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"Civil disobedience" in the Archive: Documenting women's activism and experience through the Sheffield Feminist Archive

The study investigated what motivates feminist activists to engage in archiving and memory collecting activity, such as oral history projects, and what form such activity takes, including the extent to which they collaborate with formal archives. A case study of a feminist archiving project was undertaken: the Sheffield Feminist Archive project. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with the five most active members of the project were conducted. The participants in this study saw their activity as a part of their feminist activism. They were motivated by a desire to increase the presence of women and feminists in the archival record. They hoped that the material they collected would help to change the way the public see women, feminism, and gender relations. They chose to collaborate with a formal archive, Sheffield Archives, from the start of their archiving activity. They felt that this brought benefits to the project which enabled them to meet their aims. These included status and public identity, visibility and archival expertise. Despite their limited time, the participants saw themselves as having an active and multifaceted role in the collaboration including being a link with the feminist community, collecting material for the archive, publicising the archive, and challenging archival practice.

Keywords: community archiving; women; feminism; oral history.

1   Introduction and context

"Archives – as records – wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies" 1. Thus ensuring that this memory is representative of the diversity of our societies and recognises the struggles and achievements of all citizens is an important responsibility. Yet historically, the archival record has not been representative of the diversity of society 2. One response to this has been the significant growth in members of the public becoming involved in archiving activities; both to collect existing documentation and artefacts, and to create new material for inclusion in the archival record, e.g. through oral history. In 2007, the Community Archives and

Heritage Group estimated that there were around 3000 community archives in the UK 3. Many different kinds of communities are involved in this kind of activity, including specific geographical communities, different ethnic communities, and communities based around sexuality, a given interest, vocation, or ideology. Writers who have studied this area have argued that the "great variety and diversity" of this kind of activity means that much more research is needed to fill in the gaps in our knowledge, especially of activity outside the USA 4.

One group whose experience is under-represented in the archival record are women. In response there exist a number of projects in the UK and internationally where feminist activists have sought to document and archive the experiences of women and feminists. For example: the Women's Archive of Wales, the Glasgow Women's Library, Feminist Archive North and Feminist Archive South. One other such project is the Sheffield Feminist Archive (SFA) project, begun in spring 2014. The initial project group was made up of interested members of the Sheffield Feminist Network, a Sheffield-based feminist discussion and activism group. While in contact with other Feminist archives, given their limited resources, the group recognised the need to only undertake activities they themselves could sustain. From the beginning it was decided to collaborate with Sheffield Archives, the local council run archive in the city, to preserve the material, and this meant the collection would share its geographical remit and be about the Sheffield experience. Within this geographical limit the project team were eager to collect any sort of material relating to the experience of women in Sheffield past and present. An oral history project was established to capture aspects of this activity which may not have been documented in any other way. A grant of £2000 was received from Sheffield City Council to buy equipment and run two oral history training

days. Around 25 people came forward to train to become oral history interviewers for the project in May/June 2015.

Despite the quantity of this Feminist archiving taking place, until recently there has been little research on feminist activists' involvement in archiving and memory collecting activity which seeks to understand the motivations and resulting form of their activities from their own perspective. In this context, this study investigates how and why feminist activists engage in archiving and memory collecting activities, through a case study of the SFA. It explores why they are motivated to devote time and energy to something which one would not immediately assume would be a high priority for a group of individuals seeking to create social and political change and how they see the form of their activity helping them to achieve their aims. Although many studies of community archiving have used ethnographic or oral history methods to try to explore the views of the individuals involved, the actual voices and opinions of the individuals involved do not come across strongly 5. This study seeks to ensure that the voices and views of the participants are clearly heard.

This paper begins with a review of the relevant scholarly literature. The methodology of the research undertaken is then described followed by an analytic narrative outlining the findings of this research. A discussion of the findings of this study in relation to the literature follows and finally some concluding thoughts are offered.

Literature Review

The term 'community archives' is a contested one, which has been used to describe a huge range of different activities. Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd argue that "the defining characteristic of community archives is the active participation of a community in documenting and making accessible the history of their particular group and/or locality

on their own terms" 6. Such activity has a long history. It has existed for decades but only within the last 15 years has much attention been paid to it by the formal archive sector and only within the last 10 years has there been much discussion within the professional literature in the UK 7.

Much of the literature about community archives is based on case studies of individual projects, be that of ethnic minority community archives, specific geographic community archives and LGBT community archives. Flinn argues that community archives should also be taken to include archives created by political campaigning groups, workers' rights organisations, and gender equality campaigning groups 8. Other authors, including Sellie, Goldstein, Fair, & Hoyer have labelled these kinds of archives as 'activist archives' instead and emphasise the more explicitly political intentions behind the archival activities of these groups 9.

There is some academic literature about women's archives, predominantly those based in North America 10. Many of these studies consider collections within university special collections or archives which have been initiated by academics. For example, Myers' study is written from the perspective of the professional archivist involved in the process and therefore the motivations, views, and considerations of the community group are not explored 11. A handful of studies have begun to explore more directly what motivates feminist archiving. This echoes much of the writing about motivations for community archiving in general.

A key motive that is suggested is the desire to redress the exclusion from the formal archive that many marginalised groups in society have suffered. The sense of being "robbed" of their history comes across strongly in Burin and Sowinski's account of their motivation for involvement in the Lambeth Women's Project 12. Groups who have been marginalised in society have also been excluded the archive and therefore

from history 13. Such groups have sought to "document and record their own history and that of their communities" 14 to "combat the inevitable silences and gaps in other archives" 15 and to create "counter-memories" to mainstream histories 16 Flinn has suggested that "independent community-led archives may have significant roles to play in the production of […] democratized and more inclusive histories" 17. Some authors suggest that it is at moments when a given community feel that their identity is being threatened or marginalised that community archiving projects are often formed, as a way of strengthening and defining their own identities 18. Reitsamer brings out the collaborative and participatory archival processes that such motives typically give rise to 19. The process of trying to archive material is itself a powerful enactment of identity and community 20.

Some authors have also found that community archives can be motivated by the possibility that they could be "a space in which the archive can become a significant tool for discovery, education, and empowerment" 21. This idea of inspiring contemporary and future activism is echoed in the literature about the formation of women's archives: Mason and Zanish-Belcher suggest that the original donors to women's archives in the USA wanted formal archives to hold their collections in order to "preserve a record of their struggles as inspiration for younger women" 22. It is also true for contemporary donors to women's archives such as Sarah Dyer, who relates her experience as a feminist activist who has donated her personal archive to a formal archive (the Sallie Bingham Centre) and describes her main motivations as being preservation and inspiring future activism 23. The potential to learn from past activist struggles is also echoed in Reitsamer's studies of feminist music archiving and in Tavenor's unpublished report Rebels in the archives 24. A belief in the archives ability

to inform future activism underlies a commitment to making the collection visible and accessible 25.

Much of the literature about community archives emphasises the distrust that many involved in this kind of activity feel towards formal archives 26. Indeed, the rejection of formal archives is presented by Sellie et al. as a key motivator for their activity 27. Flinn argues that activists see archival activity as a way of furthering their political goals and accelerating social change 28. Archiving should not just been seen a "post-activist consolidation phase" but rather a key tool in political struggle 29.

Authors have commented on the various conditions under which community archives are managed ranging from complete independence to being supported and ultimately housed by formal archives, such as university libraries and local authority archives in the UK 30. Many of the published case studies of community archives have focused on those that have eschewed professional involvement and remained independent. Some projects have begun as community-based but over time have been donated to formal archives so as to ensure their long-term sustainability 31. Flinn has argued that "community participation, control and ownership" is "essential" and has emphasised the need for professional archivists to support community archives to manage their collections within the community rather than insisting on their transference into the formal archive 32. Stevens, Flinn, & Shepherd developed a framework of five "areas of practice" in which mainstream archives relate to community archives: "custody, collection, curation and dissemination, advice, and consultancy" but this was only tested on a handful of case studies, none of which were gender activism groups 33.

The varied nature of community archive collections in terms of material type has been noted by many studies 34. Their collection policies tend to be much broader in

scope than formal archives': allowing materials such as "books, pamphlets, leaflets, posters, objects and art works" 35. Flinn argues that this can be a point of tension between community groups and professional archivists which may dissuade groups from working with formal archives 36.

Flinn (2011) has also noted that many community archiving projects have used oral history as a method of documenting their communities 37. He argues that "when informed by a clear political agenda and perspective, the capturing of oral histories and community memories can be used to empower the community in challenging the narratives that are falsely representing them and may be used against them" 38.

In the context of this literature the research questions for the current study were defined as follows:

(1) What previous experience and impressions of archives do feminists involved with the SFA have?

(2) What motivates feminist activists to become involved in archiving and memory collecting activities?

(3) How do they hope that material will be used?

(4) What should be the roles of activists and archivists in the archive?

Methodology

The research questions of this project were designed to develop a deep understanding of the motivations, experience, and viewpoints of non-professional individuals who are involved in archiving and memory collecting activity, specifically feminist activists. Consequently, a qualitative research approach was chosen because of its ability to go "beyond giving a mere snapshot or cross-section of events and can show how and why things happen" 39. The population of interest for this research were adults who self-

identify as feminists and who have chosen to contribute in some way to an archive or memory collecting project for material relating to feminist, women's rights, or gender equality campaigning. The first author of this paper had been a participant in this project since its beginnings so was familiar with the project and the individuals involved. Flinn et al. have noted that, in their research into community archiving, they had to spend time working to overcome a variety of barriers before gaining access to the community archiving groups they wanted to use as their case studies 40. For this study, the researcher's pre-existing familiarity with the project and the individuals involved meant that these barriers were considerably less significant.

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews with members of the SFA project were used as the data collection method. In this instance the purposive sample was made up of all members of the SFA organising group. Questions about the participants' involvement in and aspirations for the archive were asked. This allowed interviewees to explore their thoughts, feelings and motivations about the archive without being limited to thinking about its current form. Each interview was conducted in a private space, so as to make the interviewee more comfortable when discussing potentially sensitive topics such as their political views.

Participation in this research was completely voluntary. An information sheet and a consent form were drawn up in order to provide the potential participants with information about the project so that they could make an informed decision about whether to take part. Due to the nature of the research it was likely that some of the data collected would relate to participants' political views (an example of sensitive personal data) and therefore an extra step was taken to ensure that participants were happy with this. Before participants signed the consent form, the researcher verbally reiterated to the participant that their political beliefs might be discussed as part of the interview and

the participant was asked to give explicit consent for the collection and processing of these sensitive personal data. Five members of the organising group were willing to be interviewed. Although this is a small number, these five individuals do represent the most active members of the organising group. One participant wished to remain anonymous. The participants are listed below in alphabetical order including how they will be referred to for the rest of this paper:

- Anonymous participant - Participant A

- Judith Dodds – Judith

- Rachel Handforth – Rachel

- Lisa Markham – Lisa

- Emma Nagouse – Emma

The analysis followed the model of thematic analysis outline by Braun and Clarke 41. Coding was "data-driven" as one would expect in inductive research 42. A thematic map was then drawn out bringing together related codes. Throughout this process the transcripts were revisited to ensure that the themes were an accurate reflection of what had been said by participants.

Participan*ts' previous experience and views of archives*

Although not all participants had used an archive in the past, they all had views about them. Some of these were positive, particularly around the content, but overall participants seemed to recall negative experiences, particularly focusing on archives as institutions and physical spaces. As regards positive experience, one participant described the sense of a feminist community she gained through reading material in an informal archival collection in a women's centre in the 1980s: "it made me feel like I wasn't alone" (Judith). A past sense of community was reawakened too for another

participant, reading about activism in the 1970s from her current standpoint in the 2010s: "[it] bought back memories for me of things that I had forgotten and ways of being that we had developed which actually over the years have kind of been forgotten about." (Participant A). These positive experiences were a motivating factor in their involvement in the SFA Project:

> "I think it just incentivized me to be part of this project […]. It became very evident to me that it was important to collect this stuff, this material, otherwise it would be lost and it's part of history!" (Participant A)

However, in contrast with these positive impressions of archival materials, all participants described negative impressions of archives as institutions and spaces. One described materials as "hidden away" (Participant A), while another said: "everything's invisible, all locked up" (Judith). The rules and procedures in archives were seen as particularly off-putting and authoritarian:

> "What I remember is it was it was quite complicated and the place I went to look was not open to all. So you had to get permissions." (Lisa)
> "When I walked in I hadn't got a clue what I was going to meet. And of course I do understand but you have to put all your stuff in lockers and it's all quite whispery and you have to be careful and you're not quite sure what you can touch and if you put a foot wrong how it's going to be perceived." (Judith)

Those participants who had visited archives in the past also described negative impressions of the physical space of the archive and for some this had an emotionally trying effect:

> "It was very cramped and it felt quite stressful […] No displays, no displays at all. You don't get the impression that normal public would be passing by and popping in to have a look. (Participant A)

Thus previous experience of archives was largely of rather remote even exclusive institutions, something the SFA project was specifically designed to break away from.

Archiving as social and political activism

All the participants identified themselves as feminists who were engaged to varying degrees in current feminist activism. Their motivations for being involved cannot be disconnected from this. None of the participants used the word "activism" to describe their activity until explicitly asked but all participants spoke about the archive project as helping to achieve the goals of feminism and ultimately decided that they did see it as activism.

> "Activism seems to me much more like civil disobedience, but I suppose this is a kind of civil disobedience because what we are doing is actually bringing to light history that's always been hidden and so that is a civil disobedience in the same way as going on a Reclaim the Night or a demonstration about equal pay or whatever. No, I think it is a form of activism, yeah definitely, because […] what we are trying to bring about is a change in the way people are reflecting and understanding what has gone on in the past." (Participant A).

One motivating factor for participants' involvement in this project, which can be identified clearly in the data, is the feeling that some people's experiences, most notably women's, have been excluded from the archival and therefore historical record.

> "Creating that physical space where you can say all this happened and these people were really important and they haven't been visible before." (Rachel).
> "I just think it's a really important thing that signifies a movement of people towards valuing women in history and making sure that those voices are heard, which is [sic] still undervalued really." (Rachel).

Related to this, several participants mentioned the fear that women who had been involved in second wave feminism in the 1970s were now starting to die or

become infirm and so it was necessary to undertake this project before their experiences are lost. As well as documenting the lives of women and specifically feminists who had been active in the past, most of the participants also stressed their desire to document the lives of contemporary women and feminist activism today and going forward. Another kind of experience that some participants mentioned as having been excluded from the archival record was that of the "everyday" or "ordinary". These participants felt that history focused too much on "big events, generally directed, delivered, reviewed (or not) by men or institutions that were predominantly men" (Lisa). They felt motivated to be part of the oral history element of the project in order to capture, recognise, and preserve the experiences of 'ordinary' people:

> "I just feel that it is important that historically we have the voices of ordinary people and not just what is written by journalists or academics. The history as experienced by the people as they live it is really important to record because it's there without academic assumptions and it's kind of an open book for people to look into and to make up their own minds" (Participant A)

For some of the participants the motivation to document previously excluded groups in the archive went beyond women and 'ordinary people' to a wider concern about diversity:

> "I wouldn't want to just see what a bunch of white feminists wanted in the archive as well. I want to know about the experiences of non-white feminists, I want to know about the experiences of working-class feminists, I want to know about the experiences of feminists of different ages, I want to know about the experiences of men who identify as feminists, LGBT+ people." (Emma N)

Participants were motivated by the potential effect that the project and the material collected may have on society's view of women, feminism, and gender issues.

One participant referred to the collection as "almost like a public information service" (Lisa).

> "If you saw all these different people with all these different things to say and realised 'oh, that's what feminism is!' […] if it was just used as a catalyst for people to think more about what they thought about women's studies, or feminism, or womanism, or gender relations or whatever you want to call it.." (Emma)

All of the participants particularly mentioned a desire that the material should be used in educational settings with young people: "Ideally I'd like all young people to have an understanding of how it was then, how it changed, what were the processes by which it changed, what were perspectives on those processes of change." (Lisa).

Participants also suggested that the archive might play a role in inspiring future activism by raising awareness of techniques used in the past and successes that were gained, as well as giving feminists today confidence to fight for change.

> "There is still a long, long way to go for gender equality to happen so it kind of, to try and highlight to those younger women what we thought in the past and in fact that we did have to demand change it didn't come before we demanded it and my feeling is that today that is what younger women, that women have to do. They have to demand change." (Participant A)

The participants also seemed to be motivated by the form of the project itself and the inherent value in that. This included the cross-generational nature of the project, which has enabled women of different generations to work together and learn from each other:

> "This is about people who've done a bit, some people have done a lot, people have done different things, and that's another strand about where I think this fits which is about, I suppose, together, communality, collectivism, that is really important." (Lisa)

The opportunity to be involved in an oral history project was also singled out by several of the participants as a key reason why they wanted to be involved in the wider project.

> "I think there is something quite transformative about actually being listened to properly and having the opportunity to have that voice." (Lisa)

Roles of activists and archivists

The SFA project has involved collaboration with Sheffield Archives from the very beginning. The data suggest that the participants conceived of distinct roles for the project group and the formal archive, Sheffield Archives, and the professional archivists working there. Participants clearly saw themselves as the driving force behind the development of the archive. The initial idea for the archive and the oral history project came from women who are involved in the project, rather than from Sheffield Archives, and they expressed a strong sense that they would be the ones to drive progress forward. Another key role that participants saw for themselves was as the on-going link to the feminist community in Sheffield.

> "I don't know whether or not there is any correlation between where I've spoken about it [the archive project] and take up and interest in it but, nevertheless, there is something about the act of saying 'there is a project and this is what's it's doing', that's really important in helping people ask the question 'why is that important?" (Lisa).

Thus, the participants positioned themselves as advocates for the archive project. Most of the participants had not particularly considered how the collection was and should be organised within Sheffield Archives but all of them saw this as important and all had opinions about this issue once asked. None of them said that this should be left

entirely to Sheffield Archives to decide but rather wanted to have input into this decision making process:

> "We've established a way that works, a set up that works. We've established that at least Sheffield Council Archives is willing to change their practice a bit, and they have changed it a bit in terms of how they will store and how they will catalogue objects so that although they will catalogue them as individual donations, which they always have done, they will put those donations which people request to be put into the SFA collection under that collection [by way of a note in the record] but they will also suggest that people who maybe are unaware of that collection who bring things, they will ask them if they would like those objects put under that heading too." (Judith)

Participants clearly felt that part of their role was to challenge traditional archival practices in order to create a model for working which suited both parties:

> "I can see that as a pure archivist, presumably there are rules, there are professional practices and all of the rest of it, so I can kind of see why we can't have it completely our own way. But, in a funny way, part of what we're trying to do is contribute towards breaking some of the moulds as well. And that's partly how I see my feminism, to go back to that." (Lisa)

Another role of the project group that participants emphasised was to publicise the material to ensure it is used: "I think that the people involved have a kind of, almost like a duty to make sure that the stuff is shared." (Lisa).

This links to the negative past impressions of archives that many of the participants had and their desire for the collection to be accessible to the ordinary public.

> "Yeah, so, it would be for the general public really but that, you know, unfortunately, hidden away in an archive we then have to think about how we publicise this to the world outside." (Participant A)

"We need to set alight that desire to find out and give people the possibility to find things out." (Participant A).

Despite participants discussing this broad range of roles they saw for the project group in the process, all of them simultaneously stressed the limited availability of volunteers and the restricting effect of this on the development of the project and the archive. Thus concerns with resources and sustainability figure significantly in participants' thinking.

"We're all volunteers, as per usual people who do things are busy people, we're all getting on with our lives and, you know, we have no money, though obviously we can apply for money and that we'd have to look into." (Judith)

Participants also saw a distinct role in this project for Sheffield Archives. A key function of Sheffield Archives that the participants mentioned was lending importance and a public identity to the SFA. By depositing the material within an official local government institution the participants felt that they were making a much more significant statement than if the material was kept separately in an independent archive.

"Because it's got that word feminist and it's in a council owned body, it's in a very staid sort of place. So they really hold all the important documents of a place and our documents are equally important and they are also in that very important place. So, it's hugely symbolic, as well as hugely useful, it's hugely symbolic." (Judith)

One participant also mentioned that this endorsement from the local council served as a useful stamp of legitimacy when speaking about the project with others such as universities and funding bodies.

"Collaborating with Sheffield Archives, getting funds from Sheffield City Council - I think that's just a really positive thing to show that it's sort of a priority and commitment from 'the city'. (Emma)

Participants also saw the collaboration with Sheffield Archives functioning to further the aim of making the archive as accessible to the public as possible. And a crucial role that the participants saw for Sheffield Archives was in providing a secure home where the material would be preserved.

> "[In Nottingham] in the women's centre they've got a room which they're turning into an archive, which is lovely, but you know, if the women's centre goes down, it won't exist, whereas, we've got it into a Local Authority Archive that will last as long as our civilisation lasts because we need archives for all our legal documents and that's the bottom line." (Judith)

Although participants valued Sheffield Archives professional expertise around preservation they spoke about the tension and disagreement which had been caused by Sheffield Archives' collection policy and approach to cataloguing the collection. SFA were keen to collect material of any type, not just original manuscripts but anything from banners to "published material". Sheffield Archives insisted on the usual professional distinctions around what type of content they would collect. One participant noted that Sheffield Archives would not accept all the material that the project group would have liked to see included such as:

> "Spare Ribs wouldn't qualify because as I understand, under the terms of the agreement with Sheffield Archives, they're not Sheffield so they wouldn't take them." (Lisa)

Issues around the cataloguing of the collection seemed to have caused the most disagreement. The project group wanted to keep material together in one collection under the name of the "Sheffield Feminist Archive" whereas Sheffield Archives insisted on maintaining their normal practice of cataloguing items together based on their provenance and splitting up the material based on the originating organisation or body.

"Call it the 'Sheffield Feminist Archive'! If you have to stick the word collection on to it I can just about bear that but you know, it's about accessibility." (Judith)

Thus, although the participants acknowledged the role for Sheffield Archives in managing the collection, there were clearly some tensions remaining about how much this should be done in consultation with the project group and professional ideas about what an archive should be were not always well received by the participants.

Discussion

Participants held negative impressions of archives as institutions and spaces but had positive previous experiences of using archival materials, where they had done so. This seems to have influenced their ambitions for the SFA. Stevens et al. observed similarly negative views of archival institutions amongst representatives from community archives and argued that they acted as a barrier to collaboration between community archiving groups and formal archives 43. Yet for the participants in this research their negative impressions did not deter them from collaborating with Sheffield Archives and may even have been a motivating factor.

Participants saw their involvement in the SFA as part of their wider feminist activism and as furthering feminist goals. Echoing previous work on feminist archives, they were motivated by a desire to redress the exclusion of women, their lives and achievements, from the archival, and therefore the historical, record. This echoes similar findings in Flinn and Sellie et al. about community archiving in other contexts 44. However, these studies primarily looked at projects which operated largely independently from formal archives, which the SFA does not. The finding that the participants from the SFA, a community archiving project collaborating with a formal archive, also see their activity as inherently political lends weight to Eichhorn's

suggestion that because formal archives make "existing systems of thought" visible they are the perfect place to try to subvert those systems 45.

Participants in the current study, again as in previous studies of feminist archives, hoped that the material, once collected and preserved in an archive would subsequently be encountered by the public, especially young people through educational projects, and would contribute to changing the way people think about women, feminism, and gender. Learning from the history of previous activist struggles is an important motive for feminist archiving, and linked to a strong concern with access to the collection. Sellie et al. also found that inspiring activism is a motivating factor for activists involved in archiving 46. They suggest that this can happen through younger people being exposed to materials of past activism. However, they argue that it is necessary for the archive to exist in an independent space for this to take place. The participants in the current study clearly did not feel that their material's location within a formal archive would negate its potential inspirational effect. Rather they saw the visibility the material gained from being in a formal archive as a positive benefit.

Another motivation for the participants in this study was their feeling that the project itself had an inherent value as a process. They spoke about the value of working collaboratively across generations, meeting other feminists with a range of perspectives, and, through oral history, giving women the opportunity to speak about and be listened to on issues they have never discussed before. Again this echoes the sense from previous studies of feminist archival practices that the active, participatory processes of making an archive are themselves inherently valuable.

The SFA project has been collaborating with a formal archive, Sheffield Archives, since very early in the project. This reflected the limited resources at their disposal. Participants described Sheffield Archives' involvement as ensuring the

preservation and security of the materials, lending a sense of legitimacy, importance, and public relevance to the collection, and bringing expertise and established practices about how to manage collections of materials. This last area was seen as somewhat problematic when the project group members' views did not align with that of the formal archive, for example on the issue of what could be included in the collection and how the collection was to be organised. Nevertheless, the participants were enthusiastic about the importance of collaborating with Sheffield Archives.

The project group's feelings about collaboration with a formal archive are a significant point at which the findings of this research differ from that of many previous case studies of community archives. Many previous studies have focused on community and activist archiving groups who remain very wary, if not actively opposed to the idea of handing over materials to a formal archive 47. Flinn does suggest that collaboration between formal and community archives may be increasingly necessary due to the resource pressures on community archives 48. The current study begins to provide some evidence for how such collaborations might work for both parties. The participants in this study felt that housing this material within the local authority archive in itself made a powerful symbolic statement about the importance of women's history and the history of feminist activism and its relevance to the people of Sheffield.

Despite their limited time availability, they saw themselves acting as a link with the community, working to collect material from them and create new material with them, promoting the archive, and challenging the formal archive to change their policies and practices around collection and record description. Wooten suggests that feminist and LGBT activists are too busy to undertake archiving activity and that professional archivists should fulfil this role 49. The findings of the current study clearly show that, although they acknowledge the time constraints on their activity, the feminist activists

who participated in this study certainly do want to be actively involved in archiving their own and their community's activity.

Flinn notes the potential for community archiving groups to act as the link between formal archives and the wider community 50. The SFA group, through their networking with the community and the collection of oral histories do seem to be fulfilling the role that Stevens et al. identify as "community engagement consultants". This is a crucial role, if professional archivists want to increase the representativeness of the archival record and "encourage archiving as a participatory process shared with many in society" as Cook argues they ought to 51.

Participants identified their desire for non-provenance-based organisation of the materials they had collected as a particular area of disagreement with the professional archivists. The role that the participants saw for themselves in challenging archival practices around collection policies and description is pertinent given the "significant power" that DiVeglia sees archivists wielding over "how and why materials will be used" 52. Provenance has traditionally been a core principle of the archival profession but Jimmerson argues that, as an organising concept, provenance "reflects assumptions about organisational structures and hierarchies that privilege those in power" 53. Therefore, both this study and the literature suggest that there are some fundamental differences in what community archives see as a legitimate archive and archival practice and what the archival profession sees as legitimate. This represents a challenge to the profession but one which may well be beneficial in helping it to adapt professional practices to the modern age.

Conclusion

> "This has the capacity to help change people's sense of themselves but also change the way they see the world (that's a bit grand) and how the world operates." (Lisa)

Lisa summarises what seems to be the central aim of the SFA project and what may explain the relative enthusiasm for collaborating with a formal archive, in comparison to other community archiving projects. Alongside the desire to redress the marginalisation of women in the archival record, a key aim is that the material the SFA collects should be encountered by people who have previously not thought critically about gender relations and therefore about feminism. For this to happen it must be captured, collected, and preserved in a location which is visible and accessible to the widest possible range of people and where it will be preserved to high standards, leaving the activists free to publicise the collection, encourage further donations, capture more people's stories, and undertake outreach activities. The local authority archive was this group's chosen partner because, whereas most formal archives would have been able to ensure the preservation of the material, only Sheffield Archives was ideally placed in terms of visibility and accessibility.

This particular group have not felt the antagonism and distrust towards the institution of the formal archive in the way that other community archiving groups who perceive their history to have been marginalised – notwithstanding their own limited, even negative previous experiences of archives. They seem to have been more willing to utilise the formal archive for the benefits it can bring to the project. One reason might be because while the UK archive workforce is predominately white, it is also predominately female 54. It seems plausible that this may contribute to reduced feelings of alienation from the formal archive by women in comparison with BME individuals who are involved in community archiving projects. The location of this project in the city of Sheffield may also have encouraged collaboration with the local authority. Sheffield City Council has, in many ways, a long established reputation for

progressiveness and opposition to the establishment and institutional power, in comparison with other areas in the UK.

The collaboration and the resulting SFA is not currently everything that the participants in this research are aiming for in an ideal world and it has undoubtedly required compromise on both sides. Further research is also needed into the archiving and memory collecting activities of feminist activists, especially in the UK. Further case studies of the other projects mentioned in the introduction would help to establish whether the findings of this research reflect typical views among feminist activists. This study has made a conscious effort to ensure that the voices of the individuals involved are heard clearly in the findings of this research, in a way that had seemed lacking in previous studies. Further research which makes a similar effort would contribute to creating a more evidenced-based and nuanced picture of the views and actions of the non-professional individuals who engage in archiving activity.

Ultimately, for this group, archiving and memory collecting are forms of activism in their own right. These feminist activists feel that the SFA project is worth devoting time to, not just because it creates an archive to document women's and feminist history but because this becomes a tool in their activism – both the process and the outcome – to reach out and engage people, who do not identify as feminists, in questioning their own beliefs and assumptions – to act as a "catalyst" for people to question their own ideas about gender (Emma). For this group, the collaboration with Sheffield Archives, despite the compromises this requires, allows them to achieve these aims most effectively. It enables them to move beyond being a minority activist group, speaking to others who already share their views, to hopefully break into the public consciousness and change it for the better.

Notes

1. Schwartz and Cook, "Archives, Records and Power," 2.
2. Jimerson, "Archives for All"; Schwartz and Cook, "Archives, Records and Power."
3. Community Archives and Heritage Group "Impact of community archives report."
4. Flinn and Stevens, "It is no mistri, wi mekin histri."; Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge, "Archivist as activist," 298.
5. For example: Flinn, "Archival Activism"; Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd, "Whose memories, whose archives?"; Sellie et al., "Interference Archive"; Stevens, Flinn, and Shepherd, "New frameworks for community engagement in the archive sector"; Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge, "Archivist as activist," 298.
6. Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd "Whose memories, whose archives?" 73.
7. Flinn, "Community histories, community archives."
8. Ibid.
9. Sellie, Goldstein, Fair, and Hoyer, "Interference Archive."
10. For example: Benson and Allamong Jacob, "No documents, no history"; Mason and Zanish-Belcher, "Raising the archival consciousness"; Mason and Zanish-Belcher, "A room of one's own"; Myers, "The juggling act"; O'Meara, "Perfecting the new wave of collecting"; Russell, "Using biographical narrative and life story methods to research women's movements;" "An archive of the Women's Liberation Movement"; Stewart, Lal, and McGuire, "Expanding the archives of global feminisms."
11. Myers, "The juggling act."
12. Flinn, "Community histories, community archives;"Flinn, "Archival Activism"; Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd, "Whose memories, whose archives?"; Moore and Pell, "Autonomous archives."
13. Burin and Sowinski, "Sister to sister."
14. Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd "Whose memories, whose archives?" 72.
15. Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge, "Archivist as activist," 297.
16. Reitsamer, "Alternative histories."
17. Flinn, "Archival Activism,"15.
18. Flinn, "Community histories, community archives."; Kaplan, "We Are What We Collect, We Collect What We Are."
19. Reitsamer, "Alternative histories."
20. Withers, "Feminism, Digital culture."
21. Flinn, "Archival Activism" 9.
22. Mason and Zanish-Belcher, "A room of one's own,"131.
23. Dyer, "My life in zines."
24. Reitsamer, "Alternative histories;" Tavernor, "Rebels in the archives."
25. Reitsamer, "Alternative histories."
26. Flinn, "Community histories, community archives;" Flinn, "Archival Activism;" Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd "Whose memories, whose archives?"; Moore & Pell, "Autonomous archives"; Nestle, "The will to remember"; Sellie et al., "Interference Archive".
27. Sellie, Goldstein, Fair and Hoyer "Interference Archive".
28. Flinn, "Archival Activism."

29. Stevens, Flinn and Shepherd, "New frameworks for community engagement in the archive sector," 3

30. Flinn, "Community histories, community archives;" Flinn, "Archival Activism"; Stevens, Flinn and Shepherd, "New frameworks for community engagement in the archive sector"; Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge, "Archivist as activist."

31. Campbell, Stevens and Ajamu, "Love and lubrication in the archives, or rukus!" Eichhorn, "The archival turn in feminism;"; Flinn, "Community histories, community archives;" Flinn, "Archival Activism"; Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge, "Archivist as activist."

32. Flinn, "Community histories, community archives,"153.

33. Stevens, Flinn, & Shepherd, "New frameworks for community engagement in the archive sector," 63

34. Flinn, "Community histories, community archives;" Flinn, "Archival activism"; Sellie, Goldstein, Fair, and Hoyer, "Interference Archive;" Stevens, Flinn, & Shepherd, "New frameworks for community engagement in the archive sector"; Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge, "Archivist as activist."

35. Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd "Whose memories, whose archives?" 79.

36. Flinn, "Community histories, community archives."

37. Flinn, "Archival Activism," 10.

38. Ibid.

39. Gray, "Doing research in the real world", 161.

40. Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd "Whose memories, whose archives?"

41. Braun and Clarke, "Using thematic analysis in psychology" 87.

42. Ibid., 88-89

43. Stevens, Flinn, & Shepherd, "New frameworks for community engagement in the archive sector."

44. Flinn, "Archival Activism;" Flinn and Stevens, "It is no mistri, wi mekin histri;" Sellie, Goldstein, Fair, and Hoyer, "Interference Archive."

45. Eichhorn, "The archival turn in feminism," 151-152.

46. Sellie et al., "Interference Archive."

47. Flinn, "Community histories, community archives;" Flinn, "Archival Activism"; Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd "Whose memories, whose archives?" Moore & Pell, "Autonomous archives"; Nestle, "The will to remember"; Sellie et al., "Interference Archive."

48. Flinn, "Archival Activism."

49. Wooten, "Introduction," 3.

50. Flinn, "Community histories, community archives."

51. Cook, "Evidence, memory, identity, and community," 114

52. DiVeglia, "Accessibility, accountability and activism," 71.

53. Jimmerson "Archives for All," 276.

54. Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals & Archives & Records Association UK & Ireland, "A study of the UK information workforce."

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