Journal of Feminist Scholarship

Volume 19
Issue 19 *Fall 2021*

Article 5

Fall 2021

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Pauline Junginger
Philipps University Marburg, pauline.junginger@posteo.de

Marian Dörk
UCLAB, University of Applied Sciences Potsdam, marian.doerk@fh-potsdam.de

Recommended Citation

Junginger, Pauline, and Marian Dörk. 2021. "Categorizing Queer Identities: An Analysis of Archival Practices Using the Concept of Boundary Objects." *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* 19 (Fall): 66-79. 10.23860/jfs.2021.19.05.

Categorizing Queer Identities: An Analysis of Archival Practices Using the Concept of Boundary Objects

Pauline Junginger, Philipps University Marburg
Marian Dörk, UCLAB, University of Applied Sciences Potsdam

Abstract: In this paper, we present a field study that examines the development, application and maintenance of classification systems and controlled vocabularies in three archives documenting lesbian, trans* and queer-feminist histories. Queer archives face the challenge of documenting identities that are inherently characterized by embracing fluidity and ambiguity. Thus, queer identities are diametrically opposed to archival procedures of unambiguous classification. At the same time, queer activism relies partly on coherent identity categories in order to be able to act politically. We examine the pragmatic solutions that queer archives establish when dealing with tensions between those requirements. Our goal is to contribute to the ongoing discussions about the ethical dimensions of classification practices. Following the work of Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star (1999) we use the concept of boundary objects as a central theoretical foundation of our research. This concept allows for tracing the negotiations and decision-making processes that influenced the creation of a specific classification system. Through conducting semi-structured interviews with staff members of queer archives in Germany we collected data about their efforts to archive the history of queer communities. Although there are initiatives developing metadata standards for queer identities, these standards are only used to a limited extent by the queer archives we examined. Rather, those archives established individual strategies for categorizing objects that are rooted in their specific history. We argue that classification systems and controlled vocabularies themselves can be understood as artifacts documenting the history of queer movements.

Keywords: queer archives, boundary objects, classification, identity categories, metadata

Introduction

> Each standard and each category valorizes some point of view and silences others. This is not inherently a bad thing–indeed it is inescapable. But it *is* an ethical choice, and as such it is dangerous not bad, but dangerous.
> –Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star (1999)

Systematic categorization is a core element of archival practice. Classification systems and thesauri are common tools used for this task. Traditionally, the process of categorization as well as the respective tools are deemed to be neutral and value-free. This idea has been challenged from various sides as part of a wider interrogation of archives as institutions of power. Starting in the 1970s critical catalogers questioned the hegemony of classification systems and thesauri that excluded marginalized perspectives (Drabinski 2013). Efforts to challenge this hegemony aimed at including categories for marginalized groups in standardized classification systems and thesauri. In addition, grassroots communities and advocacy groups began to collect their own materials and established alternative archives as sites of strategic knowledge production (Pell 2015; Geiger and Hauser 2012).

Queer community archives are confronted with the challenge to categorize identities, while queer identities are diametrically opposed to the unambiguous classification that are associated with archival procedures. Queer theorists such as Emily Drabinski (2013) emphasize the mutability of identities and question their disambiguation through rigid categories. At the same time, marginalized groups need to position themselves clearly in relation to their identities when they struggle for social and political recognition. In this regard, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) coined the term *strategic essentialism*. It describes the extent to which social movements present themselves as homogeneous in order to be able to act politically. For Joshua Gamson (1995), this core dilemma of queer politics is also reflected in the struggles of other social movements based on identity: "fixed identity categories are both the basis for oppression and the basis for political power" (391). Furthermore, queer theorists understand identity not exclusively as an effect of domination, but also as a "field of action for resistant practices of appropriation" (Laufenberg 2019, 334). This tension between a perspective on identity categories as contingent and the simultaneous necessity of their strategic essentialization provides interesting impulses for a feminist analysis of classificatory practice.

In our study, we focus on the challenges that queer community archives face when trying to find ways to account for queer identities in their categorization systems and controlled vocabularies. Our goal is to contribute to the ongoing discussions about the ethical dimensions of classification practices. This is relevant not only for feminist perspectives on queer archives, but furthermore contributes to current discourses on the ethical aspects of data-based technologies, whose built-in biases are amplified by automatic classification and decision-making (boyd and Crawford 2012). Following the work of Bowker and Star (1999) we use the concept of *boundary objects* as the theoretical underpinning of our endeavor. We want to propose boundary objects as an analytical tool specifically useful for feminist research. This concept was developed in the context of ethnographic studies of the cooperation processes of scientists. Boundary objects enable the description of knowledge production as a negotiation process. By making the contingency of classification systems visible, they can be analyzed in terms of the perspectives, assumptions, and the local knowledge that are inscribed in them. Thus, classification systems appear as artifacts containing political struggles and ethical questions. Bowker and Star propose a conceptual approach for analyzing classification systems that is based on the entanglement of classification practices and concepts (Schubert 2017). This means that they analyze classification systems in the context of their application and consider their consequences. As one of the consequences of classification, Star and Bowker (2007) describe the production of *residual categories*, i.e., entities that cannot be clearly assigned to a single category within a specific classification system. Residual categories are characterized as being essential for the functioning of these systems. This parallels key assumptions of queer theory, in which identity categories are understood as interdependent products of power relations (Schotten 2015).

As a means to uncover the instability of categorizations, Bowker and Star also draw from to the experience of marginality, as described by Black feminist and queer of color scholars. Patricia Hill Collins' (1986) concept of the "'outsider within' status" illustrates how the position of an outsider provides a unique opportunity to produce novel knowledge. Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) "mestiza consciousness" brings forward the idea of multiplicity as opposed to dichotomous power relations. For Bowker and Star (1999) ambiguity is always already inscribed in classification systems and thesauri, no matter how clear and unambiguous they seem to us. We are interested in the potential of boundary objects as an analytical tool in the context of queer archives. Do they facilitate grasping the ambiguities associated with archival strategies of categorizing queer identities?

In this article, we report from semi-structured interviews conducted with staff members of three queer archives located in Germany. The interviews were centered on the development, application, and maintenance of classification systems and thesauri related to the preservation of queer histories. In our research we are interested in the following questions. Which classification strategies are established by queer archives? What kind of exclusions and silences do they produce? Are queer

archives necessarily institutions that "queer the archive" or do they rather follow the strategies of traditional archives? Is the documentation of marginalized queer perspectives also accompanied by a criticism of normalized archival practices and conventions?

While our interviews document the archival practices of three archives located in Germany, our interviewees also referred to and are partly active in international projects such as Homosaurus and Digital Transgender Archive. Furthermore, through the work of Drabinski we include the critique of a US-based cataloging system to our discussion of boundary objects. Yet, our perspective on queer histories is rooted in the local German discourses. The once pejorative term *queer* was initially appropriated by AIDS activists in the US in the late 1980s and then also theorized within academia (Mesquita et al. 2012). Subsequently, the term itself as well as *queer theory* were taken on by academics and activists in various contexts world-wide. In Germany, the reception of queer theory in the 1990s was initially limited to the academic realm (Woltersdorf 2003). Since then the term has gradually entered into the vernacular of the LGBTIQ community as a relatively broad and inclusive term, whose different meanings and usages in different local contexts are a vivid example for the liveliness of categories.

The archive as object of investigation

In recent years, the archive has gained increasing popularity as an object of scientific investigation. This concerns not only the institution of the archive, but also the archive as a conceptual umbrella term for strategies of knowledge production and documentation. The expansion of the concept of the archive can be attributed largely to the work of Michel Foucault. In *Archaeology of Knowledge,* Foucault describes the "archive" as "the general system of the formation and transformation of statements" (1972, 130). Together with the "statement" and the "discourse," the "archive" forms the conceptual starting point for Foucault's archaeological procedure. This procedure aims to work out discursive events as if they were recorded in an archive (Ernst 2002). The archive is understood here as the system that determines the possibility of certain forms of speech (ibid.). It constitutes a space in which statements and discourses can be analyzed (Gehring 2004). Only what actually occurs as a statement is of interest for such archaeological analysis. For this approach, the focus is thus less on the archive as an institution. Rather, it is aimed at elaborating the "discursive norms and laws that accompany the selection, arrangement, and safeguarding of certain knowledge corpora" (Weitin and Wolf 2012, 10). In particular, the historical conditionality and efficacy of these discursive norms and laws are at stake. For an investigation of contemporary archives, however, Foucault's metaphorical concept of the archive, a concept that is detached from the work of concrete archives, is less helpful, since his archaeology can only be considered for an analysis of historical discourses that no longer have relevance in the present. The archaeological procedure thus enables the visualization of the historical changeability of knowledge, but stops at the border where current discourses begin. What procedures are available to us if we want to question the self-evident nature of our own discourses in the present, which are reflected in contemporary classification systems?

Building on Foucault's archaeology, Bowker and Star propose an *infrastructural inversion* (1999, 34), i.e., a reconstruction of the negotiation processes underlying a classification system. The concept of boundary objects is fundamental to this procedure. An infrastructural inversion of archives requires a documentation of the development of classification systems and thesauri. However, to understand classification systems and controlled vocabularies as artifacts that contain moral values contradicts the claim of neutrality of archival science (Schwartz and Cook 2002). Archival science conceives of the archiving of materials as a neutral process, for which archivists are responsible: "Within archival institutions, archivists are forced to follow and reinforce a culture of neutrality, access, and preservation at the center of their work" (Zepeda 2018, 96). According to the self-conception of archival science, the indexing of archival materials is not an interpretative process (ibid.). Indexing is

understood as an objective procedure that enables subsequent interpretation by researchers. Within the scope of the archival turn, the postulated neutrality of the archival process and the archive as an institution have been challenged from various sides during the twentieth century. In comparison to an understanding of archives as mere "storage of objective facts about the past" (Friedrich 2013, 21), scholars started examining archives in terms of their productive power. Archives are then described as places of domination (Horstmann and Kopp 2010) and analyzed in terms of the violence they exert (Weitin and Wolf 2012). Within information science, the questioning of the neutrality of hegemonic classification systems and thesauri can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s (Drabinski 2013). Critical information scientists began to highlight and address the prejudices inscribed in classification systems and controlled vocabularies. This approach is based on the premise that it should be possible to develop classification systems and thesauri that can accurately describe marginalized positions. Critical information scientists have been on a mission to uncover and close the gaps in archives to make room for marginalized perspectives that have not been accounted for. Today, however, scholars also point to the limits of this corrective approach. In the following, we discuss two approaches outlined by Emily Drabinski and Melanie Feinberg. Their work is relevant for our study as they explicitly focus on the diverse groups of people devising and using classification systems.

Drabinski (2013) argues for a rethinking of queer strategies in dealing with classification systems. Rather than focusing on the correction of existing classification systems and controlled vocabularies, she describes the possibilities of queering classification systems by concentrating on the effects they have on patrons. Her approach aims to guide visitors of archives and libraries towards a "critical reading" of classification systems and thesauri and to engage with them as a "complex and biased text" (97). Inspired by Foucault's writings, Drabinski refers to a queer-theoretical understanding of identity categories as discursively produced and unstable. She suggests the development of techniques that reveal the limits of existing classification systems. Specifically, she argues that classification structures and terms that are perceived to be discriminatory should be preserved rather than corrected, in order to encourage visitors to critically reflect on still existing social discrimination (ibid.). She also justifies this strategy with the fact that queer identities are only formed through the rejection of an existing norm and are thus also conditioned by it. As much as we share Drabinski's attitude that visitors of libraries and archives should be encouraged to critically question the settings and interpretations of classification systems and controlled vocabularies, her particular proposal for action does not convince us. If materials related to homosexuality continue to be classified under *sexual deviance*[1] in order to achieve a critical reflection on social discrimination on the part of the visitors, this assumes that they are already convinced this classification is problematic. If a person does in fact consider homosexuality to be abnormal, they will hardly be bothered by a contextualizing statement, let alone think about the social discrimination of people whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual. Nevertheless, we consider Drabinki's suggestion to be an important impulse to not only focus on the content of classification systems when designing and further developing them, but to focus on their effect.

Feinberg (2012) also focuses on the effects of classification systems. The difference from Drabinski is that she pays special attention to the role of the designers of classification systems and controlled vocabularies and reframes their role. Feinberg conceptualizes the designers of information systems as authors who enter into a dialogue with the people using them. This new conception is based on the realization that all information systems establish an interpretative framework for their content and shape the perception of the people engaging with them. Since the principle of neutrality in information and archival science is untenable, Feinberg argues that the designers of information systems should be made aware that the problem is not the fact that they have their own perspectives, abilities, and goals that are incorporated into the design of information systems, but that these influences are usually hidden or denied (ibid., 365). Thus, she proposes to design "a dialogic experience between author and audience" (358) when developing information systems.

These two approaches presented illustrate that innovative and critical strategies for the design and use of classification systems have already been proposed in the field of archival and information science. But how does the practical reality of queer archives relate to such theoretical aspirations? What are the specific strategies of queer archives to accommodate fluid categories in their classification systems? Through applying boundary objects as an analytical tool we seek to investigate those questions. Before presenting our study and its results, we first discuss the concept of boundary objects and demonstrate why we consider it to be a useful tool for this endeavor.

Classification systems as boundary objects

In the following, we describe our understanding of the concept of boundary objects and then outline the reasons for its value and usefulness for feminist analysis. Star's (1990) personal experiences of interacting with classification systems that excluded her is one of the starting points for her scientific focus on categorizations, standards and infrastructures. Together with James R. Griesemer (1989), she developed the concept of boundary objects based on the study of collaborative processes in science. Star (1989) proposes four different types of boundary objects: Repositories, ideal types, terrain with coincident boundaries, and forms and labels. Boundary objects are simultaneously the prerequisite for and product of cooperation. At the same time, the term functions as an analytical tool. In her later works, Star uses the concept to investigate the establishment of boundary infrastructures, such as widely used classification systems, and their material effects on social interactions (Bowker and Star 1999). According to Star (2010), every classification system that is applied over a longer period of time produces an *other*, i.e., residual categories that cannot be named by a given classification system. Furthermore, she puts forward the thesis that the others produced by classification systems can in turn create their own boundary objects or, in the course of a negotiation process, achieve an expansion of the classification system that excluded them (614).

In our research, we are interested in the ways that queer communities negotiate the development and usage of identity categories during the preservation of their histories. Boundary objects are a helpful concept for this endeavor as they describe classification systems as artifacts that enable cooperation between heterogeneous actors without requiring consensus (Star 2010). This allows classification systems to be conceptualized as artifacts that can accommodate the internal heterogeneity of social movements. Together with Bowker, Star (1999) conducted a large-scale analysis of classification systems that was strongly based on the concept of boundary objects. Their project aimed at understanding classification systems as systems of power in a Foucauldian sense. In their analysis, Bowker and Star are interested in strategies to manage political and semantic conflicts within classification systems over long periods of time and on a large scale. Furthermore, they trace the ways in which standards and classification systems structure our lives while remaining largely invisible. Bowker and Star characterize classification systems as "situated" in the sense of Donna Haraway (1988). This situatedness is also a result of a process they describe as *convergence*, a "double process by which information artifacts and social worlds adapt to each other and come together" (Bowker and Star 1999, 82). During this process, a naturalization of information artifacts takes place, which allows these artifacts to fade into the background as invisible infrastructures.

To make naturalized infrastructures visible and legible, Bowker and Star propose to look at existing structures with the gaze of an outsider and to question the seemingly self-evident, a practice they describe as *reflective denaturalization* (308). Here, Bowker and Star also draw from the works of Hill Collins (1986) and Anzaldúa (1987). Hill Collins' description of the "'outsider within' status" (1986) takes the lived experience of Black women in the US as a starting point to illustrate the ways in which being an outsider allows for gaining distinctive knowledge that is denied to those on the inside. Marginality here is not only a source for pain but inherits great potential for creativity and unique perspectives on intersectional forms of oppression. Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" (1987) is an

approach that embraces the idea of having multiple identities rejecting the notion of dualistic paradigms of either-or.

Practices of reflective denaturalization allow for questioning the neutrality of classification systems. For outsiders or people inheriting multiple identities, classification systems become visible as infrastructures that either include or exclude. Furthermore, claims of a universal validity of information systems are undermined if it is assumed that the naturalization of information systems is a process that is largely based on a mutual adaptation between an information system and the people using it. As a means to trace those adaptation processes, Bowker and Star (1999) propose the method of *infrastructural inversion*. They aim to make the infrastructure of classification systems visible and emphasize the material effects of classification systems as physical infrastructures. Through applying boundary objects as an analytical tool they are able to describe classification systems as the result of negotiation processes. Building on this premise, standards and infrastructures can be examined regarding the perspectives of the actors that were involved in their creation. Whose perspectives are represented in a given standard or infrastructure and whose perspectives are excluded? When considering queer archives the question is whether a kind of counterhegemony takes the place of established classification systems and controlled vocabularies.

The archival praxis of three queer grassroots community archives

In this research, we focus on three archives documenting lesbian, trans*, and queer-feminist histories in Germany. These archives can be characterized as grassroots community archives, libraries, and information centers. They differ from state archives both in their degree of institutionalization, or precariousness, and in their thematic focus. They may also differ in the kinds of media they collect. For example, grey literature and ephemera are rarely found in state archives, but are collected intensively by grassroots community archives.

By preserving their own histories, social movements also function as a kind of corrective to a hegemonic historiography that excludes marginalized positions. It is a central feminist concern to make visible the social contributions of women in history and to establish a *herstory* in comparison to a history largely written by men about men. The linear historiography and perpetually repeated centrality of great men is thus questioned by the telling of diverse women's histories (Terry 1991). According to Jennifery Terry (1991), this endeavor was based in its beginnings on the idea of a homogeneous group of "women" whose uniform history could be discovered. However, in particular with the works of (lesbian) Black and Women of Color feminists, this homogeneity is fundamentally questioned and the exclusions produced by *white* feminism are named (e.g., Combahee River Collective 1977; hooks 1981; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981). Bowker and Star (1999) describe the production of exclusions also in the context of classification systems, which makes their theories especially interesting for our study.

Based on Star's thesis (2010) that every classification system produces an *other*, the question arises which other is produced by the classification systems developed for marginalized positions?

As case studies we investigate the development, maintenance, and application of the classification systems and thesauri of three queer archives. Within the scope of this paper, we differentiate the three archives by reducing them linguistically to their respective collecting focus. The *feminist archive* (A1) was founded in the 1970s and seeks to collect materials from various feminist currents with a special focus on the second women's movement. The *lesbian archive* (A2) also dates back to the 1970s and defines itself as an explicitly lesbian archive with queer content. The archive would like to address people from different generations who are interested in lesbian history. The *inter/trans* archive* (A3) was founded in the early 2010s and aims at collecting everything on the history of non-normative gender identities. They wish to document the history of inter, trans*, and gender variant people for their own community, as well as to diversify the knowledge the general public has on non-normative gender identities.

The investigation of explicitly queer archives is relevant, since the term queer, by its definition, implies a resistance to unification through classification (Keilty 2009). The term stands precisely for questioning temporally stable and coherent identity categories (Drabinski 2013). At the same time, however, the political struggle for social recognition requires a consolidation of these categories in the sense of a strategic essentialism. What strategies of classification and indexing do queer archives therefore develop in this field of tension?

Methodology and context

In the beginning of our study, we carried out initial research via the websites of the three archives and in the online catalogs in which their items are included. At the time of the study, the websites did not feature detailed information on the classification systems and thesauri used by the archives. Since we were interested in the practical application of the classification systems and thesauri, i.e., the practices and thus the collection of archival records, we carried out a total of three interviews with staff members who have different roles in the archives, but are each involved in the respective cataloging and classification practices. They work as permanently employed scientific documentalist (A1), as a freelancer for the maintenance of the database and the indexing of archival materials (A2), and as honorary member of the board (A3). During the interviews, we learned about the *Digital Transgender Archive* and the *Homosaurus,* which we then also included in our considerations. The digitization of their collections is a central concern of the archives in our study. Each archive is active in either national and/or international networks and infrastructures to increase the visibility of queer history through the creation of cross-institutional online databases. As our study is focused on the locally applied classification systems and thesauri, we have not, however, dealt more intensively with the creation of these cross-institutional projects.

For the interviews we created an interview guide that structured the interviews thematically along the following topics: archive (structure, political orientation, target groups), classification system, and its application, as well as any struggles and disputes over it. Bowker and Star (1999) describe classification systems as products of negotiation processes, which are adapted to local workflows in the course of their application. Hence, we were interested in the indexing of objects and the respective workflows the archives have developed for this purpose. Following our theoretical assumptions, we supposed that the archives do not document the revision of their classification systems and keywords. Through questions about how the archives deal with diversity within the queer and feminist communities and the resulting struggles for interpretative sovereignty, we hoped to find out something about the establishment of the classification systems and controlled vocabularies. Two interviews were conducted in person, one interview was held via telephone. During the interviews the first author took notes and created memory logs afterwards (subsequent quotes are translated from German). In our analysis we clustered matching codes and related quotations and paraphrases into overarching categories and defined the three following thematic blocks: classification, application, and perception.

All three archives are precarious to varying degrees. The feminist archive is still well positioned compared to the other two archives and receives public funding. The lesbian archive also receives public funding, but in addition to supporting an archive and a library, it also offers psychosocial counseling and is dependent on volunteer work. The inter/trans* archive is completely based on volunteer work and is largely privately financed. The different degrees of precarity also reflect the different degrees of marginalization experienced by the themes and identities on which the three archives focus.

Analysis

The following research questions guided our analysis: Which classification strategies are established by queer archives? What kind of exclusions and silences do they produce? Are queer archives necessarily

institutions that "queer the archive" or do they rather follow the strategies of traditional archives? Is the documentation of marginalized queer perspectives also accompanied by a criticism of normalized archival practices and conventions?

In our analysis, we worked with three thematic blocks that we had identified through clustering matching codes and related quotations and paraphrases: classification, application, and perception. In the next step, we compared the results from this thematic grouping with our theoretical presuppositions.

Through the analysis of the interviews it became clear that it is especially the subjective evaluations and perceptions of the interviewed staff members that are relevant for our research questions. Various comments and small hints pointed implicitly and explicitly to the interpretative space that is opened up when applying classification systems and thesauri:

> In our thesaurus there is the keyword 'women in "men's jobs"' with "men's jobs" in quotation marks. Today this keyword would no longer be assigned in this way. Therefore it would be interesting to learn about the discourse behind the keyword. Unfortunately there is no documentation on the reasons for creating it.[2]

The expert interviews have shown that the maintenance and updating of the classification systems and thesauri are tasks that cannot be fulfilled to the extent desired by the archives. This can be traced back to their precarious work situations that put severe constraints on labor or financial resources for these tasks. The classification system and the thesaurus of the lesbian archive, for example, were developed in the 1990s and have not been updated since then:

> The thesaurus was developed in 1998 and therefore does not contain the keyword "queer." There has been a plan to add the keyword "queer" for a while, but there is simply not enough time to do so.[3]

In practice, the archive's staff members handle this problem by working for special projects and individual document types with contemporary thesauri, as this allows a freer and more up-to-date keywording (A2). The employee of the feminist archive shared her dissatisfaction with the archive's thesaurus (A1). The basic structure of the classification system was developed before they started working at the archive. The knowledge about the development of the classification system and the thesaurus has been lost due to the (anticipated) lack of documentation about it. However, it is possible to observe the traces left behind by the negotiation processes underlying the development and maintenance of the classification systems and thesauri. A nice picture for this is a thick folder that the interviewee at the feminist archive showed during the interview. This folder contains countless lists with different versions of the classification system and the thesaurus, peppered with handwritten pencil notes next to individual categories.

Today the archive no longer works with paper lists, but with a database software which holds the date when a new keyword was added, but not by whom and for what reason (A1). The staff members of the lesbian archive and the feminist archive both emphasized the "age" of their classification systems and thesauri. Within the context of the lesbian and women's movements, the "age" of the terms and categories is less evident concerning identity categories, which have not changed significantly in recent decades, but rather in terms and representations that are today understood as racist (A2):

> The magazine "Loving Women" from the Weimar Republic sometimes has supposedly "exotic" images on its covers. We would not use such covers if we went public with them, because that is not possible.[4]

In the case of the inter/trans* archive and the history of identity categories in the sphere of non-normative gender identities there have been more changes in the last decades. As a result, the inter/trans* archive has to decide whether self-designations are to be assigned as keywords that are understood today as negative and pejorative (A3). This shows that the positive appropriation of originally pejorative terms such as "lesbian," "gay," or "queer" in the gay and lesbian movement, only

took place to a limited extent in the context of the trans* movement, or, due to different medical and social discourses on homosexuality and transgender, could only take place to a limited extent:

> The German trans*-pioneer Gert-Christian Südel defined himself as "transsexual." This is why we use "transsexual" as a keyword in our archive even though the term is perceived as pejorative in current discourses on trans* identity.[5]

From a purely technical perspective, digital databases contain the possibility of creating "living classification systems" and thesauri that can be updated as political discourses change (Bowker and Star 1999, 326). Our analysis illustrates that despite the fact that the technical requirements for updating classification systems and thesauri are existent in queer community archives, they face organizational and financial obstacles that hinder them from exploiting the available technical possibilities. Ideally, there should be an editorial team to oversee and design the continuous updates (Bowker and Star 1999). For LGBTIQ topics, the English thesaurus *Homosaurus* was developed. It seeks to "support improved access to LGBTQ resources within cultural institutions" (Homosaurus, n.d.) and is maintained by the *Digital Transgender Archive*. Among the archives we examined, only the lesbian archive occasionally works with the mentioned thesaurus. The Homosaurus can be described as a boundary object in the sense of Star. It was developed jointly and is edited continuously by different actors to unify the indexing of thematically related, but distinct content and thus increase its visibility. The limits of such a project for LGBTIQ history are discussed on the website of the *Digital Transgender Archive* regarding the term *transgender*. The aim of this online project is to increase access to transgender history worldwide, thus it has a universal claim. However, the term transgender has its origins in a US-centric tradition of knowledge and carries the danger of obscuring the very diverse gender categories and identities that exist internationally. In this respect, the *Digital Transgender Archive* positions itself by using transgender not as identity, but as practice.

In the three archives we examined, the content indexing based on keywords is a typical task for interns. Although the interns are supervised by more experienced employees, they also make their own decisions while indexing objects. The fact that the content of the inventory is recorded with the help of interns is another expression of the precarious structures of the archives. The interviews show that the design of the classification systems and thesauri is a topic that is a matter of concern in all three archives, albeit to different degrees. While the Homosaurus could enable a standardized indexing of LGBTIQ history, it is only used sporadically. Instead, the lesbian archive as well as the feminist archive work with keywords that they acknowledge to be partly outdated. Or, like the inter/trans* archive, they develop their own keywords based on their evolving inventory.

The three archives are committed to an approach that seeks to preserve the history of women, lesbians, and people with non-normative gender identities in order to diversify mainstream history. Towards this end, an identity-political approach is relevant and necessary, especially when the work of the archives depends on public funding. One interviewee explained that the positioning as an explicitly lesbian archive is also a strategic decision in order to distinguish themselves from other queer and feminist archives (A2). Without explicitly naming their approach as such, the archives thus partly apply strategic essentialism in order to fit into the funding conditions of public funding bodies and to be able to position themselves clearly within the archive sector.

Discussion

Our findings show that the three archives we examined developed classification strategies that are anchored in their respective organizational history, and—to some degree—past. Each institution formulated concrete goals that they pursue as community archives. The lesbian archive wishes to be a place for everyone interested in lesbian history (A2). The employee at the feminist archive emphasized that the archive must be neutral and position itself above inner-feminist struggles (A1). The inter/trans*

archive collects all published material on the topic of trans* and non-normative sexualities (A3). In addition to the collection of published materials, all three archives also collect the estates of notable members of their respective community.

Apart from their clear thematic focus, the archives claim to do justice to different, sometimes contradictory sub-movements or particular positions within the larger movements. The goal is to make visible and preserve the inner heterogeneity of the respective social movements and communities. Nevertheless, the archives face the challenge to be the lasting memory of movements, while having limited resources to ensure the continuous maintenance of their classification systems. In addition, the example of the inter/trans* archive clearly shows the practical problems that arise when trying to classify non-normative sexualities *correctly*. Does one take into account the self-designations of the people whose legacy is kept in the archive? Or does one focus on correctness in the sense of current political discourses and concentrate on the perspective of the archive's visitors?

The interviews have shown that the three queer archives did not document the development of their classification systems and thesauri. Furthermore, they have only limited possibilities to systematically adapt and improve their classification systems and controlled vocabularies. While this may not aid the reconstruction of past negotiation processes, the existing classification systems and keywords are evidence for aging artifacts. The classification systems and controlled vocabularies themselves are potential archival documents that tell something about the discourses of a social movement at a given point in time. Not documenting their modification means losing contemporary documents about the changing movement-specific discourses. Considering that the three queer archives we investigated work under financial and personnel constraints that allow only limited updating of the classification system and keywords, the question arises if and how continuously negotiated updates would be feasible for these three specific archives.

Our research highlights that projects of classification must be conceived as open-ended in order to do justice to the variability of discourses and the identity categories that arise from them. Representatives of marginalized groups should be included in the collection, analysis, and presentation of data collected on them (Ahyoud et al. 2018). In such a scenario, the perspectives of marginalized groups would be part of the negotiation process leading to scientific findings. Community archives with the appropriate resources could also apply this approach to the design and maintenance of the classification tools they use. The flexible categories created during such a negotiation process can be described as boundary objects. If no resources are available for the further development of classification systems and controlled vocabularies, the limitations of this approach are evident. Maybe a processual understanding of the category *transgender* proposed by the *Digital Transgender Archive* can be a sustainable strategy for dealing with changing identity constructions. The focus here is on the discursive formation of queer identities, not on their fixation. Nevertheless, the categories "women" or "lesbian" remain relevant in the sense of strategic essentialism, as we were able to show with the lesbian and the feminist archive.

One aspect that also needs to be considered in the context of the documentation of marginalized identities, is the question of what risks the collection of knowledge about marginalized social groups can entail (Weiß 2017). Bowker and Star's (1999) analysis of the development of the *Catalogue of Nursing Measures (NIC)* offers promising points of departure here. In their analysis of the *NIC*, Bowker and Star emphasize that the standardization of care work is, on the one hand, a necessary step for the professionalization and visibility of care work, but on the other hand also harbors the danger of control and monitoring in the course of neoliberal measures to reduce costs. This example shows that there is a tension between the activist credo of visibility, which drives the political work of many marginalized social groups, and control facilitated by visibility. Applied to the collection of data on marginalized gender identities, this means that the collection of data on various gender categories is necessary on the one hand, in order to be able to make political demands based on this data. On the other hand, it requires courage from individuals with non-normative gender identities to disclose and disambiguate

their gender identity. Population data on marginalized social groups also harbor the danger of being (mis)used by future governments as a basis for discrimination and persecution. In the case of the queer archives we investigated, a changing political climate can also lead to political decision-makers deciding not to continue funding the projects. What happens to the inventory of archives whose public funding is discontinued? The lesbian archive was already on the brink of collapse in 1996 and had to fight for further funding by the local government. So while public funding is a sign of social acceptance and establishment on the one hand, it is also accompanied by a dependency that can have drastic effects in the event of a change of the political situation (Arondekar et al. 2015).

Conclusion

Community archives assume an important role in the documentation of social movements' histories on often rocky paths towards political equity and social inclusion. In particular, queer archives face the challenge to preserve their histories while accounting for marginalized and fluid identities via reliable classification systems and thesauri.

Our investigation of queer archives shows that they have a rather pragmatic approach to classifications and the content-related indexing of archival materials, which we attribute largely to their precariousness. In the case of the three archives, the documentation and preservation of marginalized queer perspectives is not accompanied by an explicit critique of normalized archival practices and conventions. Nevertheless, individual statements in the expert interviews implicitly refer to the difficulty of classifying changing identity categories and movement-specific discourses. Critical information scientists suggest to investigate classification systems regarding their effect on visitors of libraries and archives. As a next step it would be interesting to include the perspectives of the visitors of the archives in further analysis. Especially because these archives are grassroots community archives that seek to preserve the histories of their respective communities. Would the visitors of the feminist and the lesbian archive also describe the keywords as partially outdated? What opinions do the visitors of the inter/trans* archive have regarding the archive's decision to use the self-designations of persons as keywords, even when these terms are sometimes perceived as pejorative today?

Projects such as the *Digital Transgender Archive*, and *Homosaurus* illustrate that there are international efforts in the context of queer archives that are working towards an institutionalization or at least conceptual standardization of queer historiography. These are projects that aim at designing living queer classification systems in the sense of Bowker and Star. In doing so, they seek to balance the tension between the diversity and fluidity of queer identity categories, and their simultaneous establishment in the course of queer knowledge production. Our research emphasizes the necessity of categories for the production of knowledge and the emancipatory struggles of marginalized groups, while at the same time confirming the ethical dimension of categories and their built-in danger (Bowker and Star 1999).

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Marie-Luise Angerer for her thoughtful advice throughout the research project, the participants from the three archives for generously sharing their experience and perspectives, and the *JFS* reviewers for constructive feedback on the submission. Special thanks to Lara Kronenbitter and Daniela Sellen for their valuable comments and feedback on early drafts of the paper.

Notes

1. Until 1972, information resources about homosexuality were classified under *sexual deviance* in the Library of Congress Headings (LCSH) (Drabinski 2013, 98).

2. Anonymous. 2020. Interview with staff member of A1 by Pauline Junginger. January 15, 2020.

3. Anonymous. 2020. Interview with staff member of A2 by Pauline Junginger. January 16, 2020.

4. Anonymous. 2020. Interview with staff member of A2 by Pauline Junginger. January 16, 2020.

5. Anonymous. 2019. Interview with staff member of A3 by Pauline Junginger. December 5, 2019.

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