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**Lindsey Alexandra Short**

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**Shattering the Silence: The Exclusion of Women from the Archive**

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## **Abstract:**

This dissertation asserts that women, like many groups outwith the European white male population, have been under-represented in the archive. Their voices are either not heard or heard only in faint whispers. As such, two main issues will be addressed:

- Women's records have been over-looked due to their non-traditional format and content, which has led to friction and claims of subversion.
- How the male-sanctioned language of the archival profession does not adequately represent the range of women's experiences.
- Likewise, the language employed by contemporary women to describe their experiences can be unsettling and lead for example to charges of promiscuity.
- Archival standards are poorly equipped to represent the ways in which women have been described in masculine records and how women describe themselves within their own records.
- Traditional archive theory militates against allowing the voice of women to emerge, and it is only through the works of more recent commentators such as Verne Harris and Louise Craven that a wider view of the archive is being articulated among archives professionals which allows the voice of women to be more effectively heard.

This research was based on a number of visits to libraries, museums and archives and interviews with information professionals. The first of these was with Wendy Kirk and Adele Patrick from Glasgow Women's Library. The second was with Althea Greenan and Jacqueline Cooke from MAKE – The Women's Art Library. Finally, I interviewed Terry Dennett, the curator of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive. I also visited The Women's Library in London, The Foundling Museum and attended a public lecture entitled, Tracey Emin In Conversation with Patrick Elliott at the National Gallery of Scotland.

The ways in which such fundamental professional activities of information professionals as cataloguing and the appraisal of records overlook women and make it difficult to recapture their experience will be illustrated. This has fundamental implications for information professionals, who must engage with, understand and explain the reasons for the previous lacunae and move forward to ensure that these themes of friction and absence within the archive are resolved.

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## Chapter One: An Introduction

The impetus for this research came from a visit to The Burrell Collection in Glasgow which hosted a small exhibition on Seventeenth Century Samplers between 19<sup>th</sup> May and 7<sup>th</sup> October 2006. A small room contained around twenty samplers created by girls and young women as part of their domestic and moral education. I was immediately struck by their beauty and detail but on closer inspection was intrigued by the subject matter of one of these seemingly innocuous pieces.

One of the sampler in question was created by Frances Cheyney in 1664. The white work sampler is mainly comprised of delicate patterning but at the bottom is an unusual scene showing a female figure thought to be Judith from the Old Testament. In the sampler, Judith is shown holding a decapitated head. Rebecca Quinton, the curator explains:

In the apocryphal Book of Judith (Chapter 13), Judith's native town of Bethulia was laid siege by the invading Assyrian army under the command of Holofernes. In order to save the town and her people, Judith cut Holofernes head off while he was asleep. She then gave the decapitated head to her maid, who smuggled it out of the camp in a bag of meat. Women had to defend their family, political beliefs, and often their households and property during the instability of the Civil Wars, and Judith was lauded as a role model.<sup>1</sup>

This piece made a strong impression, which has stayed with me throughout this dissertation. Until then, I had failed to fully consider that needlework could be anything other than a leisure pursuit or a domestic necessity. I certainly did not expect to be confronted by an example of a strong female leader in a piece of seventeenth century craft. In turn, I re-examined the other exhibition pieces and found another by the same artist, this time with political connotations.

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<sup>1</sup> Quinton, R., 2005. *Patterns of Childhood: Samplers from Glasgow Museums*. A & C Black Publishers Ltd., p20.

On reflection, I began to consider these samplers not simply as items of skill and beauty but rather as the vehicle through which women recorded their thoughts on contemporary events and morality. Most importantly, I engaged with the idea that women's records are not simply paper-based. Indeed, women's social standing and lack of educational opportunities often prevented the creation of more traditional records.

The fact that women had to find alternative ways to create records made me question whether these often contained subversive material such as Judith's ruthlessness and if so, whether this remains. This tied in with my interest in Tracey Emin's tent, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995*. I felt there were parallels, not simply in the medium used but also the uncompromising subject matter. I was keen to investigate whether the subversive nature of Emin's work was a common theme in contemporary women's records.

Finally, I began to question why women's output has not been included in archival collections. Archivists have been slow to include non-traditional, non-paper records in their collections and when they have been included, are not always catalogued sympathetically.

A re-evaluation of women's records is needed to ensure that women and their endeavours are not lost from our collective memory. This dissertation will examine the position of women over the past forty years in archives and archival theory in the United Kingdom. Academics and practitioners are becoming aware that history is subjective and that previous incantations have not been sympathetic to women and minority groups. Records produced by women have the capacity to change our perception of history and the archive.

The first piece of academic writing I found which tied in with my belief that archives are shaped and moulded by those in power was a statement by Judith Panitch, the Director of Library Communications at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, where she explained that:

Far from standing as enduring monuments to the past, archives instead appear somewhat fragile, eternally subject to the judgement of the society in which they exist. Neither atemporal nor absolute, the meaning they convey may be manipulated, misinterpreted or suppressed...the archives of the past are also the mutable creations of the present.<sup>2</sup>

The authors offers an alternative commentary on the archive from that which is traditionally expounded by the archival community. Whilst the archive is frequently described by practitioners such as George Bolotenko as the memory of the nation, suggesting that the records within the repository contain the historical narratives of all peoples, places and events,<sup>3</sup> Panitch offers a darker, less comfortable critique. It is traditionally accepted that the gaps and absences in society's collective knowledge of the past are due to the degradation of information over time and the failure or inability of communities to record their experiences. However, Panitch suggests that these gaps may in fact be due to the judgements, manipulations, misinterpretations and suppression of the ruling body. Society, and concurrently the archive, can exclude, to varying degrees, be this as a result of cataloguing systems which have not been sufficiently modernised to reflect current trends and experiences or a failure to recognise the need to collect records from marginalised groups. Sometimes, whole sections of society are silenced. I will demonstrate that, to a certain extent, women of all ages, backgrounds and professions remain underrepresented in the archive, as do working class men and many ethnic communities. In general, groups outwith the European white male population are represented through the repository in a limited way within the Western archival tradition; their voices are either not heard or heard only in faint whispers.

The growth in women's libraries, archives and information centres has been rapid, fuelled by second-wave feminism and gender studies. Several projects such as WINE, a network of women's libraries, archives and

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<sup>2</sup> Panitch, J.M., Winter 1997. Liberty, Equality, Posterity?: Some Archival Lessons From the Case of the French Revolution. *American Archivist* 59, p47.

<sup>3</sup> Bolotenko, G., 1983. Archivists and Historians: Keepers of the Well. *Archivaria* 16, p6.

information centres in Europe and Genesis, a database with descriptions of women's history collections from museums, libraries and archives in the United Kingdom attempt to locate and make available the holdings of these disparate services. However, the archival community has not become fully-engaged in these activities to which it could have made positive changes

Other professions within the cultural heritage sector have begun to consider the ways in which collections reflect constructions of power. The library community have made many significant inroads, most recently with Alyson Tyler's 2006 doctoral thesis which questions whether there is the potential for a women's library in Wales. Tyler explains that:

Women's libraries represent a different way of looking at information collection, dissemination and preservation. They use the additional criterion of sex to determine the focus of their collections. It has been noted that libraries and librarians play important roles in the access to information – they can be seen as “gatekeepers”. Women's libraries, with their different perspectives, act therefore, as counter gatekeepers and preservers of women's history.<sup>4</sup>

As part of her research, Tyler visited women's libraries and archive across the United Kingdom, including Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales, Feminist Archive (South), Feminist Library, Glasgow Women's Library, Swansea Multicultural Women's Resource and Training Centre, Women's History Project, Women in Jazz, Women's Library and the Women's Resource Centre.

Another significant publication was Dr. Rosie Ilett's 2003 PhD thesis entitled *Outstanding Issues: Gender, Feminism and Librarianship* which was awarded by the University of Glasgow. Ilett's work focused on the fact that:

Women's health centres and women's libraries and information centres provide a dynamic, diverse and pluralist environment for librarians to reflect on theory and practice within a setting where the provision of information is done differently. Such settings can allow greater capacity for creative

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<sup>4</sup> Tyler, A., 2006. *A Library of our own: the potential for a women's library in Wales*. University of Aberystwyth: Unpublished PhD dissertation, p1.

thinking and practice and for developing alternative models and concepts for classification and librarianship.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, museum staff have carried out research in this area over a number of years. Interesting examples include *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in A Changing World*, edited by Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe, and *Gender, Sexuality and Museums: A Routledge Reader* which was edited by Amy K. Leith. She notes that:

Public museums as we know them in North America and Europe have played a large part in the creation and enforcement of ideologies of class and gender. As educational institutions, they have continued to serve as places for acculturation well into the twenty-first century. Yet despite the widely held perspectives of the prevalence of gay men in particular – but also of lesbians and bi-sexual individuals – in museum work, little evidence of their contributions exists. But the lack of evidence mirrors the silences, gaps, and distortions that surround gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender histories in general. The pages that would tell us the role of homosexuals in the creation of museums are largely blank, their contributions are generally obscured, with the exception of a few extremely famous individual collectors. Aside from such major figures as Gertrude Stein, history is even more stubbornly silent about the lives of lesbians and transgender individuals in museum work than it is about the existence of gay men and bisexuals...When contemporary museums attempt to focus on marginalized populations, their exhibitions gain inflection from three inextricable and commanding forces: the institution's past and present relationship to dominant groups, the politics of control inherent in spectatorship and display; and the evolving economics of marketing culture, and especially sex, as a commodity. Because similar forces come into play in the more traditional use of the term "exhibitionist tendencies", I have adopted the expression to describe what happens when museums assume responsibility for greater inclusiveness, particularly with respect to gender. The term is particularly apposite when one considers that the assertion of power in exhibitionism compels others to gaze at the self; similarly, many museum installations reveal as much about those who present them as about the "others" they claim for their subject.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ilett, R., 2003. Different for Girls? Feminism, Health Information and Librarianship. *Health Information and Libraries Journal*, Vol. 19, Issue 1, p40.

<sup>6</sup> Leith, A. K. cited in Macdonald S. & Fyfe, G. (eds), 1996. *Theorizing museums : representing identity and diversity in a changing world*. Oxford : Blackwell Publishing, p4.

In contrast, archival literature, particularly in the United Kingdom has not really engaged with gender issues, despite the growth of interest in gender and history, as illustrated by the journal *Gender and History*, based in the University of Glasgow.

This research seeks to play a part in wider discussions on marginalisation which are taking place within the archival community such as *Archivaria* 68, Fall 2009 which contained a *Special Section on Queer Archives* and Kimberly Christen's article, *Opening Archives: Respectful Repatriations* in *The American Archivist*, which looks into the archive and indigenous people.<sup>7</sup> Lynn Abrams, Professor of Gender History at the University of Glasgow, recently discussed oral history as an alternative lens through which we can view women's history. In turn, this may present a way in which archivists can engage with the marginalised on their terms. Abrams believes that:

...such histories born of the attempt to access women's voices and subjectivities may offer different narratives and chronologies of change, driven by female-centred sources and feminist research strategies. This article makes three points. First, the analysis of a place like Shetland which appears different or unusual offers the historian a unique vantage point from which to form a new perspective on the general or familiar landscape of European women's history. Second, the deliberate prioritising of women's voices and interpretations in the local context provides a version of women's pasts which may jar with more familiar narratives of continuity and change. And third, this combination of strangeness and subjectivity offer the historian an authentic story with meaning for those who narrated it.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Christen, K., Spring/Summer 2011. *Opening Archives: Respectful Repatriation*. *Society of American Archivists* 74 (1) pp185-210.

<sup>8</sup> Abrams, L. (2008) The "unseamed picture": conflicting narratives of women in the modern European past. *Gender and History* 20 (3) Accessed via <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/4891/> p3.

One particular phrase in the article struck me; “I had not counted on this interplay between the past and the present through the prism of women.”<sup>9</sup> It is this sense of rediscovery which I believe can be imbued in the archive if due consideration is given to women’s records.

The archive has previously been narrowly defined and these definitions have lingered. Records were deemed important only if they related to corporate bodies, important male figures or government and religious agencies. As such, any person or body who did not meet these criterion for inclusion, did not feature in the archive, the result of which is that archives are not indicative of the wider society. Archivists therefore have to accept it is either impossible to claim that archives are representative of communal memory or expand the traditionally held definition of the archive. However, if the definition of the archive is expanded to include non-corporate records, we find that women still struggle to find a place in repositories such as The British Library as women become synonymous with important women. As such, second-wave feminist rhetoric will be used as a means to identify and analyse the ways in which women are described within the repository and classification schemas such as *UKAT* and *UNESCO*.<sup>10</sup> *UKAT*, the United Kingdom Archival Thesaurus, is a subject thesaurus which was created between June 2003 and August 2004. It is a controlled vocabulary with subject terms contributed by individual archives, archive projects and archive users. *UNESCO*, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation Thesaurus is a controlled vocabulary used in libraries and archives. It was first published in 1977 and a second edition was made available in 1995. Chapter Two focuses on the male-sanctioned language employed by *UKAT* in particular, which the majority of archival institutions use to catalogue women’s records despite the fact that it is often unsatisfactory. As a result, women’s records remain buried. Alternative, female-friendly classification systems are discussed as a starting point to redress the absence of women from collections.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p8

There is a need to act quickly, as voiced by Veronica Strong-Boag (1947 - ), Professor of Women's History at the University of British Columbia who notes:

It is time that archives recognise the importance of women's history, the widespread interest and the dangers of delay by providing concrete and meaningful assistance.<sup>11</sup>

As time passes, the gulf between women's experiences and their archival representation grows wider and passes by, largely unrecognised. It would seem pertinent to act quickly whilst some areas of the archival community are receptive to change. Examples of this can be seen in the beginnings of fruitful engagement with post-modernist thought, the impact of the digital and the public's growing awareness of heritage institutions.

In 1971 Strong-Boag published an essay, *Raising Clio's Consciousness: Womens' History in Canada*, which stressed the importance of female records and the value of the archive for researchers in women's history. The author remains one of the only archivists to have debated the place and value of women's records within the archive, not simply as interesting collections but as an academic concern. The 36<sup>th</sup> issue of *The American Archivist*, 1977 was devoted to women in archives. However, whilst this edition raised concerns regarding women's records, no further action appears to have been taken. Articles on women's archives more commonly centre around collection of note. However, Strong-Boag sought to provide practical solutions to the difficulties which existed, and continues to exist, between women and the archival structure, including the necessity of revised cataloguing systems which are more sympathetic to the female experience. As the thirtieth anniversary of her essay passes, it seems an appropriate time to reconsider the issues raised. During the interim period important steps have been taken by groups within the information community, particularly by librarians, to incorporate and re-evaluate

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<sup>11</sup> Strong-Boag, V., 1978. Raising Clio's Consciousness: Womens' History in Canada. *Archivaria* 6 (Summer), p74.

women's records.<sup>12</sup> In 2009 for example, Glasgow Women's Library appointed its first archivist and secured funding to create Scotland's first women's archive. However, the archival community has not yet explored the issues of absence and friction as fully as possible and many pre-existing problems remain which a feminist perspective may help to resolve.

There is a lack of archival theory which could be used effectively to analyse and discuss how women are described within predominantly male-oriented records and how women describe themselves within their own records. I will therefore compare traditional archival theory, as promoted by Sir Hilary Jenkinson (1882-1961), the first President of the Society of Archivists in Great Britain and Theodore Schellenberg (1903-1970), the former Assistant Archivist of the United States and contemporary post-modern archival theory written by Verne Harris, the Project Manager at The Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Louise Craven, Head of Cataloguing at The National Archives who have broadened the definition of a record, making way for women's contributions. The archive has not responded sufficiently to contemporary issues in the same manner as other disciplines which have embraced inter-disciplinary politics of inclusion, as Craven and Harris seek to do. Art history, literature and theatre studies have each considered notions of the "other" and women's presence and progress within these fields, in a way which archival theory has been slow to follow.

An investigation into the nature of archival theory may uncover an undeveloped archival research community within the United Kingdom where many professionals have previously been unwilling to engage in theoretical discussion and register the emergence of new academic interests such as queer theory and gender studies. Other disciplines will provide a context within which to consider women within the archive and will raise interesting issues. A further issue which may arise is the notion that

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<sup>12</sup> Recent examples include Mason, Karen M., Fall 2007. Raising the archival consciousness: how women's archives challenge traditional approaches to collecting and use, or, what's in a name?. *Library Trends* 56(2), pp344-359; Sacho, H.R., Winter 2008. Reconstructing a life: the archival challenges of women's history. *Library Trends* 56(2), pp 359-396; Olson, H.A., 2007. How we can construct subjects: A Feminist Analysis. *Library Trends* 56(2), pp509-541.

archivists are no longer neutral custodians but rather pro-active collectors and shapers of records. For centuries, the archivist has been taught to function as an impartial guardian. However, modern archival theory has suggested that archivists make inclined decisions when choosing which collections to promote and which index terms to use when cataloguing, and this undoubtedly favours some records over others. Archivists hold positions of power within the repository and the wider community, whether this has been fully realised or not. Furthermore, archivists have yet to meaningfully consider the disparity between women's records and those traditionally associated with the repository. Records produced by women form something of an anomaly, as they do not adhere to the definition of a record traditionally accepted by archivists. These anomalies, of subject matter and language, are not characteristics typically associated with the archive and are problematic. In turn, these problems are heightened when archivists attempt to fit modern female records or historical female records containing subversive material into the existing framework. For instance, few records can be located which document women's experiences of violence. Personal accounts of rape and domestic abuse are being created in women's space such as Glasgow Women's Library, but these would sit awkwardly in traditional repositories containing official accounts of violence and initiatives to redress it. As such, there are gaps in our collective records surrounding these issues.

Despite the progress women have made, and continue to make in many fields, this silence continues. This leads to the question of whether it is our concept of an archive as a physical repository for official records that excludes women. This research is centred on the premise that women have created meaningful records, but these do not share the commonly held characteristics deemed necessary by the archival community and thus create friction. This dissertation will address two main issues: (i) Women's records have been over-looked due to their non-traditional format and content, which has led to claims of subversion. Reasons abound for the lack of scholarly attention paid to female records which reveal women as objects, creators and custodians. This concept has developed from Julia

Kristeva's discussion of the three generations of female letter writing which encompass those who work within the symbolic, male order; those who counter identify; and those who undermine fixed notions of gender identity.<sup>13</sup> This research focuses on the possibility that the non-traditional format and content of women's archival material has proved problematic, not simply because of its non-conventional format, examples of which can include patchwork, needlework and memory boxes, but because it is suggestive of a subversive quality pervading feminism and therefore the material in the female archive,<sup>14</sup> and (ii) There is a lack of archival theory which can be used to analyse how women are described within male records and how women describe themselves within their own records.

I will argue that women's records describe the private, not simply the public; the domestic, not simply the official; and the personal, not simply the formal. The subject matter of past generations of women's records centred around the personal, the family and the domestic, in contrast with the officialdom of traditional recordkeeping. Furthermore, these records are not simply analogue letters, ledgers and minute books, but exciting mixed media creations such as Judy Chicago's 1979 art installation *The Dinner Party*. Created between 1975 and 1979, the piece shows a table laid out for thirty-nine famous women, with the names of a further nine hundred and ninety-nine featured on the floor beneath. In total, one thousand and thirty-eight women are recognised through an installation made from ceramics, porcelain and needlework. Diana Ketcham explains that:

The key to *The Dinner Party*'s broad appeal is its use of traditional crafts. Chicago was shrewd enough to realize that for many American women, the most accessible arts are domestic ones like needlework. If a woman doesn't do needlework herself, she has a mother or grandmother who did. California is the scene of a fibre-arts movement, including a stitchery revival. But The

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<sup>13</sup> Kristeva J. cited in Kenyon, O., 1992. *800 Years of Women's Letter Writing*. Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, pxx.

<sup>14</sup> Issues of female subversion have been widely discussed by feminists. For instance, Germaine Greer notes that, "The sight of women together has always made men uneasy; nowadays it means rank subversion." Greer, G., 1970. *The Female Eunuch*. Flamingo, p15.

Dinner Party is mining a cultural vein that goes deeper than fashions in crafts, or even a phenomenon as widespread as the interest in quilts. Many of the women in the new audience respond to The Dinner Party because they feel competent to understand at least some of the techniques it uses.”<sup>15</sup>

Previous generations of women created records, although not in the conventional sense. Crafts such as needlework, patchwork and quilting were one of the few forms of legitimate expressions available to ordinary women throughout history and a careful enquiry based on it can yield surprising results. For example, the Dutch Resistance Museum is currently holding an exhibition entitled *A Stitch a Day...Embroidering in Prison 1940-1945* which shows needlework produced by Dutch women in concentration camps which helped the resistance movement. Frequently, they embroidered subversive messages in everyday items such as socks and tea towels.<sup>16</sup> In turn, Ghada Amer (b. 1963), a contemporary Egyptian artist has more recently produced striking pieces of embroidery which contain erotic imagery such as *Coloured Woman with Gridded Drips*, 1999-2000.<sup>17</sup>

However, domestic outputs have not always been afforded the status of a “record.” I wish to look beyond the discovery, presentation and format of records in much the same way as Feminist Library scholarship, which celebrates the diversity of women’s recorded information. Sarah M. Pritchard notes that:

In examining information, women’s studies, and the fruitful interaction between them over the last twenty years, I use the term information in its broadest sense: that is, recorded knowledge, creative writing, the documentation of human endeavor, whatever the subject of the physical format, whether printed books and periodicals, unpublished records, electronic databases, graphic images, broadcast media, or access to information services themselves.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ketcham, D. cited in Reckitt, H. & Phelan, P. (eds). *Art and Feminism*, Phaidon Press Limited, 2001, p227

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.verzetsmuseum.org/museum/en/temporary.whats\\_on](http://www.verzetsmuseum.org/museum/en/temporary.whats_on) [20/09/11]

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.ghadaamer.com/ghada/Colored\\_Woman.html](http://www.ghadaamer.com/ghada/Colored_Woman.html) [20/09/11]

<sup>18</sup> Pritchard, S. cited in Moseley, E.M., Women, 1995. *Information, and the Future: Collecting and Sharing Resources Worldwide*. Highsmith Press, p15.

It is the breadth of this definition which sets it apart from those used by the archival community and make it a good starting point for this research. Throughout this work, the terms “record” and “information” will imply any medium on which a trace of human activity has been etched upon. It is hoped that this broadening of archival terminology will help allow information professionals to interact with other groups and create a more meaningful and representative archive. One possible solution is a reinterpretation of commonly applied terminology, which this dissertation will begin to consider. The etymology of the word “archive” suggests that:

The word *archives* (pronounced //) is derived from the Greek *arkhé* meaning government or order (compare an-archy, mon-archy). The word originally developed from the Greek "arkheion" which refers to the home or dwelling of the Archon in which important official state documents were filed and interpreted under the authority of the Archon.<sup>19</sup>

Whilst this is an historical version of the archive, some archivists continue to cling to notions of state and authority, with the consequence that women and minority groups have been excluded or overlooked through ill-suited language. Generations of women were not active in public life, certainly not in positions of power, and certainly not playing the role their male counterparts were in influencing the course of language. Since this is the case, their records cannot be compared with those of their male counterparts.

The methodology which will be applied to this work is:

- (i) an empirical study of the treatment of women’s archives both by theorists of archives and at a practical level in archives, and
- (ii) (ii) an analysis informed by feminist discourse of archival thesauri and catalogues.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.archive.eu/> [25/10/09]

Throughout, I will consider the second-wave feminist critique of women's historical studies and male-sanctioned language. At first glance there appears to be little common ground between the archive and feminism. However, feminism provides a tool which will allow for an assessment of the reasons for women's exclusion from the archive and will identify the steps which could be taken to counter the problem. A recurring theme of feminism is the need to reclaim language in order to make women heard, in much the same way as this research seeks to do.

Women shattering the silence can be witnessed in the increasing number of records produced by contemporary women, who take women's issues, experiences and concerns as their primary objective. Often explicit and sometimes subversive, the records produced by these women seek to challenge the taboos imposed by society, through a discussion of feminist themes. Feminism, which is centred around reclaiming absent spaces and voices, may provide some insights into women's exclusion from the archive, both physically and linguistically.

Archivists have failed to engage with the boom in gender and history, yet Strong-Boag's article cites examples and beliefs which remain relevant and accessible. Strong-Boag believed that the archive did not adequately serve the needs and wants of women record creators and custodians. Contemporary archivists have not fully-considered the implications of female and feminist contributions to a male-oriented archive. As such, it can be argued that archives and the Archive have neglected to consider the experiences of women. The archive should provide a link to, and a trace of, past people, places and events. Women historians such as Gerda Lerner and Mary Ritter Beard have reported a lacuna; the reader can only glimpse a trace of a trace. It is possible to vaguely see and feel where women have left their story but time has continued to erode it. Many academics have researched lacunae such as P. Levin and J. Perrault who note that:

A strain which recurs in my work has involved the probing of in-between spaces, which can appear to be holes, aporias, absences. For example

between what is said and what can be comprehended, between an event and its reinterpretation, that which takes place between the process of importing and exporting products, people, ideas; between organising systems and their confounding; between what is said and what is believed; between what is heard and what is felt...<sup>20</sup>

Such assessments of one of the prominent themes of this research; absence, are invaluable given the archival community's reluctance or inability to discuss gaps in society's collective knowledge. As such, the opinions of those in related fields could be sought and considered.

This theme of absence features prominently in second-wave feminism as Linda Nochlin, the Lila Acheson Wallace Professor of Modern Art commented on in her 1971 essay, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*. Nochlin was concerned that women had been marginalised from art establishments, both in the past and present. Her work was published at the height of feminism's second-wave and she urged women to consider issues of exclusion and the friction which exists in hierarchical power structures. She argued that whilst it was important to research and educate the population on the value of women's contributions the issue went much further:

Thus the so-called women question; far from being a minor, personal and laughably provincial sub-issue grafted onto a serious, established discipline, can become a catalyst, an intellectual instrument, probing basic and "natural" assumptions, providing a paradigm for other kinds of internal questioning, and in turn providing links with paradigms established by radical approaches in other fields. Even a simple question like, "Why have there been no great women artists?" can, if answered adequately, create a set of chain reaction, expanding not merely to encompass the accepted assumptions of the single field, but outward to embrace history and the social sciences, or even psychology and literature.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Levin, P. & Perrault, J. cited in Merewether, C. (ed), 2006. *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art*. Whitechapel Ventures Limited, p139.

<sup>21</sup> Nochlin, L. cited in Edwards, S. (ed), 1998. *Art and Its Histories: A Reader*. Yale University Press, p153.

As such, an investigation of women's place within the archive will prove very significant for further feminist debate on the place of women within society and equally, act as a catalyst within the archival community to address the marginalisation of certain groups which has undoubtedly taken place. It can be argued that women's archival contribution has, at times, been treated as minor, personal and laughably provincial; nothing more than a sub-issue, if that. For instance, Mabel E. Deutrich confirmed that until 1968, women in the Society of American Archivists were mentioned only three times in the publication, *The American Archivist*. She quoted Dr. Posner, a university Dean who reminisced:

My own memory of our Society goes back to the year 1959 when I attended the first meeting in Annapolis, having just arrived from the old Continent. Boy! Was I impressed by the number of archivists, by the free and easy intercourse between big shots and small fry. And how I was impressed when a lady – it was Jean Stephenson, a humble female – got up in one of the discussion periods and talked on her feet, and talked sense!<sup>22</sup>

Posner continued with a discussion on the 1951 annual meeting, where the committee:

felt obliged to pay some attention to geographical distribution of the membership, to the types of activity represented, and to the large and increasing number of women members.<sup>23</sup>

The language used, on the one hand incredulity that a woman could make a useful contribution, and apathy on the other, demonstrate the difficulties which faced women within the profession. Michelle F. Pacifico continued to analyse the problem in her article, *Founding Mothers: Women in the Society of American Archivists, 1936-1972*.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Posner cited in Deutrich, M.E., 1973. Women in Archives: Ms. versus Mr. Archivist. *American Archivist* 36 (2), p171-172.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p172.

<sup>24</sup> Pacifico, M., 1987. Founding Mothers: Women in the Society of American Archivists, 1936-1972. *American Archivist* 50 (Summer), pp370-389.

The need to reaffirm the status of women within the profession has been addressed but women's records remain hidden within the archive. If the status quo remains, valuable information on women will be irretrievably lost. However, if steps are taken to locate women within the past, new versions of history will emerge which will impact on contemporary research. Furthermore, women are increasingly visible within today's society and produce unprecedented numbers of records; archivists must act in order to safeguard these for future generations. The chain reaction in this case may not simply be the need to locate women's records, but to question why the existing cataloguing systems appear to hinder progress. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

As discussed, women's records pose a problem in that they have traditionally comprised craftwork, such as needlework and patchwork, and have, therefore, not been considered to be documentary evidence by archivists. The archival community believed that records existed primarily on paper and documented the lives of those things that seemed most significant: the powerful individuals, businesses and organisations. These were all outwith women's group as theirs was rarely the public but the private sphere, and they had little experience of the public realm, not even being privy to the same range or standards of education. But, recent expansions in the notion of history and the broadening of notions of inclusion, allow women to be placed within the historical narrative, albeit still sometimes hesitantly. Needlework and patchwork are gaining recognition as alternative sources of information through which it is possible to explore and understand previous generations of women. For instance, The Women's Library website explains:

The strength of the Museum Collection lies in the range of printed ephemera and artefacts that documented suffrage campaign activities such as badges, arm bands, sashes, tea sets, board games, playing cards, tea towels and aprons. The Museum Collection complements the range of artefacts and ephemera held in The Women's Library archive and printed collections. As at 2011, The Women's Library held approximately 5,000 objects in the

Museum Collection, with an additional 7,000 objects identified in the archives.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, a recent publication on the promotion of women's history, *Clio in the Classroom: A Guide for Teaching US Women's History* included a chapter on *History You Can Touch: Teaching Women's History Through Three-Dimensional Objects*.<sup>26</sup>

The examples chosen will seek to uncover a female archival tradition, which remains a relatively unexplored area of research. As Strong-Boag notes:

It is not enough to ask women to "make do" once again and to trust others' good intentions. Women's history requires a positive commitment on the part of archives at every level to combat the male biases distorting Canadian's awareness of their past.<sup>27</sup>

The first claim, that women's records have been overlooked due to their non-traditional format and content, in turn leads to a closer inspection of historical feminine records which reveals the subversive quality of some material within the female archive. Frequently, these accounts appear to be domestic, aesthetic or personal in nature, but in actual fact can contain seditious sentiments. It was perceived by men that pursuits such as needlework and diary-keeping would allow for artistic and moral endeavours alone, but the reality is somewhat different. These moments of solitude sometimes provided an outlet for the expression of sentiments which were not publicly accepted. In 2007, Jenna Bailey published the findings of her Masters dissertation, *Can Any Mother Help Me? Fifty Years of Friendship Through A Secret Magazine*. The book focuses on a secret magazine produced by The Cooperative Correspondence Club as a result of one woman's plea in *The Nursery World*, 1935:

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.vads.ac.uk/collections/WLS> [14/09/11]

<sup>26</sup> Berkin C., Crocco, M. & Winslow, B. (eds), 2009. *Clio in the Classroom: A Guide for Teaching US Women's History*. OUP USA. Chapter: Derousie, A.M. & Rose, V.E. *History You Can Touch: Teaching Women's History Through Three-Dimensional Objects*, pp239-252.

<sup>27</sup> Strong-Boag, V., p71.

Can any mother help me? I live a very lonely life as I have no near neighbours. I cannot afford to buy a wireless. I adore reading, but with no library am very limited with books. I dislike needlework, though I have a lot to do! I get so down and depressed after the children are in bed and I am alone in the house. I sew, read and write stories galore, but in spite of good resolutions, and the engaging company of cat and dog, I do brood, and “dig the dead”. I have had a rotten time, and been cruelly hurt, both physically and mentally, but I know it is bad to brood and breed hard thoughts and resentments. Can any reader suggest an occupation that will intrigue me and exclude “thinking” and cost nothing! A hard problem, I admit.<sup>28</sup>

Numerous women offered to write to the author and the decision was made to form a magazine which lasted until 1990. During this time, the mothers wrote about their children and marriages, as one would expect, but also surprisingly about death, infidelity and sex. Indeed, Rosemary Hill, a Fellow of Old Souls College, Oxford noted that:

The magazine, like the members themselves, presented a more or less conventionally feminine front, behind which the contents, which were confidential and written under pseudonyms, ranged far beyond the duster and the oven.<sup>29</sup>

Documents such as the above collection, housed at The Mass Observatory Archive reveal personal trials, but also comment on wider social and political situations. The archival community has not fully explored the content and value of these types of records, but it is documents of this kind which could help to change notions of women’s history.

Meanwhile, more contemporary forms of subversion are less subtle. Modern women increasingly produce material which is sexually explicit and this too is worthy of investigation. Records such as *The Sexual Life of Catherine M* and *Girl With A One Track Mind* can be deconstructed using a

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<sup>28</sup> Bailey, J, 2007. *Can Any Mother Help Me?: Fifty Years of Friendship Through A Secret Magazine*. Faber & Faber, p5

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n10/rosemary-hill/keep-calm>

feminist analysis.<sup>30</sup> Women have typically been represented by their male counterparts and there is a distinct possibility that works of this kind form a backlash against this form of representation. Women in this context, may have decided to objectify themselves, and where sex can be used as a weapon, they might be thought to be employing shock tactics. Dr. Lydia Rainford, a Lecturer and Research Fellow at St. Hugh's College, the University of Oxford, who specialises in modern literature, feminist theory and women's history discusses those who:

Use their secondariness as a form of negative freedom, repeating it back to the patriarchal structure in order to undermine the authority of sexed subjectivity itself. Irony creates a way to unravel the prevailing "truth" of gender positions without being obliged to step outside these positions.<sup>31</sup>

The second supporting argument which backs up the claim that women's records have been disparaged is that there has been insufficient reflection on archival terminology. These absences, which have been discussed, are in part, due to the male-oriented language which pervades society, and therefore the archive. This research will demonstrate the extent to which the archival community employs white European male-sanctioned language to the detriment of any group that does not conform, and one of the most significant groups that is affected is women. Second-wave feminists such as Germaine Greer (1939 - ), Professor Emeritus of English Literature and Comparative Studies at the University of Warwick; Judith Butler (1956 - ), the Maxine Elliott Professor in the Department of Rhetoric and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkley; and Rozsika Parker (1945-2010), a psychotherapist who published in the fields of art history and psychoanalysis, have addressed issues of male-sanctioned behaviour. Cheris Kramarae (1938- ), Visiting Professor at the Centre for the Study of Women in Society, University of Oregon, in particular, asserts that the communities have placed male-sanctioned language above the interests of

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<sup>30</sup> R. Morley, 2002. *The Sexual Life of Catherine M* [2001], trans. Adriana Hunter. London: Serpent's Tale,

<http://arts.monash.edu.au/ecps/colloquy/journal/issue009/morley.pdf> .

<sup>31</sup> Rainford, L., 2005. *She Changes by Intrigue: Irony, Femininity and Feminism*. *Genus: Gender in Modern Culture* 6, Rodopi, p4.

the community as a whole and particularly to the detriment of women. In response, women's language has often been explicit, even shocking, in a way male language cannot adequately describe without denigration. For example, Tracey Emin (1963- ), has received much criticism for her tent, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With, 1963-1995* and *My Bed*, 1998, one example of which is this section from Brian Sewell, renowned for his apathy towards women artists:

In the years since Charles Saatchi brought her to the fore in his Sensation show at the Royal Academy in 1997, I have said very little of Miss Emin; at that he exhibited her Tent, to the interior of which she had patchworked the names of "everyone I have ever slept with", a thing of puerile simplicity, and, two years later, he acquired the tumbled bed that was her notorious installation for the Turner Prize, a squalid relic of concupiscence and misery reconstructed in self-pity. Neither had much to do with art, both justified my contempt for the parading of herself that were the works of her earlier hang-out years, and I thought that even our insane contemporary art world would have enough common sense to let her fade into obscurity. She did not. She became instead, largely through the amused but sceptical interest of the popular press, a very public figure, cunningly exploiting ignorance, irascible emotion and raw sex to draw attention to herself.<sup>32</sup>

Sewell is dismissive of Emin's use of needlework and later refers to her "silly patchwork blankets". The critic refuses to accept traditional female craft as an important contribution to the art world, in much the same way as previous generations of archivists have been reluctant to confer status to women's non-paper records.

Similarly, performances of *The Vagina Monologues* (1996) by Eve Ensler (1953- ), a feminist author and activist, have been banned across the world. For example, John Jay High School in the United States suspended three students who read an extract from the text at a school recital. Megan Reback, one of the students involved explained:

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/arts/review-23951482-terrible-tracey.do>

We did it because we believe in the word vagina, and because we believe it's not a bad word. It shouldn't be a word that is ever censored, and the way in which we used it was respectable.<sup>33</sup>

The widespread criticism of the text appears to be indicative of society's reluctance to use the term "vagina" and the functions with which it is associated. Again, there are parallels with the archival community's failure to engage with women-centred issues and experiences.

Chapter Two will discuss the reasons behind the archival community's reluctance to consider the place of women with the archive and the debates within the feminist sphere which might be useful, such as discussions on gendered language. This will prove particularly important when considering cataloguing schemas. Chapter Three will be based on the findings of my research trips to women's libraries and archives such as Glasgow Women's Library, Make/The Women's Art Library, The Jo Spence Memorial Archive and The Foundling Museum and includes interviews with staff, information on the collections consulted and an examination of the differences between these spaces and more traditional repositories. In conclusion, Chapter Four will make a series of recommendations which it is hoped will help to improve access to women's records and encourage further debate.

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/08/nyregion/08vagina.html>

## **Chapter Two: Archival Theory and Feminist Theory**

This chapter will examine existing archival theory combined with second-wave feminist rhetoric to facilitate an effective analysis and discussion of women's records. Whilst the non-traditional format and content of women's archival material has been explored, attention will now shift to the insufficient reflection on archival terminology which prevents women and minority groups from contributing fully to the archival community. As such, the lacunae of women's records and the disparagement which has surrounded the issue will be analysed through a comparative study of the tensions which exist between traditional archival theorists such as Jenkinson and Schellenberg, with post-modern commentators such as Harris and Craven. The key issues which are currently under discussion and will, therefore, be considered are (i) the relative lack of importance attached to archival research communities, (ii) the belief that archivists should function as neutral custodians rather than pro-active custodians, and (iii) the disparity between women's and traditional records. This chapter seeks to assert that the establishment of active theory-driven research communities will ensure that the role of the archivist will no longer be assumed to be secondary to the record creator and user, and will therefore allow for a greater sense of inclusion.

The archival community is well established in terms of historical longevity and the gravitas it is accorded, but has been left behind in theoretical discussions. Archives existed in most advanced societies including Sumeria, Persia, Egypt, China and Greece. They were created to house records pertaining to "religious, legal, administrative, commercial and genealogical purposes."<sup>34</sup> An important development was the creation of the papal archive in the mid sixth century. However, modern archival practice was formed by the decision, in the aftermath of the French Revolution, to create a "centralized national archive"<sup>35</sup>, a concept subsequently adopted by many European countries. Despite this significant

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<sup>34</sup> McKemmish, S. & Reed, B. (eds), 2005. *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*. Charles Sturt University, Centre for Information Studies, p26.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p29

history, archivists appear uncertain of their role in the twenty-first century and have yet to reconcile the practical nature of their profession with professional research interests. Whilst other professions and research communities have embraced numerous theories including feminism, black theory and queer theory, archivists have often failed to engage with each other, fellow information professionals, and the public. Louise Craven recently noted that, “In recent decades, the UK’s archives sector has not been noted for its academic research.”<sup>36</sup> For example, *Archives* and the *Journal of the Society of Archivists* contain no articles on either queer theory or black theory. *Archivaria*, a Canadian publication more sympathetic to academic concerns, meanwhile published a *Special Section on Queer Archives* in its Fall 2009 edition, Number 68. This is despite the plethora of journals devoted to gender history, queer theory and black theory, which overshadow the relatively few number of archival publications and are representative of large academic communities and readerships. This has resulted in archives being slow to produce research papers on ways to interact with diverse user groups and equally slow in adopting new technologies to allow for greater access to collections in comparison to their library counterparts. However, a new generation of archivists are creating theory-driven communities.

This can be demonstrated through a publication which followed the 2009 Society of Archivists conference, *Fast Forward: Preservation & Access in a Digital World*, which encouraged participants to consider the importance of theory. One delegate noted, “Theory is vital, you need the theory as a foundation for the practical.”<sup>37</sup> Many others echoed these sentiments although one did voice doubt, “I’m a bit of a cynic – what we do is not rocket science and there is a danger of over-theorising when on the front-line a lot of it is luxury.”<sup>38</sup> This sentiment was reiterated when respondents

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<sup>36</sup> Craven, L. (ed), 2008. *What Are Archives? Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives: A Reader*. Ashgate, p12.

<sup>37</sup> November 2009, Society of Archivists Conference. *ARC Magazine* (243), pp32-33.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

were asked how archivists “find space to stop and think in world where there are so many pressures on our time?”,<sup>39</sup> a common response was:

Realistically we often can't but we need to find some way to do so. We need to set aside time to contemplate what we are doing so we can get on and do it.<sup>40</sup>

Another delegate, when asked how important the social side of the conference was, remarked on the sense of isolation which can be felt within the profession:

It creates the bond within the profession; it can be easy to operate in isolation from our professional peers for the rest of the year so it is good to meet others to share experiences and best practice. It builds a sense of identity as a profession.<sup>41</sup>

This lack of engagement will be explored further in this chapter. Typically, archivists have remained loyal to the practicalities of appraisal, respect des fonds and original order, as espoused by Jenkinson and Schellenberg, to the exclusion of theoretical discussions. An argument can be made that as these practical processes have been ingrained in archival thinking for such a long period of time, it has become difficult to conceptualise new strategies or ways of working. Prolonged focus on issues such as these has resulted in few theoretical discussions. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a context wherein theory and practice can be discussed as a jointly, relevant concern in order to fill in some of the gaps.

The scarcity of archival research communities or forums for sharing and debating theoretical thinking appears to be particularly prevalent in the United Kingdom. Strong archival communities tend to have a designated research journal such as *The American Archivist*, *Archivaria – The Association of Canadian Archivists*, *Archives and Manuscripts – The Journal of the Archives Section*, *the Library Association of Australia* and *Archives Museum Informatics – Cultural Heritage Informatics Quarterly*, *the Netherlands*. Archivists in the United Kingdom can contribute to *The*

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

*Journal of the Scottish Records Association, Journal of the Society of Archivists (UK) and Archives: British Records Association.* However, these publications tend to focus on practical issues and specific collections. Australasia, South Africa, Canada and America have all been more open to the discussion and dissemination of new concepts than their counterparts in the United Kingdom. This can be seen most prominently in the progress made by Verne Harris who has gained an international reputation for his role in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission where archives were used to expose the Apartheid regime. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission took place in South Africa, 1995 after the abolition of apartheid. The TRC collected the testimonies of 21,000 victims, 2,000 of whom appeared at public hearings having been the victims of human rights abuses between 1960 and 1994. Verne Harris was the official liaison between the TRC and the National Archives.<sup>42</sup> Harris and others have engaged in attempts to bring archives and archivists into the public arena where they can engage with broader communities. Whilst a great deal remains to be addressed and achieved, Harris and others have begun the process of theorising the archive and discussing its possible significance.

An examination of archival training programmes within the United Kingdom may yield some answers and expose the tensions which exist between traditional practitioners and post-modern thinkers. At present, seven institutions in the United Kingdom offer Society of Archivists accredited courses, many of which have been developed very recently. Liverpool Centre for Archival Studies (LUCAS), Liverpool University has offered archival education since 1947, but LUCAS was not established until 1996. School of Library, Archive and Information Studies (SLAIS) at University College London has been running for around fifty years. Aberystwyth University has offered professional archival training in the form of a diploma since 1956 and a Master's course since 1995. The University of Glasgow has offered an MSc in Information Management and Preservation (Archives and Records Management/Digital) since 2004 in HATII (Humanities and Arts Technological Information Institute) which

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<sup>42</sup> [http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/trc\\_frameset.htm](http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/trc_frameset.htm) [03/11/09]

was established in 1997. Dates were unavailable for the University of Northumbria and University College Dublin, National University of Ireland. These teaching programmes have the opportunity to inform new archivists and provide exciting research opportunities to consider topical issues and professional challenges. However, it can be argued that there is an under current of resistance and scepticism which distorts the benefits of archival research and in some cases, actively discourages researchers from engaging with theoretical issues, such as the lack of female records. This may initially have stemmed from the importance placed on practical archival tasks by the historians who founded many such courses.

UK archival practice tended to focus on traditional issues and concepts; importance was placed on physical records without due consideration of societal factors such as political power, cultural hierarchies and government agendas. This is exemplified in the works of two of the foremost archival practitioners, Schellenberg and Jenkinson who espoused concepts of original order and respect des fonds. Their discussions focused on archival practices and the role of the archivist within the repository and history. The cataloguing and preservation of records was considered to be a priority, as opposed to the record creators, leading to further marginalisation.

Indeed, the archival compulsion to maintain original order and respect des fonds has resulted in exclusion of certain groups from the archive:

The theory of the state in nineteenth-century European thought has centred on its legal structure, as an all-embracing juridical entity or “fonds”, which provided a framework in which the functions and activities of the state could be conceptualised. It formed the basis of the “historical method” employed by archival science as a means of classifying records by the juridical body that created them, separating the records of one creator from another, for legal rather than historical purposes. Although the method provided the origin of the classic archival theories of provenance and original order, which became the basis for the arrangement and description of archives, it reveals the central purpose of the archive authority since antiquity – maintaining authenticity of public records through their unbroken custody.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Iacovino, L. cited in McKemmish, S., p258

Given that original order and respect des fonds were developed as a means to deal with public records, it is unsurprising that these concepts operate against the inclusion of women. As previously discussed, women rarely featured in public records and the ongoing concern of archivists with these principles has resulted in blinkered practices. McKemmish notes that archivists:

Became wedded to the cataloguing notion that archival data consists of the description of the physical objects thus “created”, the formed fonds or record group. They were like the early photographers who captured on film incomplete streetscapes, ones from which all moving objects had “vanished”, or else immobilised their subjects for long enough for them to be “frozen” on film.<sup>44</sup>

The relative infancy of recorded archival theory was noted by Jenkinson as part of his Presidential address to the Society of Archivists, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1955:

The word “Archives”, if it had occurred to anyone to employ it, would perhaps have been dredged from the depths of the Dictionary, with perhaps a quotation from Charles Lamb or Mrs. Hewitt adhering to it but with little else to explain its significance.<sup>45</sup>

It can therefore be assumed that it would have been difficult for other, marginalised communities such as women, the working class, gays and lesbians, and asylum seekers to engage with a service and profession which did not possess the vocabulary to make itself heard and understood. As well as having difficulty in determining the meaning of the word “archive”, so too has the role of the archivist proved problematic. Jenkinson asks:

What then is, in the most general terms, the question that suggests itself? I suppose it is the question whether in the future our conception of Archives, and arising from that our conception of the part Archivists are to play in the work of the world – whether these are to alter. Basically, I think they are not.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> McKemmish, S.,, p167.

<sup>45</sup> Jenkinson. H. cited in Vaisey, D., 2001. Archive Training Past and Present. *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 22, p231.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

Perhaps it is the manner in which Jenkinson continues that is the most telling with respect to the fixity with which he, and others, perceive the role of the archivist:

But the principles on which the Archivist must base his treatment of these new problems and new materials remain, I submit, unaltered because Archives will still be, as they have always been, the Document in the Case: requiring, before we can be sure that we have their significance correctly, a full knowledge of their administrative background, but entailing for the Archivist, no primary duties other than those he has always had – the duties of Conserving the Evidence and of Communicating it to the Student Public; with anything in the way of special technique which the material and nature of the Evidence, and the circumstances of the Public's enquiries, may tender necessary.<sup>47</sup>

It would appear that traditional archival holdings have heeded Jenkinson's warning that archives, "will still be, as they have always been" and let the status quo remain, thus failing to meet the challenges of the modern researcher and modern archivist. Whilst Jenkinson was a prolific archivist he was a product of his time and despite raising many interesting issues, he refused or was unable to enter into meaningful debate on the archivist's wider social responsibility. Frank Upward has noted that:

All works were culturally insular, with the partial exception of the archetypal traders of the period, the Dutch, where the work of the Germans and the French were taken into account. At times the insularity reached majestically arrogant levels, as when Jenkinson, early in the twentieth century, argued before a Parliamentary Commission that in relation to archives there was not much the English could learn from Continental Europe. [Footnote: He referred only to Belgian practices in his argument and demonstrated that he knew little about European practices.]<sup>48</sup>

As such, the archivist is in suspended animation with, "no primary duties other than those he always had." In a sense, Jenkinson could foresee no alternative future for the archivist, a role which has and continues to be rigorously challenged. Schellenberg on the other hand was engaged with cultural and social issues and remarked:

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Upward, F. cited in McKemmish, S., p216.

Admittedly, the first, or primary reason why most records are preserved is to accomplish the purpose for which they were created and accumulated . . . They [records] must be preserved for another reason to be archives, and this reason is a cultural one. They are preserved for use by bodies other than those that created them, as well as by their creators.<sup>49</sup>

Given that Schellenberg identified the importance of records as pieces of history, his writings appear to be more inclusive and accepting than those produced by Jenkinson.

More recently, David Vaisey, President of the Society of Archivists between 1999 and 2002, described his training at The Bodleian Library in 1959 and asserted:

That training, and the training courses at Liverpool and University College London, which began at much the same time and which did (and still do) equip successful participants with a professional qualification, all began as a result of initiatives by medieval historians – Sir Maurice Powicke at Oxford, Sir Hilary Jenkinson in London, and George Barraclough at Liverpool. All these courses were framed with local authority records offices in mind and were initially firmly based on their documents – their meaning and their interpretation. The skills of the historian, and especially the medieval historian – sigillography, palaeography, diplomatic, and editing skills amongst them – were learned in detail and (at London and Liverpool) examined with provision in supervised 3-hour final examination papers. All this may sound archaic and odd now, but those were the skills needed then, and they were the ones with which the courses set out to equip the participants.<sup>50</sup>

This serves as a useful starting point when considering the inability or reluctance of the archival community to engage with wider issues such as feminism. Many archivists were, and continue to be, trained historians and since the archival courses were founded by historians, the profession operated from this viewpoint. This is compounded by the fact that the majority of archival users are those with a direct need for historical information. The modern archivist has catered principally for this group and has, as far as necessary, fulfilled their duties through safekeeping and providing trustworthy historical evidence. When archivists conducted their own research, it was within an historical framework and tended to focus on

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<sup>49</sup> Schellenberg, T. cited in Tschan, R., Fall/Winter 2002. A Comparison of Jenkinson and Schellenberg on Appraisal. *American Archivist* 65, p181.

<sup>50</sup> Vaisey, D., 2001. Archive Training Past and Present. *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 22, p231.

specific collections, thus maintaining the status quo.<sup>51</sup> When archivists did seek to discuss archival theory as a postmodern concern, in order, for example, to allow for greater inclusion, outcry followed.

David Vaisey acted as an external examiner at University College London on both the Diploma and M.A. courses in Archives and Records Management for four years, finishing in November 2000 and was critical of those who encouraged archival students to research professional concerns. Previously, students on the course had completed an end of year report which typically consisted of cataloguing an unlisted archival collection. However, in 2000 it was agreed that the students should focus on “current professional topics which needed research.” Vaisey noted:

However, I confess that I feel that if we moved away altogether from archival description, and dealt only with “professional topics which need research” (whatever they may be), we would, to my mind, be encouraging young archivists at the start of their careers to distance themselves from the documents, their contents, their conservation and their accessibility. Furthermore, would-be archivists undergoing a critical training year which schedules their M.A. dissertations into the last four months of their course (during which they are also looking for, or starting jobs) are hardly in a position to undertake the sort of research outlined as desirable recently by Michael Moss.<sup>52</sup>

Vaisey appears to believe that archivists can either function as practitioners or researchers, sentiments which are at odds with those expressed more recently by Michael Moss, Course Director and Seamus Ross, former Founding Director of HATII, in a paper which explains the rationale behind their creation of an MSc. course in Information Management and Preservation at the University of Glasgow which comprises two strands: digital and archives and records management. The authors note:

We designed a course to strike a balance between the “knowledge base” and “tools and service” with at first a tilt towards the latter. This has changed and the balance has shifted decidedly in the other direction. There are several reasons for this alteration in approach. As a teaching team with a strong trans-disciplinary flavour, we have become more confident about our ability to explore theoretical perspectives and to our surprise, we have found

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<sup>51</sup> Kelly, S., 1993. A Sisterhood of Service: The records and early history of the National Union of Women Workers. *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 14, pp167-174. Also, Goldberg, J., 1994. Women in Later Medieval English Archives, *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 15, p59-71.

<sup>52</sup> Vaisey, D., p233.

students engage with them. I say surprise because in the United Kingdom history, the discipline from which traditionally records and information managers have been drawn, has been resistant to theory and certainly anything that smacks of post-modernism.<sup>53</sup>

These comments mark Vaisey as a traditionalist, whereas Moss and Ross favour a post-modern approach.

Vaisey does not appear to consider that the archival community does not exist in isolation and that research topics and theories from within and outwith the repository can have a powerful and positive effect. Research findings may be surprising, indeed uncomfortable and often raise more questions than answers, but if they succeed in challenging the profession to consider its motivations and responses then the research will have been worthwhile. Whilst archivists seek to establish a sense of order through the appraisal and cataloguing of records, theoretical discussions do not always allow for a neat and tidy final solution, which is perhaps at the crux of Vaisey's argument when he speaks of newly-trained archivists "distancing themselves from the documents."<sup>54</sup> Vaisey may indeed be correct in his suggestion that the document is no longer the only focus, other factors are now considered such as marginalisation, inclusivity and education. However, this shift from purely practical considerations to an engagement with theoretical concerns can be seen positively in University of Glasgow MSc. students' dissertations which consider professional research issues of trust, authenticity and identity, and have both theoretical and practical implications.<sup>55</sup>

Vaisey continues:

Elizabeth Danbury recently drew my attention to the inaugural lecture given at King's College London in 1976 by Professor R. Allen Brown who became

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<sup>53</sup> Moss, M. & Ross, S., Fall 2007. Educating Information Management Professionals: The Glasgow Perspective. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 48 (4), pp294-308. See: [http://ils.unc.edu/digccult2007/papers/rossMoss\\_paper\\_6-1.pdf](http://ils.unc.edu/digccult2007/papers/rossMoss_paper_6-1.pdf) [09/07/09]

<sup>54</sup> Vaisey, D., p234.

<sup>55</sup> Gauld, C., 2005. Neo-Liberalism and the Archive – The Erosion of Trust. University of Glasgow, Unpublished Masters Dissertation; Girdwood, J., 2006. Beyond Archive Fever. University of Glasgow. Unpublished Masters Dissertation; Little, H., 2006. Archive Fever as Genealogical Fever. University of Glasgow. Unpublished Masters Dissertation.

a research academic having left a position as an archivist in the Public Record Office when he found that administrative and managerial duties were drawing him away from the documents and their contents. The job he said had become like “sucking toffees with the paper on.” By directing young archivists down the “professional research” route, are we not likely to end up encouraging entrants to the profession to think of themselves as people whose time is to be spent in committees or working parties finding ways to make the toffee papers prettier, tastier, more colourful, easier to manufacture, more transparent, and more inclusive, while we leave the real toffees to be sucked by the para-professionals, the archive assistants.<sup>56</sup>

The notion that young archivists are drawn towards the “professional research route” can be considered positively in a profession which has not developed its research footing as rapidly as other disciplines such as Museum and Gallery Studies and Library and Information Science which will be discussed later. A consideration of theoretical and philosophical issues is, in some instances, as important as the role of the archive assistant in answering enquiries, locating material, cataloguing and ensuring the day-to-day running of a repository. The two branches of the archival community can co-exist; documentary work is not necessarily superior to theoretical preoccupations.

One of the first and most exciting post-modern discussion centring on the archive was raised by Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), a French philosopher and historian, in his work *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1998) which has influenced many current thinkers including Harris and Brien Brothman of the Rhode Island State Archive who have both responded, producing pieces of archival theory which would once have been considered unthinkable.<sup>57</sup> Derrida begins by setting the archive within a traditional, historical context which cannot be disputed, whilst firmly asserting the notions of power attributed to it, far removed from the notions of passive custodian. Derrida speaks convincingly of the power attributed to the archon, thus challenging previously held notions of neutrality:

As is the case for the Latin *archivum* or *archium* (a word that is used in the singular, as was the French *archive*, formerly employed as a masculine singular: *un archive*), the meaning of “archive”, its only meaning, comes to it

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<sup>56</sup> Vaisey, D., p233.

<sup>57</sup> Brothman, B., Fall 1999. Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity and, the Preservation of Archives from Deconstruction. *Archivaria* 48, pp64-88.

from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrate, the archons, those who commanded.<sup>58</sup>

This initial description appears at odds with those provided by feminists and a similar notion presented by Martha Cooley (1955- ), Assistant Professor of English at Adelphia University, in her 1998 novel, *The Archivist*; where the protagonist Matthias Lane, a librarian says:

My mother was the censor and revealer of experience. She opened and shut its doors. Librarians, too, are gatekeepers – not of actual experience, of course, but of its written accounts. My job is to safeguard those accounts...As an archivist I have power over other people. I control access to material they desire.<sup>59</sup>

However, whilst Cooley's view suggests the presence of a dark power over the archive, Derrida sets the archivist firmly within a legitimate profession which requires debate and discussion in order to progress. The two concepts, power and professionalism are not distinct, but Derrida stresses the positive aspects of power and responsibility, not only attributed to the archivist but also to the document itself and continues with the assertion that the:

Arch-archive, the book was "stored" with the arch-patriarch of psychoanalysis. It was stored there in the Ark of the Covenant [Deut. 10:1-5]. Arca, this time in Latin, is the chest, the "ark of acacia wood," which contains the Stone Tablets; but area is also the cupboard, the coffin, the prison cell, or the cistern, the reservoir.<sup>60</sup>

Derrida challenges those who have accepted this traditional, static version of the archive and archivists as service custodians. Interestingly, he suggests that the archive's heritage and actions have rendered it exclusive and supports claims that archivists speak in an impenetrable language which is not conducive to a wider discussion. Derrida is often accused of writing without clarity but he opens discussion and facilitates dialogue in the following statement:

It is then our impression that we can no longer ask the question of the concept, of the history of the concept, and notably of the concept of the archive. No longer, at least, in a temporal or historical modality dominated by the present or by the past. We no longer feel we have the right to ask questions whose form, grammar and lexicon nonetheless seem so legitimate,

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<sup>58</sup> Derrida, J., 1996. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. University of Chicago, p30.

<sup>59</sup> Cooley, M., 1998. *The Archivist*. Little Brown Books, p32.

<sup>60</sup> Derrida, J., p23.

sometimes so neutral. We no longer find assured meaning in questions such as these: do we already have at our disposition a concept of the archive? a concept of the archive which deserves this name? which is one and whose unity is assured? have we ever been assured of the homogeneity of the constituency, of the universal relationship of any concept to a term or to such a word as “archive?”<sup>61</sup>

Derrida’s discussion has enabled contemporary thinkers to expand their notions of the archive. By questioning “the concept of the archive”, Derrida acted as a forerunner for Craven who asked, *What Are Archives?* Similarly, by raising the issue that the archive is a site of political power, Harris in turn was able to powerfully document the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Since Derrida’s challenge, there has been a shift in archival consciousness with some archivists more willing to engage in new ideas and practices. Derrida is one of the first people in recent years to question and criticise archival theory and subsequent practices; this has resulted in his audience questioning the basic principles and tenets of the profession and finding it lacking. Derrida appears to support a discussion of the archive within a wider context, paying particular attention to language as do second-wave feminists. Through this germinal work, archivists and those outwith the archival community have been able to expand the previously held definition and suggest new versions of the archive; blogs, memory boxes, and Facebook pages all feature in current debate. This corresponds with the assertion of this dissertation that women’s records have been disparaged due to their non-traditional format and content.

Derrida provokes the archival community in his criticism of their reluctance to engage with theoretical issues because, “it is then our impression that we can no longer ask the question of the concept, of the history of the concept, notably of the concept of the archive.”<sup>62</sup> The archive appears before the community as a finished, inscrutable institution which functions outwith the realms of the individual. From within its walls, questions of how it developed, by whom and for whom it was developed may be regarded as

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<sup>61</sup> Derrida, J., p33.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

trivial in comparison with the work of safeguarding the nation's heritage. This is compounded by Derrida's statement, "we no longer feel we have the right to ask questions whose form, grammar and lexicon nonetheless seem so legitimate, sometimes so neutral." The archival community has developed a language which is often inaccessible to the public and discourages the wider community from engaging with it. This sense of impenetrability may have prevented research and debate on the "other", be that women, gays and lesbians, asylum seekers and many other groups which do not fit the mould. However, literature from Derrida and other academics is penetrating the archival consciousness and facilitating further enquiry.

However, the prolonged failure of the archival community at large to engage with feminist theory, one example among many, has resulted in most women's repositories operating with a feminist undercurrent or awareness as crucial to their work, often favouring feminist thinking over archival theory. Many are concerned with a more holistic approach than that currently offered within traditional archival settings and have very different concepts of a repository and a record than more traditional archivists with which there has been little engagement. Women's repositories, libraries and information centres are often concerned with providing a safe educational environment and whilst the archive forms part of this experience, it is neither the sole motivation, nor the sole deciding factor when decisions are made. For instance, the staff at Glasgow Women's Library spoke passionately about the need to maintain a women-only space where users can comfortably discuss their personal experiences and concerns in a supportive, feminist space. Classes and groups form an important part of GWL's work and demonstrate their commitment to helping the women who use the space in all aspects of their lives. The Women's Library also offers classes to develop women's skills and have held banner making sessions as a means of prompting discussion on the suffrage movement and as a means of expression.

An inter-disciplinary discussion of the meaning of key terms and arguments would allow for a more integrated approach between the disciplines. Postmodernism and the questioning of traditional concepts would facilitate this and directly connect with feminist thought. Cataloguing issues could also be considered to find the best available solution which suits the needs of traditional archivists and those working within feminist spaces. An interview with Althea Greenan, Special Collections Curator and Jacqueline Cooke, Special Collections Librarian, from MAKE – The Organisation for Women in the Arts (formerly the Women Artists’ Slide Library, then the Women’s Art Library) gives a clear example of custodians who have informed views on the archive but are not stifled by traditional definitions. Cooke asserts:

But we do fairly often have discussions about archives and this not being an archive in that sense, it doesn’t have that sort of completeness and it’s not private papers but at the same time in contemporary art the term “archives” is used about the kind of material we’ve got, documentation or representations of practice have become known as archives in an artistic, curatorial context. So we keep all these different conceptions of what an archive is I think.<sup>63</sup>

This type of engagement with like-minded professionals was epitomised at a recent conference, *Archive Impulse: Artists and Archivists* which took place at The Tate (16<sup>th</sup> November 2007). The Tate archivist suggested that:

The past is searched for something...that confirms the searcher in his or her sense of self, confirms them as they want to be, and feel in some way that we already are...[but] the object has been altered by the very search for it...what has actually been lost can never be found. This is not to say that nothing is found, but that thing is always something else, a creation of the search itself and the time the search took.<sup>64</sup>

Again, Cooke provided a fascinating insight:

I’ve been to conferences made from an artistic curatorial position where they’ve been talking about art archives and they haven’t had an archivist speaking. I know there are archivists who know about these same questions and theoretical positions but they’re not speaking in the same places and I think that’s a pity. I think it is crossing over more with the art libraries society events which have happened recently. I suppose there are more archivists and librarians reaching out to artists than the other way around.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with Cooke, J., Special Collections Librarian, Make – The Organisation for Women in the Arts, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2008. Transcript of interview in Appendix 1.

<sup>64</sup> Steedman, C., 2002. *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*. Manchester University Press, p48..

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Cooke, J.

Cooke's suggestion that archivists and other professionals are working with similar ideas and concepts yet moving in differing circles is pertinent and worth further exploration.

Adele Patrick, the Lifelong Learning and Creative Development Manager at Glasgow Women's Library, concurs with these beliefs through her assertion that:

There is more scope for dialogue now. We could not have had a discussion with any of these library colleagues in the past and it has taken us a long time to gain respect and an ear from some of our colleagues.<sup>66</sup>

Before archivists can engage with wider communities a commonality in informational research needs must be established.

Whilst it has been established that the numerous and complex theoretical and practical issues raised by these spaces have received little attention from the archival community, it is interesting to note that when research into women's information sources and centres has taken place, it has been principally carried out by librarians. One of the most recent studies was completed by Alison Tyler who received her doctorate in 2006 from the Department of Information Science, University of Aberystwyth. Tyler's dissertation, *A library of our own: the potential for a women's library in Wales*, focuses on the possibility of establishing a designated women's library in Wales.<sup>67</sup> Her investigation took the forms of interviews with staff at women's libraries and archives across the country including Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales, Feminist Archive (South), Feminist Library, Glasgow Women's Library, Swansea Multicultural Women's Resource and Training Centre, Women's History Project, Women in Jazz, Women's Library and the Women's Resource Centre. These interviews were coupled with her belief that three types of women's libraries currently exist; "research-oriented institutions, community-based women's resource centres and online databases of material pertaining to

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Patrick, A., Lifelong Learning and Creative Development Manager, Glasgow Women's Library, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2008. Transcript in Appendix 2.

<sup>67</sup> Tyler, A.

women”,<sup>68</sup> with Wales spearheading a fourth model; “distributed donations of material pertaining to women.” However, there are fundamental differences between Tyler’s findings and this dissertation. Tyler believed that the examples listed above, “are not closely engaged with librarianship or feminism; and librarianship and feminist research do not appear to be closely linked to them.”<sup>69</sup> In contrast, this dissertation seeks to assert that women’s libraries and archives are acutely aware of feminist issues and seek to engage with feminism; many, however, do not wish to be known only as feminist spaces. Equally, this dissertation firmly believes that if we are to understand women’s libraries and archives, the best methodology at the present moment in time is that produced by feminists. Similarly, Tyler does not fully address the importance of women-only archives and libraries as safe spaces for the user. She does mention some of the other services offered by Glasgow Women’s Library for example, but her focus is primarily on the information contained within the space. Despite this, the work within Tyler’s thesis is innovative and it is encouraging to know that like-minded information professionals are deconstructing and analysing the role of women’s libraries and archives.

Archivists might usefully collaborate with the library profession who have carried out useful research which is not simply based on feminism and its associated issues but also notions of gender; it is these notions of gender which give a sense of awareness of the inherent difficulties attributed to feminist debate.

One of the key differences between feminist theory and archival theory is the notion of neutrality. If one considers the concepts of power inherent in the archive, neutrality becomes a very problematic concept, especially in terms of the archival record, creator, custodian and space. Eric Ketelaar (1944- ), Emeritus Professor at the University of Amsterdam, considered notions of power in the archive through his essay, *Recordkeeping and Societal Power* (2005) which he based on the contention that records are not

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p46

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

neutral artefacts but are often deeply meaningful; an idea with which archivists have been relatively slow to engage.

A consideration of supposed archival neutrality in the context of feminism is problematic, however. Feminists have frequently discussed the personal as political, imbuing not only the record with notions of power, but also the creator, custodian, and user. Feminist repositories offer women a safe and supportive environment in which to share, document and preserve their experiences. They often contain powerful material gifted by readers, including accounts of domestic violence, rape and experiences of prostitution. In these instances, records are created in the presence of the archivist or form part of a creative class. In such settings, the archivist may facilitate record creation. Indeed, material has been specifically donated to GWL because the donors believe their records will be treated sympathetically and, more importantly, will be used by other women. Feminist repositories allow the creator a greater sense of freedom, a space in which she can express and fulfil thoughts, needs and desires safely. Whilst there is a strong case for archival neutrality, in some cases, important records simply would not exist without the archivist stepping outwith the typical, accepted role and interacting in a meaningful way with users.

An important part of the research undertaken for this dissertation was meeting with information professionals experienced in women's records and women's spaces. Adele Patrick and Wendy Kirk, Librarian provided a fascinating insight into the work carried out by GWL. Patrick began the discussion with the notion of the personal as political which she expressed in the following statement:

You mentioned earlier on how archives seem to have a handle on women as long as they fall into particular categories like health...I think that looking at it through another lens is a very politicised activity.<sup>70</sup>

which echoes the sentiments of friction and absence throughout this dissertation. Kirk moved the discussion on to the intimacy which can be experienced in a women-only space:

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Patrick, A..

We do have a lot of materials that are very personal in a sense of women telling their own stories whether it be about their involvement in prostitution or pornography or their own stories about surviving domestic violence...Quite a lot of them with the view of it being out in the open and empowering for other women and sharing the story and other people learning from it.<sup>71</sup>

She continued her description of the positive relationship which exists between the staff and women who use the library through her admission that:

People do say things like I really want to give to the Women's Library because I know it is going to go to a good home and will be a benefit to other women, I suppose in what they would consider an accessible place as opposed to a formal institution.<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, Patrick spoke of the "connections with real women living real lives."<sup>73</sup>

The notion that the library should continue to function as a women-only space was passionately and convincingly argued by Kirk and Patrick throughout the interview. Kirk stressed the importance of:

feeling comfortable and access materials that are quite sensitive, that they maybe wouldn't feel comfortable talking about or asking for in an environment where there were men. To have a bit of privacy to do with issues to do with their health or sexuality or violence. I think that the fact that we have worked with women who have experienced things like that in their life and for them to feel confident that they are going to come to a space and not turn round and there is going to be a man standing there.<sup>74</sup>

Patrick continued in this vein with the pledge to women that:

We can guarantee your husband or your ex-husband won't be there. In a theoretical sense, that you're not going to come across your abusive father, your brother...You never know who women fear coming across. We can say it will be a safe environment for you...I think that's an important fact, the fact that even though it might not be the most likely thing to happen, but the fear element of who's going to be there....<sup>75</sup>

Glasgow Women's Library provides a space for women to create and experience records in a carefully controlled environment. The staff

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with Kirk, W., Librarian, Glasgow Women's Library, 25<sup>th</sup> June 2008. Transcript in Appendix 2.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Patrick, A..

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Kirk, W.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Patrick, A..

have implemented methods which facilitate this, including sympathetic cataloguing systems.

Feminists such as Kramarae and Andrea Dworkin (1946-2005), a radical American feminist, believed that language, in its myriad forms, is not a neutral tool, but rather is implicitly gendered. Whether used in speech, written form or for cataloguing purposes, many believe that women have been excluded. Oral history projects offer fascinating alternatives which support gendered and social histories, such as Patrick Joyce's discussion on *The end of social history*.<sup>76</sup> Second-wave feminist rhetoricians and historians were among the first to consider such alternatives. There are numerous examples of feminist rhetoric at work; many women choose the prefix Ms as opposed to Miss or Mrs as they do not wish to disclose, or be judged by, their marital status. Equally, many feminists object to mankind being used as the term to describe society as a whole. History is also a controversial term among some feminists. However, examples such as those listed above are often ridiculed:

As Jessica Bernard, and Dot Griffins and Esther Saraga, have noted, the kinds, extent, conclusions, and expectations of research on gender differences vary depending upon what issues are politically and socially useful for the dominant group at any particular time. Seventeen members of Harvard's linguistic department replied to students asking for a ban of the use of man and masculine pronouns to refer to all people: "The fact that the masculine is the unmarked gender in English (or that the feminine is unmarked in the language of the Tunica Indians) is simply a feature of grammar...There is really no cause for anxiety or pronoun envy on the part of those seeking such changes."<sup>77</sup>

The dismissive nature of the reply and the Freudian tone implied in "pronoun envy" demonstrate the defensiveness felt by some members of the linguistic community when discussing issues of feminist rhetoric. Kramarae continues:

Women who implicitly, or explicitly recommend change in the relationship between women and men are often accused of intellectual deviancy. They are said, for example, to be making "childish war" on language, or to write "from a very subjective point of view"...When women take steps to change the language structure and their own uses of language, they are in fact acting

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<sup>76</sup> Joyce, P., 1995. The end of social history. *Social History* 20 (1), pp73-91.

<sup>77</sup> Kramarae, C. cited in Foss, K.A., Foss., S.K. & Griffin, C.L. (eds), 2004.. *Readings in feminist rhetorical theory*. Sage Publications, p15.

to change their status in society; they are challenging the legitimacy of the dominant group. By challenging the challengers and calling their proposals for language change silly, unnatural, irrational, and simplistic, the dominant group tries to reaffirm, its threatened social identity.<sup>78</sup>

Whilst these examples may be deemed to be unimportant, there are numerous underlying issues of greater importance. If language is pro-male or, at the very least, male-oriented, then at a basic level it would appear unlikely, if not impossible, for women to record their experiences and subsequently create records with any degree of authenticity using a biased tool. This could provide a further explanation for the lack of female records; not only have women been unable to express themselves from a lack of opportunity, formal education and societal expectations, but language itself may have been an obstacle. If women cannot find the words to describe their experiences, then their voice will be diminished and there will be a gap in record creation and subsequent custodianship. Alternatively, it could be suggested that the records that do exist are unable to reflect the female experience.

When women began to theorise these issues through consciousness-raising, research and debate, some responded using explicit, unsparing language to describe female experiences in a manner which men could not. Certainly some women have employed subversive means of expression through both subject matter and language, typically focusing on the body or sexuality, which society has deemed to be unsuitable and distasteful. However, some women believe these actions are the only means of expression as the authorised channels are closed to them. Words can act as a formidable weapon. *The Vagina Monologues* by Enslin focused on sexuality and liberation, whilst encouraging women to reclaim words which had previously been deemed improper or sordid. The author noted: “Look at how often the word “vagina” is used now. And how easily it’s used. I think that things have changed a lot.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> <http://randomhouse.com/features/ensler/vm/qna.html> [02/04/08]

However, productions have received numerous complaints. For instance, a theatre in Florida was forced to change the name of the show to the *Hooah Monologues* after, “a woman said she was “offended” when her niece asked her what a vagina was.”<sup>80</sup> This would appear to support Kramarae’s claim that:

In public discourse especially, “the appropriate language registers often seem to have been “encoded” by males, [and thus] women may be at a disadvantage when wishing to express matters of peculiar concern to them.”<sup>81</sup>

This remains one of the final taboo words in a society where some sections continue to believe it is dirty and improper to describe the functions of female genitalia and subsequent experiences. Confusingly, variations of the term are deemed acceptable. Gloria Steinem (1934- ), a feminist writer, lecturer and activist, notes that:

I come from the “down there” generation. That is, those were the words – spoken rarely and in a hushed tone – that the women in my family used to refer to all female genitalia, internal or external.

It wasn’t like they were ignorant of terms like vagina, labia, vulva, or clitoris. On the contrary, they were trained to be teachers and probably had more access to information than most...

It wasn’t even that they were unliberated, or “straitlaced,” as they would have put it...

As for my own mother, she had been a pioneer newspaper reporter years before I was born, and continued to take pride in bringing up her two daughters in a more enlightened way than she had been raised. I don’t remember her using any of the slang words that make the female body seem dirty or shameful, and I’m grateful for that. As you’ll see in these pages, many daughters grew up with a greater burden.

Nonetheless, I didn’t hear words that were accurate, much less prideful. For example, I never once heard the word clitoris. It would take years before I learned that females possessed the only organ in the human body with no function other than to feel pleasure.<sup>82</sup>

Women and men have yet to reclaim many explicitly feminine words. Indeed, issues of childbirth, menstruation, genital mutilation and rape have long been silenced. For instance, UKAT links genital mutilation to the microthesaurus term, “medical sciences” and the broader term, “gynaecological surgery”. No mention is made of this being a violent cultural practice which attracts widespread criticism in Western society.

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<sup>80</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/6347649.stm> [02/04/08]

<sup>81</sup> Kramarae, C. cited in Foss, K.A., Foss, S.K., & Griffin, C.L., (eds), p20.

<sup>82</sup> Steinem, G. cited in Ensler, E., 1998. *The Vagina Monologues*. Viragi Press Ltd., ppix-xi.

Equally, rape is linked to the microthesaurus term, “social problems”. The term “social problems” also includes “abandoned vehicles”, “drink driving” and “poachers”, which somewhat diminishes the prolonged physical and mental impact of rape. It can be argued that through this silence, women are taught that these experiences should not be shared, that they are hidden and forbidden. Kramarae notes that:

The muted group theory provides the following explanation and expansion of their experience: The language of a particular culture does not serve all its speakers equally, for not all speakers contribute in an equal fashion to its formulation. Women (and members of all other subordinate groups) are not as free or as able as men to say what they wish and where they wish, because the words and norms for their use have been formulated by the dominant group, men. So women cannot as easily or as directly articulate their experiences as men can. Women’s perceptions differ from those of men because women’s subordination means they experience life differently. However, the words and norms for speaking are not generated from or fitted to women’s experiences. Women are thus “muted.” Their talk is often not considered of much value by men – who are, or appear to be, deaf and blind to much of women’s experiences. Words constantly ignored may eventually come to be unspoken and perhaps even unthought.”<sup>83</sup>

Similarly, women who record their sexual activities have received negative attention. *Girl With A One Track Mind* published under the alias Abby Lee, caused controversy due to the author’s frank description of her sexual encounters in terms previously reserved for men:

Why search for a knight in shining armour when you can have a great ride with just a few vodka-based cocktails and a cheap sex toy? When you’re 32, single and horny, why not have some fun?  
With all these thoughts going round my head, I decided to keep a diary. It seemed like the best way to express all my anxieties, neuroses and needs without any risk to my friendships. I reckoned that writing everything down would be the only way I could be truly open about sex; I could talk about my sexuality and desires as a woman and not have to worry or care what people might think, and whether they’d judge me or not. It would be liberating.<sup>84</sup>

There appears to be a chasm between what is acceptable for men to reveal and what is acceptable for women. Society is often less judgemental of men revealing high numbers of sexual partners or admitting to having no desire to have children. In contrast, women are denounced for voicing the same information. For instance, the author, Zoë Margolis (1972- ), originally chose to blog anonymously but was outed by the mainstream press. It

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<sup>83</sup> Kramarae, C., 1984. *Language and Power*. Sage Publications Inc., p26.

<sup>84</sup> Lee, A., 2006. *Girl With A One Track Mind*. Ebury Press, ppviii-ix.

would appear highly unlikely whether similar salacious reporting techniques would have been employed had the writer been male. In this instance, it appears that society can accept that women are sexually active and experienced, but do not wish to be confronted with explicit evidence. The power of the written word still holds true in this instance. Margolis has since attempted to describe her blog as an act of feminism:

I did think, all along, that maybe women who would read *Elle*, or whatever, would pick up the book thinking it was chick-lit, and get politicised. That was always my hope, to have a political subtext in there, packaged up. A spoonful of sugar, you know...Feminism has such a bad reputation, and it's seen as so unpalatable. How could you get it on the front page of anything?<sup>85</sup>

It seems unlikely that this was her prime motivation but this may have been the only explanation which the public would accept.

Furthermore, female artists who have expressed their sexuality through language have been derided. Many of Tracey Emin's works have caused controversy, not simply for the materials employed, including used condoms and worn underwear, but for the language with which these scenes are synonymous. Emin embroiders her work with words which are frequently deemed unacceptable for women to use:

Emin's work has played with the world of words from the beginning, and it has often been through language, as opposed to images, that she's shocked her critics. She avoids enigmatic titles such as *Untitled IX*; instead we get *And then you left me – Left me cold and naked* (1994), a title more substantial than any flimsy print that accompanies it. More memorable perhaps was Emin's tent, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995*, with the names of everyone, from her twin in the womb to countless lovers, embroidered painstakingly inside. As she said in 2001: "It's my words that actually make my art quite unique."<sup>86</sup>

Society expects women to use language in certain ways and when Ensler, Margolis and Emin have chosen otherwise, the scandal has been widespread. It has been suggested that:

Women who write for the public eye risk being considered "deviant" almost as much as those who adopt the "masculine" public speaking role. At the very least, their writing is seldom judged by the same criteria as men's.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p64.

<sup>86</sup> [http://www.believmag.com/issues/200404/?read=interview\\_emin](http://www.believmag.com/issues/200404/?read=interview_emin) [02/04/08]

<sup>87</sup> Kramarae, C. cited in Foss, K.A., Foss, S.K., & Griffin, C.L., (eds), p14.

Concurrently, the reader must also be aware of the silences in speech. The yawning gaps in female record keeping may stem from a void in terminology which can adequately describe the female experience of rape, body dysmorphia or genital mutilation, for example.

Other groups of feminists wish, not only to reclaim supposedly subversive words, but also aim to debate and redefine the words in circulation and provide feminist-friendly alternatives where possible. Cheris Kramarae; Paula A Treichler, Professor of Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Illinois; and Ann Russo, Associate Professor in Women's and Gender Studies at DePaul University, produced *A Feminist Dictionary* (1992) in an attempt to remedy the problem. Whilst there are critics who will dismiss this book as reactionary and unnecessary, this provides evidence that feminism is pushing the boundaries:

Women concerned with language cull dictionaries, fiction, and conversations for the terms used to define women, in order to document the type and extent of the linguistic putdown of women. While the old dictionaries remain a disturbingly accurate picture of the usage of many speakers, Ruth Todasco's introduction to an alternative dictionary, the Feminist English Dictionary, reminds us that "a general awareness of their sexism can weaken their authority," and thus promote the spread of ways of speaking that do not devalue women. She argues that openly talking about words which have been men's property (for example, the many epithets for women) destroys some their power. In addition to pointing out and analysing the manner in which women have been negatively defined by men, a number of women are also concerned to define themselves and their interests. Early in the contemporary women's liberation movement, many feminists began consciously developing a vocabulary to deal with their concerns. For example, a 1970 article in the Long Island Press lists 13 expressions – including sexist, male chauvinism, sexegration – in use by feminists.<sup>88</sup>

There are several problems inherent with the production of a dictionary of this type. As previously mentioned there is no single definition of feminism. However, the authors appear to have anticipated this challenge:

A recurrent difficulty in creating a "feminist" dictionary concerns whose feminism an entry represents. Our 1980s feminism has inevitably pulled us toward the material that seems most useful and enticing to us.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p13.

<sup>89</sup> Kramarae, C. & Treichler, P., 1986. *A Feminist Dictionary*. Rivers Oram Press, p3.

The authors appear to accept that this is not and cannot be the definitive feminist dictionary, but hopefully one of many, the contents of which will change as feminism develops. Similarly, a feminist dictionary will either attract or repel readers. The authors state that:

As feminist lexicographers, we do not claim objectivity nor believe that simply by offering a dictionary of “women’s words” we can reverse the profound structural inequities of history and culture. The dictionary is also therefore a critique of current and past practices; collectively, the entries provide commentary on the institutionalised processes and politics through which some forms of languages are privileged over others – how words get into print, why they go out of print, the politics of bibliography and archival storage, the politics of silence, of speech, of what can be said, of who can speak and who can listen.<sup>90</sup>

The third problem is the issue of reappropriating masculine terminology for female use. Women have rarely had the chance to debate words and have often been brought up to accept that there are certain words and concepts which they cannot express:

The problem has not been in finding enough material for many women’s dictionaries, but in selecting material to be put in this dictionary. A number of problems of identification and documentation should be noted. Most of our entries come from written or printed sources. This means that we are inevitably missing many of the important words of women whose colour, class, age, disabilities, resources and circumstances have made them, particularly marginal. As one woman discussing this project said, “How can we know what women’s definitions have been ignored and gone unrecorded since women’s definitions have been ignored and gone unrecorded?” This project is intended as one effort to interrupt this process of centuries, but we recognise that much of the silencing of women is irreparable, particularly the erasure of unwritten words. Many men are also silenced, of course, but all men as a class have had power over the actions, including the speech, of women.<sup>91</sup>

*A Feminist Dictionary* therefore offers not only various meanings for words, but also charts the change in those meanings. Examples are given within specific contexts and quotations are provided. Therefore:

#### Needlework

Form of creative expression and bonding among women. “I am sure that just as I pour my heart into my needlework, so did slave women doing quilts in their cabins from the little pieces of material they got from their white masters, turning them into quilts for everyday use, pouring their sadness, their creativity into their work, just as they did into the spirituals. It’s part of our creative history, showing that we have always been here, and doing these things all the time.” (Barbara Smith, 1982, 8).

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p3-4.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p18.

“Sight-Murder.” (An Indignant Woman 1883, *Women’s Union Journal* 8:89 [June], 50).<sup>92</sup>

Similarly:

Witch

Female magician, sorceress, sage, soothsayer, wise woman skilled in occult arts and beneficent charms. Only later, a woman in league with evil spirits. From wic, to bend or shape, thus one who shapes or influences reality...

“It can be argued that the very concept of witchcraft represents the epitome of misogyny, and must be understood in these terms. Some recent feminist writers have looked upon the legends and rituals of witchcraft as part of women’s spiritual heritage, and have found in the witch an inspiring image of female strength.” (Mary Anne Warren 1980, 489-90).

Witches “were scientists and healers of the people.” (Ann Oakley 1982, 326; also see Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English 1973).

“Is really all women; it names the cultural status of women.” (Morene 1982; quoted in Karen Payne 1983, 392).<sup>93</sup>

The radical nature of this endeavour can only be explored through an examination of a more traditional dictionary which provides the following explanations:

Needlework

Work done with a needle; spec. the art or practice of sewing or embroidery. In pl. Pieces or kinds of needlework. Now somewhat arch.<sup>94</sup>

and:

Witch

A female magician, sorceress; in later use esp. a woman supposed to have dealings with the devil or evil spirits and to be able by their co-operation to perform supernatural acts.<sup>95</sup>

*A Feminist Dictionary* is essentially a collection of records brought together under the auspices of a feminist agenda. Whilst outspoken feminists are represented, for example Germaine Greer, Andrea Dworkin and Ann Oakley, Professor of Sociology and Social Policy at the Institute of Education, University of London, there are others who undoubtedly had feminist intent but would not have classified themselves in such a manner. Caroline Norton (1808-1877), who challenged the prevailing notion of the time that fathers should retain ownership of children in the event of a marriage breakdown, and Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), English author of *A Room With A View* (1929) which contained the famous line, “A woman must have money and a room of her own”, are two examples among many.

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p298.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p487.

<sup>94</sup> <http://dictionary.oed.com> [24/11/09]

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

Dictionaries of this nature can be described as repositories which house the material of feminist women and allow for its dissemination. Dictionaries form a key part of both academia and everyday learning, and it therefore seems appropriate that whilst dictionaries of art terms exist, for example, feminists and feminist theory should also have a similar point of reference.

A discussion on the feminist reclamation of subversive words and the establishment of feminist dictionaries leads to a consideration of the archival terms employed to catalogue such records. This dissertation suggests that the terms employed by archivists are limited and should be reconsidered. Similar issues were raised by Elizabeth Baigent, Charlotte Brewer and Vivienne Larminie in their article *Gender in the archive: Women in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography and the Oxford English Dictionary* which was published in *Archives*, 2005. The authors chart the changing status of women in each of these resources which are often seen as academic tools despite their previous shortcomings. For instance, in the first edition of the ODNB, three per cent of entries related to women; the authors describe how “women were adjuncts first of father, then of husband, then of sons, lastly of daughters.”<sup>96</sup> The article praises the efforts of Colin Matthews, the editor appointed in 1992 who began reworking and updating the entries. He appointed women editors such as Jane Garnett, “to point out deficiencies in the representation of women in the dictionary, to devise strategies to address them and to monitor progress.”<sup>97</sup> John Grosz, a reviewer of the ODNB remarked on the progress that, “Nowhere have the editors of the dictionary worked harder to remedy past injustices than in improving the representation of women.”<sup>98</sup>

In the six years since the article appeared, one would have expected the archival community to have examined the usefulness of the thesauri employed by the profession and begun to redress any imbalances towards

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<sup>96</sup> Baigent, E., Brewer, C. & Larminie, V., 2005. Gender in the Archive: Women in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography and the Oxford English Dictionary. *Archives* 30 (113). Available at:

<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/images/stories/articles/baigent2005.pdf> p4

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p6

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p15

women and minority groups. This does not appear to be the case as many collections remain poorly indexed or without index terms altogether. For example, Jane Austen's will (PROB 1/78) is catalogued by The National Archives but has no index terms attached, despite the fact that Austen is perhaps the foremost English author of the nineteenth century. This important piece of information about Austen is therefore remains hidden. Equally, the Records of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WO 398) are indexed with the terms womens [sic] employment and First World War, 1914-1918 which significantly diminished women's contribution.

Another problem is the fact that thesauri remain incomplete. For instance, UKAT does not allow for the inclusion of terms such as motherhood, feminism, stillbirth, vagina or uterus which may be necessary to fully catalogue certain collections. Whilst it is true that women's records have not always gained acceptance in mainstream repositories, in part due to their medium and content, it is also possible that archivists have yet to develop a language of classification which incorporates these records. If this is the case, feminists face a two-fold problem; how to incorporate female records into the archive and how to encourage archivists to reconsider their terminology.

The link between feminist rhetoric and the archive was first suggested by Strong-Boag who noted of female archives that:

There is also a real neglect, stemming in large part from time-worn classification systems which emphasise the activities of political, military, diplomatic and economic elites. Inevitably, priority of recovery and classification is accorded to the individuals and groups reaching the top ranks. As a result women, who rarely appear among the powerful, are largely excluded.<sup>99</sup>

This theme of neglect is prevalent within society and therefore the archive, although rarely spoken about. Whilst past generations of women were not typically part of the "political, military, diplomatic and economic elites," contemporary women do fulfil these roles, albeit in limited numbers. It is my contention that classification systems have not kept abreast of societal

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<sup>99</sup> Strong-Boag, V., p73-74.

changes; a great deal of emphasis continues to be placed on the roles carried out in the public sphere as opposed to the private realm which is full of untapped information which may be lost if not recorded in the near future and a significant aspect of societal history will continue to be overlooked.

Strong-Boag suggests two actions which may counter the problem; reappraisal of existing collections in a bid to uncover forgotten women and a programme to acquire new records which may be more representative of the female experience. In some instances, these suggestions may have been worthwhile. However, archivists may need to consider other solutions. For instance, explorations which use specific ideologies, such as feminism, will alter our perception of women and their recordkeeping, as will as a reconsideration of the record. The authors of *A Feminist Dictionary* note:

We have used many sources for this book, some of them unconventional. Feminist critics suggest that we must look for women's language and communication in new ways and in new places. We must look beneath the surface orthodoxy, to find the female subversion. We need to look in such places as gynaecological handbooks passed between women for centuries; in women's art; in folklore and oral histories; in graffiti and gossip; in journals; in letters and diaries; in songs, billboards and posters; in the cant and chant of witchcraft and voodoo; in slogans, in parodies and humour; in poetry; in graphics; in comics and symbols; and in the mass of work by "uncanonised" writers whose richness and diversity we are only just beginning to comprehend.<sup>100</sup>

Archivists in the United Kingdom typically use a single source, namely UKAT which is employed as a national standard to ensure continuity and consistency of archival description. However, these terms are published and often used by archivists without further enquiry or consideration of alternative methods. I believe an analysis of the list of sanctioned terms used by archivists could yield surprising results. For instance, a search from the main thesaurus of UKAT terms for the term women yielded the following list:

Bible women, employment of women, female manpower, female students, females, Jewish women, Methodist women, Quaker women, rural women, women and development, women artists, women authors, women gardeners, women in politics, women journalists, women labour union members, women managers, women membership, women missionaries, women professors, women scientists, women students, women teachers, women workers,

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<sup>100</sup> Kramarae, C. & Treichler, P., p17.

womens education, womens employment, womens health, womens missionary work, women's organizations, womens participation (political), womens participation (social), womens rights, womens status, womens studies, womens suffrage and womens unemployment.<sup>101</sup>

However, a search for the term men did not reveal any results. The terms listed above are comprised of the accepted male-sanctioned term with the term women attached to the end. It is therefore taken for granted by UKAT that men occupy the positions listed above; students, artists and scientists, and that the women who achieve these ranks are anomalous. UKAT is aware that this is not a satisfactory solution and one with which many people disagree. An online exercise instructs users to:

Go to UKAT and enter "women authors" as a search. Some archivists have an issue with the way in which UKAT can ask you to enter separate search terms for a subject such as this. You can see that you would need to enter "women" and "authors", which it could be argued, does not amount to quite the same thing. The Women's Library does not use UKAT for this reason...However, one of the issues with thesauri is whether lists such as this can be considered at all comprehensive.<sup>102</sup>

However, I have not found any evidence to suggest that discussion or consultation is taking place on ways to make UKAT more inclusive.

Similarly, UKAT does not allow for use of the term feminism but instead directs the user to the women's liberation movement. Many feminists, especially those from minority groups, rejected this term in the 1960s as they believed it did not encompass the range of female experiences, but rather focused on those of middle-class, white women. Recently rejected terms include:

Women communists, women composers, women in education, women in medicine, women's missionary work, women in the labour movement, women in war, women miners, women orientalists, women physicians, women tailors, women's organisations, Women's Rights, women's societies and clubs, Women's Suffrage, women's writings, women's diaries, women's history and Women's Royal Air Force.<sup>103</sup>

The UKAT website does not offer the reasons for the rejection of these terms. However, several collections could be effectively catalogued using

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<sup>101</sup> <http://www.ukat.org.uk/thesaurus/term.php?i=3818> [27/06/10]

<sup>102</sup> <http://www.ukad.org/UKAD-indexing-tutorial/ukat.html> [28/09/11]

<sup>103</sup> <http://www.ukat.org.uk/thesaurus/rejected.php?1=w&o=20> [13/04/08]

these terms. One example is the *Papers of Mary Auld* (1893-1984), a political activist whose papers are held by Strathclyde University Archives (GB 249 T-MIN 29). Appropriate terms for this collection include women in the labour movement, women's organisations and Women's Rights, selected from the rejected terms above. Another collection which could benefit from the use of some of the rejected terms are the *Records of Marjorie Cruickshank* (1920-1983) (GB 249 CRU), a lecturer at Jordanhill College of Education. In this instance, relevant terms include women in education and women's history.

UNESCO is similarly problematic. Once again, the term "women's liberation movement" has to be used in place of "feminism" and other terms are prefixed with the word "women", such as women teachers, women managers and women scientists. However:

The majority of jobs/professions that include women, such as women engineers, have not been allocated a separate UNESCO term. For these use "women" and the individual work related term, e.g. "women" and "engineers".<sup>104</sup>

No explanation is offered as to whether it is more unusual to have women engineers as opposed to women teachers, women managers and women scientists. This type of inconsistency makes the task of identifying women within records increasingly difficult.

Despite these shortcomings, UNESCO is the preferred thesaurus used by Genesis and The Women's Library when cataloguing. If UNESCO approved terms are inserted into an Archives Hub description, they will be included in the Genesis catalogue. However:

The following UNESCO compliant terms, commonly associated with gender, will not automatically be included in Genesis as they do not include the prerequisite word "women". If you wish to include the collection on Genesis

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[http://www.google.co.uk/url?url=http://archiveshub.ac.uk/features/genesis/Guide%2520to%2520Subject%2520Indexing%2520for%2520Inclusion%2520in%2520Genesis.doc&rct=j&sa=U&ei=oO6ETo2nMaiw0QXl\\_dT9Dw&ved=0CCQQFjAF&q=ukat+women&usg=AFQjCNGvPHz22NeTEf4eTmaSP2A1FqzzFA](http://www.google.co.uk/url?url=http://archiveshub.ac.uk/features/genesis/Guide%2520to%2520Subject%2520Indexing%2520for%2520Inclusion%2520in%2520Genesis.doc&rct=j&sa=U&ei=oO6ETo2nMaiw0QXl_dT9Dw&ved=0CCQQFjAF&q=ukat+women&usg=AFQjCNGvPHz22NeTEf4eTmaSP2A1FqzzFA) [27/09/11]

please add “women” as a specific subject term: abortion, gender discrimination, gender roles, gender stereotypes, girls, girls education, homemakers, married women, maternal and child health, mothers, nursing, pregnancy, prostitution, sex education, sexual abuse, single mothers, widows, working mothers.<sup>105</sup>

Once again, this makes the process of cataloguing women’s records via the shortcut offered by Genesis time-consuming. Equally, it is difficult to understand why it is necessary to add the term “women” to women-only experiences such as abortion, maternal health and pregnancy. I have been unable to ascertain why Genesis and The Women’s Library use a cataloguing system which does not fully meet their needs when female-friendly examples do exist.

An alternative and more inclusive cataloguing method was developed by Aletta which created a unique women-friendly classification scheme, the *Dutch Women’s Thesaurus* (1993) and began working on a more accessible European version in the same year. The project was completed in 1998 with:

The aim of developing a common European indexing system was to give a tool to women’s libraries and archives in Europe to enable them to create a gender indexing system. The European Thesaurus is developed for information centres who have as their special focus the collecting and disseminating of information on the position of women and women’s studies. The European Women’s Thesaurus enables them to facilitate dissemination of information on equal opportunities between women and men, especially in regards to the modern means of communication (e-mail and Internet). The EWT will also facilitate integrated searches in public catalogues of libraries.<sup>106</sup>

The *European Women’s Thesaurus* (1998), like feminist dictionaries, seeks to provide the appropriate terminology to record and discuss women’s experiences and subsequent record keeping. The Thesaurus contains around 20,000 searchable terms and the creators note that:

A word-system like a Thesaurus is never a finished language in general and in women’s studies is always changing. This means that a thesaurus constantly needs maintenance and development to keep it up to date. But only libraries that are working with it can contribute to the process of maintenance and development.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> <http://www.collectivejourneys.org/stories/iiav.html> [02/02/08]

A comparison of the *Women's Thesaurus* with UKAT demonstrates the perceived lack of commitment on the part of the latter. The Feminist Archive (North and South) in the United Kingdom use an assortment of terms from the Thesaurus which include:

Visual and performing arts, anthropology, built environment, economics/labour, education/training, health care/medicine, history, lifestyles/parenthood, literature/linguistics, law, media, philosophy, politics/policy, psychology, recreation, religion.<sup>108</sup>

A breakdown of a few of these terms yields the following results:

Economics/Labour: affirmative action, career development, childcare, development aid, disguised unemployment, employment conditions, equal opportunities, glass ceiling, homeworking, jobsharing, parental leave, poverty, trade unions, unemployment, wages for housework, women in male-dominated occupations, women re-entrants.

Education/Training: career choice, curriculum, consciousness-raising groups, sexism in schools and colleges, teaching materials, women's training centres/groups.

Health Care/Medicine: AIDS, anorexia, bulimia & self-abuse, birth control, counselling & therapy, food & diet, health campaigns (e.g. Women's Cancer Campaign), mental health, physical "well-being", sexuality.

History: individual women's collections e.g. Dora Russell Peace Caravan, oral histories, first feminist wave, life histories, biographies and autobiographies.

Lifestyles/Parenthood: childcare, caregiving, cohabitation, divorce, gender-specific upbringing, lesbian mothers, marriage, single mothers.

Law: abortion law reform, equal opportunities act, European Union, human rights, matrimonial laws, police officers, prison, sex discrimination act, sexual violence.

Politics/Policy: abortion movement, action groups, anarcha feminism, ecofeminism, Equal Opportunities Commission documents, European Union bulletins, gender mainstreaming, immigration, liberal feminism, liberation movement (WLM), radical feminism, socialist feminism, social security, statutory rights (including children's rights), theories of power.

Religion: goddessing, matriarchy, spirituality, witches, women in religious movements, women priests.

Social Conditions/Relations: abuse, anti-sexism, developing countries, discrimination, gender socialisation, housewives, lesbianism, pornography & visual degradation, poverty, prostitution, racism, sexual harassment, sexuality, social security, stereotyping, violence against women – domestic abuse, rape, women's aid refuges, female genital mutilation, child sexual abuse, violent women.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> <http://www.iiav.nl/eng/iiav/index.html> [02/02/08]

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

This analysis demonstrates the plethora of terms which can be associated with women in many aspects of life. Whilst classification will never incorporate all peoples, this Thesaurus serves to focus on female-friendly language which considers many issues and experiences from a female perspective, thus avoiding further female marginalisation. If UKAT and other cataloguing tools incorporated some of these terms, a more rounded, comprehensive system could be developed which would allow women's records to be identified in archival repositories. An example of this can be seen in the Wellcome Library's *Papers of Marie Stopes* (1880-1958) (PP/MCS) which could be usefully catalogued with the thesaurus terms birth control, physical "well-being", sexuality, individual women's collections and marriage among many others. A further example can be found in the Women's Library which holds the *Records of the Wives' Fellowship* (1916-2008) (GB 106 5WFE), a group for married Christian women to support and encourage the institution of marriage, motherhood and community service. Feminist search terms for this collection could include affirmative action, marriage, women in religious movements and housewives.

Issues of feminist rhetoric can have wide reaching implications; from the voice which women use within the archive to the classification systems which researchers consult when accessing material on women. The archival community has not yet engaged with feminist theory to the extent which it could, but an analysis of the language employed might be a prudent and practical starting point. Feminist rhetoric offers an analysis of the language which women use, thus altering and shaping the way women's records are perceived and avoiding further deprecation and neglect. If the archive is to become a women-friendly space, it should incorporate feminist rhetoric into its terminology and classificatory terms, so that women's records can enter the archive and women's voices can be heard.

### **Chapter Three: My Experiences in Women's Archives**

A fundamental and particularly enjoyable part of my research was visiting alternative archive and library spaces for women and interviewing the staff who carry out important work, often in challenging circumstances. These organisations and the people who facilitate their work, are not always part of mainstream archival discussions and decision-making processes; their work is rarely featured in recognised archival literature yet the wider information community could learn from their knowledge and expertise..

I undertook the first of my visits to Glasgow Women's Library in June 2008. Before my visit I was aware of GWL through their website and was excited by what they had achieved in such a short period of time and the wide range of events and activities on offer. Key dates in GWL history include:

1991: GWL was established in 1991 in Hill Street, Garnethill as a voluntary organisation with no paid members of staff.

1994: The library moved to the Trongate area to accommodate increasing numbers of users and resources. At the same time, the library was incorporated as a company and began its volunteer training programme.

1995: Funding was made available for a part-time salary which was shared between three workers. Significantly, the London-based Lesbian Archive and Information Centre was acquired by GWL. The 500<sup>th</sup> member was also welcomed.

1996: Monthly free lawyer's surgeries started at GWL, these continue today. Furthermore, the first GWL banner and monthly newsletter were produced for the first time, these remain in production.

1998: The 1000<sup>th</sup> GWL user was welcomed.

1999: Funding was made available by Comic Relief for the LIPS project, which brought two further members of staff to the service.

2000: GWL was awarded charitable status.

2001: A motion was passed in the newly formed Scottish Parliament congratulating the charity of its work.

The following years saw a flurry of new appointments

2001: A Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator was instated.

2002: An Adult Literacy and Numeracy Co-ordinator was appointed.

2005: The first Librarian was put in post.

At the same time, GWL established the Women's Community Garden, the Scottish Arts Council funded GWL's first Writer in Residence and the website was relaunched.

2006: The Library moved to a temporary home in Parnie Street.

2007: The Black and Minority Ethnic Women's Project was launched.

Over the past few years, the library has gained funding from, among others, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Scottish Arts Council, to facilitate a move to The Mitchell Library, therefore creating the first Women's Archive in Scotland. However, the decision has been taken to seek larger premises and the future home of GWL remains unclear.

When I visited, the library was located in a second floor tenement building in Parnie Street in the Merchant City area of Glasgow, a street containing an eclectic mix of neighbours including a comic book shop and a working men's club. The library was open plan with the library collection housed in one area, the archive in another and a central seating area. The walls were covered in posters and artworks created by the users, with paper cuttings hanging from the ceiling. The furniture was mismatched and helped to create a homely, relaxed and inviting atmosphere. In the shared kitchen, there was a selection of home baking and seedlings which people could take home.

When I met with Wendy Kirk, the Librarian and Adele Patrick, Lifelong Learning and Creative Development Manager, we sat in the communal area drinking tea and chatting. The experience was not what I had been expecting. It was far removed from a traditional archive and felt much more like a welcoming community centre or meeting place. The environment was very relaxed, unlike the sterile and informal search rooms I have been used to. GWL is not a place of silence, rather the users can browse books and drink tea, take part in the wide range of classes on offer or attend talks.

The staff are passionate, not just about their work but also about the people they come into contact with. There is an awareness that for many of the clients, the space is holistic and allows them to heal and be supported by others. It is very obvious that all the women who use the service are known by name and by story.

Adele and Wendy spent hours talking to me about the library, why it was important and what they hoped to achieve over the coming years. Most tellingly however, they spent the greatest part of the interview talking about the women who use the service, why it was needed and the change it can facilitate in individuals. Their users include women from ethnic minorities, women who have escaped prostitution and those enduring domestic violence, who need a women-only space where they can begin to share their stories. The nature of the work carried out differs perhaps from a more traditional archive; a great deal of time and patience is spent in gaining the trust of women who have difficult home lives or traumatic pasts. The women are encouraged to see the Archive as a learning tool, historical record and source of creative inspiration.

Unfortunately, I was unable to view the Archive as it was boxed up awaiting removal to the new premises. However, Adele and Wendy talked me through the varied collection which has been mainly donated by users. The archive includes scrapbooks, badges, t-shirts, banners, blankets, embroidery, artefacts and placards. When I visited, GWL did not have a professional archivist. However, an archivist was later appointed and recently, the first version of the archive catalogue has been made available online. At the moment, only four collections are visible with basic cataloguing information: the Clare Galloway collection, records of St. Andrews LGBT Society, the Hannah Frank print collection and The Ladder: A Lesbian Review. I look forward to using the finished catalogue and finding out which classification schemas have been employed. Wendy Kirk gave me a valuable insight into the way in which the library collection has been represented:

I looked at different examples of women's libraries and their classification schemes and merged and took bits I liked out of them and made one for the library based on our collection and trying to think about what our user base is. And thinking of my own experience of using a library, I hate using a library with Dewey, big long class marks I can't remember and it's so confusing. I wanted to make something that was quite simple in the sense that I don't think we need an overly complicated system for the amount of stuff that we have and our subject matters, things like that. I just made one up based on different women's libraries. I particularly liked the Indian Women's Library Classification Scheme and I had a look at the Feminist Library in London and the Austrian Women's Library and Archive...It's obviously not perfect...I definitely think I wanted something that would feel pleasant to use and not off-putting because obviously we have never had a system before. When all the collection is out it is really like a bookshop, subjects you could browse, so I have tried to follow what we had before in terms of topic areas and things like that. It is interesting the amount of women's libraries who do it. I've found they tend to be using their own more than using a traditional one...I think they're an improvement on traditional systems. It is good for correcting gender biases in terms which I think some people wouldn't really be aware of, like saying stewardess rather than flight attendant, it's ingrained in a lot of people's minds and they wouldn't necessarily think of that as being a sexist term or an inappropriate word to use now. I think as well some traditional systems just don't have words or don't have whole sections on women's information like eco-feminism and things like that. You think where would you find that in the Dewey Decimal Classification System?

Wendy was passionate about the need for a useful catalogue and meaningful description terms for the users. Until this visit, I assumed archivists used standard thesauri and made accommodations for feminist terminology of they so wished. However, this interview brought to my attention the importance of developing a feminist classification scheme to address the imbalances. Catalogues like Wendy's make women visible and create alternative systems which challenge accepted male-sanctioned language.

This was my first experience of an alternative library and made a considerable impact, not simply upon my research but in terms of challenging my preconceptions of what a library and archive can and should provide for its community. I have witnessed first hand the change in public and university libraries over the last ten years, where the atmosphere has visibly relaxed and greater interaction with users has developed, but a space like this was unrecognisable and unconceivable. It made me question the lessons which archives could learn from the work being carried out at GWL, on the outskirts of the mainstream archival community. I have yet to read an archival essay or text which mentions the work being carried out here as

a model for what archivists can hope to achieve. The staff offer English language classes in recognition of the fact that English is not the first language of many; runs reading, writing and numeracy classes to improve the skill set of library users and carries out living classroom sessions outdoors, therefore removing learning from a more rigid, traditional setting. The focus is very much on the needs of the user and the library and archive form a backdrop to a wide range of essential services.

That version of the Library is no more. GWL moved to The Mitchell Library in September 2011 but are currently seeking larger premises to contain their expanding collections and services. The temporary setting is more prestigious, widely known and will hopefully allow the service to grow in the short term until a permanent home is found. I hope that GWL does not lose its home-grown ethos within this grander setting, but I very much doubt that the staff and users would allow this to happen. Perhaps, GWL will challenge the existing structure within its new home and show a new way of managing archives and libraries. I look forward to visiting GWL in its final home and believe the service will continue to flourish.

The next phase of my research included a two-week visit to London in July 2008 to visiting a range of museums, archives and libraries. The first visit was made to Make otherwise known as The Women's Art Library where I met Althea Greenan, Special Collections Curator and Dr. Jacqueline Cooke, Research Support Librarian. The collection is housed at Goldsmiths, University of London where courses are offered in Fine Art, History of Art, Art Writing, Curating, Aural and Visual Cultures, Contemporary Art Theory and Global Art. The acquisition of the collection by Goldsmiths, a prestigious academic environment, adds to the legitimacy of the records and makes them more visible. Cooke explains that:

We felt that it would fit in at Goldsmiths because it's a cross-disciplinary college – creative, cultural and social processes- that was something we tried between us. It was a collection which had possibilities for research in sociology as much as art and we could provide that.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Interview with Jacqueline Cooke.

However, the collection has its roots in much different surroundings:

Late 1970s: A group of feminist artists began collecting slides of their work as a means of documentation.

1982: The library opened to public from its base in Battersea Arts Centre.

1983-2002: The library diversified into an arts organisation which published catalogues, books and a magazine.

1985: The library became a registered charity.

1987: The library moved to Central Saint Martin's School of Art and Design.

1993: The facility changed its name to the Women's Art Library.

2002: The library lost its funding from the Arts Council of England and could no longer operate as a membership organisation.

2003-2004: The library was integrated into Goldsmiths College Library Special Collections and changed its name to Make/Women's Art Library. From this point, it was no longer an independent organisation.

I spent time in the Archive, located in a small section of the Special Collections Library, where I once again became aware that the Archive was not managed by an archivist. However, the library staff provided a search room and a basic online catalogue is available. At the moment, there are very few thesaurus terms attached to the records and those which do feature appear to be derived from traditional library methods.

Make houses important collections including The Women of Colour Index (1985-1995) which holds information on black women artists in the United Kingdom and the archives of The Women's International Art Club (1901-1978). Furthermore, the library houses a wide range of journals and periodicals including *Feminist Artists Newsletter*, *Heresies*, *Matriart*, *The Women Artists' Slide Library Newsletter*, *The Women Artists' Slide Library Journal*, *Women's Art Magazine* and *Make, the magazine of women's art*. The library also holds over 9,500 artist files dating from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I spent my time at Make looking through material

donated to the library by Jo Spence. These artist's files do not contain unique material but rather photocopies of articles donated by the individual, therefore differing from traditional archival practice. The staff acknowledge this and explain that they approach the term "archive" from a slightly different perspective:

But we do fairly often have discussions about archives and this not being an archive in that sense, it doesn't have that sort of completeness, and it's not private papers but at the same time in contemporary art the term archives is used about the kind of material we've got, documentation or representations of practice have become known as archives in an artistic, curatorial context. So we keep all these different conceptions of what an archive is I think.<sup>111</sup>

Cooke continues:

I'm going to quote Victor Burgin because for me it's that breadth, that sense of lots of records of lots of different histories and that history isn't necessarily history. He says that real history is mutable and heterogeneous and collections like this one are a reminder of that. There are simplified versions of histories that get repeated. Real history is forgotten while it's impostor, a more plausible narrative takes over. This kind of collection is a pull in the other direction.<sup>112</sup>

The ethos of the Library is not so much about the originality of material contained within the files but rather to ensure that women artists are represented and made visible, something which they acknowledge has not always been the case. Althea Greenan explains:

People who come here don't necessarily expect to find this and when they do it's a bit of an eye-opener. It's not necessarily the content, it's the idea and it's the quantity. It's just the fact that there are thousands of art names, it's kind of obvious that there are all these individuals. They all have their own little files, they may have one piece of paper but they have their own files. It's a kind of presence there, just that sheer weight of evidence. Something that makes people think again and makes them think of their own practice in a different way.<sup>113</sup>

I gained the impression that Make was once similar to the Glasgow Women's Library in that it was a hub for activism, change and personal expression. The move to Goldsmiths then placed it firmly within an academic setting, a change which the staff have embraced. Cooke

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<sup>111</sup> Interview with Jacqueline Cooke.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Althea Greenan.

acknowledges the changing nature of the archive and reflects on what the wider implications might be:

There are changes that have come about from it moving into a university setting and a special collections library. I'm not sure we know what those consequences are yet but with regard to feminism and feminist debate one of the things that's come out of that is that we're now in a higher education institution, we have an advisory board of people who include academics from this college and also people representing the art world and galleries. But one of the things that people on that board are interested in now is looking back on the feminist projects of the last half of the twentieth century.<sup>114</sup>

Most of my conversation with the staff at Make centred around the move to Goldsmiths and the fact that they were fortunate in comparison to other organisations who are financially unable to retain their collections and are struggling to find institutions to take ownership.

Make continues to develop and engage with wider audiences in challenging and innovative ways. For instance, *Living with Make: Art in the Archive* saw *The Women's Art Library/Make* and *The Feminist Review* award a £1000 research bursary to Clare Gasson in 2011. As part of the project:

Women's Art Library/Make and *The Feminist Review* invited writers and artists working with text to propose an original engagement with this special collection, for proposals which would not only approach the archive's holdings creatively but also excavate them as a feminist resource that records women's lives and activities. The proposed outcome encompasses a broad register of writing, realised in any number of formats, i.e. as an article or a gallery handout, online blog, performed script or radio broadcast. The final work will be presented in the Open Space pages of a forthcoming issue of *Feminist Review* and feature in a public launch in the South London Gallery.<sup>115</sup>

This project demonstrates their commitment to retaining a feminist ethos, whilst engaging in archival theory.

My visit to Make left me feeling troubled regarding the provision of funding for women's archives and libraries and the startling realisation that large institutions are unable to accept all of these collections. There exists a real possibility that women's records, which have already been excluded from the mainstream archive, are being turned away from larger women's spaces

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<sup>114</sup> Interview with Jacqueline Cooke.

<sup>115</sup> <http://www.gold.ac.uk/make/events> [05/09/11]

due to lack of space and resources. If this situation continues, the gaps in our understanding of women's history will grow ever wider.

My next visit highlighted this issue even further and showed me the reality of an archive without professional resources. The Jo Spence Memorial Archive is run by Terry Dennett, Spence's former partner and artistic collaborator, in the London flat which they once shared. I spent two days talking with Terry, looking through Spence's work and viewing other material which he felt reflected her philosophy and outlook. Jo Spence (1934-1992) was an important British photographer with a strong feminist and socialist ethos. She was initially a studio photographer before moving into documentary work and developing several collaborative relationships. Spence helped to set up Photography Workshop Ltd., Camerawork magazine and the Hackney Flashers. However, she is perhaps best known for her photo-therapy work which began around the time she was diagnosed with breast cancer. During her treatment, she produced many intimate photographs such as images of herself prior to and after a mastectomy. Spence made the private and supposedly shameful into something public and worthy of discussion, to the discomfort of many. Sadly, Spence was later diagnosed with leukaemia, a battle which she lost in 1992.

The first thing which struck me about the material in Dennett's flat was the sheer scale of the archive. Material was piled to the ceiling, in no apparent order. Papers, scrapbooks and bundles of photographs covered every area of the room Dennett used as a study with one clear area around his computer desk. The material was uncatalogued yet Dennett was able to find items throughout our conversation. The Archive was undoubtedly a labour of love, with Dennett working tirelessly to promote and protect Spence's work. Dennett once remarked:

Preparing an exhibition is always an emotional experience for me. It's a reliving of past times. Having known Jo, I can still hear her voice when I read her texts. David also said this was the case for him. So, in a sense, by working with her material, I am also still working with Jo. When we were doing the work on ancient Egyptian ideas, we were struck by the notion that an image could stand in place of a person after death even if the body itself was destroyed. A small statue or even writing or speaking their name was

enough to preserve their essential presence. But when no one spoke or wrote their name, they would cease to exist. I feel that each exhibition is my way of getting the public to speak Jo's name and keep her essence alive through her work and ideas.<sup>116</sup>

Dennett himself is not a young man and as sole custodian of Spence's work, I wonder what will eventually befall the important material within his home. I spoke to Dennett about the future of the Archive and he was keen for the material to be donated to a large organisation, wishes expressed by Spence. Spence was aware of archival issues as Dennett explains:

During Jo's lifetime, we were always concerned with archives and the survival and dissemination of historical material. With Jo's archive, the problem is a practical one. Before her death, Jo thought it was solved. The Director of the Centre of Contemporary Art in Glasgow was going to open a Jo Spence Room, and Jo was going to donate her archives to them. [That] director left, and his replacement was not interested in Jo's archive. After her death, I was hopeful that the UK cultural community that she served during her life would be sympathetic to appeals for funding. But the general answer has been, "we don't fund dead artists". So I have kept the project small and within the private means that I have at my disposal. The ideal situation would be to place the archive in a university, where students could work with the materials. This has not been fulfilled so far, but her materials are currently in collections in Scotland, the US, Spain and Japan. Under the current economic slowdown, it is probable that the work will eventually have to be dispersed to institutions worldwide to ensure its survival in at least one or two places. Right now, I continue to make the material available to students, teachers, artists, and scholars. I also give lectures, do tutorials and curate exhibitions of Jo's work as often as I can.<sup>117</sup>

Surprisingly, he did not want the material to be kept together; instead his vision was for the material to be split up between various organisations so it could be viewed by the widest number of people possible and make the biggest impact. However, the institutions and archives he had approached were not in favour of the idea. I had previously believed that an archival collection should be kept together where possible. Upon reflection however, I began to think of artworks; the works of an artist are rarely kept together in their entirety and this is accepted by professionals and visitors alike. This is a difficult concept for archivists who are trained in the preservation of bodies of material but keeping collections together may not always be possible.

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<sup>116</sup> [www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/196399282.html](http://www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/196399282.html)

<sup>117</sup> [www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/196399282.html](http://www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/196399282.html)

It was both powerful and moving to view Spence's work with her former partner and artistic collaborator. Dennett showed me some of the final scrapbooks produced by Spence, images which he helped her to create. Whilst archivists may be trained in the best ways to catalogue and preserve records, I would never have experienced the intimacy and emotional impact of viewing these photographs with someone who had not been so obviously affected by Spence's death.

My last visit was to The Foundling Museum which was set up in 1998 as a charity to look after the Foundling Museum Collection and opened in 2004. The Foundling Hospital was set up by Captain Thomas Coram who was moved by the many homeless children on the streets of London. By 1745, the Hospital had moved premises and attracted considerable support from William Hogarth, a founder governor, who donated artworks and George Frideric Handel who conducted benefit concerts in the Hospital Chapel. The first children arrived in 1741 and were baptised and renamed. In 1926 the decision was made to move the Hospital to Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire and subsequently closed in 1954. From this time, the Hospital became known as the Thomas Coram Foundation for Children, now simply Coram, a charity for vulnerable children.

When I visited the Foundling Museum there was a small and intimate display of small objects which the website explains:

Some of the most poignant items in the collection are the foundling tokens. These were pinned by mothers to their baby's clothes and upon entry, the Hospital would attach them to the child's record of admission. As foundling babies were given new names, these tokens helped to ensure correct identification, should a parent ever return to claim their child. The children were not allowed to keep their tokens, which were frequently everyday objects, such as a coin or button. The Hospital gradually evolved a more sophisticated administrative system, whereby mothers were issued with receipts. So the practice of leaving tokens died out at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> <http://www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk/collections/the-foundling-hospital-collection>  
[27/09/11]

The power of these small objects and the love they represent is hard to describe. This is a museum dedicated to women who, for a variety of reasons, could not be mothers to their children. Many archivists would argue that these small mementoes should not be kept in a repository; I would disagree. There was complete silence in the small museum as people walked among the exhibits.

The emotions associated with viewing these tokens was demonstrated in 2010, when a Matt Collishaw, Tracey Emin and Paula Rego exhibition opened at the Museum. Each of the artists focused on childhood and motherhood. Emin contributed sketches completed during her pregnancy which ended in an abortion. Her artworks have been described as:

Unknown hands clutching at her foetus, nightmares of labour and suckling, half-formed scribbles of a half-formed child who never was. This theme is picked up in her other contributions – the row of infant clothes she has collected and neatly hung on a rail but never used, the soft, woollen baby clothes her grandmother made for her, in the hope the maternal line might continue. Outside are Emin’s orphan mittens and socks, cast in bronze and left on railings, or on stone steps, in the forlorn hope of finding their twins.<sup>119</sup>

It is very rare for people to engage so expressively with archival material.

An exciting exhibition recently opened at the museum called *Foundling Voices*, 21<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> October, which contains the memories of seventy-four children who lived in the Hospital through oral history interviews, photographs and films. The exhibition was funded by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of a four year project, “to collect and preserve the memories of former pupils, complementing the Foundling Hospital’s past and present archives.”<sup>120</sup> A moving version of the exhibition is also available online.<sup>121</sup> The museum and archive are doing an amazing amount with a relatively small collection. However, I believe it is the tact and sensitivity with which they have approached the material which has partly contributed to such successful projects. Unfortunately, an online catalogue

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<sup>119</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2010/jan/31/collishaw-emin-rego-foundling-museum> [27/09/11]

<sup>120</sup> <http://www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk/events/view/Foundling-Voices/> [27/09/11]

<sup>121</sup> <http://foundlingvoices.foundlingmuseum.org.uk> [27/09/11]

is not yet available but I patiently await a forthcoming publication on the tokens.

These visits proved invaluable to my research and allowed me to see first hand the challenges facing each of the organisations. The staff I met at Glasgow Women's Library, Make and The Jo Spence Memorial Archive, were dedicated and enthusiastic about their collections and user base. The prevailing sentiment expressed by the staff was the need to make women visible and a sense of urgency accompanied this. For Terry Dennett at The Jo Spence Memorial Archive, the future is uncertain. He is unable, despite his best efforts, to secure a permanent home for the collection of his former partner and artistic collaborator. This is perhaps due to his request that the material be dispersed among various collections. Archivists may be uneasy about renouncing traditional concepts which teach that collections must be kept together whatever the cost. Similarly, the staff at Make spoke of colleagues desperately trying to find homes for collections as their organisations close. It is difficult to reconcile the fact that women are underrepresented in most archival collections yet organisations with important records about the place of women within society are unable to secure their long term futures.

A strong theme which emerged from my visit to Glasgow Women's Library was the idea that the provision of a safe space to access information can be just as important as the information itself. The need for female-friendly spaces has been a recurring theme throughout this work but hearing from Adele Patrick and Wendy Kirk about the women who use the service and the challenges they face made an impact. I was also struck by the relaxed atmosphere in each of the spaces. GWL was very homely and inviting whilst the Make collection was housed in a small part of the library, far removed from the hustle and bustle usually associated with university search rooms.

The only disappointment I faced was the realisation that when I visited, all of these spaces were functioning without a qualified archivist. Despite this,

the staff remained committed to making the material in their collections available to the general public. However, this explains the often sparse catalogue records associated with these archives and libraries; the staff at Make were limited in what they could achieve as they were a team of only two who managed the search room and Special Collections department. Similarly, Glasgow Women's Library only recently appointed an archivist who is starting to make their collections available online. I wanted to find an example of a women's collection which was meaningfully catalogued to illustrate the benefits of inclusive index terms and female-sanctioned language. However, the one institution which I felt certain would have achieved this, The Women's Library, continues to use UNESCO, which as discussed in Chapter Two does not fully meet the needs of women's archives and libraries. However, I am hopeful that the archive collection of Glasgow Women's Library will change this and use a custom made thesaurus which reflects both the nature of the collection and the needs of the user in much the same way as the library material has been catalogued.

Whilst the situation facing women archivists and librarians is far from perfect, the work being carried out is exciting and innovative. Women's repositories across the country are carrying out weekly activities with diverse groups of women, sharing their skills, knowledge and expertise. The next chapter will look at the ways in which more traditional archives can engage with women's records and help to highlight the presence of women's records within the archive.

## Chapter Four: Drawing together and moving forward:

In order to assess the extent of the female absence within the archive, there is an increasing need for an investigation into the extent of women's archival holdings across local authorities, special collections and national organisations in the United Kingdom. This will underpin the central claim of this dissertation that women's records do exist but have not been afforded the status they deserve. An examination of the number of specific female collections which exist in relation to those of their male counterparts, the types of records held in repositories and the subjects these cover will help to locate women and would tie in with the work of projects such as GENESIS and the Women's History Network which have been discussed previously. A sample assessment of this type would be fairly quick to complete and would give a much needed overview of the issues and records involved, as well as providing indisputable evidence on the extent of the problem.

The next suggested step is increased communication within the archival community on these forgotten women and attempts made to increase their visibility. For instance, the *Third Women in the Archives* conference was recently held at Brown University in association with the Brown University Women Writers Project.<sup>122</sup> This is a:

Long-term research project devoted to early modern women's writing and electronic text encoding. Our goal is to bring texts by pre-Victorian women writers out of the archive and make them accessible to a wide audience of teachers, students, scholars, and the general reader. We support research on women's writing, text encoding, and the role of electronic texts in teaching and scholarship.<sup>123</sup>

Once again, the focus of the project is the rediscovery of forgotten women and their contributions within the archive, but what makes this interesting is the fact that this is being carried out with the help of digital information specialists who may not have a prior interest in the topic and through a medium which promotes accessibility. The main themes which permeate the project are accessibility and a willingness to engage with new audiences. The visualisations within the catalogue are particularly engaging and could

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<sup>122</sup> <http://www.wwp.brown.edu/about/activities/wia/wia2010/conference.html> [23/05/10]

<sup>123</sup> <http://www.wwp.brown.edu/index.html> [23/05/10]

entirely reshape archival catalogues. In comparison, more traditional catalogues appear linear and static. The project allows the user to search intuitively and reflects the sometimes organic nature of archival material. It is not simply the visual nature of the project which is remarkable, but also the additional material contained within it. I was particularly impressed by the Visualisation of Fictional Correspondence Networks which is explained below:

In this visualization of *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), the novel's characters are represented according to the frequency with which they write to one another. Female characters are represented by orange nodes, while blue nodes represent male characters. The size of each character's node indicates the total number of letters he or she writes over the course of the novel. The width of the edges between nodes indicates the frequency with which any two characters write to one another.<sup>124</sup>

The software utilised allows users to visualise the number of women's records created in comparison to those by men which could helpfully illustrate the themes raised throughout this dissertation. Whilst the aim of this series of conferences is to consider "the role of archival texts in the study and teaching of early modern women's writing", conferences and projects such as these seek to provide an opportunity for "scholars, activists, and technologists" to consider areas in need of future research and work towards a new, more inclusive archive.

Another exciting project was The Wales Women's History Roadshow which took place between January 2008 and June 2009. The country-wide events were organised by The Women's Archive of Wales:

The 17 Roadshows were based on the popular model of the Antiques Roadshow and the public were invited to bring items along which tell us about the lives of women in Wales. As well as one-to-one discussions about the historical (as opposed to the monetary) value of family or organisational

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<sup>124</sup> <http://www.wwp.brown.edu/ww/lab/correspondence.html> [29/09/11]

records, Roadshows included talks and exhibitions, advice on conservation, and on safeguarding materials for posterity.<sup>125</sup>

The roadshows increased the visibility of archival staff and the services they offer, as well as engaging the public in the importance of women's history. The series of events uncovered photographs and letters, as well as more unusual items such as a dentist bill, family household accounts from 1951 to present day, a WRVS dress, nursing equipment, a child's evacuation tag from the Second World War, a ladies leather motorcycle helmet and a pair of Women's Land Army breeches, tie and badge. These items not only confirm the hypothesis of women's non-traditional records but also the fact that these items do not always feature in museum and archive collections.

Other institutions and projects seek to question the extent of women's archival holdings within a wider professional context. For instance, Dr. Margaretta Jolly, a lecturer in Life History and Life Writing at Sussex University, was awarded funding from the Leverhulme Trust for Sisterhood and After: The women's liberation oral history project. Project partners include The British Library and The Women's Library. Jolly explains the importance of collecting the oral history interviews:

The generation of women who powered the Women's Liberation Movement in its heyday are mostly now in their 60s and 70s. For many, memories of a youth in which feminism was part of everyday life are vivid. For other, those memories are difficult, or fading. It is important to record their stories for future generations, before it is too late.<sup>126</sup>

The aims of the project include interviewing fifty women, filming ten short films, creating a website and hosting workshops, producing various articles, running seminars and conferences, the completion of a PhD thesis and creating an archive collection from the documents produced. The interdisciplinary nature of the team and partners will undoubtedly facilitate the creation of a unique repository which will address the lack of oral history testaments from feminist pioneers.

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<sup>125</sup> <http://www.womensarchivewales.org/en/roadshows/index.html> [29/09/11]

<sup>126</sup> <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/newsandevents/pressrelease/id/3591> [29/09/11]

An exciting conference which has taken place recently is *Archiving Women*, a by-product of the *Engendering Women* project which took place at The Centre for Critical Analysis of Social Difference at Columbia University in 2009 with the aim of examining feminist practices in the archive, as this dissertation seeks to. Whereas the previous project was concerned with unearthing past generations of women, this endeavour is among the first which seeks to question the legitimacy of the male-dominated archive and instead reconceive the archival space from a feminist postmodernist perspective. Their mandate is as follows:

“Archiving Women” will ask how the scholarship on gender, race and sexuality has transformed the ways we think about archival structures and practices. What kinds of new archives are being created and how are they structured? Are new material being collected, new histories being shaped? What alternative forms of transmission are being imagined? How have new media transformed the ways in which knowledge is classified, stored, and retrieved?<sup>127</sup>

This concurs with the thinking behind this research; that current methodologies do not encompass the breadth of past and present female experience and that alternative versions are instead being formed. The broad remit of the project is made possible by the range of Faculty Fellows involved, including those from the departments of English and Comparative Literature, Oral History, Africana Studies, Women and Gender Studies, Art History, German, History, Anthropology, Sociology, Law and Architecture. Visiting Fellows come from disciplines as diverse as African American Studies, Writing and New Media, Archives, Photography, Art Education, Media Culture and Communication, Performance Studies, Spanish and Politics. This suggests that multi-disciplinary teams are better equipped to answer such challenging questions on female recordkeeping. The wide range of knowledge and points of reference known to conference participants allows for unique perspectives to be considered which the archival community might not have been able to engage with single-handedly.

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<sup>127</sup> <http://www.socialdifference.org/events/archiving-women-0> [23/05/10]

Those involved tackled challenging questions such as:

How do archives change when women are the subject?  
How have feminist archival practices engendered new historical narratives and new political agendas?  
How do archivists need to be transformed, recreated and created to accommodate feminist questions and women's collections?  
What new theoretical questions emerge in the creation of new archives?  
What have digital technologies and the world wide web enabled and disabled?  
What constitutes an archive?  
What are the ethical and theoretical consequences of collecting and being collected?  
Are there advantages to forgetting and disappearance?<sup>128</sup>

Some of these questions have been explored in this dissertation.

This research argues that women's records have been overlooked because they have not adhered to the traditional concept of the record and have instead incorporated patchwork quilts and their associated stories and memories, recipes passed down through generations of women and pieces of advice traditionally known as mother's wisdom. The realisation that archives change when women are the subject is discussed by Elizabeth Grosz, Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers University, who notes that:

Women's specificities, their corporeality and subjectivities, are not inherently resistant to representation or depiction. They may be unrepresentable in a culture in which the masculine can represent the other only as versions of itself, where the masculine relies on the subordination of the feminine. But this is not logically or biologically fixed. It can be contested and changed. It can be redefined, reconceived, reinscribed in ways entirely different from those that mark it today.<sup>129</sup>

The importance of such conferences and groups has not yet been realised in the United Kingdom. Exciting work is taking place, mainly at grassroots levels, but those involved often do not have the academic platform to make themselves heard and are unsure of audience response in a society where feminism has fallen out of favour. The next step towards addressing issues of this nature could be the formation of a UK theoretical archival journal. At present, the only UK archival publications are *Archives* and the *Journal*

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Grosz, E., cited in Betterton, R., 1996. *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and The Body*. London and New York: Routledge, p17.

*of the Society of Archivists* and tend to deal with a mixture of practical and professional issues rather than engaging in theoretical debates more akin to the Canadian journal, *Archivaria*. Furthermore, the creation of a journal to which non-archivists were encouraged to submit could produce exciting, more encompassing results. The opportunity to share experiences, research material and projects would prove invaluable and encourage a fresh research community which would be equipped to deal with complex, interdisciplinary issues such as those discussed at Brown University. In turn, this could lead to British archivists participating in conferences such as those discussed above and producing publications which could alter archival thinking. Communication and involvement with other professionals, academics and interested parties will facilitate progress and begin to redress the imbalance which has occurred when considering women's records. Once a dedicated feminist archival community has been established, no matter how small, the message can be spread to those others. Archival institutions can then begin to consider the impact their practices have on women's records and the researchers who wish to utilise them.

It is hoped that future research articles and projects will consider, among other reasons, the inflexibility of language for the supposed absence of women's records. Chapter Two detailed the extent to which language prevents women from retelling their experiences and prevents archivists from meaningfully cataloguing their subsequent records. Deborah Cameron (1958- ), Scottish linguist and Robert Murdoch Professor of Language and Communication at the University of Oxford, describes the inadequacy of language as:

Women struggling to reinterpret their existence have noticed again and again that language itself does not guarantee communication, and many feel actually inhibited by the inadequacy of words. A woman writes:  
"Sometimes when I am talking to people I really feel at a loss for words. I have this idea in my head and a feeling I want to express and I just can't get it out. I have felt like this for years and I have never been able to understand why...A vast number of the words I use all the time to describe my experiences are not really describing it at all."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Cameron, D., 1985. *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*. MacMillan Press Ltd., p5-6.

Therefore, a questioning of language use, its restrictions and assumptions may help to explain the female absence from the archive both in terms of the language which they have used to record their experiences and also the cataloguing systems employed by archivists. Further research is needed into the ways in which women's records can be unearthed and meaningfully described. This can be undertaken in numerous ways, from the fairly straight forward task of integrating female-friendly classification terms into the existing structure to a wider examination of women's records within the archival community. As previously discussed, commonly used cataloguing schemas such as UKAT are not inclusive of the range of female experiences. For instance, the term "feminism" is currently unavailable; the archivist is instead directed to "women's liberation" which is a parallel but distinct entity. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Two, the terms used relate to men with women treated as a sub-genre of the male.

However, steps can be taken to alter this outlook. An investigation is needed into the ways in which women are perceived in and frequently negated by everyday language. Until this takes place, the archival community cannot begin to challenge its shortcomings. Archivists must critically engage with adopted standards and question whether they are as effective as they can be. Undisputedly, standards are necessary for best practice and help to facilitate consistency, but the possibility also exists that archivists follow them without questioning their helpfulness. Cataloguing standards such as UKAT and UNESCO must be constantly revised and updated in order to keep pace with societal developments. Many feminist repositories have long been aware that traditional cataloguing methods do not cover the range of terms necessary for their collections and have therefore adopted alternatives.

As discussed, the IIAV developed the *Women's Thesaurus* which is widely utilised by women's information centres throughout Europe. Whilst UKAT does not allow for the use of the term "feminism", the IIAV thesaurus suggests the following options:

anarcha feminism, Christian feminism, cultural feminism, cyber-feminism, ecofeminism, equal rights feminism, first feminist wave, global feminism (eng), Marxist feminism, Muslim feminism, new feminism, radical feminism, second feminist wave, socialist feminism, third feminist wave, anti-feminism, anti-racism, black feminism, deconstruction, emancipation, lesbian movements, women's movements and women's studies.<sup>131</sup>

Similarly, when some archivists have realised that no one method suits the needs of their collections, hybrid versions have been created. Wendy Kirk, GWL Librarian developed a unique classification method which suited the needs of the users and staff from an amalgamation of thesauri. Mainstream repositories could operate similarly and cherry-pick terms from the *Women's Thesaurus* which might be relevant, thus creating a more effective method of cataloguing.

Finally, interviews and observations are needed with archivists working in women's and feminist repositories; those who are tackling these very issues. Throughout this dissertation, interviews have taken place with staff at GWL, Women's Art Library and the Jo Spence Memorial Archive. The opinions and work being carried out by professionals in these settings is invaluable; their experiences and methods of working must be recorded and explored. Future interviews could be carried out with members with of the Feminist Archive North and South, the Women's Library in London, the Feminist Library and the IIAV.

The success of women's information spaces is, in part, due to the realisation that archive must also consider unique methods of engagement with users and communities, often in non-archival settings. Many exciting events are taking place with which women are engaging such as GWL walks, talks and plays, and IIAV cataloguing projects which are being rolled out across Europe. GWL runs a plethora of activities which seek to engage women in library and archival material. One such popular endeavour is *Women Make History – exploring the hidden histories of women* which is a history group providing tours of the city in a bid to uncover forgotten women and their stories. The group believe that, "In doing this we are making history

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<sup>131</sup> <http://www.iiav.nl/eng/databases/thesaurus/index.html> [04/08/09]

ourselves.”<sup>132</sup> Other methods of engagement are slightly more abstract but seek to make a significant impact, in this case visually. Shauna McMullan’s *Blue Spine* installation could be viewed at The Mitchell Library in Glasgow on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2010. The concept was surprisingly simple, but very effective. In collaboration with GWL, McMullan, a part-time lecturer in the Sculpture/Environmental Art Department at Glasgow School of Art and an Associate Lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University, invited women across Scotland to donate a book to the project over an eight-month period. The only restrictions placed on the choice of book were (i) the book had to have a blue spine, and (ii) the book had to have been written by a female author. A staggering five hundred and twenty books were donated on loan, thus creating both a visual representation of women’s creative endeavours, but also an archival representation of those who had treasured these books. Titles would not have been selected by chance, but rather by meaning and memory. The installation included works of fiction, poetry, short stories, biographies, history, religion, health, science and travel. Specific titles included *The Penelopiad* (2005) by Margaret Atwood (1939- ); *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (1996) by Helen Fielding (1958-); *Little Women* (1868) by Louise May Alcott (1832-1888); *Not After Midnight: Five Long Stories* (1971) by Daphne Du Maurier (1907-1989); *The Hat* (2007) by Carol Ann Duffy (1955- ); *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1952) by Anne Frank (1929-1945) and *Woman’s Consciousness, Man’s World* (1973) by Sheila Rowbotham (1943- ).<sup>133</sup>

Another interesting project which considers archival material from a unique perspective and engages fresh audiences is the Nicky Bird sound archive entitled *Unsorted Donations*. Dr. Nicky Bird is an artist whose work often uses photographs and archives. Her work is part of GWL’s Making Space project which was funded by the Scottish Arts Council, with the exhibition taking place on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2010. She sought to record sounds which captured the atmosphere of the archive through group discussions, interviews with

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<sup>132</sup> <http://history.womenslibrary.org.uk/aboutwmh/> [03/09/08]

<sup>133</sup> <http://makingspace.womenslibrary.org.uk/286/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Blue-Spine-Book-List.pdf> [17/07/10]

individuals and hidden speakers. Bird asked participants the following questions:

If you had to pick one object from your personal possessions to save, what would it be and why? It can be anything as long as it holds a story for you that you are willing to share.

If you had to pick one object from your personal possessions to donate to the GWL archives, what would it be and why? It can be anything as long as it holds a history that you feel is important.

Is there something you wish you had kept, but didn't?<sup>134</sup>

in a bid to engage women and question the traditional view of the archive and history. In this instance, the artist sought to encourage the women to view themselves as worthy record creators, thus taking a step towards reconceiving the archival space and ensuring that potential gaps are filled. Bird also noted:

But is important to touch on why our archives exist – whose histories do they record and preserve? What treasures do they hold in their controlled-temperature-cool embrace?

Glasgow Women's Library is rather pleased with our collection of feminist badges from the 70s and 80s; we tell anyone who'll listen about our umbrella stand that was painted by incarcerated suffragettes; we are appropriately proud of our own beginnings and the necessary actions taken by our founding-mothers in their ongoing fight for women and equality.

But there is a glaring absence – even in this appallingly patchy catalogue. I have not listed YOU amongst our prized possessions: your stories, your personal achievements, your contributions to Glasgow Women's Library's remarkable history. We would be nothing without you, and we believe that your stories are invaluable additions to our archives.<sup>135</sup>

However, the wider archival community is not always aware of these events, as they rarely feature in journals and publications. Renewed conversation is needed between female researchers, feminists and the wider public as a means of sharing research and mapping out future projects. Only then can a united front be presented to the more traditional archival community and integration of resources, methods, artefacts and theories begin.

A systematic plan for future archival research is required. The principle strategies which have arisen from this research and are believed to be worthy of future consideration are:

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<sup>134</sup> <http://makingspace.womenslibrary.org.uk/2010/05/05/archive-hour-revisited/> [17/07/10]

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

- (i) The need for a project which identifies the extent of women's archival holdings with UK repositories and examines the trends within these records. This will help determine the extent to which women's records have been overlooked. Sadly, it was impossible to cover these issues within this dissertation. The scope of women's records are too vast and varied to be covered here. Equally, the extent to which some women's records are buried within archives would only make this possible if a major project was initiated, such as the Australian Women's Register. The systematic coverage and consideration which women's records have received in this project is heartening and shows what could be achieved.
- (ii) Increased communication within the archival community on these forgotten women and the issues which have arisen from their records, whilst making them accessible using new media. Digitisation projects such as the Brown University Women Writers Project have helped to raise the profile of women's records quickly and innovatively; if similar projects were initiated in the United Kingdom using popular collections, the impact would be substantial.
- (iii) Discussion on women's archives, including potential problems and solutions, with thinkers and professionals from other disciplines to gain fresh perspectives. A promising starting point could be a dedicated listserv. Projects with a strong online presence such as the Brown University Women Writers Projects are doing just that, but a UK equivalent is desperately needed to kick start discussions on women's records.
- (iv) The formation of a UK theoretical archival journal which incorporates these perspectives such as, among others, postmodernism and feminism. At present, UK archivists wishing to publish theory driven articles have to submit to *Archivaria* or *American Archivist*, where the impact of their

research is lost due to the reader's unfamiliarity with the people within the collections or the institutions which hold them.

- (v) An analysis of gendered language and archival cataloguing systems which do not currently encompass the range of female experiences, and suggest improvements. As discussed, current thesauri are outdated and in need of modernisation. Alternatives can only be developed once archivists admit the failings of UKAT and UNESCO.
- (vi) Investigate the work being carried out by women's and feminist repositories which conceive of the archive in a fresh, exciting manner. Exciting work is being carried out which the archive community are unaware of.

Women's records have an important part to play in society's understanding of women and their contributions. Historians and archivists are slowly realising that the versions of history which society previously accepted are either flawed, or at best, one-sided. The rediscovery of forgotten women can be facilitated through simple steps such as improved cataloguing systems and debate in theory-driven journals, as outlined above. Significant steps are being taken to produce sophisticated digital resources which will hopefully raise the profile of women's records and attract new audiences. However, the first and most important step is to ensure that today's women are not forgotten. Women's records have the power to change not only the historical landscape but also the future role of the archive.

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**Interviews:**

25<sup>th</sup> June 2008, Interview with Adele Patrick, Lifelong Learning & Creative Development Manager and Wendy Kirk, Librarian, Glasgow Women's Library.

9<sup>th</sup> July 2008. Interview with Althea Greenan, Special Collections Curator and Jacqueline Cooke, Special Collections Librarian, MAKE – The Organisation for Women in the Arts.

**Appendix 1:**

**25<sup>th</sup> June 2008. Interview with Adele Patrick and Wendy Kirk, Glasgow Women's Library.**

**Lindsey Short:** I've been trying to do a survey of what traditional archives are holding in terms of women's records, so it's very, very small, there's hardly anything, and what I've been finding is that it's specific types of records. A lot of it relates to health, education or social reforms. So I was just kind of thinking of your experiences. Do you think women are adequately represented in general libraries and archives?

**Wendy Kirk:** Well I would probably say no in the mainstream libraries, just with the things you were mentioning earlier. I don't think traditionally, and sometimes even now, women's records have been valued or the formats that they've produced them in are valued or considered to be like proper records. Here we collect things like leaflets, posters, badges, things like that, more kind of ephemera that sort of represent... is that collected quite regularly in archives?

**LS:** It sounds like what the Feminist Archive North and South are doing. And the Women's library had some banners. They were fantastic.

**WK:** I think that in the more traditional archives and libraries the information would have been silenced if it was something that was speaking out against the status quo and although the fields of librarianship and archiving do have a lot of women traditionally, but quite often you'll find even nowadays that a lot of the heads of departments continue to be men and are maybe making decisions based on what kind of media they feel is going to be accepted and are maybe not or haven't been very sympathetic to women's records. What do you think Adele?

**Adele Patrick:** I think you're absolutely right. A further problem is that I've been astonished at how many collections or how many archive collections

you can't search on women. I'm thinking here from the micro to the macro, for example a few years ago I was on the board of the Glasgow Print Studio and they've got thousands and thousands of prints and they were embarking on a catalogue and now actually I think they've got funding to do this from the Heritage Lottery Fund and I was again reminded of how male this world ...have the gender of the maker available to search under. I can't guarantee that they would do that and I think that is a further barrier to the important work that women might be doing in the field for example of printmaking where there have been quite a lot of women involved and involved in setting up the Glasgow Print Studio and its origins and so on. Somehow I think that the default notion certainly is the assumption that the maker will be male and through these mechanisms of not recording... We were astonished actually when we went to [the National Library of Scotland], although we really respect the work of our colleagues at the National Library of Scotland, I did ask when we went... they laid on a fantastic, wonderful welcome for us when we were starting out and we were really trying to think about our own collections having some sort of national significance or whatever and I asked whether you could search for their records in terms of women writers and they said no. You know if you did go and say, 'I want to know about Scottish women writers, obviously I don't know about local libraries whether you could actually say, 'I want to know about women writers, I want to you know, for example, about black women writers. My feeling is that there should be this gender profiling, you know gender disability and only that way can we look at issues like underrepresentation anyway. I just think that there are so many people who are now interested in this territory and can't actually search easily and could be put off looking at something like the trajectory of Scottish women writers work and how it might have changed and or how it might have been impacted on. Are there other women writers...I think the other thing that might not have been mentioned by others, but that we're really aware of is, that first of all that women don't give to the institutions in a way that a lot of men do. Say for example something like left political activists in a Scottish context, sometimes are aware of things like giving copies of pamphlets to national collections or making sure that there is a record of activities that they might

be involved with. It's not always the case because I think there is a class issue that is a barrier to a lot of giving but thinking about the difference between an organisation like our own that's got some sort of grass roots connections still and values the grass roots connections that we still have with real women, living real lives. I think if you've got institutions and academic institutions collecting, you've got quite a distance between what's been created in a grass roots level and how those things might percolate into an institution and I just think that most of the women we know might give badges, pamphlets, posters, you know not even giving necessarily, they might be bringing things in that they think the Women's Library might be interested in that and they might remember the way that Wendy responded when they brought in something or other or other colleagues, so they have been encouraged to give. We accumulate things that would never be handed in to National Archives, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh University Archives and other institutions. I think in that way you are not going to find stuff and I don't think it's a deliberate exclusion, it's an institutionalised value that has gone up. I think there's probably people working very, very hard in institutions and academic settings to bridge that, but I still don't think there's a proximity between the people who have got something to give and the materials that might map the social history for example and the institutions that pride themselves on having excellent archives. I see that as a continuing divide and fortunately for us, an area that we can really capitalise on. I think that's maybe one of the reasons why the Heritage Lottery Funding has been forthcoming because I think we could make a case not only the difference in the materials that we have here because of that proximity to real people and grass roots activism and so on. But I think also the whole thing rested on the way that those people could continue to be active in preserving and conserving the materials. And to an extent I would say in the way that they get classified and catalogued in the longer term because I don't think that activity will take place without an ear to what women might be saying about, "Well I gave that and now it's in a box and I can't get a hold of it" or, "I have been in once and wanted to show Margaret..." We wanted it to be very active, the archive, in terms of the

collections that we have being interpreted and developed and added to by women in the longer term. I think that's really why we've been given.

**LS:** I never thought about that. It never occurred to me.

**AP:** I don't think you're on your own. I think if we weren't doing the job we're doing...

**WK:** It's from receiving donations that people do say things like, "I really want to give to the Women's Library because I know it's going to go to a good home and it's going to be of benefit to other women." And I suppose in what they would consider an accessible place, as opposed to a formal institution.

**AP:** And I think it might be the type of access as well. I don't think it's just about being able to visit it in the way that I described earlier on like, "I gave it, where is it?" I remember when we acquired the National Lesbian Archive that used to be in London and the discussion and debate that took place was really interesting. A lot of activists in London wanted it to stay in London to be perfectly honest and I think at the time, we did hear a little bit tongue in cheek, one of the guardians of the collection said, "Well are there any lesbians in Scotland?" We did say it will be used and it will be added to and then we can start getting some Scottish stuff in it if it goes to Scotland but we in there just saying in principal we are open to the idea of it coming here and we have got a space and so on. The other contender was Sussex University – there's a really lovely woman who was, not bidding for it but saying well this is what we could offer...I think that was really good because we were both really frank, like we were saying we don't have a librarian, we don't have an archivist, we don't have very much room but we could keep it together. In Sussex that was an institution, now what were the issues there for the archive? Were the archivists voluntary archivists who would take care of the collection? They wanted it to be only accessed by women because quite a lot of the people who had donated, that was the condition that they had donated it, to have it accessed just by lesbians and

by women. But also the institution couldn't ensure that it would be unboxed and literally be able to be looked at for years and years and years. And that it would only be accessible then to students, there's always incredible barriers. They were saying, "the way that funding is going we could maybe get three boxes catalogued or whatever in the first year" and then it wouldn't be available or it would have to go to the main library. Men and women would be...there's all these types of things that are real for an academic institution. I think they thought that we were almost saying that it will be on shelves and people can look at stuff. People have literally said, "only open this in twenty years time." I think the thinking of the women is that this is life changing stuff and it shouldn't just be for research, it shouldn't just be out for academics purposes. It is almost a politicising and life changing bunch of stuff. So who are they really to say it could go to an institution because then the frame of looking at the stuff is totally different. This will make its way into a publication, a PhD, whatever. And ours I think were very much were like that way of thinking that the archives should still have a potency, the material should have a life changing capacity and not just we fuel for publication or for research that might not trickle down. Some research does impact but we are not under the illusion that all of it does and that would be great if we could have people really having a life changing experience looking at this stuff as well as fuelling more research. I think it should do more things in an ideal type of setting.

**LS: We were talking earlier about how women's records have taken a non-traditional format. I just wondered if those were the types of records that you had come across?**

**WK:** We have loads of t-shirts and banners, blankets, embroidery...

**AP:** Original art works, artefacts, placards...

**WK:** Films, again I would say it's not like printed materials, films the women have made themselves. Of things like Reclaim The Night

marches, as opposed to just properly produced films. Films the women have produced themselves.

**AP:** Some manuscripts, not a lot...

**WK:** Scrapbooks...

**AP:** We've got things like individual group records, in some instances more information than you could possibly shake a stick at. Like the Black and Minority Ethnic Women's Project, literally their whole history and all the financial history and so on and so forth. Pamphlets, placards.

**WK:** Loads of badges...the badges in particular do tell an amazing history of activism, especially if they've got dates on them you can map from feminism in the eighties, Faslane and Greenham Common and stuff like that...and people really connect with them. One of our colleagues was at Cornton Vale Prison doing an open day about learning and she was looking for something to take that was light to carry so she took some badges and she said women were like, "Oh wow!" Like a real kind of draw, I think because it is an accessible thing for everybody.

**AP:** We were talking earlier on about classification issues and I think there is an absolutely, almost visceral reaction to any of these categories. It's sort of like a flavour of feminist history, these boundaries and to fracture them and to resist them and so on and so forth. I think that it's almost like because we've had this topsy turvy history of just collecting things and not differentiating between archive items and library items and saying yes to everything. We should say first of all that everything is donated, we've never had a budget for collecting. So fortunately, what that's given us, is something that does reflect the interests of at least some of the users of the library. It reflects the donors to this particular collection obviously, because it's their personal stuff, their personal tastes, and so on and so forth. Because we haven't had this direction and this knowledge, it's caused a lot of problems but I think there are advantages as well. When I see the

discussions that are happening now around libraries, archives and museums and the sort of problems that are occurring but they are to do with conversions or resistance to conversions and how do we name this object and is it a manuscript or is it an archive or is there an object and so on and so forth. It's almost like we have landed in a good situation because we are now looking to museum status and we are looking to become a collection of national significance. We know the Women's Library in London have done this and we know that we have got a similar type of array of items that might mean we can do that. But I think it's analogous to the situation we've got in terms of already having this widened access use but again maybe that was problematic when we started off because it was like this is just a women's place, this is just a women's group with stuff being added whereas now I think we have got a creditable collection. We've already got this sort of thing that a lot of libraries and archives are trying to get which is a bunch of people that are genuinely using it and genuinely having an ownership of it, so it's funny that the way that the gestation period of this library, we are almost converging with some of the things that are happening in our big sister organisations or the really big collections and also some of the discussions that are taking place there around things like owning. We are sort of going in the other direction, we are trying to get a bit more structure, a bit more formalised, getting a classification system and Wendy's push to catalogue is going to be a really major, major movement forward as well. We're almost getting more and more library-like, on the museum track. And the libraries are trying to say, "Hey! Come and feel our stuff but your hands look mucky, put your gloves on first."

I think it's a good thing - we're both learning from each other and there's more scope for dialogue now. We could not have had a discussion with any of these library colleagues in the past, it has taken us a long time to gain respect and an ear of some of our colleagues. We didn't really have much to say to them to start off with but I think now the landscape has changed so radically.

**LS: I've been thinking about the tensions and opposites in archives and trying to think about the public and private persona of women. Do you think that is true here in the records that you have?**

**AP:** Where has this idea come from?

LS: I've been looking at blogs and Tracey Emin's artwork and I couldn't have imagined women would have spoken about these types of issues before, such private experiences becoming public.

**WK:** We do have resources that women talk about their public and the private persona, I'm thinking of the Jackie Forster collection in LAIT, women who years ago and until quite recently as well, were dealing with their sexuality in their public and private lives, coming out and the acceptance or non-acceptance and the impact it maybe has on your family or your career or their relationships with their friends, things like that. So we do have materials that talk about those kinds of issues.

**AP:** I think all the women's liberation is, to some degree, addressing just that issue. I think that what a lot of those women were trying to do is make something meaningful out of the personal as being political. It's hard to think back and try to put yourself in that position where women found themselves in say in the mid seventies. Jackie Forster being a BBC broadcaster and then decided to come out and go on Speaker's Corner, all that is documented and set in a lesbian magazine Sappho. If you look at Sappho and the types of ways lesbians are anxious, the levels of anxiety there – were they ill, were they mentally deranged, were they going to lose their children, the levels of anguish represented in texts like that even from such a short period of time ago. I think you can broaden that out as well to say any of the women campaigning around abortion issues, a terribly fraught area even now, around rape, around particular sorts of sexual health and other health issues, parenting. I think feminism is extremely courageous and not actually saying "we're ok, we don't have to look at that." Or "we don't have to look at can boys come into groups that are to do with

women?” If you look at the consciousness raising experiment that was exactly what women were trying to do, get together. Women were getting together and saying, “Have you got a hairy bum? Do you have problems with the way you feel about your own breasts? Do you hate sex?” Not starting a meeting but just to say, do you know what, we’re going to cut through the crap and the things that are actually occupying our minds and our thoughts. Should I have to do the washing up? Am I wrong to feel completely trapped by own child? I think that absolutely addressing this front as it were of femininity or social approval and the reality and complexity of women’s lives is at the root really...All different women are doing different things and you’ll find a lot of pulpy poppy fiction and all that type of stuff. We’re guardians of the stuff rather than saying “This isn’t the kind of stuff we want.” I think probably more than most collections we will have that stuff going on. Some of the stuff is still quite...Looking at some of the stuff that Wendy has just got back in today that was part of an exhibition at Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery, some of that stuff is...where it’s feminist stuff saying no men under any circumstances are allowed to even look at this pamphlet or to open this book. It’s controversial stuff and there were women at the same time writing stuff like men and women should be part of this campaign. There’s not one voice, but I think there’s all those knotty, problematic things going on. And women putting their own lives up...

**WK:** We do have a lot of materials that are very personal in a sense, women telling their own stories about their own involvement in prostitution or pornography, or their own stories about surviving domestic violence and things like that. So we do have a lot of things with that kind of focus, I suppose quite a lot with the view of being out in the open and being empowering for other women and sharing their story and other people learning from it. But we also have some interesting material, springing to mind talking about the public and private. There’s one resource that we’ve got that we got a letter with explaining that it was documenting partly a relationship between two women. One of the women’s mother’s had tried

to suppress that material, so interesting things like that. The material was saved and sent to us.

**AP:** I suppose it goes without saying that more women who leave their histories of campaigning consider them not to be important than guys. I think that women take a lot of convincing that the materials that they have in the bottom of their wardrobe are worth preserving. I do now think that the notion of being a hero is something more easily grasped by boys and men than by girls and women. Maybe that's changing, I don't know. And I think people are learning stuff from family history records and things like that, hopefully people are getting more aware of the potential relevance around histories. Certainly when we started collecting stuff I would say that most women didn't really think, even if they had been involved in setting up a wee fanzine, it troubled me a lot things getting thrown away. But again women's organisations threw away a lot of stuff because it was so cutting edge and so pioneering and so fraught and so crisis ridden that if you were working at Women's Aid the last thing people would be thinking about is archiving and cataloguing. So many things we have come across with no date on, no author on but I think that's testimony to the fact that women weren't thinking about history and the historic document or doing historic work. It's expedient, it's like let's gather together next week and let's get that out. So I think that whereas maybe some guy's organisations might have thought of themselves as historically significant, women still in the main need persuading that the stuff they have is important.

**LS:** Which would explain some of the huge gaps...

**LS:** **Would it be fair to say you are a feminist organisation? I've spoken to other people who either don't believe they are or they don't want to fly under that banner.**

**AP:** I think that we say we are an organisation that is rooted in feminist principles because we are. We recognise that women historically have not had an opportunity to have their work promoted, preserved, celebrated in the

way that men have. I think that obviously we are trying to redress some sort of form of discrimination in the work we are doing. A good definition for me of feminist is an individual or an organisation that recognises there is discrimination around and critically tries to do something to address it. I think that's what we are. However, we have got a very eclectic, very broad ranging collection – it has been helpful for me over the years to think we are not driving the collections policy, we are guardians of material. That could be viewed as a get out but I think actually again it has worked in our favour that we haven't said what the colour of our feminism is because I think right along the line all the staff members have got very different histories, backgrounds, we haven't asked women at interview what the nature of their feminism is. We are just are women who are committed to celebrating, promoting, preserving women's lives, cultures, histories and I think that is a feminist type of project.

**WK:** Similar to what you were going to say, I think as well from the point of view of the materials, Adele was saying we get things and we are the guardians of it as opposed to directing the kinds of things we have. I think as well the fact that we are not called Glasgow Feminist Library, we are a women's library, so obviously we have materials donated from women who perhaps do not consider themselves feminist or materials that are about women but don't necessarily have a feminist slant but doesn't mean that they're not valuable or that they shouldn't be saved and recorded. I think we have lots of users who are maybe coming to the library with no thoughts or experiences of feminism. I think in a way we are here to introduce them to it in a non-dogmatic, you have got to be a feminist to use this library, kind of attitude. The library is here for all women of all different viewpoints.

**AP:** You are so right. I really think that that is a wonderful aim. When I think about some of the women who use the library, like those taking part in The Introduction to Women's Studies, I'm really proud and pleased that we're hosting something like that. I think that women find circuitous

courses to their own fulfilment and I think if we can provide as many avenues and routes as possible for women.

**LS: How important are female-friendly spaces to further society's understanding of women and their place in history?**

WK: Women only spaces? I think for a lot of women who use the library, in terms of feeling comfortable, from my point of view as the librarian, they can come and access materials that are sensitive, that they maybe wouldn't feel comfortable talking about or asking for in an environment where there were men. And to have a bit of privacy, maybe to do with issues to do with their health or sexuality or violence and things like that. I think that's an important part of why we're a women only space and I think the fact that we do work with women who maybe have experienced things like that in their lives, for them to feel confident that they are going to come to a space where they feel safe and they aren't going to turn round and there's going to be a man standing there, thing like that. I think sometimes as well some women feel more confident or comfortable if they are dealing with women only, a feeling of being in a supportive group.

AP: I think it is a qualitatively different and we get that feedback all the time, don't we? I know one of my colleagues in the library works on a Saturday [at another project] doing outreach sessions where it is a mixed project and she has been talking about how it is qualitatively different in terms of discussions and the types of issues being discussed. It's a homelessness project and when women whose partners are there...it will be a really supportive, nurturing relationship, but nevertheless, the discussions that can take place when the women are speaking with other women...I think all these territories are gendered, I think the issues that impact on women's lives in terms of literacy, talking about parenting, sexuality, all these things...I think we feel that it's great if women feel they can talk about those things in a mixed setting and there's a qualitative difference and positive thing there, but I think having the choice to be able to go somewhere if women want to. And it might be that women might just feel

they get something totally different and really positive. It's almost like going to bingo and chatting in the women's toilets, they intuitively felt that there's something I get from that tagging or with a group of relatives or whatever. I think there's a whole mass of different things that women can get in a women's space. We do have some mixed things now and again, I think we are holding a mixed thing next week. I think to have the opportunity to have it women only, since we've been getting more women from different faith backgrounds as well into the library that's also become very heightened. Because women are asking on a more regular basis, "is it a women's space? Will there be any men there?" And for us to be able to say yes this is a women's space, we'll let you know when it's a mixed thing, I think we always have to be clear. I think it's fair for us to say we specialise in doing stuff just with women.

**WK:** Men do access the library, particularly when we are open. Men do quite often come in and use it for research purposes or just out of general interest. But when we are having women in and groups we do tend to be women only.

**AP:** I anticipate actually when the archivist gets here that one of the things we were talking about is the archivist working with is say a group of volunteers who want to work with, for example the lesbian archive materials or the Scottish Women's Aid archive materials...I don't know because it's been discussed but I think there will be scope at the very least for a women only group working on the lesbian archive, whether there will be a mixed group as I don't know. We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. I think something like looking at the Women's Aid archive, it will probably be appropriate that it is a women only thing because we do want to attract women who have been the beneficiaries of an organisation like that, who have survived violence as Wendy said. I think just to say, do you know what? We can guarantee your husband or ex-husband won't be there. In the theoretical sense that you're not going to come across your abusive father, your brother...you never know who women fear coming across. If we can say it will be a safe environment for you.

**WK:** I think that's an important point that even though it might not be the most likely thing to happen, the fear element of who is going to be there, I think that is really important.

**AP:** Because we do target women who use refuges in the city. We do publicise our service to lots...if you think of the outreach potential with Cornton Vale for example that Kay is exploring at the moment, the vast majority of women in the prison service and criminal justice are women who are survivors of different types of male violence. If we are really targeting those women I think we need to continue to say, there are times you can come and it is just women, and times when guys are going to be here and flag that up so that if women don't want to come then they can avoid it. I hope it has an ongoing and perpetual value having women spaces.

**LS: I have spoken to some people who have criticised women's only spaces as ghettos?**

**AP:** Really?

**LS:** I have been surprised at the number of people who have said it. I never know how to counter it. I wonder what your thoughts are?

**AP:** It's a very charged word.

**WK:** It's not a word I would have thought of in relation to women's spaces.

**AP:** I think that every organisation has to review on a fairly regular basis whether it is still of value, whether it still functions, whether there is a need for it. I think there certainly doesn't seem to be any shortage of women who are surviving male violence and are reticent about coming to places where they might still have that threat of violence. The numbers of women who fall into that category are not diminishing, they seem to be increasing.

There is certainly a lot of minority ethnic, for example Moslem women who would want...certainly a lot of the asylum seeker refugee women who have also been subject to appalling levels of violence in various settings. I just think it would be inappropriate to think about that in the horrible, racist type of framework like the ghetto which is what...the association that comes to my mind is the ones where people have been persecuted and people have been victimised, people have been diminished in terms of what they can be. I think that maybe when we are in a more public setting and people who have not visited a women's library can come in and see the types of services. I think that certainly the way that term developed in the historical setting it's definitely on the basis of fear, it's definitely on the basis of discrimination. I think they are maybe the factors that play for people who think about women in a certain way or want to homogenise a group of people. We are the majority of people in Scotland, we are definitely thinking about that as our aim, to provide a place that represents women in Scotland. I think there is scope for that, there is a need for that. There is now public endorsement of that in terms of Heritage Lottery funding and so on. Certainly in terms of need, we have grown as an organisation over the years, there is probably more of a need for it rather than less. We have got to look at it, check it, think is it time to change, is it time to change what we do? I don't think there is scope for complacency yet, that everything is sorted out in terms of gender, politics, equality issues, whatever. We will keep checking in on it. It's interesting.

**LS:** A few people have used the same word and again in Alison Tyler's thesis it comes up again as part of the literature. I don't know where it has stemmed from.

**WK:** In particular in relation to women's libraries or women only spaces?

**LS:** It's been women's libraries and archives.

**WK:** Isn't it interesting that you would probably never use that term for a women's support project that focused on one particular issue like domestic violence or prostitution.

**AP:** Think about the development of black archives as well and collections like that. How problematic would the use of that term be in relation to other types of specialist collections? If they were to do with black people's histories or diversity issues, it is a very charged type of term isn't it? One that I definitely would resist using, associating with.

**LS: I was wondering about the classification schemes you use, whether you use the Women's Thesaurus and the challenges that come with that.**

**WK:** At the moment we aren't cataloguing because we are imminently buying a library cataloguing system but what I have been doing is classifying. When I started in my post that was one of the tasks I had to do, to look at a classification system for the library and whether we were going to use a traditional one or a women's-focused one. Basically, I looked at different examples of women's libraries and their classification schemes and merged and took bits I liked out of them and made one for the library based on our collection and trying to think about what our user base is. And thinking of my own experience of using a library, I hate using a library with Dewey, big long class marks I can remember and it's so confusing. I wanted to make something that was quite simple in the sense that we I don't think we need an overly complicated system for the amount of stuff that we have and our subject matters, things like that. I just made one up based on different women's libraries. I particularly like the Indian Women's Library classification scheme and I had a look at the Feminist Library in London and the Austrian Women's Library and Archive. I also used things like the geographic descriptors and the time descriptors from the Women's Thesaurus and that is something I will use when we get the catalogue. Does that make sense?

**LS:** Yes, rather than a one-size fits all approach with bits that don't apply.

**WK:** It's obviously not perfect. It was interesting making up the classification scheme and then everything was boxed up for a while, and then going back and starting classifying. Now to be honest it's not really until you start doing it that you go there's a section that I could redo because there are more materials on that topic than I thought we had and things like that. I'm tweaking it as I go through. I definitely think I wanted something that would feel pleasant to use and not off-putting because obviously we have never had a system before. When all the collection is out it is really like a bookshop, subjects you could browse, so I have tried to follow what we had before in terms of topic areas and things like that. It is interesting the amount of women's libraries who do it. I've found they tended to be using their own more than using a traditional one. I was at a women's library conference and there were quite a few women's libraries doing presentations on thesaurus and the different systems they were using.

**AP:** The Mapping the World database on the IIAV website, I think most of the women's libraries will be there, it should detail which ones have their own catalogue.

**LS:** What do you think about those?

**WK:** I think they're an improvement on traditional systems. It is good for correcting for gender biases in terms which I think some people wouldn't really be aware of, like saying stewardess rather than flight attendant, it's ingrained in a lot of people's minds and they wouldn't necessarily think of that as being a sexist term or an inappropriate word to use now. I think as well some traditional systems just don't have words or don't have whole sections on women's information like eco-feminism and things like that, you think where would you find in the Dewey Decimal Classification system. I don't know if you would now, I'm not sure.

**AP:** There is a whole controversy isn't there around Dewey and things like prostitution and some real hot spots that are about, pathologising women really in a nineteenth century way to be perfectly honest. I think Wendy, what an incredibly tall order to embark on really because I think even in terms of our user base there are huge conflicting areas like prostitution where some feminists would talk about that in terms of sex work, other women are so pathologically opposed to the notion of that being work and that being violence against women and so on and so forth, that I think these are productive sensitivities that are about what feminism is about. And I think what Dewey and the Library of Congress, I can't remember where prostitution lies in that, these are real hot spots in terms of how women are positioned and I think it tells you a lot about how women are viewed when you think about them being pathologically sexualised or you mentioned earlier on how about the way archives seem to have a handle on women as long as they fall into particular categories like health, that women are somehow more likely to be concerned with health or concerned with being victims of domestic violence. I think looking at it through another lens is a very politicised activity, a very, very difficult, complex thing to do. But I think it's great that we are having a stab at it, doing our best at this particular moment in history, in this particular location, because I think certainly the discussion around the European Women's Thesaurus, I remember being at the conference when it was launched, that there was definitely a feeling that in different settings women will be experiencing different things geographically and I think that is another thing feminism has been sensitised to rather than the Dewey monolithic notion that we are going to find the same things in different places all over the world and that one size fits all in everything. There are going to be particular vernaculars around women's lives that...

**WK:** That's exactly what that Indian classification scheme is like. It's got a lot to do with women's lives particularly in India which are about certain types of law, about dowries, about things that I don't have in our classification system particularly because it's quite specific but it's quite interesting to see that they are going to have quite a lot of material on that

issue and from a woman's perspective as opposed to a general perspective. I suppose what you could say about the European Women's Thesaurus is that it is euro-centric, it's saying what it does on the tin, you are not expecting it to be necessarily applicable in all situations.

**AP:** I think they talk about how they anticipate adaptations for regionality and about the breaches and things we have been talking about that the experts have as almost bolt-ons to help reflect the different settings that it might be used in.

**Appendix Two:**

**Interview with Althea Greenan, Special Collections Curator and Jacqueline Cooke, Special Collections Librarian, MAKE – Organisation for Women in the Arts:**

**Lindsey Short:** As part of my research I have been conducting a survey of the number of women's collections held in archival repositories, whether as a specific collection or part of a husband's collection. I wonder whether you feel women's collections are adequately represented in UK repositories, in your experiences?

**Althea Greenan:** Well...my experience is very narrow and it is very tied in with art. I get a lot of queries that I can't answer so I'm assuming that there is a dearth of information on artists who are exhibiting in public spaces and who were moderately successful at the time. So if there are repositories they are not that well known and if I can't find them, that's another indication. And I'm getting these references from, mostly somebody at the Royal Academy, so that's a national institution where a lot of these women had shown. I mean there are brief records of them but they disappear. Maybe they are dropped into their archives and they're not highlighted.

**Jacqueline Cooke:** And the fact that ours is specifically the Women's Art Library flags up the fact that we are somewhere that people could look for women artists. But also there's the Women's Library who you've had a lot of contact with in the past and there's a clear arrangement between the two of you isn't there?

**AG:** Yes...

**JC:** That the Women's Art Library deals with art and the Women's Library didn't and that's something that has been, I don't know, negotiated.

**AG:** I think it's just worked out that way. I mean I've had a couple of queries, I'll try and find some, there's someone who's going through some

archives at the Women's Library now, coming across archives or boxes on contemporary artists and asking me, "Who are these people? Do you have any more on them?" Or rather people donating stuff to them and they don't know who this group is, like the Women's Art Alliance, she just got some stuff from them. And I'm nervously saying, "They're very important." Not that they were going to do anything risky but they are not giving us stuff. If it's donated to them, the donor wanted it within that setting, of the Fawcett Society and that whole history of that particular library which is very different to the Women's Art Library. The idea, the way it's developed is that we are supposed to be a bit more comprehensive as far as art.

**LS: What do you think have been the reasons for the lack of representation? Do you think it has been due to the women artists themselves or is it an archival issue?**

**JC:** I don't know. I mean I haven't looked specifically at the records of women artists but I've looked at ephemeral art events and records of those, so there's a similarity there perhaps. I did a review of ephemera collections in the UK and what I found was that they are there in repositories but hardly anybody knows about them. They are a minority interest amongst the people who work in closed places so consequently they are not catalogued, so researchers have not much chance of finding out what's where. Now I think it's becoming easier to map what's where with the increase in archival catalogues going online and the initiative by the National Archives to link to catalogue level holdings nationally which will also help to illuminate what's where and that should help.

**LS: Do you think women's records have been afforded a lower priority?**

**JC:** I don't know if I could say that here particularly, it may be the kind of field that we are collecting in. We got a couple of substantial ones recently and we're a fairly recent special collections centre as well. We have Margot Heinemann's papers which came to us. They were deposited

elsewhere in the college and they have just come in to our collection here and that's a fairly big, substantial collection from a woman who was significant intellectually and relevant across a lot of the subjects that are here- history and English and drama. And the other big one that we've got lately is Daphne Warren's. She was a pioneering woman electronic musician and that came through a research project, so that's a fairly recent area of research, electronic music, sonic arts and that's come to us for that reason. So they're both fairly large and things we've acquired lately. Probably about half of our collection is in shelf space, we are not just the Women's Art Library. And the other woman represented in the collection who is of a different kind is Peggy Seager and we have that as one of the other examples you mentioned, somebody who's come in with her husband's collection, it was Ewan McColm and Peggy Seager's joint library which we bought because of her ethno-musicology collections. They were both performers, both collected the books and the collection is named after both of them.

**AG:** Her retaining her maiden name...There is another collection, Emma something.

**JC:** Elizabeth Barnard.

**AG:** That's it.

**JC:** So she was smaller, that's somebody who taught here and so it's a collection mostly about music and education.

**AG:** And of course there's the affiliated resource centre, the Constance Howard Textile Resource Research Centre which is in another building.

**JC:** There may be one or two men represented in that...that represents the growing network of textile artists in first art, then embroidery, then textile art, spreading out through Constance Art Department. The textiles department was key.

**LS: Do you think it is important for women artists to document their own work because there is a fear that nobody else will do it?**

**AG:** Well that was certainly the motivation, because this began as something called the Women Artists Slide Library and that was all it was. It was a group of women artists who started meeting to show each other slides as part of that whole consciousness raising. I mean I wasn't there...It was about women identifying each other as artists, just raising visibility amongst themselves initially and then the idea of gathering together slides to draw different kinds of researchers or maybe their own students to make a research resource and then it kind of snowballed into all sorts of other stuff because once you started with the slides, then with the newsletters, then the newsletter extended into a magazine...luckily it didn't stop with the shoe box of slides under somebody's bed. I mean it wasn't the only image slide collection that started at that time but it was certainly the one that was motivated by the artists being women and getting together. It was branching off from the Artist's Union workshop which was something that happened in the Seventies...

**JC:** You've also mapped it against other similar collections when you went to National Museum for Women in the Arts in Washington in terms of selection criteria for people who would put stuff into it, it was quite different because it was much more open. There weren't criteria that they'd had to have exhibited in public galleries for example which is a difference between the Women's Art Library and one example of how they were trying to make it about women identifying themselves and each other as artists, as more of a community creating a resource rather than something that was evaluated by existing criteria which still applies.

**LS: Would it be fair to say that this started as a feminist space?**

**AG:** Absolutely. I think I'd be lynched if I didn't say that! But what's contributed to what it is now is a lot of different perspectives and within the

history of the magazine which did run kind of parallel to the history of the slide collection as a resource. There was a lot of questioning the F word and a lot of pretensions which were debated, especially through the Nineties. And you can see through the changing titles of the magazine which started of as the Women Artist's Slide Library Newsletter, then it was the Women Artist's Slide Library Journal, it kind of reflects the different ambitions. Then it was like, but we're not a slide library anymore, we have posters, we have press cuttings, we have so much more. I guess there were other slide libraries that might have been being created that were strictly slides and nothing else. And this looked like nothing else on earth. I had staples thrown in with the slides and videos, just anything actually that we could find on women artists. And then the magazine became Women's Art, the library became the Women's Art Library, the magazine became the Women's Art Magazine and then there was a real crisis where we had to just drop the whole women thing altogether because we just felt it was holding back the magazine. This wasn't just pressure from within it was what was implied from the Arts Council as far as money being provided for this. You couldn't appear to be becoming dated in any way and not keeping up with the art world debates. I think now to the position where the F word is something we have to sweep under the carpet but you cannot by any stretch of the imagination say that all the women in there are feminists, that's a completely different thing and that if it were that it would be a completely different research resource. It would be more than a group. I think that's the whole point now, it's not confined by any one philosophy or any one theory, it's taken a life of it's own.

**LS:** Is it an inclusive resource space rather than...

**AG:** As a space it's different now I think...

**JC:** Yeah there are changes that have come from it moving into a university setting and a special collections library. I'm not sure we know what those consequences are yet but with regard to feminism and feminist debate one of things that's come out of that is that we're now in a higher education

institution, we have an advisory board of people who include academics from this college and also people representing the art world and galleries. But one of things that people on that board are interested in now is looking back on the feminist projects of the last half of the twentieth century, what happened? And that's partly a generational moment but two or three of them I think who were there, and are now coming to the end of their careers. But it's also partly a U turn in teaching and research generally where they are really considering feminism because it's coming also from younger students. For the undergraduates now who are interested...

**AG:** From their own practice not because they are interested in what their mothers did. I mean there isn't a nostalgia thing about this at all, it seems to be quite immediate. I had one student in this morning; she thought it's just amazing that it's here. I mean there is this kind of idea also how it could have been dispersed or slipped away. It's kind of a microcosm of feminist activism, I mean it's not political and for a lot of people it's wishy washy or never did what it should have done. I don't really know, I'm completely non-judgemental. So I think for that generation it's kind of a miracle it exists [\*because there are so many gaps?]

**JC:** I've had several people visiting from different countries where feminism is in different stages. They sometimes come looking...

**AG:** Like Serbia, Eastern Europe or Japan. That's true actually, I hadn't thought of that. They don't assume that it should be here as well, just because it's Goldsmiths or Britain. There may be equivalents in Germany, but of course it would be German language materials which could make it inaccessible. When I went to the States the only real equivalent that is as contemporary, including slides and materials from artists was the library of the National Museum of Women in the Arts but that really started off with the collections. I mean it was never as inclusive and it didn't start as an artist's initiative, it had a different kind of feel to it.

**JC:** There are a lot of people, is it ten thousand artist files and three thousand artists represented by slide files so it's a lot of people.

**LS:** **What were the reasons for moving to the university? I've been looking at the Feminist Archive North and South and I know that at least one of them is now affiliated with a university. It is no longer an independent institution.**

**AG:** The organisation was funded by the Arts Board but that came to an end so the executive committee that were trustees wanted to prioritise as part of the exit strategy securing the research resource into one. Just securing it basically, making sure it remained accessible. Luckily, we put out feelers to lots of different friends, relatives, anybody we knew in higher education and luckily a professor who was here, Janice Jeffries who had an association with the Women's Art Library and the magazine co-ordinated with Jacqueline and the library and Sasha Shaw and managed to come up with a proposal. There were three bids, I mean three different possibilities that the executives could consider at Goldsmiths, just one by a long shot actually mostly because the bid came from the library rather than a particular academic with a personal project or a department. Politically, you couldn't be in a better place, I think, touch wood than the library because it's a separate department. And they had this space. Remember the others were promised spaces, they were ambitious. It wasn't that they were weak proposals.

**JC:** We felt I think that it would fit in at Goldsmiths because it's a cross-disciplinary college- creative, cultural and social processes- that was something that we tried between us. It was a collection which had possibilities for research in sociology as much as art and we could provide that. And we have a very open access policy for visitors and researchers, anybody with a need, a wish to look at the collections can come in and although access is getting easier in other places, I think at that time...There was also good timing in that we had just collected all our special collections

into a new centre up here in the library so we knew that we wanted to develop those and it was good fortune that this came along for us.

**AG:** We're in good company with the Prokofiev Archive and there was that precedent where the Prokofiev Archive was here as well, equally open to researchers from around the world. It just seemed to work out well.

**LS: Some of the reading I've been doing has mentioned a tension between public and private in the way women create and keep records. Do you think that is the case with any of the material stored here?**

**AG:** It's interesting talking about the LIFT archives. This collection was always for public view, it's not an archive in the sense that something's come to an end and there's all this residue, all this evidence, activities, ideas. It was always meant to be about raising the visibility of women, it is meant to be looked at. The copyright issues about reproducing individual images for educational use- we can do that with confidence that we have the artist's approval. I think I know of one file where I remember the photographer saying, "I don't want students reproducing this work." She was a little bit odd but nobody else has ever had an issue, even images that weren't produced for us, for the library, that came in from galleries to illustrate articles in the magazines. When you asked people, very rarely did they need them back. They were perfectly happy for the stuff to be used for research. It became a magnet for material too, people donated generously. We've had to buy very little. But now there is a budget for buying books.

**JC:** But we do fairly often have discussions about archives and this not being an archive in that sense, it doesn't have that sort of completeness and it's not private papers but at the same time in contemporary art the term archives is used about the kind of material we've got, documentation or representations of practice have become known as archives in an artistic, curatorial context. So we keep all these different conceptions of what an archive is I think.

**LS:** I think that maybe where archivists have been a bit slow to realise is that people are aware of archives, it's just they are thinking about it in different ways. I think archivists ignore that because it doesn't fit into their area of interest. I think it's changing now.

**JC:** It is but I've been to conferences made from an artistic curatorial position where they've been talking about art archives and they haven't had an archivist speaking. I know there are archivists who know about these same questions and theoretical positions but they're not speaking in the same places and I think that's a pity. I think it is crossing over more with the art libraries society arils(?) events which have happened recently. I suppose they are more archivists and librarians reaching out to artists than the other way around.

**AG:** Like Archive Fever at the Tate recently.

**JC:** It's a follow on from movements in the art world maybe five years ago, so yes I think there's a bit of a gap but there's more of a conversation than there used to be, I think. I remember once we had someone teaching here, Anna Harding who was a curator and her research area was document performance art. She started up the MA in Creative Curating here in the Art Department so she was interested in archives and one of the last things she did while she was still here was curate an exhibition called Potential which was about archives. It was mostly artistic projects concerned with archives and she asked me to contribute because I was in contact with me and I wrote this rather terse last page in the catalogue saying an archive is, archivists are interested in context, describing where things come from, fitting things together, they don't discard all that, they don't throw stuff away. I wouldn't write like that any more but it was how I felt at the time.

**LS:** **I've spoken to some archivists and they think women's archives or feminist spaces are removed from the archival community. Do you think that's the case?**

**AG:** I guess in this archive there is more than the one in Bristol, because they are run by volunteers maybe and there is a different culture I think around those kind of archives than archives in an educational setting.

**LS:** Someone suggested to me that these places are ghettos...

**AG:** They give me a sense of helplessness because I know that position of not being funded and relying on volunteers and seeing what you could be doing but you are stuck in some cramped place that's been supplied by the council and can be pulled out from under you at any point. I know that the Feminist Library on West Bridge road had to close and there were these desperate letters, "can anyone advise us what to do?" I mean this is the down side.

**JC:** We do hear these calls from other people running collections that are in similar positions because there is a huge amount of resources that are sustaining what we can do here or what happens at the Tate which makes things sustainable which means that you don't have to produce the immediate results, which means you can work on building projects up slowly so there's a real set of advantages we've got from being here.

**LS:** **The other argument that's been put to me is that there shouldn't be a women's only space because women's records should be included in archives, nationally, regionally. What do you think about this suggestion?**

**JC:** We've got amazing collections which were built up because they are just a few people interested and really focused on that specific thing.

**AG:** And those things couldn't happen in a different way.

**JC:** They just wouldn't. They have passion.

**AG:** They are art projects within themselves. With some of these projects they start to exclude people, there becomes a bit of a tussle between the ones who founded the project, initiated it and others who want to come in, to extend access, or make it more inclusive, then you get these frictions. It's very emotive.

**LS: Have some women been reluctant to leave their records with you if they feel they are being pigeonholed or are aware of other people's preconceptions about spaces like this?**

**AG:** Rachel Whiteread. Her mother is in the archive and her mother was very supportive. She was a member for years and the then director was approaching Rachel as she was getting more well known and asking, "why don't you become a member" and she wrote a letter which I'm not sure if it was kept or taken away or something, but she did write a very clear letter about why she didn't want to be associated. I'm not sure she'd feel the same way now, now that her mother is no longer living too. And there is an overarching mother daughter thing anyway, which comes out in women's art work too.

**LS: How important do you think female-friendly repositories like this are to furthering our understanding of women's place within history? Whether you provide something unique?**

**AG:** People who come here don't necessarily expect to find this and when they do it's a bit of an eye-opener. It's not necessarily the content, it's the idea and it's the quantity. It's just the fact that there are thousands of art names, it's kind of obvious that these are all individuals. They all have their own little files, they may have one piece of paper but they have their own files. It's a kind of presence there, just that sheer weight of evidence. Something that makes people think again and makes them think of their own practice in a different way. That's kind of sentimental.

**JC:** I don't focus on the women's aspect so much. I'm going to quote Victor Burgin because for me it's that breadth, that sense of lots of records of lots of different histories and that history isn't necessarily history. He says that real history is mutable and heterogeneous and collections like this are a reminder of that. There are simplified versions of histories that get repeated. Real history is forgotten while it's impostor, a more plausible narrative takes over. This kind of collection is a pull in the other direction.

**AG:** I think that's important. It is a way of looking at art production and the fact that it focuses on women simplifies that project or enables it, as much as it enables women to identify themselves as artists. The fact that it was a feminist initiative to begin with does not mean it is restricted to that. I think feminism itself has changed to become more interesting...

**JC:** Yeah, feminism has changed

**AG:** Being women only...

**JC:** Lots of things have changed but I think it's always a debate, a conversation, it's an ongoing thing.

**LS: Do you get a lot of male researchers?**

**AG:** I do get the odd lad who comes in.

**LS: Do you think there's a preconception that it's a women only space?**

**AG:** There was one guy who came... There wasn't any difference in what he was looking at. He was just excited that it was about art practices, he wasn't thrown by the fact that it was women only. It may have been something that I said when I was showing him around, he was part of a group of undergraduates that were being introduced to the Women's Art Library collection so it didn't spark off something in him. He was doing practice, he wasn't an art historian or theory student. He just thought "waw!" this is

about art, this is about all kinds of art and you can research quite intuitively with the collection as it's set up at the moment anyway. You can be playful when looking through this stuff, and don't have to know a single artist's name or title. And people also follow suggestions from their tutors.

**JC:** And we get people coming in looking for particular artists who are here but most of the visiting researchers are women. Maybe there is that kind of idea.