On June 23rd, 2017, the Gender Justice League held its fifth annual Trans Pride event, an event that came to be because of the exclusion and underrepresentation of the trans and gender diverse community at larger pride events. As a genderqueer and genderfluid individual, it was incredible to learn that there was an event during Pride weekend that was specifically catered to our small subgroup within the LGBTQIA+ community. It was at this event that trans and gender diverse individuals found a sense of community and inclusion. Most importantly it was a space of love, a space of support, a space of acceptance.

Prior to the archive assignment we discuss in this article, my knowledge about my social position as well as resources to which I have access were nonexistent. I was relying on my pure sense of resilience to get me through the days. I was alone, walking through a world that wanted to oppress me for living my truth. I always wanted to make efforts to improve my situation, but I did not know how, and I was convinced that I was in this effort alone. As a marginalized individual you feel isolated and alone most of the time and creating change for yourself and your situation is quite difficult without a support system. Then I met some of the leaders of the Gender Justice League and I was able to re-imagine what my life could be like. Had it not been for the archive assignment, I may have never known about Trans Pride. Had I never had the opportunity to interact and engage with the Gender Justice League, I would not have realized that there is a larger community of gender diverse individuals where I live. Since coming in contact with these folks, I have finally begun to feel included in the larger scheme of life and no longer feel like an outsider. I had the opportunity to learn about my community’s history and become familiar with the challenges and issues myself and others within it face. Most importantly, I now feel that I have a sense of agency to change my current situation and I am not alone. I have the tools and support system to do so and there are no words to describe how safe and comfortable that makes me feel. I could not imagine nor ever anticipate that a class assignment could have such lasting effects.

Using feminist pedagogical practices that incorporate student knowledge production and digital scholarship methods,
a team at the University of Washington Bothell founded the online, open-access Feminist Community Archive of Washington (FCA-WA). Faculty, students, and the library partner with local feminist and gender justice organizations to develop content for the archive. As part of a core gender, women, & sexuality studies (GWSS) course, our/the assignment asks the students to collect artifacts and conduct interviews with activists that document the current work and histories of their organizations. The library has archived these materials and made them available in an open-access, online digital collection. In an era of disappearing information and contested stories—for example, the Trump administration removed the White House’s LGBTQ page within hours of the sparsely attended inauguration—the FCA-WA aims to expand the archival record and serve as a permanent and open home for the histories of groups and individuals working to support social justice for women, femmes, gender-nonconforming folks, and their allies.

We contend that the assignment and archive, in addition to being a repository for potentially forgotten histories, are projects that embody intersectional feminist praxis and work toward upsetting academic structures of inequity. Universities are hierarchies of knowledge, knowledge production, and people (Lewis). In the academy, marginalized peoples’ stories and research methods are rendered invisible; classes and assignments that “speak to” or are taught by minoritized students and faculty are not the norm. Similarly, archives are typically created and maintained by non-marginalized scholars, ultimately reflecting the stories of the elite, their ways of knowing, and their methods of research. Perhaps most troubling, said archives are framed as neutral receptacles. Since they privilege the stories of academic gatekeepers, then, this so-called neutrality serves to perpetuates a false narrative that leaves power imbalances unquestioned. We maintain that the FCA-WA, and the assignment used to fill it, undermines these hierarchical logics and structures.

In this paper, we seek to explain the assignment and archive in the context of intersectional feminism. We begin with definitions of three key terms—intersectionality, activist scholarship, and praxis—and then move on to offer the theoretical background in which we situate our arguments: feminist knowledge production and pedagogy, community archives, and critical information literacy. We then explain the assignment and archive, and conclude by demonstrating the potential of feminist, community-engaged, student knowledge production and archive building to subvert academic hierarchies, and we consider directions for future research and collaborations.

Theoretical Context

**KEY DEFINITIONS**

We understand feminism as an intersectional project. As most readers of this journal know, Kimberlé Crenshaw’s 1989 article greatly transformed U.S. feminism by explicitly naming what earlier black feminists had also articulated. Drawing on Crenshaw, we understand intersectionality as a theory that explains overlapping and interacting vectors of power and privilege and the social locations said vectors produce for given actors. Initially Crenshaw was focused on black women because as
a legal scholar she studied anti-discrimination cases that literally forced black women plaintiffs to decide if they were black or women (143, 148). From an intersectional perspective, one is always living in their multiple social locations resultant from these interlocking vectors of power. Thus, separating race from gender and the subsequent privilege or marginalization resulting from each is impossible. Given the inseparable linkages between lived realities, identities, and experiences, we know that there is no such thing as a singular issue. All injustices are intertwined and compounded by one another and thus resistance, namely feminism, must be equally interlocked and comprehensive.

An additional concept that is of importance to us is the idea of activist scholarship. While the concept has been widely discussed, debated, and defined, we find one definition particularly relevant to this project. Julia Sudbury (now Julia Chinyere Oparah) and Margo Okazawa-Rey, editors of Activist Scholarship: Antiracism, Feminisms, and Social Change, define activist scholarship as “the production of knowledge and pedagogical practices through active engagements with, and in the service of, progressive social movements” (3). Their definition resonates with this project as they conceive of “scholarship” as extending beyond research. Indeed, they begin with knowledge production and pedagogy, which are the two central components of our archive project. That is, students learn about inequities in knowledge production via Shayne’s pedagogical practices. Furthermore, students work to produce knowledge about and by activists all “through active engagements with, and in the service of, progressive social movements” (3).

Finally, praxis. As readers of this journal know, praxis is a central part of feminism. In its most basic terms feminist praxis is about mobilizing theory into action/activism. Of praxis Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall explain that “scholars and activists illustrate how practice necessarily informs theory, and how theory ideally should inform best practices and community organizing” (786). We contend that the assignment and archive very much capture the ideas of intersectional feminist praxis and activist scholarship.

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defending our revisions of mainstream scholarly research and knowledge production. Feminist knowledge production, at its core, is about unsettling the aforementioned gatekeepers.

Our understanding of feminist knowledge production is based on the decades of scholarship from which we draw and ultimately add to, and our own feminist praxis in the classroom, library, and field. Feminist knowledge production “begins with questioning and critiquing androcentric bias within the disciplines, challenging traditional researchers to include gender as a theory of analysis” (Hesse-Biber 5). For beginners, feminists ask different questions. We know that if we want to understand the role of women in a social movement, for example, we need to interview women and ask questions that focus explicitly on their contributions or the historical record will continue to develop in their conspicuous absence. Consider the title of a chapter Shayne assigns in the course she discusses in this paper: “‘No One Ever Asks What a Man’s Place in the Revolution Is’: Gender and the Politics of the Black Panther Party, 1966–1971” by Tracye Matthews. The chapter’s title captures the androcentric point of departure, where there is no reason to ask the “man question” because it is a given that it will be addressed. Feminist scholars then work to upset that hegemony by explicitly inserting a gendered analysis. We know from experience that if we do not research minoritized peoples’ histories, their/our stories are left untold, unarchived, untaught, and thus unlearned.

Additionally, central to feminist knowledge production is attentiveness to power and hierarchies in the research processes. Feminists know power imbalances, especially those resulting from gender norms and expectations, are present everywhere, including in the curriculum and thus classroom; the researcher-“subject” relationship; the privileging of so-called objective research questions and methods; the “expert”/lay person divide, and the archives in which all of this produced knowledge is housed. So, feminists ask our questions, design our methods, create our assignments, and so on, in an attempt to challenge these inequities. Reflective practices are central here: “Feminist research practitioners pay attention to reflexivity, a process whereby researchers recognize, examine, and understand how their social background, location, and assumptions affect their research practice” (Hesse-Biber 17). Needless to say, being mindful of power imbalances does not automatically result in eliminating them. This awareness, however, does help us position ourselves as researchers, educators, archivists, and learners in order to better understand how one’s social location impacts the knowledge she produces, teaches, and archives.

Another debate in the literature about feminist research relates to so-called authenticity; that is, “who studies whom and who speaks for whom” (Thornton Dill and Kohlman 167). The assignment and archive attempts to destabilize the common practice of powerful researchers speaking on behalf of marginalized communities. Shayne and her students certainly hold the power while the research is being conducted. For example, they write the questions and transcribe the interviews. But the students are required to submit unedited audio tapes so archive users can hear from the activists in their own words. Similarly, the activists choose which artifacts they want deposited in the archive so they have input into what, in
addition to their own words, will be used to tell their organizations’ stories. Additionally, Shayne intentionally partners students who are members of the communities represented with the organizations being studied. (For example, Taylor identifies as genderqueer so Shayne made sure they were in the group researching an organization that represents their community.) So, while power imbalances cannot be entirely eliminated, the assignment and thus archive attempt to unsettle common hierarchies of research.

Feminist researchers strive for reciprocity in knowledge production rather than the perpetuation of power inequities. Reciprocity is accomplished in a host of ways, often affected by the time and resources available to the researcher. It has been well documented that this sort of “giving back” often adds a tremendous amount of time to a researcher’s project, ultimately slowing down professional advancement. Sadly, given the promotion-structured system in which most academics function, reciprocity is often a much easier goal to articulate than to implement.8

Feminist knowledge production is needed everywhere and must be grappled with long before entering college. According to Rae Lesser Blumberg, gender bias in K–12 textbooks, including those used to train future teachers, is “near-universal, remarkably uniform, quite persistent, [and a] virtually invisible obstacle on the road to gender equality in education” (345). Blumberg summarizes a significant amount of transnational quantitative data that tracked gender stereotypes in textbooks, stereotypes communicating sexism that, she argues, is ultimately internalized by girls and affects their future learning, self-actualization, and ability to succeed. Discussions of feminist knowledge production don’t typically speak to K–12 textbooks. Indeed, that is not our intention either. It is worth acknowledging, however, that college students most likely had some versions of the sexist textbooks Blumberg analyzes.9 Thus, when they enter our classrooms they have likely learned very little about women and any minoritized peoples’ histories. That pattern must be interrupted by those of us committed to feminist knowledge production.

ARCHIVES AND THE FACADE OF NEUTRALITY

Cultural critics, historians, and archivists have convincingly argued over the past twenty years that archives are not neutral; that value-laden choices determine which artifacts are pursued and selected for inclusion in archives, what types of materials are preserved, and which stories are told (see Flinn and Alexander, and Cifor and Wood for recent reviews of this conversation). A strong tradition of counter archives has emerged out of this critique (see case studies in Morrone, for example), and a broad spectrum of previously underrepresented communities and individuals are building archives and documenting their histories.

Feminist and women’s archives have developed during periods of social change throughout the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries (Eichhorn). Most commonly oriented toward collecting historical artifacts, these archives have documented women’s lives and work and historical feminist movements. Since the 1970s, feminist archives have intersected with emerging activist archival practices informed by a concern for social justice (Sellie, Goldstein, Fair, and Hoyer 457). These feminist counter archives, like other counter archives, have been focused on
contemporary action and impact and on serving the interests of contemporary communities and their goals for empowerment and change. “The archival-social justice nexus and challenge then is, in part, to utilize the past to inform and change the present through concrete action” (Duff, Flinn, Suurtamm, and Wallace).

We situate the Feminist Community Archive of Washington (FCA-WA) in the context of these counter-archives that are working to expand the historical record and support the current work and community-building of feminist social justice organizations. Specifically, the FCA-WA aims to record the contemporary work and histories of feminist, women’s, gender equity, and social justice organizations in Washington state, through student outreach and scholarship. These organizations are critical to the communities they serve, providing services, advocating for civil rights, and working toward social justice. However, they are typically so consumed with their day-to-day work that archiving their own and their members’ histories and activities is not an option. By working with student researchers and leveraging the resources of the university, these organizations have been able to develop at least an initial oral history of their founding and work and to preserve some of their group’s artifacts.

Community archives typically function to expand the scope of archival representation by standing in opposition to archival lacunae, misrepresentation, and marginalization. The scholarship of community archives (see Caswell, Migoni, Geraci, and Cifor, and Zavala, Migoni, Caswell, Geraci, and Cifor for literature reviews) has highlighted the importance of this independent and often dispersed work, asserting that community archives anchor the place of diverse communities in society and serve as a touchstone for current community members. With the FCA-WA, we strive to combine the strengths and connectedness of community archives with the sustainability and accessibility of a university digital archive. Community archives typically develop out of and maintain connections with the communities they represent. Similarly, with the FCA-WA, students work with community partners with whom they have some connection, be it identity, activism, or volunteer relationships. These alliances make their scholarship both personally meaningful and valuable to the communities they are documenting, as Taylor explained in the opening of this paper.

The FCA-WA is carefully and fastidiously fully open access, with the partnership and complete agreement of the community organizations. Anyone anywhere can view and download and reuse the interviews and artifacts in the FCA-WA. Open-access digital archives can amplify the voices and experiences within, as they are not sequestered behind a paywall for only institution-affiliated researchers to view or use. This open-access approach is also useful to the organizations themselves, as they can link to or embed materials in their own websites, use the materials in volunteer training sessions, etc. Our open-access approach reflects our commitment to feminist knowledge production; we want others to find, use, and build on this scholarship, unobstructed by institutional gatekeepers.

Open access is not a given or presumed approach to institutional, or even community, archives. Seeking and retaining control over copyright and funding streams related to archival holdings, or using corporate funding to digitize archival materials, are strategies frequently employed
to presumably bolster the survival and viability of archives. This funding-based approach can complicate and reinforce hierarchical access to archives and their contents, however, as privatized digitization, subscription archives, and pay-for-reproduction schemes solidify existing economic barriers to accessing and using archival information. Cifor and Lee discuss this phenomenon as a neoliberal constriction of public resources, affecting multiple aspects of archive-building (Cifor and Lee 12–14). Rather than seeking some variety of outside funding for scanning, we have taken a deliberately sustainable approach, incorporating only born-digital and original research products or contemporarily scanned items into the archive.

In developing the FCA-WA as an open-access archive, we did have to navigate around established institutional, administrative, and technological structures unaccustomed to open scholarship and archives. All of UW Bothell’s digital collections and archives are open access but few across the larger University of Washington system are, and the institutional software we use to deliver the archive online did not initially include functionality that supported full-size media file downloads. Similarly, standard institutional release and agreement forms included copyright assignment to the university, and we had to adapt specialized open-access oral history agreement forms and deeds of gift to support a fully open archive. Much of this is changing at the University of Washington and elsewhere as open-access resolutions and commitments to social justice are taking hold. Early adopters of open-access approaches to archives and scholarship do, however, often face initial struggles against established restrictive infrastructures.

**CRITICAL INFORMATION LITERACY**

Critical Information Literacy (IL) is an emerging wave of activist scholarship and praxis within librarianship that seeks to transform the ways in which librarians teach information literacy. Critical IL resists the dominant framing of librarianship as neutral and apolitical (Lewis) and creates space for practitioners to acknowledge the inherently political nature of IL pedagogy. To this aim, critical IL practitioners consider the ways that “librarians may encourage students to engage with and act upon the power structures underpinning information’s production and dissemination” (Tewell 25). Critical IL theory and practice developed as a critique of mainstream definitions of IL. Dominant definitions of IL, including the now defunct Association of College and Research Libraries IL Standards, described an apolitical context in which individual scholars conducted research. This definition of information literacy aligns closely with dominant narratives of librarianship as neutral or beliefs that librarians should be devoid of politics. Challenging the neutral framing of librarianship and IL, early theorists of Critical IL sought to create space for more student voice and politicized pedagogy in librarian teaching (Elmborg; Jacobs). They additionally critiqued mainstream IL for being overly linear and employing a banking model of education.¹⁰

The proponents of critical Information Literacy won a significant victory in 2015 when they altered the mainstream IL discourse. This is when the Association of College and Research Libraries released the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education and decided to sunset the aforementioned Standards. The new
framework largely addressed the critiques raised by critical theorists by emphasizing the constructed and contextual nature of the research process and the authority associated with various texts. While this new institutional definition of IL was a far cry from the linear, banking model–oriented Standards, some did not think the document went far enough in explicitly advocating for social justice in the Framework (Battista et al.), while still others thought that the Framework was an institutional cooptation of an organic intellectual movement (Seale). The Framework has been contested from advocates of an apolitical framing of librarianship as well. Many of these librarians have argued that the Framework is too unclear and the sunsetting of the Standards diminished the institutional leverage for carving out an instructional role for librarians, which the Standards created (Berg et al.). We see our project as, in part, participating in the Critical IL intellectual movement in that we are advancing a political understanding of libraries, scholarship, and archives.

The feminist Critical Information Literacy discourse is also particularly salient for our collaboration. Maria Accardi described a feminist pedagogy for IL in her groundbreaking book Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction. The core of her feminist pedagogy is tightly linked with critical pedagogy described above. In addition, her approach includes providing a nurturing and caring environment for student learning and a recognition that patriarchy and sexism are real forces in the world. She emphasizes that students should use the knowledge they gain in the IL classroom to transform the world around them. According to Accardi, when students experience feminist IL pedagogy, “they are aware of the power of knowledge and language to influence society and culture and they ask critical questions about where information comes from, about who decides what is knowledge and truth, thus illuminating the structures that create and perpetuate information production and dissemination” (57–58). Indeed, Taylor’s reflections throughout this paper certainly concur with Accardi’s analysis.

Critical information literacy and the Framework also open up space for working to counteract “information privilege.” Sarah Hare and Cara Evanson describe information privilege as follows: “Through their affiliation with an institution of higher education, undergraduate students are able to access a range of research materials and, as a result, enter the scholarly conversation and build upon existing research. This ability to access information that others cannot is called information privilege.” Hare and Evanson have built upon the work of Char Booth, a leader in connecting information privilege to information literacy. Booth maintains that one way to circumvent the privileging of information, a process which ultimately further entrenches institutional hierarchies, is to involve students in the process of knowledge production: “One facet of challenging information privilege is involving students in a process of leveraging institutional resources to create products that contribute to a broader public discourse (as opposed to ending up in recycling bins and/or behind closed institutional doors)” (Booth). We absolutely concur. Students are fundamental to the success of the archive at every step: They help Shayne identify organizations to work with; they do the research that results in filling the archive, and they collaborate on sharing our findings about the assignment and archive.”

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About the Archive

**HOW WE FILL IT**

As previously noted, we see the archive as an embodiment of Sudbury and Okazawa-Rey’s conception of activist scholarship: “the production of knowledge and pedagogical practices through active engagements with, and in the service of, progressive social movements” (3) because feminist pedagogy and research are mobilized to document feminist praxis and gender justice organizing. We contend that this project is “in the service of social movements” as it results in long-term partnerships between UWB and activist organizations, creates individual relationships between students as activists with the organizations they have researched, and serves as a resource for the organizations’ self-documentation and trainings.

Additionally, the assignment and archive trouble traditional arrangements and definitions of power, knowledge, and neutrality in the academy, which ultimately serve to perpetuate the marginalization of minoritized peoples and their histories. The assignment and archive contest academic norms of expertise by empowering undergraduate students as researchers, identifying the activists/“subjects” as the so-called experts, and using our university access and status to create a repository for histories that, simply put, the mainstream academy does not see as worthy of documentation. Even within a large and diverse public university, there was skepticism about archiving “student projects” and building an archive around new feminist digital scholarship. Student-produced oral histories have been archived previously in the University of Washington system (also at UW Bothell, groundbreaking at the time; see Hattwig, Lam, and Freidberg), but an open-access feminist archive with community organizations as partners and students as the researchers was an entirely new combination. This was pushing digital archives at our institution far beyond traditional local practices of scan-from-print digital collections, thus circumventing the self-appointed gatekeepers.

How does the assignment work? Shayne worked closely with the Community-Based Learning and Research (CBLR) office to develop this assignment. She was a participant in a yearlong campus fellowship where faculty work together to design CBLR-focused assignments or research. The assignment is in the course Histories and Movements of Gender and Sexuality, one of the core GWSS classes. The assignment has four learning objectives: 1) learn a history of a specific local organization; 2) learn how that history and organization are related to comparable movements we have studied this quarter; 3) learn the importance of qualitative research and feminist knowledge production; and 4) learn the significance of scholarly/activist archives. While it is not a stated learning objective, our personal hope is that students will continue their partnerships with the organizations they researched long after the course has ended.

Long before the start of the quarter the CBLR office and Shayne identify about eight feminist, gender, and/or social justice organizations in the Seattle area that are interested in being researched by students in the class. Shayne includes a cross-section of organizations to capture the GWSS program’s commitment to transnational and intersectional feminism. She also includes one campus organization every year to guarantee that the local
activism at the University of Washington Bothell is also documented. She feels this part is very important given the high turnover rate in student organizations and thus the potential loss of institutional memory every time core activists graduate. The course is typically enrolled at about forty students, and on the first day of class students are given a very lengthy and detailed handout that explains the assignment, including a student agreement they are expected to sign in which they commit to treating the research process with the utmost respect and seriousness. Shayne makes it clear that if students are hoping to “check out” this quarter or are vehemently opposed to collaborative work, this course is not for them. On the third day of class, students submit their top three requests for organizations or other students they want to work with and Shayne creates groups of four or five students. Students are asked to let her know if they have a special connection with the group and its mission and she works hard to assign as many “insiders” as possible to each group of student researchers.

One of the most important aspects of this assignment is the engagement between the students and the organizations they research. One of the ways this relationship is fostered is through two interviews with at least two of the founders or present leaders in the organization. This is vital in developing a connection to the people and the cause the students are researching as well as gaining a contextual understanding of the issue. Students must also attend two events hosted by the organization and collect artifacts that cannot be found online. Attending events allows students to learn about the current issues at hand and discover ways in which they might contribute to the organization. Collecting artifacts allows students to gain a visual sense of past and current efforts made by the organization and see the evolution of the organization through its history. Additionally, for the archive, students submit a typed transcript from each interview, an audio recording for each interview, high-resolution images of the artifacts that the organizations identify as meaningful, and detailed metadata. If the transcript is inaccurate, that is, it does not match the audio recording, it will not be archived unless students in the group volunteer to fix the errors.

Another part of the project is for the group to collectively write a paper that situates the history of the organization researched in relation to other histories learned in the course. The paper provides students an opportunity to reflect on their experience with the organization and allows students a moment to create a documented history of an organization to which they feel connected. Students do not submit the paper to the archive as it is only for primary documents, but they do send a copy to the organization.

Students are also required to write detailed text descriptions (metadata) for everything they submit to the archive. This descriptive metadata serves two functions in the archive—it allows for the discovery of items in the archive by other researchers, and it provides information and context about the items in the archive so they can be accurately interpreted and understood. The metadata part of the assignment is one of the most important parts for illuminating the need for feminist knowledge production. As the students work to describe and summarize the documents and choose keywords and other descriptors, they learn how much power archivists have to shape the narrative of
the histories being documented. We problematize metadata with students in order to most effectively leverage its potential. We work with students to develop what we call “activist description,” a corollary of activist archiving, in the FCA-WA by consulting with our community partners about language choices rather than privileging library classification systems (see Winn for a discussion of current thinking in archival description). Students use language that reflects what they heard repeatedly in their dialogues with community partners. They include multiple synonyms and expanded vocabularies to develop rich descriptions. This is not the norm with archives and library resources, both of which typically use controlled vocabularies and Library of Congress subject headings without additional free-text description. (See Drabinski for a critical discussion of description in libraries.)

Thus far, we have found metadata to be one of the most difficult aspects of the assignments to teach but after four iterations of the class we are feeling more confident in guiding the students to really grapple with the significance of their efforts.

As we know, a guiding principle of feminist research and praxis is reciprocity. That is, researchers should not treat communities or organizations as locales from which we can extract information for our own professional advances. Rather, feminist research is about supporting social justice work and the activists who do it. As such, Shayne feels very strongly about the students sending thank you cards, their “wow moments” about the organization, and their final paper to the activists they interviewed and who shared so generously of their time. While a thank you card may seem superficial, it requires the students to acknowledge that they imposed upon this group of strangers and that their graciousness needs to be acknowledged, at the very least, with a card. Additionally, Shayne has them send the “wow moments” because she thinks it is very important to keep partnerships alive and communication two-way. There is definitely a risk in “over researching” communities or doing CBLR work in which the organizations never hear from the students again. Those arrangements then turn the activists into the objects of inquiry in service of the students’ grades as opposed to potential activist partners in future endeavors.

All of the aforementioned parts of the assignment are done collectively, with one common grade. Individually, students keep journals where they reflect on the process of doing feminist research, speaking to Shayne’s specific prompts. Students get their own grades on their journals.

Despite Shayne’s constant reminders that students are representing the university when they conduct their research and that the class does not work well with unmotivated students, and despite visits from the CBLR team, also conveying the seriousness of their responsibilities, there will always be students who act without maturity. We share one example to encourage faculty considering a similar assignment to be proactive about supervising your students’ efforts. The first year Shayne taught the class a group of students researched a local transgender justice organization. Three of the students in the group were cisgender and one genderqueer. During one of the interviews, one of the cisgender students went completely off the interview script the group had created and ended up asking very personal and inappropriate questions of the
creating counter archives

We did not archive the audio tape, and the genderqueer member of the group who was tasked with transcribing the interview did not even do so. (They and I decided that was the correct decision given we wouldn’t archive it anyway.) Shayne sent a heartfelt apology to the interviewee as did the genderqueer member of the group. Also, in this class, because of another student’s incredibly disrespectful behavior toward another community partner, which actually preceded this event, Shayne designed the student agreement, something she has unfortunately had to “invoke” several times since starting the assignment. She now checks in with the groups much more frequently and earlier than she did when she first started teaching the class so she can intervene and make adjustments before any irreparable damage is done.

In addition to Shayne’s work on the front end of the assignment, that is, keeping students on task, making sure they write useful questions, troubleshooting how to set up meetings with slow-to-respond activists, and so forth, there is also a lot of collaborative in-class and behind-the-scenes work to support the students as they conduct their research. Members of the CBLR office visit class to give the students a tutorial regarding the norms and protocols of community-based research. Shayne and Hattwig conduct a workshop focused on archive-building theory and practice, with help from UW Bothell’s Learning Technologies staff.

In addition to technical tips and tools, this workshop includes activities and discussions that help students engage with the meanings and functions of the archiving-related aspects of this project. Student learning in this workshop is focused on community and activist archives, student and feminist knowledge production, metadata in digital collections, and open access agreements with partners. The workshop also includes discussion of a reading about a community-based LGBTQ archive (Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge) so students are familiar with a related activist archiving project and its impact. In our experience, students produce higher-quality research products and archive submissions when they are able to connect with the theoretical and activist arguments that inform the functional requirements of archiving work (metadata, agreement forms, file formats, etc.). In other words, in addition to the students’ hard work, there are at least five of us working with them to make sure their efforts are advancing productively, the end products useable, and the community partners treated with respect and dignity.

After materials are submitted, Shayne double-checks all transcripts against the audio files, making small corrections to typos and the like. Thus far, she has also had to return two transcripts to groups to have them re-do them or have them not be archived. Library staff then inventory all aspects of student submissions and follow up with groups to track down any missing pieces. Staff process submitted digital interview recordings, photographs, and artifacts and load them into the FCA-WA hosted by the UW Libraries’ digital collections system. These processes and practices are common for institutional archives and ensure their accessibility, sustainability, and preservation.

Despite the unforeseen problems that will always emerge and the inordinate amount of work that goes into this project on everyone’s part, the assignment has been a tremendous success, with students building an amazing archive, community
partners really pleased with the students’ efforts, and students learning the value of feminist knowledge production.

**ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ASSIGNMENT AND ARCHIVE**

Before linking our earlier theoretical arguments to the assignment and archive we again thought it best to begin with a student’s perspective. We asked Taylor Hiner to answer the question: Why does the assignment and archive matter?

As a student, this project and community-based learning allowed a hands-on opportunity for me to engage in feminist knowledge production and activist scholarship in ways that were purposeful, meaningful, and fulfilling. Having the opportunity to work directly with other activists has given me a strong sense of the work they do and what it really means to be an activist and advocate for those who have been silenced. Most importantly, I learned the value and the power of this kind of work. I remember clearly the eagerness and excitement of the Gender Justice League wanting to talk with my group and me. They had so much to say and teach us about the trans and gender diverse community; their energy was contagious. I learned so much about my own position within society at large and the community’s unique culture and history. Being somebody who identifies with this community, it is important for me to take this knowledge and use it as a tool to show the cis world what kind of obstacles and barriers we as a community face. Moreover, I am inspired to push even harder for not only my own recognition and legitimacy by our culture, but the recognition and legitimacy for all of us in this community.

It was through this process I came to realize that this assignment may in fact be one of the few opportunities the organization was provided a moment to speak for itself, personal and unfiltered. This assignment is a platform, a powerful platform that gave the members of this organization and the community it serves a space to correct the narrative. Their interviews and testimony speak to what it means to be a member of the trans and gender diverse community and the work that needs to be done to bring them/us justice and equity. This archive then is an uncensored, safe, and free space to let those who are marginalized say what they need to say, and it invites the community into their lives and their fight toward justice. The purposes of this archive are to build networks of solidarity, connect students with local social justice leaders, and promote inclusion across all identities. Moreover, the assignment provides students an opportunity to come to understand and appreciate activism and recognize its powerful place in social justice efforts and society as a phenomenon for procuring change.

In this paper we have attempted to demonstrate that the assignment and archive work toward upsetting hierarchies in the academy while also creating a repository for potentially erased histories. The hierarchies we are most concerned with here are those present in knowledge production, information literacy, and ultimately the historical records and archives resulting from both.15 We contend that feminist praxis is key to unsettling the inequities present in these three realms. Drawing again on Lewis’s aforementioned notion of “gatekeepers” who prove hostile to feminist knowledge production (100), we contend that this assignment
and archive are manifestations of feminist praxis needed to upset institutionalized hierarchies. Central to many GWSS classes, not just the one in which this assignment occurs, is understanding the various ways the academy, and thus students’ learning, is structured to privilege the elite and further entrench their power. Students learn this through intersectional feminist theory and thus use those theoretical insights to advance a praxis of feminist knowledge production that ultimately undermines hegemonic and anti-feminist structures in the academy and beyond. Similarly, in Thorton Dill and Kohlman’s discussion of linking theory and practice they maintain “because intersectional knowledge is grounded in the everyday lives of people of diverse backgrounds, it is seen as an important tool linking theory with practice. Intersectional work can validate the lives and histories of persons and subgroups previously ignored or marginalized, and it is used to help empower communities and the people in them” (160). We find this observation particularly related to the assignment and archive because the students are researching and documenting said “people of diverse backgrounds,” and by committing their “previously ignored or marginalized” histories to the archives, students are advancing a sort of activism and dignity that being kept out of the historical record denies. The assignment, especially the reflective and metadata components, forces students to think about whose stories are left out of archives. Who decides what goes into archives? How are materials in archives explained? Who decides who has access to archives? So, from a pedagogical perspective (intellectual and theoretical) the assignment is a move toward challenging the academy’s gatekeepers because students learn and experience that knowledge production and the hierarchy of knowledges are forms of power and marginalization. Students’ efforts reflect critical information literacy scholars’ contention that librarians are anything but neutral, and having the power to define, populate, and frame the contents of an archive is literally the power to control an historical narrative. Putting that power in the hands of students even further subverts hierarchies of knowledge production. We asked Taylor to reflect on this process, once again, from their personal locale: As a student, it was ingrained early on that we learn from our teachers and those who are above us throughout the schooling process. Teachers and professors alike need to recognize the knowledge and richness students can bring into the classroom and curriculum, especially those who occupy marginalized social locations. As somebody who inhabits marginalized social locations, myself and others might go through our entire schooling without any more than a mention of our history. Some groups go completely unnoticed and looked over. This was the first assignment that not only allowed me to learn more about my queer identities, but also actively collaborate with others like me to bring forward the stories and history that the privileged have misconstrued and swept under the rug. All the barriers and fear of posing an alternative view of the world we live in seemed less daunting in this project. I like to attribute that feeling to the agency that Professor Shayne encouraged us to have while going through this process. The combination of student agency and a sense of togetherness with my team and members of the organization
was empowering. For the first time ever, I felt like my work mattered for something more than just a grade. This freedom, as a student, to explore and discover enabled me to critically consider how power is unequally distributed and maintained in our society. It was also the only time that I served as a gatekeeper of knowledge, a truly exciting role to inhabit in the university hierarchy. Even though my gatekeeping privilege is no longer, I know that my work for this archive is benefiting others and is disrupting the narrative about trans and gender diverse individuals like myself and so many others.

**NEXT STEPS**

Where do we go from here? The assignment and archive are still in the very nascent stages. Shayne has taught the class four times, and combined, students have researched and thus archived partial histories of twenty-nine local organizations. In addition to this paper, we have presented about the project in a variety of interdisciplinary conferences: The Northwest Archivist Association (NWA) (Shayne and Ellenwood), the National Women’s Studies Association (Shayne), and the Pacific Sociological Association (Shayne and Hiner). Everywhere we have presented, we have been greeted with great enthusiasm. Part of the energy, we think, comes from the collaborative nature of the project. Sadly, faculty-librarian partnerships are not the norm in most universities, and students are certainly not valued as the skilled knowledge producers that they are. We hope that this project inspires comparable collaborations, archives, and feminist praxis throughout the academy in hopes of further chipping away at gatekeepers who remain hostile to feminist knowledge production. We close this essay with final reflections from Taylor.

The archiving assignment is more than just an opportunity to practice knowledge production and activist scholarship; it is an opportunity for marginalized people to meaningfully connect with each other. As a student, this assignment provided me the opportunity to speak with and get involved in activist efforts with others who shared a similar identity as me. What’s so powerful about this project is seeing the lines of differences between people start to blur. It is through this dialogue that the assignment asks students to overcome walls of difference and create locales of commonality and inclusion. More knowledge about difference is crucial to articulate and produce knowledge that is inclusive and vivid in its representation. The hierarchy within education, more specifically research, is being pushed back and redefined when students get involved. Students, like many of the individuals who participated in interviews from the organization, are underrepresented and often misunderstood. This project is empowering not only for the individuals who are in the organizations, but also for the students who get an incredible opportunity to have their work showcased while at the same time bringing forward voices that have been silenced or looked over. Ultimately both parties are benefiting greatly from this assignment as it cements stories and labor into a permanent state and serves as a powerful tool to build and produce knowledge that overcomes notions of difference and advocates from inclusion.

In addition to feeling empowered as a student researcher and a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, the assignment has provided me the tools to work as a student assistant in UWB’s new Diversity Center to
document the activism that led to its creation.16 Much like the archive assignment, I am leading the efforts to document and bring forward the stories and voices of those involved in the movement to actualize the Diversity Center. The raw and robust student activism on this campus deserves a spotlight and a place to be recognized and remembered in the University. Everyone who has made large or small impacts in the process of the Center’s implementation deserves to tell their story and this Archive is the vehicle to get those voices into a state of permanence. This archiving project is powerful because the minoritized students of this campus are working together to stake their claim and showcase their power in the university by making themselves visible and known to the campus and community at large.

NOTES
1. Italicized text was written in first person by Taylor Hiner, recently graduated student and co-author of this paper.
2. Another genderqueer and nonbinary student, Colin Davis, who took this class the year prior expressed a similar sentiment in one of their journal posts: “On a personal note, I was especially touched by an exchange that took place after the interview, when Marsha was asking about us and our backgrounds. I mentioned that I’d known about Ingersoll for a few years, but had never been to any of the support groups. She asked why, and I responded, honestly, that I didn’t know if I was ‘trans enough’ to go. She put a hand on my shoulder, smiled, and said, ‘Of course you’re ‘trans enough’ to be here!’ That brought me to tears, which I blinked away while thanking her profusely. I’ve been thinking a lot about that moment, and about the nature of activism. When we use the word ‘activism,’ it’s easy to think of the visible, audible kinds of activist work: organizing, protests, demonstrations, lobbying, and the like. However, there’s also a quiet, subtle kind of activism in such small moments as the one Marsha shared with me. It’s the activism of survival, of continuing to be who you truly are in the face of a world that wants you to be someone or something else, or to simply not be at all. It’s the activism of letting your existence give others the permission they need to exist, as well. It’s the activism of thriving in spite of adversity, and letting your life be an inspiration to others on the road behind you. It’s the activism of saying to someone, ‘I see you. I hear you. You exist. You have the right to be, and to be who and what you are.’” (We share Colin’s words with their permission.)
3. See www.cbsnews.com/news/moments-after-donald-trump-became-president-the-white-houses-lgbt-rights-page-disappeared/. We checked the link on September 11, 2017 and received this message: “Thank you for your interest in this subject. STAY TUNED AS WE CONTINUE TO UPDATE WHITEHOUSE.GOV.” We checked again on November 27, 2017 and the link appears to be completely gone.
4. See www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/01/20/donald-trumps-inaugural-crowds-dont-quite-measure-up-to-barack-obamas/?utm_term=.892fc8b9381bc
5. It is way beyond the scope of this paper to offer an adequate history of the concept of intersectionality. Rather, we point the readers to a fantastic chronological overview starting in the nineteenth century and moving all the way to the present day. See Thorton Dill and Kohlman, and Cho, Williams Crenshaw, and McCall, “Intersectionality.”
6. See Shayne for a recent collection which grapples with and illustrates the risks, challenges, and strengths of activist scholarship.
7. We cannot do justice to four decades of research and theorizing about feminist methods and knowledge production. Rather, we point the readers to Hesse-Biber. This robust collection is filled with chapter upon chapter written by pioneers in this field. The introduction, “Feminist Research” by Hesse-Biber, the collection’s editor, and “Truth and Truths in Feminist Knowledge Production” by Mary Hawkesworth are particularly useful in understanding the theoretical development of feminist methods and knowledge production.
8. See Taking Risks: Feminist Activism and Research in the Americas, edited by Julie Shayne, in which many of the contributors discuss their own attempts, frustrations, and successes in accomplishing reciprocity in the field.

9. Unfortunately, her article only speaks to gender inequities with no attention to race, sexuality, gender presentation, etc.

10. Brazilian educator, theorists, and philosopher Paulo Freire coined the term “banking model” in his landmark book Pedagogy of the Oppressed, originally published in 1973. The banking model refers to teachers communicating information to students for the sole purpose of memorization, completely void of critical thinking and agency as learners. For Freire, the banking model is a highly ideological and reactionary approach to education which is designed to maintain hierarchies in and outside of schools, universities, and all learning communities.

11. Recent alum Taylor Hiner is not only a co-author of this paper but, as of this writing, they will co-present with Shayne about the assignment and archive at the Pacific Sociological Association meeting in 2018.

12. See www.uwb.edu/gender-women-sexuality for details about UWB’s gender, women, and sexuality studies program.

13. Shayne has worded the student agreement in such a way that students have been warned that if their contributions to the project are noticeably subpar their grades may end up lower than their groupmates’.

14. Ellenwood used to co-facilitate this workshop but has since left UWB for Seattle Central College. In the most recent iteration of the course, Hiner worked with Shayne and Hattwig to co-lead the two-hour-long workshop.

15. Needless to say, the academy is replete with hierarchies at every turn: professorial rank; contingent and full-time faculty; professor and student; administrative staff and support staff, etc. And like all hierarchies, one’s social location with respect to race, SES, gender, and so forth greatly impact where one lands.

16. The UWB Diversity Center is the result of years of student activism. Alejandra Pérez, leader in the movement, wrote a senior thesis about the activism and presently the Diversity Center is working to collect primary documents, including interviews, to archive the activism that led to the long-fought-for Diversity Center.

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