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Queering the Colby Archive: Combating Queer Erasure with Narratives of Queer Survival

I am a queer Colby student. At a school that values normativity over bravery, silence over courage, sometimes this qualifier “queer” consumes all of the rest of my being here. Queer at an institution that refuse to grant professors and their partners health coverage and can find stronger words to condemn smoking and graffiti than it can to condemn homophobia. I have moments of feelings deeply disembodied from this school that tries to white wash everything in its path. In a place of enormous privilege I don’t want to believe I can simultaneously feel alienation, and I do. The legions of closeted students, closeted couples deeply and silently in love, closeted painful breakups and closeted locked door hook ups speak to an oppressive culture of normativity at Colby. However, here in this institution of success production I have found a queer family. In this queer family we are unlearning what we know about closets and silencing and relearning about love and sex and joy from each other. I know what I know about being queer from now, from today and this morning. My queer epistemology; it was born at Colby so it’s really just taking the first few steps. The unlearning is really an exorcism. A violent gutting of the insides of ourselves hoping that *someday, love poems will apply to us*.

I have spent this year working on a number of queer activist projects, from attempting to rewrite and distribute “QUEERS READ THIS I HATE STRAIGHTS” as “COLBY READ THIS,” to assisting other students in forms of queer visual displacement to planning institutionalized events such as “Transgender November.” I became deeply interested in how other queer students and activists had archived their time on campus in the past, and how our

own present actions were being recorded, if at all. I first imagined I would write a history of queer people at Colby. After spending a lot of time hanging out in the special collections and rummaging through drawers in the Bridge office looking for traces of queer students in the past, I decided that the content itself was not the most interesting, but rather questions about how what I was finding got there, and what I wasn't finding at all. I wanted to know: what have queer students at Colby struggled with in the past? How has homophobia been institutionalized or silenced? In what moments have queer students been agents of change on campus? I decided that I wanted to research the production and power of archiving itself in order to understand what I think a different kind of queer archive of Colby might look like, sound like, read like--- through what processes might I be able to answer my questions, or record my current actions in a way that future students could answer these same questions.

Although archiving can often mean a physical collection of primary sources that marks specific historical moments and/or people, I am not using this definition when I use the word archive in this paper. Archivists do not simply receive and store records which merely reflect society----they actually co-create and shape knowledge in records, and thus help form society's memory and reality. My initial research question was then first how the Colby archives shape the reality of queer people in Colby's past, present and future. It is important to also address my use of the word narrative; one that in this case I believe means the stories and language that comprise an archive of Colby. Whether these stories emerge in the form of a yearbook, a flier, a photograph or an oral history, I see both institutional and non-institutional narratives comprising what one can see about the history and present moment of queer people at Colby.

The motivation for this paper topic also came from a culmination of conversations I've had with friends and professors about the importance of queer visibility on campus. Visibility is

an idea that is central to my own queer politics and what it means for me to pass for a straight woman at Colby most of the time, as well as how important the visibility of queer students and events has been to me in terms of developing my own queer identity. My interest in figuring out what the phrase “queer archiving” could mean is very linked to my interest in visibility. It matters to mean that queer students can be seen now, and that we can leave something that marks that kind of being seen. Marking as a potential protest against erasure.

To start to explore this topic of visibility and archiving I reached out to queer students on campus to see why or why not they consider visibility as important. Their answers ranged from academic to deeply personal, and reaffirmed what I already believed: visibility is about a perpetual archiving of the present, a means to see the existence of queer students and spaces on a daily basis.

“Even knowing that there were other queer students at Colby in addition to the ones my friends actively made fun of would've given me enough hope that even if/when my friends found out and inevitably abandoned me, I wouldn't be alone. Besides promoting a "we're here, we're queer, get used to it" kind of message that can push an often unaccepting community away from ignorance and towards understanding, queer visibility on campus creates beacons of hope for those trying to handle becoming the visible queer themselves.”- Student ‘12

“For me, queer visibility has a lot in common with visual disruption. People get comfortable in certain spaces, which are usually constructed in certain and similar ways. What queer visibility does it disrupt comfortable spaces, both physical and socio-cultural in an effort to make something new comfortable.” –Student ‘14

Visibility important in terms of people and spaces--- the first student links visibility of queer students with her coming out, and the second focuses more on disrupting normative spaces with queer people or events. For both, visibility is important to their quotidian actions. Visibility and archiving are inextricably linked for me, because in creating a queer archive at Colby, I am not exclusively concerned with tangible archival documents or artifacts but rather a record of queer survivals and flourishings here. In Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers, Lillian Faderman writes

about the history of the invisibility of lesbian women in the United States and the significance of becoming visible.

“Before women could live as lesbians the society in which they lived had to evolve to accommodate, however, grudgingly the possibility of lesbianism, the conception needed to be formulated....the possibility of a life as a lesbian had to socially constructed in order for women to be able to choose such a life. (Faderman 11)”

Archiving has to do with constructing a possibility of life where queerness can be seen--- both in the past and the present. There must be the possibility of being queer at Colby before one can be queer on campus. If the present does not accommodate the possibility of being anything but heterosexual, a queer archive could potentially expand the present options. In Cruising Utopia, Jose Munoz writes, “we must strive, in the face of the here and now’s totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there” (Munoz 1). If a here at Colby renders queer people invisible, what is an alternative then and there?

### **Archiving and Power**

Archive theory is interdisciplinary, overlapping with history, post-colonial, English and anthropology theory. Archives traditionally have roots in forms of history telling and storytelling housed in museums and history books, genealogy maps and files hidden in special collections so important you can only touch them with plastic gloves and tweezers. Archives are used in classrooms to explore historical moments---- they appear in the form of diaries, documentaries, records and artifacts. Theory regarding the methodology, reasoning and power of archives is relevant to many disciplines--- from anthropologists’ concerned with the mere act of writing as a form of colonial documentation, to historians untying the binds of official History in favor of multiple histories.

Beginning to explore forms of archiving that deviate from a chronological record of history assist in gaining an understanding of how authors have investigated the relationship between archiving and power. Julie Bacon's "Archive, Archive, Archive!" stems from her background as both an artist and a queer theorist. Bacon's crucial point of entry comes from her critical questioning of the construction and commemoration of chronological time itself. Bacon asks, "what makes archives today the necessary form of a particular conception of time that is now seen as passing and in need of being preserved in its radical difference?" (55) She further suggests that in other centuries there was not such a dominant historical consciousness that required a recording of moments determined to be events, no consciousness that assumed traces must be left. Bacon postulates that one way to radically alter the definition of archiving is to discard the assumption that archiving must be about the act of recording itself. Instead she suggest that we might not assume that moments must be commemorated but that other processes of memory could have equal value to physical memorialization.

Her article discusses the power inherent in any form of representation, a commentary coming from her lens as an artist and an art critic. Bacon looks at the powers of visual representations in story tellings and how those representations could potentially be altered. Bacon writes, "there are many calls for us to place our belief in representation, through the marketplace, in politics, in the academy. The materialistic view that underpins this is deterministic, and so prescriptive in spirit, whilst the power relations that are in play uphold this perspective" (53). This introduction to the dominance of representation as equated to truth telling will be further relevant when discussing what a queer archive might look like, and how voices may or may not be represented in this new kind of archive. Tom NeSmith, in "Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives" address the problem with

assuming visual representation in particular as the dominant means of communication. Nesmith writes, “our means of communication are still quite limited in what they can convey, and, paradoxically, they are much more powerful and central than we have assumed in forming whatever understanding we can achieve. A hallmark of the postmodern view of communication is that there is no way to avoid or neutralize entirely the limits of mediating influences which inevitably shape our understanding” (26). Representation is always removed from the point of origin for Nesmith--- a “mediator” will always be instrumental in determining what message people will receive about an event or moment. Nesmith points to the inability to ever be objective in representation and to the lack of reflexivity in most forms of representation in the public sphere. Hayden White’s Metahistory offers a comprehensive look at the relationship between history and representation of history. In his introduction White writes, “I will consider the historical work as what it most manifestly is- that is to say, a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and the processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them” (2). White writes that all narratives of history are representations, not history itself. What White calls a “verbal structure” or audio or visual can radically determine the interpretation of historical representations as well as the accessibility for audiences.

A moment of Bacon’s article which deserves further exploration is her concern with the connection between archiving and fetishizing, or rather seeing artifacts or stories as representative for much more complex moments. Of her own artistic “archival” process Bacon writes, “the interest in an artists’ archival project does not lie in its challenge to the system of the archive, but in its consideration of its own systematizing function, and how this is bound with the power of the fetish and souvenir” (54). Her postulation poses artists as those who could address what the

power of systemizing and organizing archives manifests itself as, whereas this paper will consider how a queer person may fill the same artistic role. Bacon asks what it means for one souvenir or artifact to stand in for a more complex history or event.

So what does queer theory have to add to the body of work concerning archiving, and how could this theory be applied to the lives of queer students at Colby? To begin to answer the question I started searching for those who have attempted to “queer” histories. That is, take traditional forms of archiving such as chronological time tellings and attempted to insert gay lives into the archive. Texts such as George Chauncey’s Gay New York exemplify this kind of storytelling. Chauncey returns to 1890-1940 New York to consider how the social lives of gay men were integrally intertwined with both queer politics at the time and a more dominant American culture. His tactic is to render queer people more visible in a history that highlights almost exclusively heterosexuality. His kind of history telling is one that is revealing of queer lives--- the structure of the narrative is not altered, but the voices included are.

Other texts that have attempted to insert queer lives into a dominant narrative of historical events include Eric Marcus’ Making Gay History and Michael Bronski’s A Queer History of the United States. Although both men’s texts do address the erasure of queer lives from dominant historical narratives, they make different methodological and structural choices that are aware of inclusion and intersectionality to varying degrees. Marcus chooses to compile a series of first hand story tellings of queer people across the country. Although he narrates an introduction and at times takes the liberty of introducing sections, his text is largely a series of stories from queer people about events such as Stonewall that are typically considered as monumental points in “Queer History” in the United States. Marcus does not so much add different events to a narrative that canonizing moments such as Stonewall, but presents these moments in a series of

first hand recounts that capture personal interactions with the events themselves. **Bronski on the other hand**, Bacon asks pointedly as the question, “does inclusion liberate us?” Chauncy, Marcus and Bronski all believe that it does, and in their rewritings of history try to include queer voices in places where they previously were absent.

Amy Sonnie, editor of Revolutionary Voices: A Multicultural Queer Youth Anthology takes a different tactic of inclusion and her text stands as an example of a book that is both constructed using a variety of authors and medias and one that pays careful attention to issues of intersectionality and power through deliberate representation rather than theoretical musings. Sonnie’s introduction presents her work as a collection of “survival narratives” a phrase that quickly became the crux of this exploration in relation to Colby students. Sonnie is careful about the construction of her text itself, and the absence of her explanatory intervention, a sentiment that is shared by other authors considering queer knowledge production. In “Interrupting Heteronormativity”, Brent and Sumara write, “we are interested in showing how all educators ought to become interested in the complex relationships among the various ways in which sexualities are organized and identified and in the many ways in which knowledge is produced and represented,” (Brent and Sumara 203) instead of the content of the knowledge itself. This question of construction is addressed by Anne Cvetovich, “Archives of Feeling” who describes her own text as: “an exploration of cultural texts and repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the text themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception” (Cvetovich 9). What may be “queer” about Cvetovich’s work is not the content itself but the way in which the content is assembled and presented to her readers. The previously discussed authors are intimately concerned with queer

epistemology and the power of structures that make heterosexual epistemology the unspoken normative way of knowing about sex, relationships and futures.

Discussing the production of a queer archive itself stands proof to the fact that archives are just that--- produced and constructed, not naturally occurring representations of reality. Nesmith writes, “our reality is powerfully shaped by the particular forms and media of communications in which we are immersed” (Nesmith 29). We must pay careful attention the ways in which media and other structures of power shape the reality of queer people’s quotidian lives and how they do so. In his ethnography *Vita*, Joao Biehl is explicitly concerned with how life is constituted by societal, legal and medical institutions. In regards to the subject of his study, Catarina, Biehl says, “it is in family complexes and in technical and political domains, as they determine life possibilities and the conditions of representation, that human behavior and its paradoxes belong to a certain order of being in the world” (Biehl 17). Part of queer archiving is adding to a body of historically scientific and political knowledge that constitute queer lives. Archives are an integral part of telling queer people what they know about themselves and can know about themselves. Past scientific discourses that have considered homosexuality a mental disorder and current religious discourses that call homosexuality an abomination are part of these conditions of life. The conditions of representation are determined by what forms of knowledge and mediums of representation dominate our current public sphere. White writes that a “commitment to a particular form of knowledge predetermines the kinds of generalizations one can make about the present world, the kinds of knowledge one can have of it, and hence the kinds of projects one can legitimately conceive for changing that present or for maintaining it in its present form indefinitely” (21). Undoing the forms of knowledge available is one way in which queer people could have the power to reconstruct and reconstruct reality.

## **An Overview of the national Queer Archive**

Considering how queer people are represented in dominant discourse currently is a crucial for understanding what queer reality looks like today due to Nesmith's assertion that reality is constituted by representation. If one were to make an archive of queer people based on dominant representations, what narratives would consistently be the most visible, what kinds of queer people be seen and what voices would be silenced entirely? The question of the power in media and political discourse is imperative and often obscured. As Martha Barrett writes in Invisible Lives: The Truth About Millions of Women Loving Women, "the media is not seen as an instrument of propaganda for a certain type of sexual expression but as a reflection of the way things are---and it is all pervasive" (Barrett 181). If the media is seen as a reflection of objective reality instead of a compilation of subjective representations then examining the ways in which queer people are present or absent in perpetual archiving of the present can allow us to first, consider the consequences of queer representation in dominant archives and second, explore how we might archive queer lives in different ways. After overviewing these narratives I determined that queer people in national media are dying, normative or absent all together.

First, queer people are victims. In national political and media discourse, queer people are most frequently victims to their own violence. News sources such as the Huffington Post and New York Times regularly report on teen suicides, listing the names and ages of deceased teens in Ohio, Pennsylvania and New Hampshire. After 14-year-old Kenneth Weishuhn's suicide in mid-April of 2012, Huffington post even ran a slideshow of gay male teenagers who had taken their lives in the last few months. With over fifteen faces, the stream of pictures is captioned with lines about bullying, depression and lack of support. The slideshow was just one visceral way of promoting the suicide narrative.

Magazines also write stories of suicide, and Rolling Stone recently featured an article titled “One Town’s War on Gay Teens,” about a Minnesota School district where nine teenagers have committed suicide in the last two years. Rolling Stone reported

“Four of the nine dead were either gay or perceived as such by other kids, and were reportedly bullied. The tragedies come at a national moment when bullying is on everyone's lips, and a devastating number of gay teens across the country are in the news for killing themselves. Suicide rates among gay and lesbian kids are frighteningly high, with attempt rates four times that of their straight counterparts; studies show that one-third of all gay youth have attempted suicide at some point (versus 13 percent of hetero kids), and that internalized homophobia contributes to suicide risk,” (Rolling Stone ).

Facts such as these contribute to a tone that is thorough and devastating--- although narrated by a survivor, a teen who watched her best friend commit suicide and continually cycles in and out of depression, the article continually spews out suicide facts writing, “just 11 days after Sam's death, on November 22nd, 2009, came yet another suicide: a Blaine High School student, 15-year-old Aaron Jurek – the district's third suicide in just three months. After Christmas break, an Andover High School senior, Nick Lockwood, became the district's fourth casualty: a boy who had never publicly identified as gay, but had nonetheless been teased as such,” (Rolling Stone). Additionally, the article continually portrays all of the teens as victims of the school district’s policies on LGBTQ issues, other students bullying and teacher’s silence. Rarely do any living LBGQT students have a voice to speak in the article, and even Brittany, who “survives” to be interviewed by Rolling Stone, is a victim of this same system.

This victimization is repeated in the language of all people around her—including her parents, who Rolling Stone quote as saying, "Promise me you won't take your life," her father begged. "Promise you'll come to me before anything." Brittany couldn't promise. In March 2010, she was hospitalized for a week,” (Rolling Stone). Although the article does discuss some

backlash from parents, the students discussed are depressed, bullied or dead. There is little room for student anger or revolt.

Viral video campaigns such as It Gets Better, focused on preventing suicide, assist in this image of queer person as victim. Driven by home videos and celebrity representation, the It Gets Better campaign has gotten an enormous amount of attention. Celebrities and politicians such as President Obama, Ke\$ha, Hillary Clinton and Anne Hathaway have all made videos on the site where they speak directly to LGBTQ teenagers telling them that life will get better as they get older. The campaign's message to young people is that even though life is hard now (in high school, middle school, etc.) it won't always be so hard. The language of It Gets Better looks toward the future, and does not make suggestions for young people as to how to make it better in the present. The irony of this message was brought forward by the same Huffington Post slideshow, one where the case of Jamey Rodemeyer is highlighted. Jamey, who killed himself at age 14, caught the country's attention because he had made his own It Gets Better video just months before his suicide. In Jamey's It Gets Better video he performed Lady Gaga's Born This Way to get his message across. Although the video existed for months before his death, Lady Gaga's tribute performance to Jamey after his death highlighted the tragedy of the young boy and made sure his victimhood would be what the public remembers about him.

Lately this suicide narrative has woven itself into the scripts of prime time television as well. A few recent moments on primetime television reveal how prominently the words gay, bullying and suicide have come as an entity in recent years. *Glee*, a show famous for not only its show tunes, but also for its queer characters, recently attempted to showcase the issue of teen suicide in a one hour segment. In the episode, Dave, a closeted football player, moves to another school in fear that he will be outed at his first. However a new classmate overhears him talking

about his crush on Glee's famously flamboyant character Kurt, and consequently tells everyone at school. After the word FAG is spray painted on Dave's locker, he runs home from school, dresses in a suit and attempts to hang himself in his bedroom. Dave survives, and the other characters take a lot of time to reflect about the severity of teen bullying in the rest of the episode. During the commercial breaks for the episode, Daniel Radcliffe, speaks about the Trevor Project, another celebrity driven non-profit attempting to halt teen suicide. Kurt visits Dave in the hospital at the end of the episode, their conversation reveals that Dave in fact does not feel better, and he is still a victim of bullying online and at school.

Lisa Cuklanz' Rape on Prime Time reveals how prime time content reflects both contemporary social issues and the results of special interest group advocacy for and against specific subject matter. For Cuklanz then, the episode of *Glee* means gay suicide is a narrative we know, the fact that it is a storyline on TV means it does not surprise us. Gay teens are often depressed, attempt to take their own lives and sometimes succeed. Elizabeth Freedman, in Time Binds, writes, "queer-becoming-collective-across time and even the concept of futurity itself are predicated upon injury—separations, spatial displacements, preclusions and other negating forms of bodily experience" (Freedman 12). These injuries, in the case of suicide self-inflicted, this violence of learning that dislocates queer bodies from normative identity formations must somehow become part of an archive of "queer-becoming." Unlearning of straightness is healing of the injury that stems from learning self and abnormal or self and depressed in tandem. The narrative of coming out, being outed, and consequently suffering of depression and suicide thoughts is incredibly prevalent right now, the repetition of queer bodies as victims of their own violence, one where suicide inscribes some kind of message on queer bodies that demarcates

them as queer non-thriving, and that image as normative. The queer body that is a victim of its own violence shows that queer bodies cannot thrive in state and social institution.

### **Homonormativity: wedding dresses and white picket fences**

There is a second visible narrative of queer lives that appears on prime time television, on the front page of the New York Times and E! Celebrity news. It is one of homonormativity--- that is queer people who most closely resemble the heterosexual couple. Ellen Degeneres is representative of this kind of queer visibility--- that of queer people fitting into heterosexual partnerships, gender roles and institutions. Ellen, a beloved talk show host, is well adored by many consumers of media--- so much so that when “One Million Moms” tried to boycott JC Penney’s decision to hire Ellen as their spokesperson, JC Penney immediately made a statement supporting Ellen, and their sales shot up. In “Heteronormativity and Popular Culture” Thomas Peele wrote,

“Ellen DeGeneres is arguably the most famous lesbian in America. Her position as an accessible, likeable lesbian, is a relatively unique one in the politics of gay and lesbian representation. She is easily consumable, funny, and nice to be around. There seems to be nothing threatening about her. But lesbians are supposed to be a threat to the most basic organizing principle of hegemonic social structures. What does it mean, then, for gay and lesbian representational politics to have Ellen DeGeneres as the most visible, the most famous, and the most loved lesbian in America?” (Peele 5).

Yes, Ellen is white, wealthy, non-threatening lesbian. She is married to a beautiful, white, wealthy super model, and they live in an enormous house in California with their three dogs. When they were married, their wedding was widely broadcast over national television and the internet. The photos of it are ubiquitous---Ellen in a white suit and her wife in a white wedding dress. These representations are not negative, in fact they pose an important alternative to the non-thriving queer body previously discussed. But the representational politics Peele writes of must also be considered. In Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times, Jasbir

Puar points out that even if everyone wanted to conform to a heterosexual norm of monogamy, not everyone has access to the means of homonormativity in the way that Ellen and Portia do. Homonormativity in affect, separates good gays from bad gays--- those who are the least radical are the most visible. Those who are the least conforming are rendered invisible.

The other place homonormativity permeates is in conversations about queer people in political spaces. Here, where same-sex marriage is the hot topic of the moment, those fighting for same-sex marriage in states such as Maine and California adopt campaign strategies that emphasize how queer people are just like everyone else. These slogans include:

“Two people in a loving, committed relationship deserve the dignity support and recognition that only marriage can provide”

“Love. Commitment. Family. Why Marriage Matters.”

“Equal Marriage Now”

In essence, these slogans mean that queer people want monogamous, lifelong, legally recognized relationships too. Additionally, queer people see marriage as essential to building a family. Jose Munoz, believes that these kind of slogans are exclusive and limiting and queer activists need to consider other forms of change making through examining what kinds of sexuality marriage promotes. Munoz critiques pro-marriage author Wolfson and says, “his assimilationist gay politics posits an “all” that is fact a few: queers with enough access to capital to imagine a life integrated within North American capitalist culture. It goes almost without saying that the “all” invoked by the gay lawyer and his followers are normative citizen subjects with a host of rights only afforded to some and not all queer people” (Munoz 20). While there is enormous value in having thriving queer public figures such as Ellen, there must also be a presentation of queer lives that does not conform to the time, space and relationship constraints of heteronormativity. Puar writes, “associations with the white national hetero-

homonormative bodies trump the desire for queer alliance across class, race and citizenship... the homonormative aids the project of heteronormativity through the fractioning away of queer alliances” (Puar 28). If Puar is correct then Ellen’s image may actually be exclusionary, assisting in the creation of the “good gay” image and furthering alienating queer people of color, of lower socio-economic status, of different or no genders. In working within heteronormative structures, asking for inclusion must come at the exclusion of others. The normative narrative places some queer people in a national archive and not others.

### **Representationally absent**

The cultural territory of media propaganda that promotes thriving and non-thriving queer people also renders queer people invisible in the public sphere. The third place queer people show up in the archive is nowhere. We must thoroughly investigate the power of symbolic the locations of complete annihilation in order to understand why a lack of representations are oppressive. For Barrett this annihilation is of concern because it is a matter of affirming self-identification. She writes, “a person who does not find herself reflect anywhere—in music, or books, on a TV screen or a movie screen, soon begins to doubt her own existence” (Barrett 181). It is challenging to synthesize sources where queer people are obviously absent, however there are a few mediums in which heterosexuality is so vocally dominant that they serve as good examples of a mediums absent of any reflection of homosexuality. Cosmopolitan Magazine does not market itself as a “straight” magazine; however any and all articles assume a straight female audience. The most recent issue (April 2012) includes articles such as, “8 Things Guys Are Secretly Insecure About,” “What Men Really Think About Your Bikini,” “10 Kinky Sex Moves With Your Man,” and “10 Sexy, Fun, First Dates He’ll Love.” All of these articles were published in Cosmopolitan’s section on “Sex and Love,”---- or more aptly titled, “Heterosexual

Sex and Love.” Again, the website assumes heterosexuality as neutral, normal, and unquestioned, there is nothing to affirm the existence of queer women.

Seventeen, a magazine targeted at much younger girls, is equally guilty of heteronormativity. Under the website’s “Love Life” section, the options are: Hot Guy Panel, Battle of the Boyfriends, Hot Guy Videos and Get Guy Advice. Again, Seventeen is not explicitly marketed at young heterosexual girls---it is marketed at all girls and presents heterosexuality as the only and obvious option.



Twenty-One most popular animated Disney couples as identified by [www.fanpop.com](http://www.fanpop.com)

It is perhaps Disney movies that provides the most overwhelmingly heterosexual history or characters and story lines. The significant absence of queer voices in Disney animated movies means that young people are taught heterosexual monogamy is the most desirable and only option---literally a happily ever after. On the topic of heteronormative media sources, Peele writes, “the most dangerous heteronormative signifying practice is the utter silence on the subject

of non-normative sexuality, a silence that puts everyone at risk by insisting that queer people do not exist” (Peele 3). We must interrogate what the conditions of non-existence and how silencing works as an oppressor.

Where can queer people recognize themselves as citizens and participants in political and social structures if their exclusion itself is silenced? For Cvetovich, “it is important to incorporate affective life into our conceptions of citizenship and to recognize that these affective forms of citizenship may fall outside the institutional practices that we customarily associate with the concept of a citizen” (Cvetovich 11). The relationship between archiving and citizenship means queer people are simultaneously constituted by ourselves and by the structural and societal bounds of others. Queer people affectively understand that we are not included in Disney movies and mainstream magazines yet we are still constituted by the representations of others unlike ourselves and of the lack of others we may identify as. A lack of representation at all means being excluded from any practices or definitions of citizenship and all the rights that come along with being a citizen. As previously shown, it is not just any inclusion that writes queer people as citizens. Peele writes, “at best, such a reconceptualization of sexuality would expand the possibilities for the production of a new, less oppressive discourses of lesbian and gay sexuality in the same way that feminists’ recognition that women are in part discursively produced, has produced counter hegemonic discourse” (Peele 2). The discursive production of any queer people is not necessarily good (as previously discussed in terms of homonormativity and non-thriving bodies) but the removal of all queer people effectively eliminates the possibility of any kind of queerness in the future. The perpetuation of a heteronormative narrative that does not question the conditions of assumed heterosexuality means that queer people are given no windows in which to confirm their existence and challenge acceptable socialized behavior.

## Queering the Archive

Why do all of these representations matter? In “Live Sex Acts,” Lauren Berlant writes,

“national culture, an archive that perpetually seeks a future, is always a negative sign to be defined, even when it appears as a positive one with an essential character. Because the nation can only assure itself a past, the national culture industry that operates in the public sphere generates a mode of political discourse that, in the US, seeks to trump all other explanations and images of collective sociality and power” (Berlant 380).

All of these representations or lack thereof assist in shaping and limiting queer epistemology, or rather they inform how queer people know how they can be queer now and how they could be queer in the future. Munoz writes, “we must insist on a queer futurity because the present is so poisonous and insolvent” (Munoz 30). This present, summarized in this paper as one of non-thriving, normative or absent queer bodies, is “poisonous” to a progressive and liberating queer future. Queer archiving as I would like it to be seeks to address each of these representations--- Queer archives are visible narratives that give queer people a space in the public sphere. This is not necessarily through an additive process, rather a radicalizing one. How can we potentially alter the placement and displacement of queer people in representative media, history and politics in a way that is healing and restorative?

The media must be liberated from social, political and historical constraints and reclaimed to reflect narratives outside of official or institutionalized history. Numerous queer theorists have considered the issue of the archive, and the trouble with exclusive and dominating representational politics. In “Interrupting Heteronormativity: Toward a Queer Curriculum Theory,” Dennis Sumara and Brent Davis summarize what they believe queer theory can add to the archive of queer people’s past, present and future.

“Queer theory does not ask that pedagogy become sexualized, but that it excavate and interpret the way it already is sexualized- and, furthermore, that it begin to interpret the way that it is explicitly heterosexualized. Moreover, rather than defining queer identities in strict reference to particular bodily acts and aberrant or quirky lifestyles, queer theory asks that the continued construction of narratives supporting that unruly category "heterosexual" be constantly interrupted and renarrated,” (Davis and Sumara).

We return to Bacon’s question of, “does inclusion liberate us? Does the act of putting things on display empower us or do away with hidden forces, put them under control?” (53) To answer Bacon’s question regarding how inclusion is liberating, we can deviate from the word inclusion and head toward a deconstructionist model. It is not necessarily inclusion in a dominant narrative that is liberatory--- as shown before, those kind of inclusions can quickly become normative as Bacon puts it, “under control” and close surveillance. Political, social and scientific structures do determine life possibilities and conditions of representation, and these structures are built upon their own archives. They need a past in order to have a future, and queer people need a past built on something more than injury to have a futurity that includes positive forms of bodily experience. “Futurity,” Munoz writes, “becomes history’s dominant principle. Queerness as a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity” (Munoz 16). The future must challenge dominant cultural ideology.

*Freedom does not mean anything goes, but everyone stays*

*- Kelley Oliver, Women as Weapons of War*

Queer theory can add a version of archiving that is all-encompassing. A couple different versions of queer archiving have adapted this kind of metaphorical freedom, one where the umbrella term queer covers everything underneath it. For example, the Queer Zine Archiving Project’s mission statement is: *"The mission of the Queer Zine Archive Project (QZAP) is to establish a "living history" archive of past and present queer zines and to encourage current and*

*emerging zine publishers to continue to create. In curating such a unique aspect of culture, we value a collectivist approach that respects the diversity of experiences that fall under the heading "queer." (qzap).* QZAP's approach is one that resonates with me, because it doesn't draw lines around the definition of "queer" itself. Expanding the archive is a liberatory practice. I don't want to exclude narratives of suicide, or depression, or normativity--- rather create a queer archive seeking to expand the process of archiving, leaving traces of visibility, and the voices that are presented through that process. Not only traces of non-thriving queer students, but students that are vibrantly thriving and fighting for recognition here.

The definition of queer archiving I started with was trying to find a simple way to state WE as queer people EXIST. Soon after I began my research process I came across a quote that has stuck with me throughout the semester, and summarizes what I want a queer archive to be, and that is: "our *survival* is news too": I want to know what it looks like to thrive as a queer individual or community and how we can express that.

Two senior women shared what the phrase queer archive means to them:

"To me, "Queer Archiving" is a political act. It not only demands, but actively creates visibility of and for queer issues in our institutional history. It both acknowledges the queer moments of the present, and grounds our lived experience as part of some larger narrative. The use of the word archive insinuates that there is a community of queer documents, and all of them represents some undiluted, primary lived experience" –Student '12

"Take Dragball for instance. Hot damn. After three years of being pretty miserable here, I never ever ever thought Colby could be like that. I think the fundamental difference was not only an atmosphere of acceptance, but actually seeing all that queerocity on stage and in the audience. That's what felt like the turning point for me."- Student '12

A community of queer documents, I don't see as physical documents but I do see as moments such as Drag Ball--- an event which currently holds a sort of mythical status of a Colby tradition

are an example of what archiving the now could be. It's important to me to create venues for anger, happiness, hope, desires, joy: a place for emotions not easily expressed in a culture that either doesn't believe queer people exist, doesn't open the doors for thriving expression from queer people or actively represses queer voices. I don't have an answer for what you physically might see, hear, touch, read as part of at queer Colby archive, but I do have a philosophy about what I think it should be:

Examining a reassemblage of self---- self built not through injury or separations but having the opportunity to assemble subjectivity in the first place. This idea is best exemplified in Biehl's *Vita*, where Biehl explains how Catarina is constantly up against a world of political, medical and social structures that de-realizes her own self so that in order to stay alive she is perpetually in the process of making herself real. Biehl believes that she does so "by way of speech, the unconscious, and the many knowledges and powers whose histories she embodies, there is the plastic power of Catarina as she engages all this and tries to make her life, past and present, real, both in thought and in writing" (Biehl 17). Self reassemblage through an engagement and understanding of an oppressive past plus the act of self-narration and writing is what lets Catarina to continue to claim her own subjectivity on a daily basis. Both Biehl and Munoz consider the significance of time as a form of oppression and the reclamation/rewriting of time as revolutionary. For Munoz this may mean deviating from a heteronormative life path that dictates weddings and children and anniversaries. Biehl's discussion about time is more concerned with the way time pauses for those exiled from health care and social systems in Brazil. Through Catarina Biehl sees thoughtlessness and silencing as themselves oppressive and dehumanizing. Catarina's making of her life "past and present" as real, stems from her ability to literally write a past and present that the structures around her do not provide. Biehl's text and

his attempt to bring Catarina's life out of thoughtlessness, and in effect make her human may be another way in which to subvert normative state time.

Rehumanizing means that at this moment I am concerned with survival. I am looking for narratives of triumphant survival and barely surviving. Amy Sonnie, in her introduction to "revolutionary voices," writes of narratives that repeat a story of queer suicide saying, "revolutionary voices retaliates against these mandates. We speak to counter the silencing imposed on us; we speak to break the silence we have internalized. We have created a family here. And standing in solidarity, we say, "we matter. Our *survival* is news too." (xiii) I want the survival of queer Colby students to matter. I want it to not only be news that too many queer students transfer or are asked to leave, removing themselves or being removed. I want it to be celebrated that queer students here struggle violently with themselves and their bodies and their lovers and their words and still, they survive. It is necessary for us to claim the autonomy to represent ourselves. It is necessary that we write about how we're surviving. Narratives of living, of choosing to live vibrantly, loudly and lovingly. Archiving exposes violence, celebrates survival, presents geographies of people, testifies to human dignity, resists a white washing of activism and commodification of bodies.

Queer archiving involves a perpetual reflexive critique of the archive as a practice, and must be a practice that is an evolving and dynamic process, one that allows for greater inclusivity; respects diversity; facilitates historical reclamation and surfaces new ways of knowing and understanding. If "queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (Munoz 1), in using the phrase queer archiving I want to say that queer people have the power to deconstruct and reconstruct reality and rewrite new possibility. At Colby, our *survival* will be news too.

