to ensure that oral histories continue to both accurately document the stories and experiences of the individuals that are interviewed and become even better tools for increasing representation in the archives.