

*Editors' Note*

# An Introduction to Radical Empathy in Archival Practice

Elvia Arroyo-Ramírez, Jasmine Jones, Shannon O'Neill, and Holly Smith

*We honor the lives and work of Latanya Jenkins and Roseanne O'Neill, and devote this special issue to their memories.*

## INTRODUCTION

When we embarked on our journey as first-time editors to this special issue, produced in response to Dr. Michelle Caswell and Dr. Marika Cifor's 2016 article, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in Archives," we had no idea how the next five years would compound the need to forge a feminist ethic of care and to bring care work to the front and center of so much in our present society.

We started our work together shortly after the original article's publication in 2016. The four of us, along with other archival practitioners in the field—Molly Brown, Dinah Handel, Rachel Mattson, Giordana Mecagni, and Kelly Wooten—believed that the praxis of radical empathy gave us the structure and liberty to challenge, critique, or more fully engage with many issues in the archival profession. We felt that so much of what we already do, or aspire to do, in our work as archivists aligned with feminist ethics approaches to archival work; the framework helped materialize the ways in which our relationships with archival creators, donors, subjects, users, communities, and colleagues are at the forefront of what it means to enact care work in archives. We proposed a panel at the 2017 Society of American Archivists to apply Caswell and Cifor's ideas into archival

Arroyo-Ramírez, Elvia, Jasmine Jones, Shannon O'Neill, and Holly Smith. "An Introduction to Radical Empathy in Archival Practice," in "Radical Empathy in Archival Practice," eds. Elvia Arroyo-Ramírez, Jasmine Jones, Shannon O'Neill, and Holly Smith. Special issue, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 3, no. 2 (2021). DOI: [10.24242/jclis.v3i2.171](https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v3i2.171).

ISSN: 2572-1364

practice. Each of us provided examples of how we interpreted radical empathy in our personal and collective practice, and Rachel Mattson proposed a new, fifth affective relationship, that of archivist to archivist, to Caswell and Cifor's original framework.<sup>1</sup> After the panel, there was a sense that there was more to be examined and understood—so many participants in the audience stayed after the session to talk about how they have been able to apply radical empathy, and to express their gratitude for the opportunity to affectively engage with these issues in a conference setting. This response, coupled with the inspirational Liberated Archives Conference, which was intentionally organized outside of the official conference program to “explore how archivists might partner with the public to repurpose the archive as a site of social transformation and radical inclusion,”<sup>2</sup> were harbingers for us to continue our work together and pursue this publication project.

Examining the framework for radical empathy cannot be extrapolated from the condition of the United States' society then and now. When we first started, months after the murder of Michael Brown and the uprising in Ferguson, Missouri, we individually carried the heaviness and trauma brought on by state-sanctioned terrorism, particularly aimed at Black communities, and sought ways to continue to bring justice and equity into our profession. The framework for radical empathy has allowed us to make space for collective vulnerability, racial reckoning, and accountability. This is a proactive departure from the culture, ethics, practices, and theoretical foundations that we have inherited in the archival profession. As practitioners in this field, we have inherited a professional and institutional culture of toxic ambition that:

1. Sets the expectation to divorce our identities and act impartial and unfeeling to project the image of the consummate professional.
2. Normalizes moving to a different part of the country (or another country) for a job opportunity, uprooting archivists from their home communities and contributing to feelings of extraction and isolation.
3. Expects students and/or early career professionals to work for free, or gain academic credits, for experience. There is also the expectation to pay to attend conferences to gain exposure.
4. Over-relies on contingent and term positions and low wages, which leads to job insecurity, financial precarity, and devaluing of labor.

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Mattson, “Horizontal Mentorship: Radical Empathy and Professional Development,” (SAA Annual Conference, Session 301: Radical Empathy in Archival Practice, Portland, OR, July 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Society of American Archivists, “Liberated Archive Forum,” Archives 2017, Society of American Archivists, accessed October 4, 2021, <https://www2.archivists.org/am2017/program/liberated-archive-forum>.

5. Champions metrics-driven, efficient, hyper-productive approaches over slow and deliberate work, i.e., how many linear feet can you process, etc., instead of allowing room for intentionality and reflection.
6. Does not provide enough person-driven care—paltry benefits, stagnant wages, policies that attempt to place the institution above all else in our lives (insufficient leave time, refusal of flexible work hours, requirements to sign non-disclosure agreements).<sup>3</sup>

This list is not exhaustive and can be expanded upon significantly. The special issue is an invitation to continued discourse, to encourage further evolution of the definition of radical empathy, to enact practices that go against the grain of those listed above, and to create more just and equitable workspaces. Throughout our editorial journey, we constantly came back to the questions outlined below: *What are the evolving definitions of radical empathy? What does contemporary care work look like? How does radical empathy facilitate liberatory archival practice? And what does enacting radical empathy look like in practice?* Finally, we consider how feminist ethics of care informed our editorial process and sustained us personally and professionally through this collective journey.

## EVOLVING DEFINITIONS OF RADICAL EMPATHY

The framework for radical empathy in archival practice was first proposed by Caswell and Cifor in their article, “From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives,” which was featured in *Archivaria* in the spring of 2016. In their article, Caswell and Cifor define radical empathy as “a willingness to be affected, to be shaped by another’s experience, without blurring the lines between the self and the other.”<sup>4</sup> Since then, Caswell and Cifor have expanded on that definition, writing that “such empathy is radical if it critically and consciously shifts existing power relations in favour of those who are marginalised.”<sup>5</sup> The evolution of the definition of radical empathy highlights its inherency towards change. And while radical empathy is expansive, capacious, and responsive, it is also bound by its insistence upon uprooting structural harms, and it is

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<sup>3</sup> Juliana Feliciano Reyes, “After a Temple Librarian Died, Coworkers Said the Sick-Leave Policy ‘Ran Her into the Ground,’” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 4, 2021, <https://www.inquirer.com/news/temple-university-librarian-sick-leave-policy-cancer-20210804.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, “From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives,” *Archivaria* 81 (2016): 23-43.

<sup>5</sup> Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, “Neither a Beginning Nor an End: Applying an Ethics of Care to Digital Archival Collections,” in *New Digital Practices in Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums and Heritage Sites*, eds. Dirk vom Lehn, Hannah Lewi, Steven Cooke, and Wally Smith (Abingdon, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2019), 159-168.

about making intentional shifts and actions with the aim of transforming our systems. How we, as editors, define radical empathy will and should ostensibly change. To practice radical empathy means to continually move against the status quo rooted in beliefs and systems of oppression, like capitalism, sexism, racism, ableism, etc.

In the process of developing this special issue, we spent a lot of time working through the definition of radical empathy together. We had a firm sense of what radical empathy was for us; Caswell and Cifor provided excellent examples of it in their article. Our colleagues, with whom we presented on a panel at SAA in 2017, and scores of others whose work has been rooted in feminist ethics of care and liberatory frameworks, have modeled what it has meant to practice radical empathy in archival work. And yet, when preparing for this special issue, it became apparent that the difference between empathy and radical empathy was not entirely clear. There are some who see radical empathy and empathy as interchangeable. But there are limits to empathy, and empathy alone, or in-and-of-itself is not necessarily radical. Empathy doesn't necessarily necessitate action, nor does it require self- or structural- examination; without humility and genuine care, it can manifest as pity, white guilt, or a paternalistic responsibility to make decisions for others. Empathy can become a space that people feel comfortable in. However, it is simply not enough to say that we empathize, or understand, another person's experience if we simultaneously continue to perpetuate a cycle of harm and marginalization.

This special issue of the *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* is not intended to be definitive nor prescriptive. Because radical empathy is an emergent practice, it responds to the needs of its time; and, as an emergent practice, it is a "strategy informed by complexity, by learning from nature how to be in right relationship with each other."<sup>6</sup> Radical empathy is not "paying it forward," "putting yourself in someone else's shoes," or merely bridging divides. These may be empathetic actions, but they are not radical. Radical empathy also cannot serve as a simple counter to the deceptive supposition that archives and libraries, and those who work in them, are neutral spaces or actors. Without an intentional action of uprooting, radical empathy—not unlike what we've experienced with "diversity, equity, and inclusion"—becomes diluted, performative, and at risk of cooptation by institutions who perpetuate the harms that radical empathy seeks to upend; the rot is still at the root.

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<sup>6</sup> adrienne maree brown, "build as we fight: remarks from the 2019 American Studies Association Annual Meeting," adrienne maree brown (blog), November 10, 2019, <http://adriennemareebrown.net/2019/11/10/build-as-we-fight-remarks-from-the-2019-american-studies-association-annual-meeting/>. See also: adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017).

## WHAT IS CARE WORK IN OUR CURRENT CONTEXT?

Practicing radical empathy is a form of care work. Historically, care work is an invisible form of labor, most often carried out by women and non-binary people. It is often disparaged and demoted as being background work and yet our world does not function without it. For decades, Black feminists like Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, and Toni Cade Bambara; the 1970s International Wages for Housework network; sex workers and campaigns to decriminalize sex worker labor; and the disabled leaders of the disability justice movement have made the necessity of care work—and care work as a refusal of the violence of capitalism—abundantly clear. Bambara invoked the powerful ideology of communal care and healing with this powerful question in her formative novel *The Salt Eaters*: “Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well?... Just so’s you’re sure, sweetheart, and ready to be healed, cause wholeness is no trifling matter. A lot of weight when you’re well.”<sup>7</sup> In 2022, as we experience the full-on devastation wrought by racial capitalism and public health crises, care is an imperative. Johanna Hedva writes in their article first published in *Mask Magazine*, “Sick Woman Theory”:

The most anti-capitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself. To take on the historically feminized and therefore invisible practice of nursing, nurturing, caring. To take seriously each other’s vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and to support it, honor it, empower it. To protect each other, to enact and practice community. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care.<sup>8</sup>

Where capitalism valorizes individualism, care work thrives because it is a mutual commitment. It is “working together on purpose.”<sup>9</sup> More so, care work flourishes because it is a mutual undertaking in which power is shifted to, reclaimed by, or amplified within the margins.

The last five years were tumultuous, and the last two and a half years, in particular, were marked by grief, struggle, and resistance. As many of us prepare to return, or have returned, to office spaces—or are seeking new pathways after being laid-off, furloughed, or making decisions to leave toxic employment—we must affirm that we are not hitting a reset button or merely going back to where we were before 2020. We are not returning to some idea of “normalcy.” As Sonya Renee Taylor remarked, “We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other

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<sup>7</sup> Toni Cade Bambara, *The Salt Eaters* (New York, NY: Random House, 1992), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Johanna Hedva, “Sick Woman Theory,” Johanna Hedva (website), accessed October 4, 2021, [http://johannahedva.com/SickWomanTheory\\_Hedva\\_2020.pdf](http://johannahedva.com/SickWomanTheory_Hedva_2020.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*, (New York: Verso, 2020), 43.

than it normalized inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate, and lack. We should not long to return..."<sup>10</sup> Care work, in this current moment, is an act of refusal: a rejection of this supposedly necessary, and yet undesired, return. Care work is reciprocity. Care work is consent. Care work is trust. Care work is a tool for our collective survival.

## ENACTING RADICAL EMPATHY IN ARCHIVAL PRACTICE AS PATHWAY TO LIBERATORY ARCHIVES

How might practicing radical empathy and an ethics of care lead us toward a more liberatory archives? As we have emphasized, enacting radical empathy and an ethics of care is an upending, an uprooting, an undoing, but—to harken to Ruth Wilson Gilmore's expression that abolition "is about presence, not absence"<sup>11</sup>—it is also about building. Radical empathy welcomes us to reflect: what kind of archival work and archival profession are we building together? Conversations around care and self-care have dominated wellness circles for years, and they have now proliferated into mainstream discussions and the media. Frequently, these conversations center around capitalist measures of relief, as if self-care is a material thing to be purchased. While there is nothing wrong with a manicure or shopping trip, these models encourage the idea that self-care is a physical, individualized commodity, and often do not include discussions or focus on the importance of "communal care": how do we relate to, care for, and advocate for each other? Caswell and Cifor's groundbreaking work reminds us that a feminist framework of ethics focused on collective care is revolutionary. It extends the thinking of who the stakeholders are in archival care and memory work, and it asks us where our mutual responsibilities to, and care for, one another lies. Radical empathy and feminist ethics of care cause us to think beyond simply understanding how an individual or community feels; they compel us to commit to just actions and to fundamentally shift our interactions and understandings. This becomes particularly important for historically marginalized and oppressed communities, who have frequently experienced harm via cultural heritage institutions, through everything from "benign" neglect to intentional erasure.

Within our current condition of a global pandemic, archives and other cultural heritage institutions have had to reckon with care for collections, researchers, and staff.

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<sup>10</sup> Sonia Renee Taylor (@sonyareneetaylor), "There Can Be No Going Back to 'Normal'...", Instagram, Instagram reels and post, March 31, 2020, no time stamp, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B-avtdKAXRh/?hl=en>.

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Keynote Conversation with Ruth Wilson Gilmore, James Kilgore, and Mariame Kaba," (Keynote, Making and UnMaking Mass Incarceration Conference, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS, December 5, 2019).

During the summer of 2020, institutions had varying reactions and ideas about staff productivity, working from home, and overall health and well-being. The long-term effects of the pandemic will take generations to understand, but some of the ramifications can already be seen. The editors heard from colleagues who were expected to still work eight-hour days, be available for meetings, and generally work in the same pre-pandemic ways, all while caring for sick loved ones, managing complex family dynamics at home, and dealing with their own challenges in the midst of a global health crisis. The conversation about care work remains all the more vital because of this. Our current modes of productivity, at any cost and expense, are harmful. They lead to burnout among staff and faculty, ineffective leadership, and uneven models of operation—with the burden of work often being placed upon the most vulnerable. Most importantly, prioritizing productivity over care reinforces the idea of product-over-people: that people are replaceable, that individuals can be dehumanized, and that people are only valuable by what they contribute. As Moya Bailey, reflecting on the lessons that disability justice teaches us, writes in “Ethics of Pace,”

Our insistence on moving faster, both physically and in production, can actually slow us down as more people experience the drag caused by the friction of an impossible expectation of pace. And why must we move faster? To what end? The need to move quickly simply for the sake of moving quickly is not a compelling reason to do so. Capitalism’s insistence on profits over people seems to be a major force behind the seemingly unquestioned ethos to make us produce more and faster. I ask that we consider the ethics of this pace, particularly in the academy, where research has shown there are other ways, better ways, for humans to move.<sup>12</sup>

There are “better ways for humans to move” and better ways for us to move as a profession. We know another way is possible. We can see the possibilities for a more liberatory archives, and many of our colleagues are leading the work to move us in the direction of centering radical empathy and care. Colleagues have written about practices of care work in archives and the overall LIS field in innovative and powerful ways. The We Here community, a collective space for BIPOC individuals in diverse memory work fields, “seeks to provide a safe and supportive community for Black and Indigenous folks, and People of Color (BIPOC) in library and information science (LIS) professions and educational programs, and to recognize, discuss, and intervene in systemic social issues that have plagued these professions both currently and historically.”<sup>13</sup> We Here hosts trainings, discussions and resources for BIPOC communities on topics ranging from

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<sup>12</sup> Moya Bailey, “Ethics of Pace,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 120, no. 2 (2021): 285–299.

<sup>13</sup> “About,” We Here, accessed October 4, 2021, <https://www.wehere.space/about>.

publishing to radical self-care. Tywana Hodge and Kaetrena Davis Kendrick have facilitated a number of workshops focusing on self-care, communal care, and taking care of ourselves as information professionals, particularly in the face of microaggressions and various forms of oppression.<sup>14</sup> In June of 2020, Zakiya Collier penned a powerful call to action for Black Memory workers in the wake of the pandemic and amidst the many state sanctioned murders of Black people such as Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. In the piece, Collier rejects “institutional exploitation and professional opportunism,” and insists upon Black memory-workers’ leadership to document “when Black people are suffering.”<sup>15</sup> Collier’s call ultimately asks for our professional community to support Black memory workers, providing them with the space and resources to do this critical work, and welcomes us all to act in solidarity with the activists and communities who are ethically and responsibly carrying out this work.

The work by our colleagues demonstrates that the personal is political, and there is room for conversation about health, wellness (mental/physical/emotional) as it relates to our work, our institutions, and our colleagues. It is increasingly important to think about how critical it is to advocate for communal care and liberation, particularly for BIPOC communities. Reflecting on Collier’s words, as editors, we also call attention to the fact that, as Tarida Anantachai and Camille Chesley write in their book chapter, “The Burden of Care: Cultural Taxation of Women of Color Librarians on the Tenure-Track,” it is so often women and non-binary people of color who disproportionately take up this work.<sup>16</sup> As much as we must dismantle and decenter whiteness in archival work, and as much as we know that it is an imperative to follow the lead of our BIPOC colleagues, we also know that the future of care is our interdependence.<sup>17</sup> Radical empathy amplifies our mutuality and connection, and in doing so allows us to tap into our collective abundance, making space for those amongst us who are most privileged to recognize our positionalities and reposition power to those at the margins, to reinvest and redistribute our resources, and to reflect on ways to more generatively grow together.

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example: Tywana Hodge, Kaetrena Davis Kendrick, Amanda Leftwich, and Rayna Smaller, “BIPOC in LIS Mental Health Summit,” The BIPOC Mental Health Summit, April 1, 2020, [https://renewerslis.wordpress.com/2020/04/01/bipoc-mental-health-summit-panel-resources/?fbclid=IwAR2FLQpy2wyS2kiq7R95dDbHJQgzQkElypec58IN3RsF\\_QPjsxsjtiFlgyM](https://renewerslis.wordpress.com/2020/04/01/bipoc-mental-health-summit-panel-resources/?fbclid=IwAR2FLQpy2wyS2kiq7R95dDbHJQgzQkElypec58IN3RsF_QPjsxsjtiFlgyM).

<sup>15</sup> Zakiya Collier, “Call to Action: Archiving State-Sanctioned Violence Against Black People,” Medium, June 6, 2020, <https://medium.com/community-archives/call-to-action-archiving-state-sanctioned-violence-against-black-people-d629c956689a>.

<sup>16</sup> Tarida Anantachai and Camille Chesley, “The Burden of Care: Cultural Taxation of Women of Color Librarians on the Tenure-Track,” in *Pushing the Margins: Women of Color and Intersectionality in LIS*, eds. Rose L. Chou and Annie Pho (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2018), 301-327.

<sup>17</sup> The Care Collective, *Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence* (New York, NY: Verso, 2020).



This aspect of growing together is significant. Radical empathy and care work are always already relational. In the words of Grace Lee Boggs, “The only way to survive is by taking care of one another, by recreating our relationships to one another.”<sup>18</sup> Who do we become when we center care, when we center collectivity and genuine connections, when we become people-first, when we refuse hierarchy, when we reject saviorism or the idea that there is only one expert in the room? When we center care, we become radically empathetic. When we become radically empathetic, we understand our interdependence. When we understand our interdependence, we become collectively active. And when we become collectively active, we can move toward liberatory practice.

## WHAT DOES ENACTING RADICAL EMPATHY LOOK LIKE?

If radical empathy in archival practice is an uprooting of the harmful logics that have dominated our profession for so long, and if radical empathy is first and foremost about relationships that counter and shift power dynamics, a question arises: what do these relationships look like in our work as archival practitioners? In their original article, Caswell and Cifor provide examples of their experiences with traditional archival practices that ultimately demonstrate a lack of care and fail to protect the diverse groups with whom archivists are in community. The articles in this issue build upon these examples and, when taken together, aim to build a deeper understanding of how archivists can shift power dynamics in their relationships with records creators, subjects, users, communities, donors, and other archivists. As you will read in this issue, radical empathy in archival practice means holding space for grief and taking a trauma-informed approach to our labor; unpacking, understanding, and supporting care work as an imperative in our profession; demanding anti-racist approaches and dismantling the violences that archives perpetuate; resisting capitalist impulses of productivity and foregrounding the value of slowness and reparative work; and shifting priorities in LIS education towards critical engagement with, and embedding of, ethics of care and radical empathy.

Elvia Arroyo-Ramírez, Amanda Demeter, and Rachel Tropea and Georgina Ward all contend with issues of encountering and experiencing grief, trauma, and violence in our field. In each of these articles, the authors underscore the affective nature of archival work and the impact that this has on archivists and archival labor. Demeter contributes a challenging piece, sharing her experiences processing and managing access to the police investigative files of serial killer Ted Bundy. Through this case study, Demeter proposes a new affective relationship, the archivist and the archivist’s self. She offers reflective insights into her own visceral response to the collection; she experiences both a deep aversion to the collection and its content, and she feels a responsibility to protect other

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<sup>18</sup> Grace Lee Boggs, interview by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, April 2, 2010, [https://www.democracynow.org/2010/4/2/grace\\_lee\\_boggs](https://www.democracynow.org/2010/4/2/grace_lee_boggs).

colleagues and reduce their risk of exposure to the collection. Demeter also discusses the tension between the archival tenet of universal access, a legal mandate at public entities like government records offices, and the desire to limit access to images that depict victims out of respect for them and their surviving kin.

Tropea and Ward argue for the role that archives can play in reparations, and they offer a case study for how reciprocity is an expression of radical empathy. Writing about the Care Leavers—the more than 500,000 children, many of them Aboriginal and Indigenous children, who were removed from their families and placed in state and church organized orphanages, children’s homes, foster family settings, and training schools—Tropea and Ward highlight trauma-informed approaches to working with Care Leavers’ records, demanding “compassionate responses, honoring the agency and authority of creators/subjects in the archives, and building in practices of reciprocity and reparative action.” Arroyo-Ramírez describes the experience of processing the papers of Argentine poet Juan Gelman, a collection thick with the heaviness of Gelman’s investigations of human rights abuses in Argentina inclusive of the state-sanctioned disappearance and murder of his son Marcelo and his daughter-in-law Maria Claudia. Arroyo-Ramírez begins this work as she emotionally processes the losses of her friend, Marcy, and former partner, Heidi. As Arroyo-Ramírez wades through her own grief, while also observing Gelman’s, she describes the feeling as “grief in suspension,” and she offers us a new archival concept of “suspended grief,” or “the double grief experienced and witnessed by an archivist who is undergoing simultaneous personal grief and secondary trauma while processing archival collections about traumatic events and experiences.”

At the core of Caswell and Cifor’s 2016 argument for radical empathy is the idea that archivists have “affective responsibilities.” Itza Carbajal and Kathy Carbone discuss the affective responsibilities of archivists through case studies on relationship building. A deeply under-examined relationship in the archival field is that between the archivist and the donor. Focusing on “music artist” donors at the core of her case study, Carbajal presents the reader with a research study that analyzes the ways donors express their needs during, and their understanding of, the donation process. Carbajal ultimately argues that, by emphasizing archivists work within “a web of mutual affective responsibility,” archivists must consider donors as active collaborators in their donation, and that archivists should take a people-centered approach to collection development. As Carbajal writes, “archivists and archival donors should be able to develop and maintain a relationship based on clear communication, trust, cooperation, understanding, and compromise...Unfortunately, many archivist and donor relationships end right after the transfer of archival materials from owner to repository. As a result, most archival scholarship tends to focus more on the value or resulting impact of the acquisition of archival materials instead of the people involved.”

Carbone’s work centers the materials of the CalArts Institute’s Feminist Arts Materials Collection, analyzes the relationships of feminist scholars and artists with the collection, and describes how the archive informs current feminist practices. The article

features several interrelated stories of how different women artists and researchers interacted with the collection, where Carbone “surface[s] the particular feminist histories, relationships, subjectivities, and concerns invoked through uses of the Collection to contemplate the archive as a conduit and locus for current day feminist identifications and meaning-making, exchange, and resistance.” The interrelationships between the women artists highlighted in the letters, the archivist caring for them, and the patrons interacting with them powerfully highlight the affective relationships within the radical empathy in archives framework. This piece “not only reveal[s] how second-wave feminist matter in the archive still matters and resonates with women today, but how this legacy can be redeployed towards various aims.”

Radical empathy is an anti-racist practice, proactively seeking to shift power as a means of dismantling all forms of supremacy and hierarchies of difference. It refuses the passive acceptance of supposedly normative identities—what Michelle Caswell, hearkening to Hope Olson and Marika Cifor in her article for this issue, “Dusting for Fingerprints: Introducing Feminist Standpoint Appraisal”—calls “WEBCCCHAM,” that is: white, ethnically European, bourgeois, Christian, cis, citizen, heterosexual, able-bodied, and male. White supremacy, colonialism, and patriarchy have long dominated the theories and practices of archiving, and several of the authors in this issue, including Michelle Caswell, Krista McCracken and Skylee-Storm Hogan, and Nancy Godoy, offer strategies for approaching our work in ways that urge our profession toward justice and liberation. In “Dusting for Fingerprints,” Caswell argues for a new appraisal strategy in archives: feminist standpoint appraisal. She asks us, “How has the dominant canon of appraisal theory remained largely immune to the past forty years of feminist theory?...Why, when it comes to the dominant canon of appraisal theory, are we stuck on disembodied notions of value, a focus on institutional priorities, and, most liberally, documenting bureaucratic functions as reflections of society—all of which often fail to acknowledge, let alone celebrate, the marginalized positionalities of some of us doing the appraising? Why hasn’t the dominant canon of appraisal theory changed in the past decade in response to the demands of critical archival studies?” Caswell’s proposed methodology questions archival concepts of value and radically repositions the archivist—who often inhabits WEBCCCHAM identities and whose knowledge has been centered in archival theory and practice—and as an agent whose role it is to acknowledge their positionality, decenter themselves, and to center ways of being and knowing from the margins.

A powerful instantiation of shifting power dynamics in archives is through the ways in which community archives center and give autonomy to those whose experiences have been historically documented in grief, erasure, and trauma. Krista McCracken and Skylee-Storm Hogan write about the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre (SRSC), a Residential School Survivor organization established by the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association in Canada, whose purpose is to support community healing of Survivors and their descendants by taking a trauma-informed care approach to navigating the records

of the Residential School. The SRSC is an example of a community archive that exists to decenter the power colonial archives once yielded over Indigenous communities and to reinscribe new meaning and ownership towards community strength, healing, and resilience. McCracken and Hogan write, “when decisions about archival management, use, and access are determined by community, archival spaces can be transformed into spaces of community truth.” The SRSC operates through a trauma-informed archival practice and prioritizes the affective needs and wellbeing of its community and visitors above traditional archival procedures.

Nancy Godoy writes about her application of *conocimiento*, a Queer Chicana epistemological framework rooted in consciousness and knowledge, to inform her approach to managing the Community-Driven Archives (CDA) Initiative at Arizona State University. As a Queer Latinx archivist helping other BIPOC and Queer community members preserve and document their own histories, Godoy writes that a truly radical empathetic approach to archives is to redistribute “power and resources needed for BIPOC and Queer communities to lead archival projects and storytelling... we are not victims... we witness and experience the worst of humanity on a daily basis, yet we survive because we are the living archive of generational wisdom, love, grief, and strength.” Godoy shares parts of her autoethnography as she describes the seven stages of *conocimiento* that BIPOC and Queer community archivists move through “as they learn how to preserve their archives, reclaim their narratives, and build a collective memory that heals historical trauma.” Within this conceptualization of shifting power, Jessica Tai provides her perspectives and a case study that advocates for cultural humility as an anti-oppressive framework for archival description. Cultural humility centers learning the ways in which bias, harm, and power imbalance show up in one’s own self, and it offers a cycle of critique to assess the means to challenge them. She writes, “cultural humility emphasizes the need for process-oriented approaches that are iterative, flexible, and acknowledge the inherent biases that impact both our everyday work, and the structures from which that work is carried out.” In her article, Tai identifies examples of how the framework of cultural humility can be integrated into archival descriptive practices and workflows, sharing transparent, community-centered description initiatives.

Though anti-capitalism was not expressly situated as an aim within Caswell and Cifor’s 2016 article, in their 2021 introductory note, Caswell and Cifor make the case that in order to be radically empathetic, we must resist capitalism. There is no empathy or care in capitalism. As Saidiya Hartman states, “care is the antidote to violence,”<sup>19</sup> and for the author-archivists featured in this special issue, enacting care in their work means developing critical methods, practices, tactics, and language that remind us that our professional ethic is not one that should value capitalist impulses toward hyperproductivity and scarcity. We should focus, instead, on critical inquiry and

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<sup>19</sup> Saidiya Hartman, “In the Wake: A Salon in Honor of Christina Sharpe” (presentation, Barnard Center for Research on Women, Barnard College, New York, NY, February 2, 2017).

reparative work. Existing practices rooted in productivity and scarcity can often put archivists at odds with centering the wellness of the communities whose experiences we preserve. In this special journal issue, a number of the authors offer approaches and examples of times they have been able to advocate for slowness and intentionality. A conversation between Cristela Garcia-Spitz and Noah Geraci offers insights into their work on digital collections care as they ask, “How do we act as responsible stewards of archival collections in the digital realm, with a reflective eye toward issues of privacy, ethics, and cultural sensitivity, while working with technological infrastructures that tend not to share these priorities?” In their dialogue, Garcia-Spitz and Geraci acknowledge the contradictions and challenges of doing ethically oriented digital collections stewardship in academic libraries while using systems that have descended from, and have been designed for, other fields outside of cultural heritage, like the military, for example. Each offers insights into projects where issues about cultural sensitivity, privacy, and mediated access needs are raised because the limitations of current library and archives technologies make it difficult to meet community needs.

Similarly, Monique Lassere and Jess Whyte consider the impacts of technological expediency on our work. Lassere and Whyte reflect on the practice of disk imaging and retention of disk images. They point out the increased risk of harm for creators and subjects when disk images may inadvertently enable access to hidden or deleted files that neither the donor or institution would like to make accessible. At its core, the practice of disk imaging is a result of the “take and keep it all” approach. This approach during the acquisition of media-bound archival digital content raises significant ethical implications, and has an impact on archivists’ labor and the privacy of our donors, records creators, and subjects. Giordana Mecagni focuses on the commodification of archival collections and how frequently paywalled resources result in inequitable access to these collections, particularly for the communities who are represented in these materials. She describes “efforts to critically examine and disrupt current practices using a radical empathy framing, and offers practical solutions for archival institutions to take the first step toward a liberatory digital archive available to all.” Using Northeastern University’s Archives as a case study, Mecagni describes long term efforts to document African American, LGBTQ, Latinx communities and other historically marginalized groups in Boston, and describes how previous microfilm projects to make some of these collections available must be reevaluated. She raises several critical issues in the challenges these communities have accessing the materials that are behind paywalls, and she highlights several ways Northeastern’s Archives staff have collaboratively sought to find solutions for equitable access and community input. Mecagni powerfully states “an archival re-framing toward a feminist ethics of care could lead to a radically altered landscape of digital collections access, and it is within our power to make this happen.”

While many of the examples of radical empathy in practice in this issue focus on evaluating and changing the past and present ways archives perpetuate harm, the articles also offer insights for how radical empathy can create a pathway to a more liberatory

future in archives. Radical empathy calls attention to the fact that the MLIS degree needs an overhaul in its structure and pedagogy. As a more-or-less mandated requirement for obtaining a job in our field, many young professionals are introduced to archival practice through the vocabularies and discourses of bureaucratic management, administrative record-keeping, and positivistic science, rather than interdisciplinary thought that can enrich approaches to our work and deepen our understanding of our affective responsibilities. The lack of critical race theory, queer studies, Indigenous studies, feminist studies, and disability studies in our profession's accredited curricula has been made readily apparent and scholars such as Sofia Y. Leung, Jarrett Drake, Dorothy Berry, Anthony W. Dunbar, Tonia Sutherland, Jamila Ghaddar, Lae'l Hughes-Watkins, Gracen Brilmyer, and Stacie M. Williams have made interventions in our body of professional literature. Within this special issue, several authors offer dialogue, and examples, for how we might infuse critical MLIS pedagogy with the principles and practices of radical empathy.

Nicole Cooke, Kelle Warren, Molly Brown, and Athena Jackson discuss their diverse professional experiences in a roundtable-style interview, highlighting why conversations around "empathy, diversity, equity, and inclusion" are necessary in LIS and archives education. They also emphasize "the need to continuously infuse these values into graduate education, professional development, research, writing, and peer mentoring." Warren brings up these very important questions in the interview, "How do we define power? Its source and priorities? ... [W]hiteness will reproduce itself at any cost. So how do we get to the liberatory aspects of power?" Jackson critically notes, "Perhaps in the past, empathy meant something completely different when the majority of a team was comprised of a homogenous group derived from a historical ruling class. Today, the skill of empathy for new professionals, regardless of their backgrounds, entails having conversations about this trajectory the academy is endeavoring to take and the path it has been taking since its inception. Empathy extends beyond pleasantries and being collegial at meetings and moves into new territories of enabling authentic cultural exchanges and fostering mutual respect."

Speaking to the fact that "whiteness will reproduce itself at any cost," Samantha R. Winn names the whiteness inherent to LIS education and professional education opportunities. As a counter to the paucity of pedagogical spaces where archivists can acknowledge and confront whiteness in their work, Winn offers a case study describing how she produced a workshop entitled "Deconstructing Whiteness in Archives." This workshop was first facilitated by Winn at the 2016 Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists. In her article "Radical Empathy in Peer Education: A Case Study in Deconstructing Whiteness," Winn notes, "For more sustainable transformation to take place in our field, I believe we must expose the invisible defaults of our profession and incorporate cultural competency into the core of our curricular and professional standards...Without radical empathy at the core of our training, white archival workers cannot contribute to the liberation imagined by memory workers who have been

marginalized by whiteness.” While offering her own critiques of the workshop itself, Winn ultimately identifies the necessity for a “workshop aimed to train archival workers from dominant groups to interrogate their normative assumptions,” in particular as whiteness not only abounds in LIS education but within our continuing education opportunities as well. Winn’s workshop makes space for “self-reflection and affective entanglement”—both of which are necessary in a radically empathetic reimagining of our work.

## FEMINIST ETHICS OF EDITORSHIP AND RADICAL EMPATHY

If we can reimagine our approaches to archival work, then we can also reimagine the shape of our scholarship. In this light, enacting radical empathy also looks like practicing a feminist ethics of editorship. This special issue is one of the largest that the *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* has ever published. It has been a privilege, responsibility, and pleasure for the four of us to edit this collective work together. It has also been a deeply challenging project. In editing this issue, we questioned traditional journal publishing models, and we aimed to widen the scope of work we want to see in academic publications: we elevated the importance of less-traditional forms of scholarly writing, welcoming dialogical pieces (Cooke et al., Garcia-Spitz and Geraci) and artistic works (Brilmyer’s poster and postcards); we made space for writers to speak openly, and we did not shy away from or censure critique of our profession; and we centered practitioner experiences, recognizing that opportunities for practitioners to publish in an academic journal is not what has always been normalized in our professional literature. Throughout our work together, and through our work in support of the authors in this issue, we reflected on and remained cognizant of representation, and we worked within and—challenged our own—positionalities. We brought our authentic selves to this issue, and we welcomed the authors to do the same.

As we worked together, we frequently mused on what it would mean to enact a feminist ethics of editorship. Building on the work of our colleagues with the publishing collective up//root and finding inspiration in Sonya M. Alemán and Flor de Maria Olivo’s work, “Guerrillera Editorship Enacts the Decolonial Imaginary of Chicana Editors,”<sup>20</sup> we approached this issue by asking ourselves, “How does centering a feminist ethic of care change the editorial process? What is the body of work that results from this?” With these questions as our guideposts, we began to define a feminist ethics of editorship shaped by the practice of radical empathy. Radically empathetic editorship rejects the corporatization of scholarship. It was vital to us that we chose an open-access journal and that these articles would be available through an accessible platform outside of academic

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<sup>20</sup> Sonya M. Alemán and Flor de Maria Olivo, “Guerrillera Editorship Enacts the Decolonial Imaginary of Chicana Editors,” *Feminist Media Studies*, 29, no.4 (2018): 556-573.

paywalls. Peer review is political.<sup>21</sup> Authorship is political. Editorship is political. We choose a feminist politic of editorship that challenges and disrupts power dynamics. We made concerted and conscientious choices to publish first-time authors, authors of color, queer authors, and authors publishing in formats that we rarely get the chance to see in academic journals. We recognized that, from a position of power as editors, it was our responsibility to be intentional about who we selected as reviewers. Reviewers were purposefully paired with pieces, and we took into consideration whether or not those reviewers had some level of rootedness in the theory or practices articulated by the authors. We aimed to select reviewers who would be informed and offer critical perspectives, and we aimed to select reviewers who could also provide feedback that was honest yet generative and supportive. Our friends and colleagues at up//root, “a publishing collective that exists to center the works, knowledge, and experiences of BIPOC within the context of the library and archive community”<sup>22</sup> are truly leading in this work. As our practice of feminist editorship expands, we look to the example they are setting.

Radically empathic editorship asked us to notice where the norms and narratives of capitalist productivity have been ingrained within us, and it invited us to do the work of shedding ourselves of these constraints. We allowed for contributors to communicate their own timelines, and we were transparent when our own timelines changed. We refused to set deadlines for contributors and reviewers that expected them to work on manuscripts at times, like weekends and holiday breaks, that are allocated for rest. This latter point, rest as an act of care, is imperative. Rest is a lesson that we are in the collective practice of learning from the teachings of Tricia Hersey’s *The Nap Ministry*<sup>23</sup> and centuries of Black and Indigenous networks of resistance and mutual aid.

This issue delves into topics that are triggering and exhausting: white supremacy, violence, grief. As we learned how to express care as a principle of feminist editorship, we acknowledged the heaviness and emotional work of reading and editing these pieces, and we made time to discuss our feelings together. We worked at the pace we needed. We laid down. We closed our eyes. We canceled meetings when our energy was depleted. We took turns being the facilitator, the note-taker, and the meeting-scheduler. Writing this introduction, editing the pieces, and reading and reviewing many more pushed us to our limits. Radical empathy invites joy and liberation.<sup>24</sup> It also requires naming and

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<sup>21</sup> Erin Owens, “Raise Your Voice: Increasing Diversity and Inclusion by Participating in Scholarly Peer Review” (webinar, ACRL University Libraries Section, September 12, 2019), <https://www.acrl.ala.org/ULS/raise-your-voice-increasing-diversity-and-inclusion-by-participating-in-scholarly-peer-review-video-replay/>.

<sup>22</sup> “About,” up//root, accessed October 4, 2021, <https://www.uproot.space/about>.

<sup>23</sup> Tricia Hersey, *The Nap Ministry*, accessed October 4, 2021, <https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>24</sup> Michelle Caswell, “Feeling Liberatory Memory Work: On the Archival Uses of Joy and Anger,” *Archivaria* 90 (Fall 2020): 148-164.



confronting the harms of living in racialized capitalism. In response, when we felt anxious, depressed, overwhelmed, sick, or tired, we cared for each other. Some days, when we video-conferenced with the intention of coworking, we chose instead to confide in one another, cry with one another, or laugh until our sides ached. We saw this as part of the work of this journal issue as well: to be real; to be our whole, messy selves; and to be loving of one another. At various points each one of us took on the role of carrying the project forward—of pulling us together and holding us up when we were worn out. While we made time to process together, we also made ourselves available to contributors, ensuring that we could be reached by email and phone. We prioritized the contributors' lives, and our own lives, outside of work, and we were honest about the impact that our worlds have on our collective energy and well-being.

We close this editors' note with transparency. At times, this all felt daunting. None of us has ever been an editor before. Did we actually have the expertise to take this on? Were we ever going to publish this thing? Were we truly being accountable to the contributors of the issue? What if we got it wrong? We struggled to start writing this editors' note. How would we meaningfully contribute to this issue? We took up Alexis Pauline Gumbs' counsel in *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Animals* to practice deep listening, to "quiet down and tune in,"<sup>25</sup> and we spent a period of time in self-reflection. It was okay that, perhaps, even after years of studying radical empathy, we did not have it all figured out. But as Sonya Renee Taylor writes, "When we liberate ourselves from the expectation that we must have all things figured out, we enter a sanctuary of empathy."<sup>26</sup> We decided to write letters to one another. In these letters, we talked about where we found joy; we named where we felt challenged in our collaboration; we thought about the ways this project was simultaneously intimate and expansive; and we described what it felt like to work on a project that is forged in love<sup>27</sup> and gratitude.<sup>28</sup> We opened ourselves up to the lessons we have received from the practice of radical empathy and, in the process, we have learned how to become editors. Radical empathy calls us forward to share this experience with you.

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<sup>25</sup> Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, (Chico, CA: AK Press), 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Sonya Renee Taylor, *The Body is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love*, (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers), 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Holly Smith, "Radical Love: Documenting Underrepresented Communities Using Principles of Radical Empathy," *Journal for the Society of North Carolina Archivists*, 15 (2018): 2-11.

<sup>28</sup> adrienne maree brown, during an online celebration of activist, performer, dreamer, and revolutionary Marsha P. Johnson's birthday stated, "Gratitude is at the center of empathy." See: adrienne maree brown, Black Obsidian Sound System, Tourmaline, and Lola Olufemi, "Happy Birthday Marsha!," NTS Radio, August 8, 2020, <https://www.nts.live/shows/revolution-is-not-a-one-time-event/episodes/happy-birthday-marsha-24th-august-2020>.

Our profession eschews vulnerability. As an archival professional, you're meant to keep a straight face, a stiff upper lip, to toe the line. We reject this. This does not mean, however, that we allow our responsibility as editors to slide. We understand the position of power that editors hold in the publishing process, and we also embrace our accountability as the editors of this issue. We know we haven't gotten everything right in our editorship, and that radical empathy as a concept and strategy has evolved since we first embarked on this journey. To this end, we are grateful for the dialogue that radical empathy welcomes, and we welcome you, the reader, into the conversation.

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